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# Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest

## **Blacks in the Diaspora**

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GENERAL EDITORS

# Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest



*Black Club Women  
in Illinois*

Wanda A. Hendricks

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## INTRODUCTION

This book explores the significance of the social and political grassroots movement led by African American club women in Illinois from 1890 to 1920. It looks at the unique structures, ideologies, strategies, and tactics that differentiated this movement from and linked it to the national black club women's movement during the period. By focusing on the ways in which efforts at the state level intersected with those on the national stage, this study demonstrates that the limitations imposed on these women by racism and sexism did not hinder them from effecting social and political change. In addition, it shows the crucial role that regional differences played in shaping the ideologies and institutions that sustained and nourished black communities throughout Illinois.

This study focuses on Illinois because there was an unprecedented proliferation of black female clubs there, and because the women who joined these associations faced numerous challenges that were unique to their region of the country. Illinois was one of several Midwestern states affected by a burgeoning industrial economy and by the massive movement of African Americans. Like other states in the area, it was mostly rural but was dominated by a large city. While the black population gradually increased during the twenty-six years from 1890 to 1916, it mushroomed between 1916 and 1920. By 1920, the number of black residents was triple that of 1890. And because the number of blacks living in rural areas was steadily declining, the state became one of the most urbanized black regions in the nation. Chicago's population, for example, more than doubled during those years.<sup>1</sup> With that urbanization came a variety of problems associated with growth. Poverty, overcrowding, and

high mortality rates plagued the many blacks who sought shelter in the state.

Many of the blacks who migrated to Illinois prior to the turn of the century were attracted by the state's reputation for racial tolerance. Indeed, few legal, social, and political restrictions greeted migrants. Yet Illinois was the site of some of the worst race riots in the nation during the first two decades of the twentieth century.

For black female activists, the confluence of these circumstances presented some unique challenges and opportunities. By 1920 they had helped to establish the largest national network of black club women in the country, created scores of women's associations, developed a political network, and cast ballots for the first black elected to Chicago's city council. In Chicago alone, there were more than seventy social and political clubs.<sup>2</sup> Even in rural areas, where there were fewer clubs, women participated and demonstrated a commitment to the community, providing valuable service to those in need.

It was a genuine concern for the problems faced by blacks in both rural and urban areas that drew women to association building. When the call went out for a national network of black women to be formed, club women in Illinois eagerly joined. The creation of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) in 1896 was both an affirmation of their efforts and a method of organizing women's clubs nationwide in the struggle for voting rights and health and educational programs for women and their communities. Three years later, one of the largest state organizations of black club women, the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (IFCWC), was born.<sup>3</sup> Its primary goals were linking the state's women to the NACW, elevating the image of black womanhood, providing social and economic services to blacks throughout the state, and contributing to the welfare of African American women.

The IFCWC united the voices, resources, and skills of hundreds of women in the state. Its multiple layers of local and regional organizations united middle-class women from every area into the largest African American social welfare agency in

the state. Like the NACW, the IFCWC adopted a constitution, bylaws, and a motto, opened its membership to any woman with the financial resources and the time to commit to uplift, provided for the cultural benefit of its members, and developed strategies to nourish the black community. Because the number of black women in rural and urban areas shifted over time, the club made no distinctions between those areas heavily or less populated by blacks when it planned its annual meetings. Conventions were held in northern, central, and southern cities and towns such as Peoria, Springfield, Evanston, Jacksonville, Quincy, Danville, Champaign, Bloomington, Monmouth, Rock Island, Moline, Galesburg, and Carbondale. But because nearly 80 percent of blacks resided in urbanized areas by the second decade of the twentieth century, members did adapt by reflecting the changes in the election of officers and in the types of programs they created.

A variety of women sought membership in the association. Almost all were middle-class and educated. Many were native to the state, while others were migrants. Most had some connection with the community in which they resided through both secular and religious work. They all pledged to be dedicated soldiers in the struggle against inequality. It was these members who enabled the IFCWC and regional and local affiliates to create, support, and manage an extensive list of social, cultural, and political agencies. The IFCWC had a large following, claiming nearly eighty groups by 1921, with at least ten members in each.

While the migration that brought so many black Southerners to the state came to represent both an escape from oppression and a promise of opportunity, it presented major challenges to the reform network of club women. The social programs organized by these women became vital to the survival of the black community. Largely through their own volunteerism and fundraising, they combated the problems of homelessness, unemployment, illiteracy, high mortality, and inadequate health care that plagued African Americans. They opened kindergartens, day nurseries, orphanages, settlement

houses, homes for the elderly, recreation centers, and medical care facilities. Another consideration was providing decent housing for homeless women and girls. As the migration escalated, morality was increasingly an issue for black women. To halt the assault on their Victorian womanhood, these middle-class women vigorously led a campaign to rid the African American community of the image of female impropriety. They located housing for prostitutes, homeless women, and young female migrants. They also built and supported institutions specifically for them, or directed them to the appropriate authorities for help.

The simultaneous explosion of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration from eastern and southern Europe exacerbated tensions between blacks, immigrants, and whites. Competition for space and heightened racial animosity made Illinois almost as inhospitable to blacks as the South. Slums flourished in Chicago and East St. Louis. White ward bosses prevented African American men from achieving any tangible political gains. In Springfield and Cairo it was much the same. African Americans too often occupied substandard housing, paid higher rents, were forced to accept the lowest-paying jobs, and received little aid from social service agencies. Pervasive fear and resentment on the part of whites led to an alarming increase in violent crimes in the state. With little being done to relieve tensions, lynchings and race riots escalated.

The vigorous efforts to end violent attacks against blacks in the Midwest also led to an energetic campaign for the enfranchisement of women and the political empowerment of the African American populace. The race riot in Springfield in 1908, the impetus for the creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), signaled that racial polarization had reached its highest level. The number of race riots in Illinois had increased dramatically since the turn of the century. It was the riot in Springfield, however, that elicited the loudest public outcry, because this disturbance symbolized the extent to which racial animosity and violence had grown, and illustrated the alarming rate at which lynchings and



riots were spreading throughout the nation. In response, progressive whites, prominent black club women, and black men organized the NAACP. Its support of black rights, anti-lynching legislation, and woman suffrage impelled Illinois resident Ida B. Wells-Barnett to sign the initial call and participate in the association's first conference. The IFCWC endorsed the organization as well.

Through the pages of the journal *The Crisis*, the editor, William E. B. DuBois, nationalized the dual plight of African American women and averred that female enfranchisement could be a potentially powerful force for the African American population. DuBois theorized that the African American female vote was both an opportunity for the black populace to increase their political standing in a racist society and an opportunity for African American women to become equal partners with white suffragists in the fight for women's rights. Since leading white suffrage organizations in the North had increasingly begun to campaign for membership among Southern white women, who adhered to a policy of white supremacy, the NAACP's platform was significant: for the first time, a group integrated by race and gender was publicly endorsing the franchise both for black men and for women.

The ideology of expediency adopted by the National Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) had a profound effect on its state affiliates and on black women. The predominantly white suffrage organizations in Illinois embraced black women for the most part, but they were also bound by the dictates of their national affiliations. In other words, national policy often overshadowed state policy. In 1913, for example, there was a nationally sponsored suffrage parade in Washington, D.C., in which suffragists from every state were invited to participate. Before the procession began, Wells-Barnett and a few of her white colleagues questioned the validity of NAWSA's policy of allowing the individual state suffrage associations to make their own decisions concerning the admittance of black members. They felt that this policy essentially sanctioned the Jim Crow practices of the South, practices that had been enforced during

the late nineteenth century and bolstered by the Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1896. By custom and law, Southern suffrage affiliates of NAWSA could maintain their practice of racial segregation even during the parade. As a matter of fact, political expediency necessitated that any racially integrated affiliated organizations conform to the Southern standard.

The majority of Wells-Barnett's white colleagues voted to acquiesce to the demand of NAWSA that the marchers be separated by state and race so that the Southern participants would not be offended. Wells-Barnett was to march at the back of the procession with all the other black women, not with her state contingent.<sup>4</sup> One of the most outspoken advocates of female suffrage now found herself being rejected by those who had enlisted and utilized her services as a lecturer for the cause. The action both illuminated the complicity of local suffrage chapters in the national organization's Jim Crow agenda and demonstrated the attempt to bifurcate gender and race. Despite the racist overtones of the larger suffrage movement, black women in Illinois continued to ally themselves with local white suffragists and build strong political networks.

In 1913, the Illinois legislature approved the Presidential and Municipal Suffrage Bill, which gave women in the state the right to vote in municipal elections. Its passage propelled Illinois into the national spotlight as the first state east of the Mississippi River to politically empower a substantial female voting constituency. This legislation opened the way for African American female voters in racially segregated urban wards to play a profound role in the electoral process. By the second decade of the century, they had created their own political culture, organizing associations and developing the skills to become actively involved in black political life.

So politicized, by 1915 club women were moving into important roles in the state's fifty-year celebration of black emancipation. During the planning stages of the festivities, African American club women secured administrative posts on committees of interest to them and eventually, through successful

lobbying, they gained a place on the planning board as well. When suffrage legislation made it possible for African American women to become equal partners with men in the public arena, they formed suffrage clubs, cast ballots, entered public debates on major issues, and voiced their opinions on the importance of holding politicians accountable for their actions. Because much of their rhetoric was shrouded in the Victorian ideology of the day, which demanded that women bear the moral responsibility for society, they successfully circumvented most major attacks from black males.

The successful alliance between black men and women forced the powerful Republican machine on Chicago's south side to re-evaluate its policies concerning African Americans. The Second Ward was home to the majority of African American men and women in the city by the second decade of the twentieth century, and racial segregation on the south side had created the largest concentration of African American women voters in the state. As the population continued to grow and women gained access to the ballot, prominent black men and white Republicans pursued a politically expedient policy that actively pursued the black female vote. In 1915 the policy paid major dividends, as Oscar Stanton DePriest was elected the first black alderman in the city. His victory was the result of the political empowerment of women, the migration of blacks before and during World War I, residential segregation, and a heightened sense of race consciousness.

The "race woman's vote" continued to play a significant political role, ensuring that African American men maintained a lock on at least one city council seat. With the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, black women's expanded political power contributed to an increase in the number of black state legislators, and helped DePriest to become the first black United States representative elected from the North.

Through their club work and political involvement, African American women helped to advance the chances for eradication of social and political forces oppressive to the Illinois African American community. They shared equally with their

men in defining the direction of black life during one of the bleakest eras. They instituted welfare programs and sought social justice to redress the inequities within American society. At the height of the migration, these race-conscious women embraced politics to further their cause. The marriage of the public domain of politics with the personal space of domesticity came to symbolize both a civic duty and an obligation to the race. Ultimately, they promoted an African American-based movement built around a racially conscious ideology, successfully blending their private world of club work with the public world of political activism.

# Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest



# ONE



## *The Movement to Organize Race Women*

Planning for the World's Columbian Exposition, to be held in Chicago in 1892, got under way in 1890. The fair, dedicated to commemorating the four hundredth anniversary of the founding of America by Europeans and celebrating the accomplishments of Americans, presented black women activists in the city with the opportunity to lay the foundation for a social and political movement that would last well into the twentieth century. To expose their exclusion and increase their visibility, African American club women pushed for greater involvement in fair activities by petitioning the governing body over women's exhibits. As a result of the criticisms leveled at the all-white governing body, Chicago resident Fannie Barrier Williams was appointed to an administrative post.

Black female activism at the exposition also inspired a campaign to organize a national movement of African American women. As a result of her polemical pamphlet documenting racism at the fair and her international campaign against lynching, Chicagoan Ida B. Wells's character was subsequently viciously attacked in the white press. Feeling the sting, black women across the nation called for their loosely tied web to form a powerful association of "race women" dedicated to com-

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bating racism and sexism, serving the needs of black women, and uplifting the race. This call eventually ignited an unprecedented growth in local and regional associations of club women in Illinois and across the nation.

From the beginning, the exposition was mired in controversy. For white Americans, the fair represented an outlet for showcasing the cultural and technological superiority of the United States. It reminded African Americans, however, of their second-class status. (The style of the buildings was the first indication that blacks would play a limited role in the activities: all of the buildings were to have white exteriors.)<sup>1</sup> Financed partly with funds appropriated by Congress, the fair was to be governed by at-large national committees representing each state and territory. Because of the inclusion of the historic Woman's Building, there were two committees, one all-male and the other all-female. At the outset, however, these committees reflected the racism that pervaded the country: the female committee had one black member, while the male committee had none. An editorial in the December 1890 *Indianapolis Freeman* chastised President William Harrison for the oversight. "The Negro is surely no useless part of the great American people," the editor lamented. "[But the fact that] no Negro is on the commission implies that no one Negro in any state of the Union had the required qualities to represent one-fourth of his state or one-eighth of the nation."<sup>2</sup> Eventually a token African American male was appointed as an alternate.<sup>3</sup>

As residents of the host city, African American women in Chicago felt that despite the one position accorded them on the national committee, they were being deliberately snubbed by those fair personnel who would be orchestrating local preparations. In addition to the at-large female committee, the fair commission appointed a nine-member Board of Lady Managers to oversee the concerns of women, particularly the Woman's Building. Final approval for space in the building rested with this powerful group of women. Headed by wealthy socialite Bertha Honore Palmer, this nine-member board from Chi-

ago had no African American women on it.





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perous white women like themselves not only would but should set the agenda for the burgeoning woman's movement," they appointed Mary Cecil Cantrill, a Southern white woman, to represent the interests of African American women.<sup>5</sup> The appointment of Cantrill drew angry protests from African Americans. As the *New York Age* opined in October 1891,

As to the merits of the controversy we are free to say that we are in sympathy with the "colored women" as against the "lady managers" on general principles. In the first place, a "colored lady" should have been placed on the Board just as a "colored man" should have been placed upon the Board of Commissioners. We don't know Mrs. CANTRILL. We are sure she is a splendid woman, as Mrs. LOGAN and Mrs. BRAYTON vouch for her. But why she should have been placed in charge of the interests of the colored women does not appear on the face of matters. She cannot know as much about our "women" as what they are capable of as Mrs. GEORGE L. RUFFIN of Massachusetts, Mrs. PHILIP A. WHITE of New York, Mrs. BLANCHE K. BRUCE of the District of Columbia and Indiana, Miss IDA B. WELLS of Tennessee, and a hundred other "women" of the race we could name.<sup>6</sup>

A similar criticism from the Woman's Columbian Auxiliary Association, another group of Chicago club women, forced the board to reconsider its earlier appointment. After much deliberation, members agreed to select a black woman for a post within the organization. They chose black socialite Fannie Barrier Williams of Chicago to assist in supervising installations in the Woman's Building.<sup>7</sup>

Williams was certainly qualified for the position, and she represented the best of African American womanhood. But her appointment served primarily to quiet the controversy for the Board of Lady Managers. Williams was chosen by the board primarily because she had not publicly vocalized her sentiments, and because she represented the black female aristocracy, who were thought to have more in common with the white socialites than with the majority of African American women. As a member of the exclusive "Elite 400," she belonged to a

culturally distinct group of some of the wealthiest blacks in Chicago. This class distinction afforded her the necessary acceptance of the board because her background was similar to theirs. Moreover, she had grown up in a small, predominantly white New York town, where her father was a successful entrepreneur and her mother was a homemaker. From childhood to adulthood, she had had sociable relations with whites. Educated and refined, she was married to a prominent attorney in the city.<sup>8</sup> Thus Williams was chosen to help board members feel comfortable with their decision to appoint an African American woman to a position. Williams represented the best of the African American women for the members. They also hoped that her genteel demeanor would be less apt to produce hostile behavior. So to pacify black women and the black community, the board embraced Williams, later appointing her the secretary of the Art Department of the Woman's Branch of the Congress Auxiliaries.<sup>9</sup>

Williams's appointment and her friendship with a number of prominent white women secured her a spot at the Departmental Congress of the National Association of Loyal Women of American Liberty at the World's Congress of Representative Women on May 17, 1893. As one of the few black women present, she spoke before an audience of women from the United States, England, Germany, France, Finland, Denmark, Greece, Sweden, and Canada. In her presentation, titled "The Intellectual Progress and Present Status of the Colored Women of the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation," she challenged her predominantly white female audience to both acknowledge the existence of black women and understand that the commonality of gender played a much greater role in their lives than the divisive factor of race. "Less is known of our women than of any other class of Americans," she lamented. "No organization of far-reaching influence for their special advancement, no conventions of women to take note of their progress, and no special literature reciting the incidents, the events, and all things interesting and instructive concerning them are to be found among the agencies directing their career." She found it

curious that “there has been no special interest in [African American women’s] peculiar condition as native-born American women. Their power to affect the social life of America, either for good or for ill, has excited not even a speculative interest.”<sup>10</sup> For that matter, resources “relative to colored women are not easily obtainable,” while for white women “nearly every fact and item illustrative of their progress and status is classified and easily accessible.”<sup>11</sup>

Her remarks were intended to raise the level of gender consciousness and place African American women at the heart of the contextual debate about the feminine role in American society. Because there had been little interest in their activities, she argued, African American women remained invisible. This produced a denial of black female citizenship and legitimized black women’s omission from the general discourse on women and the larger women’s movement. As women in Victorian America, African American females embodied all the qualities of respectable middle-class women. They were religiously astute, benevolent, educated, and moral. “Our women show a progressiveness parallel in every important particular to that of white women in all Christian churches,” Williams noted. And in the twenty-five years since slavery, “conditions discouraging in the extreme, thousands of our women have been educated as teachers. They have adapted themselves to the work of mentally lifting a whole race of people so eagerly and readily that they afford an apt illustration of the power of self-help. Not only have these women become good teachers in less than twenty-five years, but many of them are the prize teachers in the mixed schools of nearly every Northern city.”<sup>12</sup>

On the myths surrounding the morality of African American women, Williams said, “I regret the necessity of speaking to the question of the moral progress of our women, because the morality of our home life has been commented upon so disparagingly and meanly that we are placed in the unfortunate position of being defenders of our name.” The malicious attacks on black womanhood, she continued, “are impertinent and unjustly suggestive when they relate to the thousands of

colored women in the North who were free from the vicious influences of slavery. They are also meanly suggestive as regards thousands of our women in the South whose force of character enabled them to escape the slavery taints of immorality.”<sup>13</sup> This public defense of black women’s morality highlighted the concerns of the nation’s black female middle class about stereotypical views of impropriety.

Williams’s “progress” speech fit the themes of all the speeches made by African American women. Anna J. Cooper and Fannie Jackson Coppin followed Williams with more discussion of the progress of black women. Sarah J. Early delivered the address “The Organized Efforts of the Colored Women of the South to Improve Their Condition.” Hallie Q. Brown supplemented Early’s speech. Frances E. W. Harper spoke on “Woman’s Political Future.”<sup>14</sup>

Williams was chosen out of all the black female participants to speak to the World’s Parliament of Religions a few months later. There she opined that “it is a monstrous thing that nearly one-half of the so-called Evangelical churches of this country, those situated in the South, repudiate fellowship to every Christian man and woman who happens to be of African descent.” For African Americans, “the golden rule of fellowship taught in the Christian Bible becomes in practice the iron rule of race hatred.” “Can religion help the American people to be consistent and to live up to all they profess and believe in their government and religion?” she asked. Yes, she concluded—if it was reinforced by “the gentle power of religion that all souls of whatever color shall be included within the blessed circle of its influence. It should be the province of religion to unite, and not to separate, men and women according to superficial differences of race lines.”<sup>15</sup>

Williams’s deliveries at both the National Congress and the World’s Parliament of Religions catapulted her into national prominence. Over the next few decades, her services as a speaker, writer, and organizer were sought by both black and white audiences. As an African American woman, she used those forums to debunk myths, highlight the concerns of middle-class

African American women, and explain the issues facing the black populace.

Another African American woman who gained a reputation as a strong advocate for black rights and women's rights at the fair was Ida B. Wells. Though not a resident of the state at the time of the fair, she later became one of its most prominent citizens. An anti-lynching crusader, a club woman, and a political activist, she epitomized the defiant attitude that characterized only a small group of black activists in the late nineteenth century.

Wells's presence at the fair resulted from her passion for exposing racial injustice. Having had firsthand experience dealing with racism, she led a campaign against lynching. Some personal battles with racism and discrimination and the knowledge that the fair would attract both a national and an international audience encouraged her to take her crusade there. Her uncompromising and nonconformist style set her apart from club women such as Williams. Though she had published and lectured and was nationally recognized, Wells was not embraced by the Board of Lady Managers, or, for that matter, by any other fair administrative unit. Often on the receiving end of criticism from her black colleagues, she charted her own course.

Financed by several club women, Wells wrote, produced, and sold the pamphlet *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition*. It was published on August 30, 1893, and twenty thousand copies surfaced during the exposition. Frederick Douglass, former minister to Haiti, provided Wells with a desk at the Haitian building on the fairgrounds, where American and foreign visitors could purchase the booklet. The inclusion of essays by Douglass, Ferdinand Barnett, a lawyer in the city, and I. Garland Penn, a journalist and editor, contributed to the pamphlet's popularity.<sup>16</sup>

In *The Reason Why*, Douglass discussed the shift from slavery to the entrenchment of discriminatory laws. Wells presented a statistical and descriptive account of lynchings. Penn acknowledged the impressive progress of emancipated blacks despite overwhelming odds. Barnett addressed the disappoint-

ment of blacks at being purposefully excluded from the fair.<sup>17</sup> He concluded that the failure of black representation was “not of our own working and we can only hope that the spirit of freedom and fair play of which some Americans so loudly boast, will so inspire the Nation that in another great National endeavor the Colored American shall not plead for a place in vain.”<sup>18</sup>

The African American community was divided over the publication and distribution of the pamphlet. Some condemned it, attacking Wells’s motives. Opponents also questioned the use of hard-earned money for such a venture. Philanthropic gestures toward building up the black community, they believed, would better serve African Americans. Supporters, on the other hand, championed Wells and Douglass’s efforts and called for increased financial patronage. They believed that protest, not accommodation, would pave the way for equitable social, economic, and political resources. Further, they encouraged the distribution of the pamphlet in national and international markets.<sup>19</sup>

Wells’s denouncement of the designation of August 25 as “Colored People’s Day” at the fair also stirred debate. According to Wells, the true purpose of this “Negro Day” was to “appease the discontent of colored people over their government’s attitude of segregation.” For her, acceptance of the offer meant acquiescence to the system of Jim Crow. So she encouraged blacks to boycott the exposition on that particular day.<sup>20</sup>

Controversial actions had always limited Wells’s ability to work closely with other blacks and whites who did not share her views. Her assertiveness, independence, and outspokenness ran counter to the female mores of the Victorian era and often left her isolated and marginalized. A product of Southern white racism and the ideology of white supremacy that governed the social, economic, and political lives of blacks and whites alike, Wells developed these characteristics early in life. Born July 16, 1862, in Holly Springs, Mississippi, she was the eldest of the eight children of Jim Wells, the son of his master and a **slave woman and** **Warren**, a former Virginia slave.<sup>21</sup>

Life in Mississippi was not easy. Post-Civil War era Mississippi accorded few opportunities to African Americans. Though black Mississippians were a majority during the late nineteenth century, they continued to be subjected to systematic disfranchisement, Jim Crow segregation, and racial discrimination. White supremacists thwarted most educational, political, and economic opportunities for them. By 1890, few African Americans voted; most were still tied to sharecropping and tenant farming, and separate, inferior facilities were very much a part of their lives.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the inhospitable surroundings, the Wellses were able to educate their children. In 1866, the Freedman's Aid Society established Shaw University in Holly Springs, later renamed Rust College, for freed people. As an interested father and community activist, Jim Wells became a trustee at Shaw. Lizzie Wells, who had had no formal education, often accompanied her children to classes so that she could learn to read and write.<sup>23</sup>

In 1878, yellow fever swept through the area and changed Ida Wells's life drastically. Her father, her mother, and a nine-month-old sibling died in the epidemic. The care of the other children then fell on sixteen-year-old Ida's shoulders.<sup>24</sup> Financially responsible for the family, she passed the teacher's exam for the county schools and gained employment at a school six miles from her home, with a monthly salary of twenty-five dollars. A year later, invited by her mother's sister in Memphis, Tennessee, Wells left Holly Springs. She took the two younger girls with her to Memphis, leaving a sister and two brothers with relatives. As a teacher in the Shelby County school district, she earned a higher salary than in Mississippi.<sup>25</sup>

In the post-Reconstruction era, Memphis, like much of the South, implemented a program built on the usurpation of African American rights, a pervasive system of Jim Crow rules. By 1883 the U.S. Supreme Court, in a series of cases, had upheld the right of Southern states to enforce laws that violated the civil rights gained by African Americans after the Civil War.

Deeply disturbed over the events leading to the restoration of



white supremacy, Wells challenged the legality of the system. In May 1884, she boarded a train owned by the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad and chose a seat in the ladies' coach. Though informed by the conductor that as an African American woman she could not sit in the car reserved for white females, Wells stood her ground and refused to move to the all-black Jim Crow car. Rather than allow Wells to remain seated, the conductor attempted to forcefully remove her. In retaliation, she bit his hand. Refusing to be outdone, the conductor sought the aid of the baggage man. The two men then dragged Wells from the coach.

In retaliation, she hired a black lawyer and sued the railroad. Disappointed with his services, she turned to a white lawyer. The victory, with its settlement of \$500, was bittersweet. The state supreme court reversed the ruling of the lower court. Though disappointed, Wells understood that hers was "the first case in which a colored plaintiff in the South had appealed to a state court since the repeal of the Civil Rights Bill by the United States Supreme Court," and if she had won, it "would have set a precedent which others would doubtless have followed."<sup>26</sup> The case and its outcome served as a springboard for her career fighting racism and discrimination. Over the years, she pushed the system to its limit by persistently defending her rights as an African American woman. She advocated protest, demanded equality, and sought redress for crimes committed against her race.

One of the mediums she used to publicize her message was the newspaper. Realization of the power of the printed word came when she joined a lyceum of public school teachers that met on Friday afternoons. After each program, the meeting was closed with a reading of a weekly, the *Evening Star*. The *Star* disseminated news about important events, included biographies of influential blacks in the area, and provided literary notes. Reaching hundreds, it was an important source of communication in the black community. So when the editor of the paper returned to his position in Washington, D.C., Wells assumed the post. She continued her membership in the lyce-

um and accepted responsibility as the weekly reader of the paper. Wells later proudly claimed that membership in the lyceum grew because “they came to hear the *Evening Star* read.”

One of the people who heard Wells’s readings was a local Baptist minister who published the weekly *Living Way*. Impressed by her oratorical style and her editorship, he invited her to write for his paper. She accepted the offer because she had “an instinctive feeling that the people who had little or no school training should have something coming into their homes weekly which dealt with their problems in a simple, helpful way.” Her weekly column, written under the pen name “Iola,” reached mostly rural, uneducated people, so she wrote “in a plain, common-sense way on the things which concerned our people.” Her popularity grew, and over the years she contributed articles to local and national publications such as the *Memphis Watchman*, the *New York Age*, the *Indianapolis World*, and the *Chicago Conservator*.<sup>27</sup>

In 1889 she bought a one-third interest in the *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight*. F. Nightingale and J. L. Fleming attended to the public relations and financial end of the business, while Wells edited the paper. (Wells and Fleming later purchased Nightingale’s share.) Early on, she spent much of her time writing about Jim Crow schools. She abhorred the poor conditions in local schools for black children. Inadequate buildings and improperly trained teachers exacerbated already deteriorating conditions. Reactions to her exposés were overwhelmingly negative. Conservative blacks distanced themselves from her, and the white school board refused to renew her contract for the following year. Despite the setback, she believed that her action was “a blow against glaring evil and I did not regret it.”<sup>28</sup>

Without financial support, Wells searched for new endeavors. She spent much of the summer of 1890 seeking subscribers for the *Free Speech* throughout the Delta region in Mississippi, Arkansas, and Tennessee. Reacquainting herself with the people of Mississippi, she attended political meetings, church conventions, and Masonic meetings. While in Mississippi, she

learned that three of her colleagues in Memphis had been lynched. This horrible episode led Wells into another realm of journalism, investigative reporting.<sup>29</sup>

The events surrounding the deaths of Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Henry Stewart on March 9, 1892, forced Wells to challenge her own perceptions about black-white relations. The three men had successfully managed a grocery business, the People's Grocery, in a heavily populated black section just outside Memphis. Their fates were sealed when a competing white grocery store owner, accompanied by a police deputy, visited the store and harassed two of the African American owners. An altercation ensued. McDowell knocked the white grocer down and confiscated his gun. Stewart and McDowell were charged with assault and battery and were arrested. McDowell later posted bond, and they were released. The following Saturday night, the white grocer and a mob of white men entered through the back door of the store. Fearful of retribution, the African American men inside fired several shots at the intruders. Three of the white men were wounded. Chaos erupted when news spread that several black men had been dragged from their homes and questioned or incarcerated. Eventually, Moss, McDowell, and Stewart were indicted and thrown in jail. During the night they were removed from the jail, shot, mutilated, and hanged.<sup>30</sup>

The African American community responded in several ways. The *Free Speech* ran an editorial that indicted the entire white community for the deaths of the three men and encouraged blacks to leave the city:

The city of Memphis has demonstrated that neither character nor standing avails the Negro if he dares to protect himself against the white man or become his rival. There is nothing we can do about the lynching now, as we are out-numbered and without arms. The white mob could help itself to ammunition without pay, but the order was rigidly enforced against the selling of guns to Negroes. There is therefore only one thing left that we can do; save our money and leave a town which will neither protect our lives and property, nor give us a fair trial in the courts,

but takes us out and murders us in cold blood when accused by white persons.<sup>31</sup>

Pushed by fear, many black Memphis residents heeded the call of the *Free Speech* and migrated to Oklahoma. So many departed that there was a rapid drop in black ridership on the City Railway Company's trains. As a result, profits decreased for the owners of the Railway Company and other businesses heavily trafficked by African Americans. Concern over the massive out-migration forced mainstream white newspapers to discourage such moves and declare Oklahoma to be a major disappointment and plagued by hardships.

Wells refused to bow to pressure from white business owners to join them in their efforts to terminate the movement. Lost profits, she believed, were a small price to pay for the lives of three responsible citizens. She even visited several black churches, urging members "to keep on staying off the [railway] cars," and she "rejoiced" when many more blacks sought refuge in Oklahoma.<sup>32</sup>

Wells also decided to do her own investigation of the murders. The fates of Moss, McDowell, and Stewart forced her to question the rationale of lynchers and to reassess her own ideas about the reasons for lynchings. Like most Americans, black and white, she had been heavily influenced by myths that suggested that lynchings happened to accused rapists—that is, black men who raped white women. The men brutally murdered in Memphis, however, did not fall into that category. They were outstanding community citizens whose only crime was competing with a white grocer. This realization compelled Wells to examine previous lynching cases. After extensive research, she concluded that more often than not, the cry of rape served as a device for racist white men to legitimize the elimination of African American competitors.

She subsequently wrote a scathing editorial: "Eight Negroes lynched since last issue of the *FREE SPEECH*. Three were charged with killing white men and five with raping white women. Nobody in this section believes the old thread-bare lie

that Negro men assault white women. If Southern men are not careful they will over-reach themselves and a conclusion will be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women.”<sup>33</sup> The editorial attacked Southern white male honor and suggested that white women could be attracted to black men. It infuriated the white community.

Fortunately, when the editorial appeared, Wells was en route to Philadelphia to attend the African Methodist Episcopal General Church Conference. Warnings from an enraged white mob persuaded the co-owner of the paper, J. L. Fleming, to flee. The mob destroyed the newspaper office and in their rage threatened Wells’s life should she dare return to Memphis. Exiled from her home, she moved to New York, joined the staff of the *New York Age*, and continued her exposés on lynchings.<sup>34</sup>

Wells had met the editor of the *Age*, Timothy Thomas Fortune, in the summer of 1888 and maintained her contact with him. When Fortune called for the formation of the National Afro-American League, she supported him. Through the *Age*, Americans were alerted to the inherent problems of disfranchisement, lynching, inequitable distribution of educational funding, the convict lease system, and Jim Crow.<sup>35</sup>

Wells’s research on lynching culminated in the pamphlet *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, published in October 1892. She prefaced it with “Somebody must show that the Afro-American race is more sinned against than sinning, and it seems to have fallen upon me to do so.” She was determined to prove that blacks were not a “bestial race” and to “arouse the conscience of the American people to a demand for justice to every citizen.”<sup>36</sup>

In her crusade to alert the world to the plight of blacks in the United States, Wells became a lecturer. On October 5, 1892, Victoria Earle Matthews, a social worker who had established the White Rose Working Girls Home for young African American women, and Maritcha Lyons, a schoolteacher, invited Wells to Lyric Hall in New York City to speak to approximately 250 women. Her topic was lynching.<sup>37</sup> The speech in New York

offered her the chance to expose this heinous practice to a national audience. But it was not easy. Upon approaching the lectern at Lyric Hall, Wells recounted later, "A panic seized me. I was afraid that I was going to make a scene and spoil all those dear good women had done for me. I kept saying to myself that whatever happened I must not break down, and so I kept on reading. I had left my handkerchief on the seat behind me and therefore could not wipe away the tears which were coursing down my cheeks." Bewildered, disconcerted, and annoyed by this emotional demonstration, "I was mortified that I had not been able to prevent such an exhibition of weakness."<sup>38</sup> Rather than being offended, the audience seemed captivated by her uncharacteristic public display of a "woman's weakness," and they listened intently. The emotional interlude successfully awakened the assembly to the serious state of the African American community, particularly the male population.<sup>39</sup>

In appreciation, Wells received five hundred dollars and a gold brooch in the shape of a pen, symbolic of her newspaper reporting skills.<sup>40</sup> The event also launched her public speaking career. Invitations poured in from around the country, and by the close of the year, it was evident that she had a secure position as a spokesperson for African American rights.<sup>41</sup>

Wells's speech challenged its listeners to become involved in issues of relevance to the black community. Soon afterward, several women formed clubs of their own. Victoria Earle Matthews organized the Women's Loyal Union of New York, and Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin went back to Boston and established the Women's Era Club.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Ruffin, an active club woman and suffragist and her daughter, Florida Ruffin Ridley, began publication of a monthly newspaper, the *Woman's Era*, which disseminated news by and about black women throughout the country. As a vital component of the African American women's clubs, the *Era* circulated in Boston, New Bedford, Providence, New York, Chicago, Washington, and Kansas City.<sup>43</sup> Several women, including the co-chair of the New York rally, Victoria Earle Matthews, and Chicago resident and club woman Fannie

try on a monthly basis. Articles focused on local club activities, child welfare issues, and woman suffrage.<sup>44</sup>

Williams regarded the journal as a “rallying” instrument for black women, because it provided them with the opportunity to voice “words of hope, courage and high resolves in a journal that seems to spring out of the very heart and peculiar needs of our women.” Hundreds of black women viewed the journal, Williams insisted, “as the first intimation of the wideness of the world about them and the stretch of human interest and sympathy.”<sup>45</sup>

Wells, meanwhile, made plans to take her crusade to an international audience and began looking for a new home. She chose Chicago, which offered a vibrant black population and a freedom of expression that she found exciting. Her first endeavor was the creation of the first black women’s club in the city, the Ida B. Wells Club. Known as the mother of the women’s clubs in Illinois, it placed African American women squarely in the reform movement in the Midwest and served as a model for many newly created associations.<sup>46</sup>

When she traveled to England and Scotland in 1893 and 1894, Wells helped launch several anti-lynching clubs. On the second tour of England, in hopes of persuading the English to exert international pressure on the American government to end lynchings and discrimination, she harshly criticized the activities of prominent white leaders considered to be favorable toward the causes of blacks, arguing that they did not take a strong enough stance on lynching, and that their silence on the issue sanctioned mob violence. In addition, she denounced those among them who spoke to racially segregated audiences, saying that their actions condoned racial segregation and strengthened arguments for intolerance.<sup>47</sup> Disguised as friends, she insisted, these white leaders were reaping the loyalty of African Americans and the praise of the white community.

The accusations reverberated throughout the black and white communities and elicited swift rebuttals. Several African American leaders chastised Wells and sent a letter to the *Era* in defense of one white spokesperson in particular, Francis Wil-

lard. As president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), an organization that attracted and included many black women, Willard had demonstrated an unquestioned commitment to the African American community. Nevertheless, the *Era* supported Wells and suggested that even Willard had not publicly condemned one of the most atrocious crimes against African Americans, lynching.<sup>48</sup>

Denunciation of Wells and her speeches was immediate. The president of the Missouri Press Association, John Jacks, published a letter that he had sent to Florence Belgarnie, an Englishwoman who had a keen interest in the causes of black Americans. Jacks's letter condemned the activities of Ida B. Wells and characterized black women as "having no sense of virtue and altogether without character."<sup>49</sup>

It was through the pages of the *Era* that many African American women learned of Jacks's comment. His venomous defamation of black womanhood angered African American women, and in defense they rallied once again. Exploiting the contents of the letter, the *Era's* editor, Ruffin, issued an urgent call for a national congress of black women. She believed that Jacks's letter represented not just his own views, but those of much of white America. The legacy of slavery legitimized the idea that black women were "for the most part ignorant and immoral." She sent copies of the letter to black women nationwide, calling for a national conference:

Although this matter of a convention has been talked over for some time, the subject has been precipitated by a letter to England, written by a Southern editor, and reflecting upon the moral character of all colored women; this letter is too indecent for publication, but a copy of it is sent with this call to all the women's bodies throughout the country. Read this document carefully and use discriminately and decide if it be not time for us to stand before the world and declare ourselves and our principles. The time is short, but everything is ripe and remember, earnest women can do anything.<sup>50</sup>

Women in Illinois eagerly responded to the call to action.

Hannie Barber Williams led the appeal for the formation of a



national organization. According to Williams, Jacks's letter had "stirred the intelligent colored woman of America as nothing else had ever done."<sup>51</sup> "In spite of its wanton meanness," Williams continued, the letter "was not without some value in showing to what extent the sensitiveness of colored women had grown. Twenty years prior to this time a similar publication would scarcely have been noticed, beyond the small circles of the few who could read, and were public-spirited. In 1895 this open and vulgar attack on the character of a whole race of women was instantly and vehemently resented, in every possible way, by a whole race of women conscious of being slandered." Women were encouraged to hold mass meetings nationwide "to denounce the editor and refute the charges" of immorality.<sup>52</sup> Like Ruffin, Williams believed that an umbrella association would provide black women with the knowledge they needed for social welfare work and the power to defend black womanhood. "In order to equip ourselves with knowledge, sympathy, and earnestness for this work," she told a Memphis, Tennessee, audience, "we need the soul-strengthening influences of organization. Women unorganized in the presence of the heart-stirring opportunities are narrow, weak, suspicious, and sentimental. . . . Women organized for high purposes," by contrast, "discover their strength for large usefulness, and encircle all humanity with the blessedness of their sympathy."<sup>53</sup>

For Williams, women were the "spirit of reform incarnate," and it was only through them that African American women and their communities would be saved from the wretchedness of discrimination and poverty. Women's spirit of reform "impresses its reforming influence upon every existing evil, and its protecting power of love hovers over every cherished interest of human society. All combined institutions of Church, State, and civic societies do not touch humanity on so many sides as the organized efforts of women," she declared.<sup>54</sup>

On July 29, 30, and 31, 1895, the first national conference of African American women was held in Boston. The impressive array of speakers included Booker T. Washington, Margaret Murray Washington, Timothy Thomas Fortune, Henry B. Blackwell, William Lloyd Garrison, Jr., and Anna Julia

Cooper. Topics varied from “Women and the Higher Education,” “Industrial Training,” and “Individual Work for Moral Elevation,” to “The Value of Race Literature” and “Political Equality and Temperance.”<sup>55</sup> Ida B. Wells, however, was not there. Married only a month before, to Chicago lawyer and newspaper publisher Ferdinand Barnett, Wells was suffering from exhaustion, and did not attend the conference.<sup>56</sup>

Members at this meeting agreed to form a permanent organization, the National Federation of Afro-American Women (NFAAW), headed by the wife of Booker T. Washington, Margaret Murray Washington. The creation of the new national organization fostered a rift between the Boston group and a Washington-based black women’s club. The Colored Women’s League led by Mary Church Terrell, considered itself the first national black women’s organization and protested the activity of the NFAAW. On July 19, 1896, the NFAAW convened for its first annual meeting in Washington, D.C., at the 19th Street Baptist Church, shortly after the league had held its annual meeting. The following day, seven members from the two organizations agreed to meet at the church; they resolved to drop the individual names of their organizations and unite under the name the National Association of Colored Women.<sup>57</sup>

Black women’s clubs from every region quickly joined the NACW. From Illinois, the Ida B. Wells Club sent its president, Wells-Barnett, as a delegate to the first meeting. With a new baby in tow and accompanied by a nurse, she attended the historic event.<sup>58</sup> Other Illinois clubs present included the Phyllis [Phillis] Wheatley Club and the Y.P.S.C.E. of Quinn Chapel.<sup>59</sup> Each paid the two dollar membership fee and was listed in the first directory of delegates. The Woman’s Civic League, Wayman Circle, Progressive Circle of King’s Daughters, Hyde Park Woman’s Club, North Side Woman’s Club, and Peoria Woman’s Club joined later.<sup>60</sup>

The National Association held its first biennial meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1897 and elected Mary Church Terrell president. Illinois sent Connie Curl, president of the Civic League, and Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, president of the Phyllis

Wheatley Club, as delegates to the meeting. Part of their responsibility was to invite the NACW to hold its second biennial meeting in Chicago.<sup>61</sup>

Successful in the bid and cognizant of the need to unite factions on both the national and local levels, several Illinois club women organized under the name the Women's Conference. Attempting to connect the national movement with the local one, they sought to elect a recognizable, well-respected, supportive leader to represent them. They chose Fannie Barrier Williams as president. Over the ensuing months, the group mapped out their plans. Williams appointed a receiving committee composed of Agnes Moody, Rosa Moore, Albert Hall, Anna Douglas, Birdie Evans, Mary Davenport, and Elizabeth Lindsay Davis. They represented the Ida B. Wells Club, the Phyllis Wheatley Club, the Civic League, the Progressive Circle of King's Daughters, the Ideal Women's Club, and the G.O.P. Elephant Club of Chicago, and the Julia Gaston Club of Evanston. The four-day conference, August 14–17, 1899, was to be held in Chicago.<sup>62</sup> For the members of the Women's Conference, this was an exciting time. Publicity from the alliance with the still-novel NACW put them in the national spotlight and generated enormous interest statewide. Unquestionably, these Victorian African American women reflected "the Vision of the progressive Future."<sup>63</sup>

Wells-Barnett did not attend the Chicago rally. Instead, she joined forces with old colleague Timothy Thomas Fortune in preparing for the Afro-American Council Conference, to be held August 17–19 at Bethel AME Church in Chicago. Since the conference opened on the same day that the NACW gathering ended, a few NACW members attended the council meeting.<sup>64</sup>

The NACW's conference in Chicago gave black women in Illinois a place to network, creating opportunities for them in the process. Over the years, several women gained administrative positions within the organization. Connie Curl, former delegate to the Tennessee biennium, was elected recording secretary; Elizabeth Lindsay Davis became national organizer;

Eva Jenifer served as chair of Ways and Means and as parliamentarian; Agnes Moody was second vice president; Agnes E. Payton became corresponding secretary; and Theresa G. Macon served as recording secretary.<sup>65</sup>

The formation of the NACW was an aggressive response to the demands of African American women. Insisting on visibility, responding to the deteriorating conditions in the African American community, and defending black womanhood, these activists created the largest African American organization in the country. The association expanded the range of pursuits for African American women, yielded enormous profits, and played a major role in redefining the concept of a black female sphere by providing a basis of organized reform and widening the scope of black women's work. As a result, the numerous associations already in existence flourished, and new ones sprang up across the nation.

The formation of the NACW energized African American club women in Illinois. They began to focus on increasing the localized volunteerism of women and solidifying their forces. Clubs proliferated throughout the 1890s. They concentrated on self-development and literary and cultural activities, as well as benevolence. By the turn of the century, female activists had brought together a group of like-minded black Illinois women and joined the ranks of those creating state associations.

## TWO



### *“Loyalty to Women and Justice to Children”*

THE ILLINOIS FEDERATION OF  
COLORED WOMEN’S CLUBS

The members of the Women’s Conference Committee who gathered in October 1899 at Institutional Baptist Church in Chicago were meeting to explore the feasibility of becoming part of the national club women’s movement.<sup>1</sup> They strategized about how to create a state federation that would consolidate the efforts of the state’s black female activists as well as be a viable means of stimulating the growth of more clubs committed solely to racial uplift. United by racial pride and inspired by the success of the NACW, these women created a state superstructure consisting of an army of organized black women from a network of local and regional clubs. The members decided from the outset that the current name of their group, the Women’s Conference Committee, while demonstrating their gender consciousness, reflected neither their race consciousness nor their regionalism. Perceiving themselves as representative of educated, moral African American women providing racial leadership in a Midwestern state, the committee adopted the name the Illinois Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs (IFCWC).<sup>2</sup>

The actual creation of the IFCWC took more than a year to complete. On November 21, 1900, the members finally

agreed on a mission statement, adopted a constitution, and elected officers.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the sources needed to reconstruct the deliberations over that year and the day-to-day inner workings of the IFCWC over the next twenty years remain elusive, primarily because minutes, reports, and correspondence do not exist. But Elizabeth Lindsay Davis's *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* and a small cache of material (including a constitution, bylaws, and some records of regional organizational development) housed with the Illinois Association of Club Women and Girls Papers do provide important details on the significant role that the IFCWC played in Illinois history and in the national African American club women's movement of the period. Published in 1922, *The Story* documents the activities of more than fifty clubs, provides biographies of more than seventy members, and describes ten community-improvement projects undertaken by affiliates of the organization. Both the book and the papers list convention schedules and the names of elected officers and include the constitution and bylaws adopted by the federation. Further, Davis's impressive work illuminates how wide-ranging the membership and the activities of the IFCWC became over time. It also suggests that the members of the federation were a sophisticated group who shared a common vision of racial uplift and self-improvement.<sup>4</sup>

One of the first orders of business at the initial meeting was to develop a governing document. The constitution and bylaws set out the structure of the organization. Its twelve articles dealt with the election of officers and their terms, membership criteria and dues, and a list of permanent benevolence departments. After determining that officers would serve one-year terms, be eligible for two successive terms, preside over state conventions, and act as delegates to the NACW conventions, members voted on the first slate of administrators.<sup>5</sup> Precisely how they decided among women who had equally impressive skills as club women, and who in all probability had forged strong friendships, is difficult to determine from the limited records available. The women chose as president Mary

Jane Jackson of Jacksonville. A native Illinoisan, she had grown up in the northwestern town of Galesburg and later migrated to Jacksonville, a community in central Illinois, then to Chicago. The wife of a minister, she had much experience in aiding the black community. She was heavily involved in both church auxiliaries and secular club women's organizations. At one time, she had held membership in the West Side Woman's Club and was elected first vice president of the Phyllis Wheatley Club.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the president, other first officers were elected, including five vice presidents: Cordelia West of Chicago, first vice president; Katherine Tillman of Chicago, second vice president; M. V. Baker of Evanston, third vice president; Julia Gibson of Peoria, fourth vice president; and Julia Duncan of Springfield, fifth vice president. Other officeholders included Margaret Anderson of Chicago, recording secretary; Jennie McClain of Springfield, assistant secretary; Sarah Floyd of Peoria, treasurer; and Elizabeth Lindsay Davis of Chicago, organizer.<sup>7</sup>

At the second three-day annual convention of the IFCWC, held October 9–11, 1901, in Peoria, Jennie McClain from Springfield was elected president, serving until 1903. Subsequent presiding officers reflected a cross-section of state affiliates: Fannie Hall Clint, Chicago, 1904–1905; L. L. Kinnebrew, Jacksonville, 1905–1906; Annie M. Peyton, Chicago, 1907–1908; C. B. Knight, Alton, 1908–1909; and Eva Monroe, Springfield, 1909–1910. By the second decade, however, when the black population in Chicago had swelled to historic proportions, women in the city gained a monopoly on the top post. Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, who became president in 1910, served two terms, as did Ida D. Lewis and Theresa G. Macon, locking the presidency up until the 1916 election.<sup>8</sup>

The Chicago hegemony in the presidential office, however, did not translate into dominance of the other posts. Although the first election favored Chicago women (first vice president, second vice president, recording secretary, and organizer), and for twenty years at least two or more members of the board were residents of the city, women from Alton, Aurora, Bloom-

ington, Canton, Champaign, Danville, Du Quoin, Galesburg, Joliet, Lovejoy, Moline, Monmouth, Peoria, Rock Island, and Springfield gained other leadership positions.<sup>9</sup> The strategic inclusion of women from all geographical areas of the state reflected the quest to maximize resources and an attempt to minimize the impact of the largest and most organized group of club women on the less influential club women in other regions of the state.

Over the years, other executive board positions were added. By 1907, the heads of the Ways and Means Committee and the Social Improvement Committee began to take active roles in the decision-making process. Eventually, a chaplain, a parliamentarian, a statistician, and a historian were also included.<sup>10</sup>

Membership in the IFCWC was selective and was designed to attract middle-class race women with the economic means and the time to volunteer. In order to join, individuals had to pay a five dollar fee, and women's clubs had to have at least ten members, incorporate social and benevolent components, and pay a two dollar fee. Individuals maintained life member status as long as they remained financially stable in a local club. Privileges included all the rights of a regular elected delegate. In addition, city and district federations with a membership of ten or more clubs were granted admittance. The fee of two dollars entitled them to one delegate for every ten clubs.<sup>11</sup>

Another important order of business during early deliberations was choosing a motto that would symbolize their mission and uniquely characterize the middle-class women who sought membership in the federation. Self-help and racial uplift drove them to be community developers and reformers, but it was the importance of advancing and improving the lives of women that led them to adopt the slogan "Loyalty to Women and Justice to Children."<sup>12</sup> The motto reflected the group's concern about the negative impact of race and gender discrimination on black women's lives and their goal of defending black womanhood. It also expressed their interest in influencing the lives of the children of the black community.

Every aspect of the organization's outreach was governed



by its mission. Effecting social change and providing the opportunity for uplift were the motivating forces behind the establishment of twenty-four standing committees that tackled domestic, educational, and cultural issues unique to women. There were arts, crafts, and music departments, which encouraged the growth of clubs such as the Imperial Art Club of Chicago, the Art and Study Club of Moline, the Domestic Art Club of Bloomington, the Progressive Art Club of Rock Island, and the Social Art and Literary Club of Peoria, where members read the classics, did needlework, and listened to classical music.<sup>13</sup> Committees on hygiene, temperance, and civic responsibility were set up to teach women about the necessity of cleanliness, abstention from alcoholic beverages, and the importance of self-help. The mothers' department instructed black women about child rearing and other domestic duties associated with the family.<sup>14</sup> To be sure, the dissemination of these middle-class Victorian values reflected an attempt by the club women to direct, and to a degree control, people's lives, and suggests that they believed that it was their job to be the moral caretakers and uplifters of the masses.

As a philanthropic agency, the IFCWC also funded several projects. The primary criterion for beneficiaries was that the objective had to coincide with the mission of assisting women and children. For more than twenty years, the IFCWC provided financial resources to the YMCA, the YWCA, the Phyllis Wheatley Home, the Amanda Smith Orphanage, the Old Folk's Home, Provident Hospital, and various day nurseries in Chicago. Other contributions went to the Lincoln Colored Home in Springfield, Yates Memorial Hospital in Cairo, the Lillian Jameson Home in Decatur, the Home for Dependent Children in Bloomington, the Woman's Aid Community House in Peoria, and the Iroquois Home for girls in Evanston.<sup>15</sup>

In keeping with its mission, the IFCWC also funded educational programs. With the goal of establishing more kindergartens and making them an integral part of the public schools, the federation allocated 20 percent of its funds for providing financial assistance in the form of educational scholarships to

ensure that several African American youth could attend college. In addition, a special-purpose fund went toward increasing the number of African American kindergarten teachers.<sup>16</sup>

The federation also set aside funds for members who were “financially unable to attend” the annual convention. The Pioneer Fund provided transportation costs and afforded those women who otherwise would not splurge on such a luxury the opportunity to travel to many parts of the state. This assistance proved fruitful. Black women in Chicago, Peoria, Springfield, Evanston, Jacksonville, Quincy, Danville, Champaign, Bloomington, Monmouth, Rock Island, Moline, Galesburg, and Carbondale increasingly organized local clubs to assist the masses. Moreover, the conventions provided an arena for dialogue between members on civic, social, and economic matters. State delegates described and discussed the programs in their local organizations, and NACW delegates reported on the activities of the national organization. Officers unveiled plans for future projects.<sup>17</sup>

The IFCWC adapted to the social and economic changes in black lives. The increased demands on the organization’s resources by the large numbers of migrants attracted to Illinois by economic opportunity in several major industries challenged club women to develop more sophisticated ways to simultaneously recruit members, expand their resource base, and aid the masses, particularly those in urban areas. To that end, regional districts were created that divided the state into three sections. These sub-federated organizations were modeled after the IFCWC in that they were overlapping networks of localized clubs situated in the northern, central, and southern regions of the state. Each had its own governing body and by-laws, and each acted as a philanthropic, benevolent, and/or cultural agency. These sub-federations provided the opportunity to engage as many club women as possible in the reform efforts, to encourage the creation of clubs in rural and urban areas where women had not yet organized, and to acquaint women with the various strategies used by area clubs as well as those throughout the state and the nation.<sup>18</sup> An additional benefit

was a reduction in travel expenses. The regional associations allowed those who could not afford to attend IFCWC conventions to stay abreast of important issues.

The oldest and largest district was organized in the spring of 1906. Thirteen clubs met in March at the Frederick Douglass Center in Chicago to unite club women in the city. Soon after, the following associations joined the new City Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (CFCWC): the Ida B. Wells Club, the Phyllis Wheatley Club, the Women's Civic League, the Frederick Douglass Center Women's Club, the Necessity Club, the Mother's Union Club, the Cornell Charity Club, the Julia Gaston Club, the Volunteer Workers' Club, the North Side Woman's Club, the Ladies' Labor of Love Club, the Imperial Art Club, and the Progressive Circle of King's Daughters Club. The group adopted the motto "From Possibilities to Realities" to reflect their mission statement: "To promote the education and welfare of women and children. To raise the standard of the home. To secure and enforce civil rights for minority groups and to foster interracial understanding, so that justice and goodwill might prevail among all people." A popular association among women in the city, the CFCWC included more than seventy women's clubs on its roster nearly ten years after its inception.<sup>19</sup>

Elected to serve as the first CFCWC president was Cordelia West, who had migrated to Chicago from Evanston, Indiana, sometime during the last half of the nineteenth century. Her three-year term lasted from 1906 to 1909. As an active club woman, West at one time presided over the Ida B. Wells Club and the Volunteer Workers Club. She also held the offices of first vice president (1900), chair of the Ways and Means Committee (1901), organizer (1902, 1914, and 1915), and parliamentarian (1918) of the IFCWC. Soon after the state legislature passed the suffrage amendment, enfranchising women, she became heavily involved in Chicago politics.<sup>20</sup>

In 1921, under the reign of Irene Goins, the CFCWC incorporated and became the Chicago and Northern District Association of Colored Women.<sup>21</sup> Subsequent presidents of the

organization included Annie Peyton, Fannie Turner, Theresa G. Macon, Clara Johnson, Jessie Johnson, and Martha Walton.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout its existence, the CFCWC assisted more than three thousand individuals and contributed to numerous institutions and causes. Among them were the Amanda Smith Home, the Phyllis Wheatley Home, the Frederick Douglass Center, the Chicago Peace and Protective Association, the Equal Suffrage Association, the League of Women Voters, the Women's Legislative Congress, the NAACP, the Chicago Urban League, and Provident Hospital.<sup>23</sup>

More than a decade passed before the Central District was created. On March 22, 1918, several women met at Wards AME Chapel in Peoria to organize the Central District Federation. Membership areas included Peoria, Macomb, Galesburg, Bloomington, and Canton. Service activities increased thereafter among the local club women of central Illinois. Early presidents served one-year terms and included Julia Lindsay Gibson, treasurer of the IFCWC from 1914 to 1915, Mildred Farral, and Victoria Thomas, who served as statistician of the IFCWC from 1920 to 1921.<sup>24</sup>

The Southern District was organized at the AME Church in Du Quoin. This district focused much of its attention on the development of Yates Memorial Hospital at Cairo, which served African Americans on the Illinois-Missouri border. The five hundred women who belonged to the district held membership in the Carrie Lee Hamilton Club in Colps, Douglass Parent Teachers in Mounds, the Hallie Q. Brown Club in Du Quoin, the Community Club in Carbondale, the Community Club in Elkhville, Garrison Parent Teachers in Cairo, the Yates Woman's Club in Cairo, the Silver Leaf in Mounds City, the Benevolent Workers in Marion, the Woman's Club in Lovejoy, the Sojourners Club in Carbondale, Woman's Opportunity in Mounds, the Woman's Club in Sparta, the Sunbeam Club in Marion, the Sunshine Club in Harrisburg, and the Mary Q. Waring Club in Murphysboro.<sup>25</sup>

The women drawn to the IFCWC shared a number of characteristics. Each had a profound belief that only through col-

lective effort was it possible to uplift and improve the community. Almost all were well educated, with many holding academic and professional degrees. They were also quite religious. With few exceptions, they had ties with and maintained membership in various churches throughout the state. It was through their participation in church auxiliaries that most of them honed the administrative and social-service skills that they used in creating their clubs.<sup>26</sup> Lillian E. Jameson, for example, a former resident of Evansville, Indiana, acquired her initial experience through her church Sunday school. As a teacher, she gained public-speaking and organizational skills. She transferred those abilities to various secular club pursuits, such as campaigning and winning the presidency, chairing the Executive Board, and becoming the organizer for the IFCWC.<sup>27</sup> Jennie E. Lawrence's father was a Presbyterian minister. Accustomed to strict supervision and a rigid daily schedule, Jennie was well prepared for the superintendency of the Phyllis Wheatley Home.<sup>28</sup> Jennie Coleman McClain's volunteerism in both the Union and Zion Baptist churches provided her with the skills she needed to help found the Springfield Colored Woman's Club and govern the IFCWC for two terms in 1901 and 1902.<sup>29</sup>

The women's religious affiliations also influenced their fundraising pursuits, because religious institutions often were instrumental in the success of their operations. Some clubs sought much-needed monetary assistance from area congregations for homes for orphans and the elderly. For example, St. Paul, St. John, Union Baptist, and Pleasant Grove churches contributed to the annual year-end fundraising for Springfield's Lincoln Colored Home. Other churches were called upon to house kindergartens and provide shelter for African American children, such as that at Bethel AME Church in Chicago. The establishment of an IFCWC committee on religion attested to the desire on the part of the club women to nurture their religious beliefs and integrate them with their secular pursuits.<sup>30</sup>

Although most of the women attracted to the IFCWC and its affiliates shared some basic similarities, the group was not homogeneous. Some of the members were native Illinoisans,

while others, though longtime residents, had migrated to the state. While some were considered to be in the middle class, a few belonged to an elite group of the wealthiest African Americans in the area. Most belonged to the professional class of teachers and small business owners, but some were essentially socialites who were not employed outside the home.

Fannie Barrier Williams best exemplifies the elite group. Born February 12, 1855, into a prominent free black family in Brockport, Fannie was perhaps one of the wealthiest and most “cultured” of the IFCWC members. She and her two siblings were educated in the small town, with seemingly few problems assimilating into the white community. The Barrier family appreciated “the refinements of life, were public spirited and regarded as good citizens.”<sup>31</sup>

As the only black family in Brockport for many years, the Barriers enjoyed financial and social success. From all indications, Harriet Prince Barrier was not employed outside the home. Anthony Barrier made a successful living as a barber and coal merchant. As a man and a property owner, he shared in the leadership of the community. He held key positions as clerk, trustee, treasurer, and deacon. Both parents taught Bible classes at the predominantly white church the family attended.<sup>32</sup>

Though surrounded by whites, Fannie and her siblings faced no social or educational barriers. “During our school days,” Fannie recalled, “our associates, schoolmates and companions were all white boys and girls. These relationships were natural, spontaneous and free from all restraint. We went freely to each other’s houses, to parties, socials and joined on equal terms in all school entertainments with perfect comradeship.” Carried into adulthood, these memories had a strong influence in shaping her views about race and class in American society.<sup>33</sup>

After graduating in 1870 from the State Normal School at Brockport, Barrier devoted her time to teaching. One of her first jobs was in the South. “Race instinct” inspired her to join the other black and white Northern women who were venturing south to educate the newly freed African Americans. The experience was anything but pleasant. Influenced by life in

Brockport, she strongly believed that class distinctions outweighed race in relationships. Outside the borders of her Northern haven, however, she came face to face with Jim Crow. In the South, she "began life as a colored person, in all that term implies."<sup>34</sup>

Caught in the racist and sexist web of post-Civil War Southern culture, Barrier found that her background and views were a liability. Her elite status meant little to Southern whites. Embittered by the experience, she angrily wrote, "No one but a colored woman, reared and educated as I was, can ever know what it means to be brought face to face with conditions that fairly overwhelm you with the ugly reminder that a certain penalty must be suffered by those who, not being able to select their own parentage, must be born of a dark complexion."<sup>35</sup> So traumatized by the mores of the South, Barrier realized that in order to survive, "everything that I learned and experienced in my innocent social relationships in New York State had to be unlearned and readjusted to these lowered standards and changed conditions. . . . [Even the] Bible that I had been taught, the preaching I had heard, the philosophy and ethics and the rules of conduct that I had been so sure of, were all to be discounted."<sup>36</sup> "Instead of there being a unity of life common to all intelligent, respectable and ambitious people," she lamented, "down South life was divided into white and black lines, and . . . in every direction my ambitions and aspirations were to have no beginnings and no chance for development."<sup>37</sup> Thus Barrier discovered that the idyllic childhood and the breeding, wealth, and education that had ensured her elite status in Brockport had also insulated her from the realities of American life. "I never quite recovered from the shock and pain of my first bitter realization that to be a colored woman is to be discredited, mistrusted and often meanly hated."<sup>38</sup>

Frustration coupled with indignation compelled her to move to more hospitable surroundings. Washington, D.C., offered a large African American elite community and respectable employment. She became a teacher in Washington, socialized with other "aristocrats of color," and met a promising young

law student, S. Laing Williams. A native of Georgia and a former Alabama schoolteacher, he had graduated from the University of Michigan in 1881. When they met, he was employed at the Pension Office and was attending Columbian University Law School in Washington. Upon completion of his law degree in 1887, the couple married and moved to Chicago. The Williamses moved quickly up the social ladder. He became a prominent lawyer and was later appointed the first black assistant district attorney in Chicago by President Taft in 1909, primarily on the recommendation of Booker T. Washington, the director of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. She became an active reformer and club woman.<sup>39</sup>

She joined the elite literary Prudence Crandall Study Club and played a key role in establishing a nurses' training program at Provident Hospital. Little is known about the study club except that it was an exclusive upper-class literary society with twenty-five members. The hospital was established in 1891, and through the agitation of Williams, a training school for black nurses was added. As a result, Provident became one of only a few places in the United States where African American women could be trained as nurses.<sup>40</sup>

The national prominence that Williams achieved in 1893 as one of the few African American female participants in the Columbian Exposition in Chicago illuminated her early position as a race woman. When she told the audience that "except for teaching in colored schools and menial work, colored women can find no employment in this free America. They are the only women in the country for whom real ability, virtue, and special talents count for nothing when they become applicants for respectable employment," she was attempting to counteract the negative image of African American women generated by white society and challenging the racial status quo. It was, she insisted, "the blighting thrall of prejudice," not the lack of a work ethic, that hindered hundreds of African American females.<sup>41</sup>

Because of her performance, several of her white friends chose her to integrate the elite white Chicago Woman's Club



in the fall of 1894. Carefully scrutinized and rigorously investigated, the women admitted to the club were white and usually wealthy. Celia P. Woolley, author, lecturer, and Unitarian minister; Ellen Henroten, former president of the Chicago Woman's Club and the Board of Lady Managers; Grace Bagley, a prominent club woman in Chicago; and two others must have known the enormous significance of introducing Williams's name to the membership committee. Her credentials were impeccable: she already belonged to the exclusive elite black female literary association, the Prudence Crandall Study Club; she was married to a prominent lawyer; and she had been nominated by leading white Chicago women. Nevertheless, she was African American.

When the club deliberated over the nomination for fourteen months, it must have seemed like *déjà vu* for Williams.<sup>42</sup> Culture, class, and intellect guaranteed nothing for an African American woman in Victorian, Jim Crow America. For despite their locale, Midwesterners largely shared the Southern perspective of an African American female's place. Some members of the club refused to address the issue because they felt that "the time had not come for that sort of equality." For Williams, the agony over the debate surrounding her confirmation resembled the "anti-slavery question" because it "was fought over again in the same spirit and with the same arguments." "This simple question," she concluded, "was the old bugbear of social equality." In contrast to her Southern experience, however, these Midwestern women did admit her, because, she asserted, "the common sense of the members triumphed over their prejudices."<sup>43</sup> It is unclear how effective she was within the confines of the club or in opening the door for other black women. Obviously, however, class and gender played as significant a role as race in her admittance. She was a middle-class woman of African American ancestry. Over the next two decades, Williams was involved in many activities. She assisted Woolley in the creation of the Frederick Douglass Center, contributed articles to several journals, and lectured extensively.<sup>44</sup>

Less well known but also a member of the "Elite 400,"

Fannie Emanuel was born in 1871. Like Williams, she migrated to Illinois and found Chicago a hospitable place. Marriage to businessman William Emanuel in 1888 provided her with a stable financial situation and enabled her to pursue several opportunities. She enrolled in the Graham Taylor School of Civics and received her M.D. in 1915 from the Chicago College of Medicine. While attending school, she operated a charity home for children, the Emanuel Settlement Home. Additionally, she was actively involved in the club movement. She was a member of the Board of Directors of the Phyllis Wheatley Club, served in 1901 as recording secretary for the IFCWC, and was elected president of the Alpha Suffrage Club and the Frederick Douglass Woman's Club.<sup>45</sup>

Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, on the other hand, was part of the growing professional middle class. The eldest daughter born to Thomas and Sophia Jane Lindsay in Peoria County, Illinois, in 1855, she enrolled at Bureau County High School in Princeton at the age of ten. One of three blacks to graduate from the institution, Davis became a teacher. Traveling extensively throughout the Upper South and the Midwest, she held positions in Kentucky, Iowa, Indiana, and Illinois. When she married William H. Davis of Frederick, Maryland, in 1885, she quit teaching and devoted her time to church service and club work. An ardent believer in reform and social uplift, Davis embraced the idea that the best women of the race should be at the forefront of reform.

Her interest in local issues was demonstrated with the establishment of the Chicago Phyllis Wheatley Women's Club in 1896, of which she served as president for twenty-eight years. In 1908 this organization opened the Phyllis Wheatley Home for young black females seeking refuge from a life on the city streets. Active in other clubs, Davis held memberships in the Woman's City Club, the Chicago Forum League of Women Voters, the Woman's Aid, the Giles Charity Club, the E. L. D. Study Club, and the Service Club.

As national organizer for nine years, state organizer for six years, state president from 1910 to 1912, and historian of the

NACW and IFCWC, Davis made immense contributions to both organizations. Her documentation of the movement in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* constituted the first record of women's clubs in the state. *Lifting As They Climb*, published in 1933, was the first national history of the black female club movement.<sup>46</sup>

Another middle-class professional was Susan Allen. Born in Galesburg, Illinois, she was a member of one of the first families to settle in Knox County. Her parents played an instrumental role in organizing the first Methodist church in the county. Educated in the Monmouth public schools, Allen became a missionary. While rearing her children, she maintained an active schedule. She championed temperance and female suffrage and held membership in the Republican Club. She served as president of the Autumn Leaf Club and assisted in the creation of the Woman's Progressive Club. In 1910 and 1911, she held the post of third vice president of the IFCWC.<sup>47</sup>

Native Illinoisan Jennie Coleman McClain was born in Springfield on February 12, 1855, to Laundrum and Melissa Coleman. After completing high school, she moved to Missouri and taught school. She returned to Springfield sometime during the last decades of the nineteenth century and remained there for the rest of her life. Committed to religious endeavors, McClain assumed an active role in the church. She was treasurer of the Union Baptist Sunday School, secretary of the Zion Baptist Sunday School, and assistant secretary and vice president of the Wood River Baptist Sunday School Convention. Strongly committed to the welfare of children, McClain held a seat on the executive board of the Lincoln Colored Home in Springfield. At the age of fifty-four, she was elected the Grand Most Ancient Matron of the Heroines of Jericho Lodge, one of the most distinguished honors for a member. Other lodge work included serving as grand lecturer in the Grand Chapter Order of the Eastern Star. In the IFCWC, she was elected chair of the Committee on Constitution and By-Laws, assistant secretary, and president.<sup>48</sup>

Connie Curl-Maxwell, from Cincinnati, Ohio, came to Illinois via a long trail of job opportunities in the South and the Midwest. After graduation, she secured teaching positions in Cincinnati, Keokuk, Iowa, and Louisville, Kentucky. Upon her arrival in Chicago, she became an active club woman. She organized and became the first president of the Woman's Civic League and a member of the Phyllis Wheatley Home Association. In addition, she served as the recording secretary of the NACW from 1899 to 1900.<sup>49</sup>

The mobilization of these middle- and upper-class African American women was based on a shared belief that they had to collectively tackle the issues contributing to the destruction of the African American community. They saw their social welfare crusade as improving both their own lives and the lives of those around them. Equally devoted to uplifting the community and to aiding themselves, they found that participation in the club movement offered them a rare opportunity to associate with like-minded individuals who also were seeking collective advancement. Thus the IFCWC was organized to maintain a resource network of reliably skillful black females who could help lift the masses while elevating the image of middle-class black womanhood.

When the IFCWC incorporated in 1912, members were also turning their attention to discussions of female enfranchisement on the state level. At the Rock Island convention that year, the keynote address was "Why Women Should Vote."<sup>50</sup> The interest of the IFCWC was piqued for two reasons: the first was the growing national campaign by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the NACW, and white female suffrage groups to enfranchise women in the eastern states; the second was their own local interest. The female suffrage legislation pending in the state assembly would have a major impact on organized club women, further enhancing their ability to serve the community. When the legislation passed in 1913, the newly enfranchised club women adapted. As the first and largest group of black women in the country to obtain suffrage, they joined forces with West-

ern black club women, who had already enjoyed that privilege. By 1915 the Northwestern Federation of Colored Women's Clubs was born.<sup>51</sup>

Throughout its tenure, the IFCWC remained a grassroots organization. Committed to empowering affiliates, club women met the social, political, and economic challenges faced by blacks in both rural agricultural areas and urban industrialized areas. The unification of local and regional affiliates into a centralized association harnessed the inventiveness, the spirit, and the essence of black reform-minded progressive women while expanding interest, commitment, and funds. In turn, black women gained considerable administrative skills, friendship, and the satisfaction that they had indeed uplifted the race.

The organization had a strong foundation, enduring well into the second half of the twentieth century and remaining responsive to the needs of blacks. Club women continued to extend social services to the black community long after the reform years ended. In August 1931, the federation changed its name to the Illinois Association of Colored Women. In December 1954, it became the Illinois Association of Club Women. With the change, a junior association known as the Illinois Association of Club Girls was added. Girls ages nine to seventeen and a young adult group, ages eighteen to twenty-five, were trained to incorporate volunteerism into their daily lives and embrace racial uplift.<sup>52</sup>

The creation and development of the IFCWC was a response to the increasing demands on African American women in the state. The organization enlarged their sphere of influence, contributed to their sense of sisterhood, and provided them with the resources they needed to assist the African American populace. Including more than eighty clubs by 1922, the IFCWC was unquestionably a powerful force: it was the largest organization in the state championing the rights of blacks, and the most comprehensive welfare agency meeting their needs. Through more than two decades of extensive social service work, the organization successfully increased the level of racial consciousness, contributed to improving the lives of the

poor, and provided black women with a sense of comradeship that enhanced their own lives. Moreover, the members of the IFCWC successfully addressed issues concerning poor black women and bridged the barriers between urban and rural women.

## THREE



### *Agents of Social Welfare*

Industrial growth exploded during the Progressive Era in Midwestern states such as Illinois, and with the rapid advances and changes in manufacturing came a need for additional labor. African Americans both from Southern states and from within Illinois sought economic opportunities in these industries. As a result, the state's black population increased, and there was a dramatically altered pattern of black settlement. In 1890, 57,028 blacks resided in Illinois. By 1920 that number had more than tripled, to 182,274. Moreover, the percentage of blacks residing in rural areas dropped steadily—from nearly 40 percent in the last decade of the nineteenth century, to 28 and then 22 percent during the first two decades of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> With approximately 80 percent of African Americans in 1920 situated in urban enclaves, where there were few social programs to aid them, the social welfare network of black club women became not only a means of improving the quality of life, but also a necessity for survival.

Many of the blacks who migrated to the state prior to 1916 did find gainful employment. Yet for most blacks there were few other long-term tangible benefits. Racism, segregation, and discrimination blocked any chance of significant advancement.

Because many of the black migrants who settled in urban centers came from rural Southern environments, they were, as Fannie Barrier Williams explained, “utterly incapable of adapting themselves to the complex conditions of city life. They come for more liberty, and alas, many of them find it all too soon and to their lasting sorrow. They come for better homes, only to find unsanitary tenements in the black belts of the city. Some of the more competent come with high hopes of easily securing employment in some of the higher class occupations, but they find themselves shut out by a relentless prejudice, drifting at last into the easy path of immoral living.”<sup>2</sup> While Williams’s remarks denote her own class bias, they nevertheless demonstrate that African Americans in Northern urban centers such as Chicago often found themselves at the bottom of the employment scale. While a few others found jobs in the factories, labor unions usually excluded them, a fact that further eroded their economic power.

Eventually, the only housing areas open to them were the urban ghettos. Segregated by race and economic status, the majority of these areas set aside for African Americans lacked adequate shelter, educational institutions, recreational programs, and decent health-care facilities. Black deaths in Northern and Midwestern cities increased because of the high incidence of tuberculosis, venereal diseases, infant cholera, and pneumonia. Although the rates of death for both blacks and whites declined steadily after the turn of the century, historian Florette Henri contends that “the black death rate was consistently higher and diminished less rapidly” than the death rate for whites. In 1910, nonwhites died at a higher rate: 21.7 per 1,000, as opposed to 14.5 per 1,000 for whites. Although the disparity was reduced in 1920, the death rate for nonwhites continued to be greater than that for whites, 17.7 to 12.6, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

Restrictions based on race were not limited to urban areas. Racially segregated neighborhoods, exclusion from better economic opportunities in the factories, and the denial of services



by social welfare agencies in rural communities exacerbated the plight of blacks. Hoping to find better housing and employment, many rural blacks joined a large intra-state migration. Their move to more urbanized areas aggravated the difficulties for both the newcomers and the natives.

To answer the needs of the increasing number of poor blacks who descended on the state prior to the Great Migration of the second decade of the twentieth century, African American club women, on the city, regional, and state level, created a remarkable network of social agencies. They organized and maintained kindergartens, established a large number of homes for the aged, the infirm, and the orphaned, and opened, staffed, and operated medical facilities. They also “rescued” young women from a life of immorality, provided libraries and recreational facilities, and responded to the health concerns of black men and women.<sup>4</sup>

Because there were so many demands on the club women, fundraising was a full-time activity. Maintaining their allegiance to the self-help philosophy, the women looked primarily to the African American community for assistance. They generated funds from membership dues, bake sales, talent shows, and musical presentations. Church congregations contributed money for the upkeep of orphanages and homes for the elderly. The women also turned to the philanthropic arm of the NACW and wealthy African Americans in Illinois. The African American community provided other types of aid as well: Churches donated space to house kindergartens and recreation centers, and the services of church personnel to teach and maintain the programs. Doctors and nurses donated their time and energies to taking care of the sick. Others in the community presented women’s clubs with much-needed furnishings, blankets, rugs, utensils, and clothing.

Because of the enormous burden placed on the limited resources of the African American community, black women also found it necessary and often prudent to seek the aid of white philanthropists. Influential whites provided the requisite funds

for sustaining the services black women offered the masses. Too, they often became a political voice for these second-class citizens.

Two of the most important programs initiated by club women were in child and elderly care. The kindergarten at Bethel AME Church and the day nurseries maintained by the Phyllis Wheatley Club and the Necessity Club in Chicago demonstrate the commitment of black women to the young. The Amanda Smith Home in Harvey, the Lincoln Colored Home in Springfield, and the Home for the Aged and Infirm in Chicago exemplify their zealous mission to help the elderly, infirm, and orphaned.

The club women in Chicago took the lead in developing day care for black children. One of the first projects of the Ida B. Wells Club, founded in 1893, was the establishment of a kindergarten at Bethel AME Church. Only a few of the private kindergartens established in the "Black Belt," the Second Ward, admitted African American children. But increased demand, coupled with long waiting periods, such as at Armour Institute, remained a deterrent to black parents seeking early educational training for their children. Recognizing the void, the members of the Ida B. Wells Club sought aid from Reverdy C. Ranson, pastor of Bethel from 1895 to 1900. The group, the minister, and two African American women trained to teach kindergarten opened an alternative school for African American children in the mid-1890s. The lecture room at Bethel served as the classroom for half-day sessions.<sup>5</sup>

Other clubs followed a similar route. In 1904, the Phyllis Wheatley Club established a day nursery at Trinity AME Mission in the Second Ward. With \$1,000, the Necessity Club purchased and remodeled a building in the ward, opening the Necessity Day Nursery in 1920.<sup>6</sup>

As the number of black migrants in Illinois rose, so did the number of orphaned children and elderly. Amanda Smith led the fight to obtain adequate facilities for orphaned children in Harvey. The eldest of thirteen children, Smith was born in slavery on January 23, 1837, in Long Green, Maryland. Her fa-

ther, eager to free himself and his family, labored in the fields for his master by day, then hired himself out at night. With his income he first bought his own freedom, then purchased that of his wife and children. The family subsequently moved to Pennsylvania.

Commitments to education and religion shaped Smith's life. Though not formally educated, she did learn to read at an early age. As a young child, assisted by her mother, she practiced forming words from the one source of literature in her home, the newspaper.<sup>7</sup> Religion also played a major role in her life. In the mornings, the family would gather around the table after breakfast as her father read the Bible. Influenced by her early life, Smith married a deacon in the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1859. During their marriage, she worked as a washerwoman and became a devoted follower of Christianity. After the death of her husband in 1869, she pursued a career as an evangelist. For almost two decades, she dedicated her life to being a Protestant missionary and lecturer, proselytizing in New York, England, Africa, and India.<sup>8</sup>

In 1892, Smith settled in Chicago. When she arrived in the city, the number of homeless black children was still on the rise. Three years later, at the age of fifty-eight, she invested her life savings, \$10,000, in some land in Harvey, a suburb of Chicago, as a site for the future Amanda Smith Orphan Home. Nearly four years later, the home opened to five orphaned children. As one of the few orphanages for black children in the state, with ties to the Cook County Juvenile Court, it continued to experience increased enrollment. Less than five years after it had opened, thirty children found refuge there. Support from Smith's savings, the sale of her autobiography, *Amanda Smith's Own Story*, and her newspaper, the *Helper*, evangelistic work, and donations from black and white friends kept the orphanage afloat in its first years. But the lack of consistent long-term financial support finally took its toll. Restricted growth and an inefficient staff limited the home's success. In 1905, ten years after it had opened, the constant shortage of funds and inadequate staff led state inspectors to suggest that

the orphanage be closed. Practicality prevailed, however. It was the only facility in the area serving African American children, and the state could hardly do without it.

By 1913, the orphanage was granted a state charter. In honor of Smith's contributions and in recognition of its new mission as a home for orphaned and delinquent girls, it was renamed the Amanda Smith Industrial School for Girls. Nearly forty girls between the ages of four and seventeen attended the school by 1917. Smith, however, had relinquished the helm. Failing health forced her into retirement in Sebring, Florida. She died February 23, 1915. Three years later, the home was destroyed in a fire.<sup>9</sup>

Another champion for the orphaned was Eva Carroll Monroe, who was less than thirty years of age when she opened the Lincoln Colored Old Folks' and Orphans' Home. Born in Ke-  
wanne, Illinois, in 1868 (or 1869) to Richard and Mary Glenn Carroll, Monroe learned early about responsibility. After the death of her mother in 1880, she gained custody of six younger siblings. In the mid-1890s she settled in Springfield and worked for a while at a sanatorium.

Over the next three decades, Monroe became deeply involved in the black women's club movement. She joined the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and served as president from 1909 to 1910. She represented the federation at the national conventions in Salt Lake City in 1909 and in Kansas City in 1916. She was the only black woman on the executive board of the State Department of the Illinois Woman's Relief Corps. In 1915, the Illinois Commission of the National Half-Century Anniversary of Negro Freedom made Monroe vice chairman of its Department of Sociology. In addition, she held memberships in the WCTU and the Phyllis Wheatley Home Association of Chicago.<sup>10</sup>

Springfield, located in Sangamon County, had a large number of dependent black children. Most were undernourished, inadequately clothed, and homeless. The only facility in the city for orphans, the Home for the Friendless, was restricted to whites. Distance and lack of space rendered the Amanda Smith

Home ineffectual. Recognizing the enormous need, Monroe and her sister, Ollie Price, solicited money from the black community for the down payment on an old, dilapidated brick house on South Twelfth Street in Springfield. On March 8, 1898, Monroe named the structure the Lincoln Colored Home, moved herself, Price, four children, and one elderly woman into the building, and thereby started the first orphanage and elderly home for African Americans in the county.

The Lincoln Colored Home experienced the same financial woes that had plagued the Amanda Smith Home. Depleted funds and the lack of consistent outside financial resources remained a problem. Monroe and Price solicited help from black and white friends and acquaintances. Donations of furniture, bedding, carpet, and coal made the home habitable and sufficiently comfortable for the residents. By the end of the year, however, the sisters were behind on their mortgage payments, and unsanitary conditions remained a problem. When foreclosure seemed imminent, the wife of a former mayor, Mary Lawrence, paid off the mortgage of \$1,400 and had the building deeded to her. Lawrence's philanthropic role was strengthened by her friendship with city officials and acceptance in the white community. Until her death in 1904, she was an indispensable financial and political ally for Monroe, the home, and the African American community.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to Lawrence's support, Monroe and a small group of middle-class black women met in August 1899, at the home of Julia Duncan, to discuss organizing a black women's club that would be dedicated to keeping the home open, providing necessities to the residents, increasing awareness of the black orphan problem in Sangamon County, and seeing to the cultural welfare of African American women. The club adopted the name the Springfield Colored Woman's Club. Duncan, the granddaughter of Sangamon County's first black settler, William Florville, was elected president.<sup>12</sup>

The club immediately elected a board of officers and board of directors to set policies and act as liaison between the club, the home, and the black community. The first board of officers

included Julia Duncan, president, Sadie Demeny, vice president, Mattie Johnson, secretary, Martha Hicklin, treasurer, Ollie Price, matron, and Eva Monroe, solicitor. The board of directors consisted of Jennie McLain, Lizzie Taylor, Hattie Manuel, Anna Donegan, Etta Taylor, and Sarah and Alice Wilson.<sup>13</sup>

To help the club reach its goals, each member selected a benevolent or social section. The Philanthropic Section developed methods of raising much-needed capital. The Home Culture and Social Purity Section educated members about domestic and moral issues. The Mother's Division and Juvenile Section provided lessons in parenting skills. Cultural activity was the province of the Musical and Education sections.<sup>14</sup>

Through annual dues, a ten cent tax on each member, and solicitations from the community, the club raised \$360.50 for the home in its first year. Over the next decade, more than \$3,000 was contributed. Members sold tickets to musical programs, held bake sales, and solicited financial support from individual blacks and whites, churches, businesses, and clubs in the city. In addition, members donated food, bed linen, crutches, medicine, and a washing machine.<sup>15</sup>

Members also sought assistance from African American churches. Their monthly visits increased awareness of the goals of the home and the club, as well as encouraged African Americans as a group to commit to their own community development. And in all probability, since many of the women were members of the churches, they found receptive audiences in the congregations. The "small sum" received from the worshippers "soon counted up," related club historian Jennie McClain. As a result of the success, club members tapped into this resource on an annual basis.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, they harnessed the support of other black women's clubs, individual black men, and black men's clubs in the city. For example, a women's club, the Don't Worry Club, assisted in the home's annual fundraising fair. Donations from individual black men helped to purchase shingles for the building. A men's club called the Douglass Club performed a drama, which generated \$300.<sup>17</sup>

They also solicited the aid of one of the black newspapers, the *State Capitol*, which urged the black community to support the home because it was “a colored institution entirely managed by colored ladies.” A year after Monroe opened the home, the paper published a patron donation list so that “the public can see who are and who are not doing anything for their race.” Perhaps the editor imagined that interest in the project would increase if it was endorsed by the local media, or that public embarrassment would force non-contributors to donate.<sup>18</sup> Whatever the motive, this strategy suggests that black community values and mores rested on the philosophy of empowerment and self-help.

Though no records exist of white patrons, McClain notes that white Springfield residents, including Lawrence, came to the home’s aid. During a matching campaign, nearly \$500 was raised. Mary Lawrence later contributed an additional \$800.<sup>19</sup>

The Springfield Colored Woman’s Club also looked to the IFCWC as a source of funding. After the state convention in Springfield in August 1902, the IFCWC adopted the Lincoln Colored Home as a project and contributed to its fund on an annual basis.<sup>20</sup>

Ultimately, the stability and upkeep of the home remained in the hands of Monroe. As solicitor, she was responsible for administering and canvassing for funding. To that end, she traveled throughout the state, attending social events and making speeches. Northwest of Springfield, she visited the cities of Galesburg, Havana, Monmouth, Peoria, Quincy, and Rock Island. Beardstown, Decatur, and Jacksonville were the cities on her itinerary for the central areas. Southwest of Springfield, she spoke to audiences in Alton and Edwardsville. In addition, she traveled as far as Joliet, in the northeastern part of the state. Monroe also canvassed outside Illinois, in places such as Fort Madison and Davenport, Iowa.

Her productive campaigns heightened awareness of the home’s existence, which led to a rise in applications. Soon a larger and more modern structure was needed. After enough money had been successfully secured, primarily from Lawrence,

and the dilapidated old structure had been demolished, construction began on a new building in 1903. Residents lived in tents on the property during this time. A limited supply of water, carried in by the boarders, contributed to poor sanitary conditions. Alarmed by the situation, club members requested that Mary Lawrence intercede on their behalf. Lawrence spoke with the white district alderman, and within a few days a water system was installed.<sup>21</sup>

On New Year's Day 1904, residents celebrated the opening of a modern three-story brick building. There were almost eight times as many boarders as in earlier years. In addition to Monroe and her sister, the new Lincoln Colored Home housed eight elderly women and twenty-nine children. Growth, however, remained a problem for the home. Diminishing space and financial resources eventually forced the board to curtail Monroe's travels. Solicitations and applications were now limited to Springfield.<sup>22</sup>

Soon after the new building was dedicated, Lawrence died. With her death, Monroe, the Springfield Colored Woman's Club, and the African American community lost a valuable ally. For years, Lawrence had influenced white residents and government officials on behalf of African Americans. Funding from the white patrons had flowed in annually, and city officials had remained on friendly terms with Monroe at the insistence of Lawrence. She was a critical link between the black and white communities: when she donated money and furnishings to aid the home, her white colleagues did the same. As she had requested, and in her memory, Lawrence's daughter, Susan L. Dana, was deeded the property and donated \$7,000 to the home. Dana continued to make contributions over the years, but her preoccupation with personal issues overshadowed her involvement with the home.

The Springfield Colored Woman's Club and the Lincoln Colored Home began a series of outreach programs for the community. The Mary A. Lawrence Club was formed to provide monthly literary and educational programs for boarders and patrons. The home also hosted the Crispus Attucks Camp



for black youth. The 1913 dedicatory exercises of the camp included an address by the governor of Illinois, Edward F. Dunne. During the same year, Monroe secured a charter for the Mary A. Lawrence Industrial School for Colored Girls and the Lincoln Industrial School for Colored Boys.<sup>23</sup>

In the 1920s, the Lincoln Colored Home became part of the Springfield Council for Social Agencies. State guidelines then governed its administration. By the early 1930s, criticism of Monroe's administration surfaced. Depending on the generosity of the African American community and white philanthropists, the facility had operated on a shoestring throughout its history. Because of the Depression, even with financial help from the Service Bureau for Colored Children, in all probability the home continued to operate on limited funds. And in all probability, Monroe's inadequate training exacerbated the distress. As the push to professionalize social service work escalated, Monroe's obsolete late-nineteenth-century training rendered any credentials she may have acquired invalid. Because of her enormous commitments, she had little time and few financial resources to enroll in classes to improve her skills.

Charges of understaffing and operating an unsanitary facility continued to hound Monroe, but she managed to keep the home open. By the mid-thirties, however, she finally succumbed to the bureaucracy, and the home was closed by the bureau. The children and the elderly were moved to another site under the direction of Family Services of Sangamon County.

Eva Monroe remained in the home until she was hit by a car in the late 1940s. She spent months in the hospital and died January 31, 1950, while being taken to a home for the elderly at Quincy, Illinois. The Lincoln Colored Home was sold at public auction on April 17, 1944.<sup>24</sup>

During the same year that Monroe had begun her search for housing for orphans in Springfield, a fire destroyed the homes of seven elderly black citizens in Chicago. This prompted Grabrilla Knighten Smith and Fannie Mason, two Chicago club women, to seek funds from women's clubs and churches

to open the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People of Chicago in 1898. By 1899, thirteen men and women resided in the facility, and a permanent board of trustees was appointed.

As in Springfield, the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People spawned the organization of a black women's club to act as custodian and fundraiser. In 1904, the Volunteer Workers for the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People was organized to work exclusively for the home. Workers raised money, donated food and clothing, ran errands, and served dinners. They purchased a steam-heating plant at a cost of \$342 and built a separate stairway leading to the men's quarters for better accessibility.

In order to broaden their philanthropic efforts to reach more underprivileged African Americans, the Volunteer Workers adopted new bylaws in 1911 and became the Volunteer Workers Charity Club. The new organization widened its sphere and donated time and money to several other services: the Amanda Smith Home, the Phyllis Wheatley Home, and Provident Hospital. Its financial support helped to purchase larger quarters for the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People in 1921.<sup>25</sup>

Other projects were also initiated. For example, the Colored Old Folk's Home Association of East St. Louis expanded its services by opening an orphanage on May 5, 1920, in a rented building. The Labor of Love Club in Chicago installed a bathroom in the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People. In addition, several clubs, including the Cornell Charity Club, the East Side Woman's Club, and the Union Charity Club, donated money for the maintenance of housing facilities.<sup>26</sup>

The Progressive Era, which ushered in one of the "most zealous and best recorded campaigns against prostitution," offered African American women another avenue for curtailing moral evil in their communities. A consequence of rapid growth, particularly in urban areas, prostitution represented for black middle-class women the corruptibility of young, poor black women and lent support to the demoralizing stereotype of black females. Thus, prostitution reform involved a campaign against

the popular myths of promiscuity and immorality that had plagued black women throughout their lives. The ultimate goal, of course, was to uplift the race by elevating and bestowing dignity on black womanhood.<sup>27</sup>

For black women, the attack on prostitution was important for two reasons. First, as Victorian women and as moral caretakers, they felt that it was their duty to attack the underside of American life. Abolishing prostitution meant protecting the home from negative outside forces. Restraining the sexual appetites of men was viewed as a priority. Second, the legacy of slavery had generated stereotypes of black women which were directly opposed to the ideal moral Victorian woman. Because African American women were labeled as licentious, sensual, and promiscuous by mainstream society, they were “prey for the men of every race,” suggested Nannie Burroughs, a national lecturer and active club woman. Consequently, most middle-class black women struggled throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to dispel the myth.<sup>28</sup>

As the largest metropolis in the state, Chicago presented the biggest challenge to the eradication of prostitution. City authorities, including police, often cooperated with prostitutes and pushed the red-light districts into or near black neighborhoods to keep them away from commercial and white residential areas. Consequently, blacks received little support in their efforts to clean up their streets. The lack of aid prompted Fannie Barrier Williams to complain that she and other law-abiding black citizens were forced to “witness the brazen display of vice of all kinds in front of their homes and in the faces of their children.” It was these “trying conditions” under which Victorian black women lived, Williams insisted, that motivated them to organize crusades against prostitution.<sup>29</sup>

Black girls who were “led unawares into disreputable homes, entertainment and employment because of lack of the protection that strange girls of the other Races enjoy” found a cadre of black club women committed to preventing them from falling victim to “the hand maid of shame.”<sup>30</sup> Club women took young women into their homes, appointed task forces to study

the problem, built recreational and housing facilities, instituted programs, and taught classes on the duties of women.

Members of a task force formed by several black women's clubs in Chicago concluded that a shelter was needed for homeless young girls. Lula Farmer, Anna Dunmore, Laura Manning, Naomi Fenwick, and the well-known black educator Dr. Anna Cooper found that because the YWCA and similar white organizations providing services for single women restricted those services to whites, many black girls were turning to a life on the streets. The task force recommended that accommodations be purchased in a "desirable neighborhood" to protect young girls from "human vultures ever ready to destroy young womanhood."<sup>31</sup>

The Phyllis Wheatley Home, which opened in 1908, was a direct result of the increasing number of African American female migrants who were seeking employment and housing. To deter them from the temptations of life in saloons and prostitution, the Phyllis Wheatley Club, established in 1896, raised funds to provide employment services, recreation, and lodging for as many as three hundred girls over an eight-year period. In an ongoing effort to maintain the home, a philanthropic arm, the Phyllis Wheatley Home Association, was created in 1909. It was successful in its mission, and the home grew rapidly. By 1915, a new facility was built to accommodate the swelling female population.<sup>32</sup>

Women in other parts of the state also joined in the morality and anti-prostitution crusade. The Big Sister Club of Decatur, founded in 1913, initially dedicated resources to supplementing rental payments, working with the juvenile court system by vouching for young girls sentenced to jail, and placing dependent youth in homes. By 1918, however, the club was limiting its work to aiding dependent women and their children. It opened the Lillian Jameson Home, named in honor of a fellow colleague, which provided low-cost shelter for estranged girls and women who needed a safe environment.<sup>33</sup> In Evanston, Eva Rouse, president of the Iroquois Community League, initiated the construction of a recreation center for girls. The Iro-

quois Community League Home opened in 1923 and was promoted as a place where girls could find “healthful recreation, Christian guidance, and protection.”<sup>34</sup>

In rural areas such as Rock Island and Mounds, women’s clubs also provided a safe and secure environment. The Juvenile Department of the Progressive Art Club in Rock Island reported rescuing several girls from prostitution. The Silver Leaf Club pleaded for leniency in juvenile court for a few delinquent youth and placed girls in the homes of club members when necessary.<sup>35</sup> The Springfield Colored Woman’s Club did the same; for example, Julia Duncan offered room and board to a young girl brought before the club at one of its Monday night meetings.<sup>36</sup>

Few concrete conclusions can be drawn about the success of the campaign against prostitution among black women, or about the success of the moral and Christian values that middle-class women sought to instill in their charges. Increasing migration and ongoing racial and gender discrimination continued to contribute to the high unemployment and poverty levels among black women. Other black women could not “rescue” all of them. As a result of limitations placed on them by outside forces, newly arrived young girls were often easy prey for aggressive recruiters. Many also found themselves at the mercy of the juvenile court system, with few alternatives available. Moreover, because of blacks’ limited political clout, red-light districts in their neighborhoods withstood even the most zealous efforts. The secrecy surrounding the business of prostitution, scanty records, and the failure of the club women to list the numbers of girls they “saved” add to the difficulty of ascertaining whether the club women could claim any substantial victory.

The nationwide settlement house movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries attracted African American women as well. Their interest contributed to the nearly one hundred settlements operating in the United States by 1900. Distressed over the filth, squalor, and poverty in American cities, these women dedicated their lives to combating problems.

The settlements provided temporary and permanent shelter, employment, education, and recreation.<sup>37</sup>

The two most prominent and renowned settlements in Illinois were Hull House, founded by Jane Addams, and Graham Taylor's Chicago Commons. But because white settlement workers were not free of prejudices, few houses accepted African American residents. Even the YMCA, the YWCA, and the Salvation Army discriminated against blacks, despite the fact that African Americans accounted for a disproportionate percentage of the unemployed, underemployed, and impoverished. Women such as Williams demanded to know what migrating blacks were supposed to do when they could not find employment or adequate housing upon entering the city. "Go to the Young Men's Christian Association?" Williams quipped. "That exists only for the benefit of white young men."<sup>38</sup>

Wells-Barnett voiced a similar accusation: "While every other class is welcomed in the Y.M.C.A. dormitories, Y.W.C.A. homes, the Salvation Army and the Mills hotels, not one of these will give a negro a bed to sleep in or permit him to use their reading rooms and gymnasiums. Even the Women's Model Lodging House announces that it will give all women accommodations who need a place to sleep, except drunkards, immoral women and negro women. What then is the negro to do?"<sup>39</sup>

The Frederick Douglass Center, the Negro Fellowship League, and the Wendell Phillips Settlement filled the void, becoming the most prominent settlements in black Chicago. In 1904, Celia Parker Woolley, a white Unitarian minister who had moved to Chicago in 1876, called a meeting of several black leaders, including Ferdinand and Ida Wells-Barnett, George Cleveland Hall, a prominent physician, and S. Laing Williams, a lawyer and the husband of Fannie Barrier Williams, to discuss the feasibility of opening an interracial settlement in the Second Ward. The black leaders applauded the settlement idea, believing that it would be an important asset to the community. The Frederick Douglass Center, dedicated to promoting

amicable relations between whites and blacks, opened in 1905. It incorporated and was governed by an interracial board.<sup>40</sup>

Woolley and her husband lived at the center and monitored daily operations. Blacks and whites worked together in recreational groups, religious services, boys' clubs, and athletic programs. The Douglass Women's Club was formed as a result of the center's activities to improve the lives of women. A white woman, Mrs. George Plummer, acted as president, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett was vice president.<sup>41</sup>

Wells-Barnett left the center a few years after its inception because of an ideological disagreement with Woolley and other whites associated with the project. She argued that the white administrators patronized blacks and "were not willing to treat us on a plane of equality with themselves." So she solicited money from Victor Lawson, the publisher of the *Chicago Daily News*, and organized the Negro Fellowship League in May 1910.

The league launched a newspaper, the *Fellowship Herald*, in 1911, and provided lodging, recreational facilities, a reading room, and an employment agency for primarily new migrant men from the South. Like the Phyllis Wheatley Home, the league acted as a referral service for men seeking jobs. By the end of the first year, Wells-Barnett claimed, it had helped 115 black men find employment. The league also acted as a political agency, fighting discrimination on several fronts. It sponsored lectures and conferences on racial discrimination in employment and on race riots, particularly the East St. Louis Riot of 1917.

As an advocate for temperance, Wells-Barnett argued that the league's purpose went beyond that of a social center. It was important because "all other races in the city are welcomed into the settlements, YMCA's, YWCA's, gymnasiums and every other movement for uplift [because] their skins are white. Only one social center welcomes the Negro, and that is the saloon." The league, then, was to play an important role in curtailing the vices of alcoholism and vagrancy among black men.

Dwindling funds, however, limited the success of the Negro Fellowship League. After 1912, Victor Lawson completely withdrew financial assistance. In addition to feeling that the league should be self-supporting, Lawson felt that other facilities established for blacks were sufficient to meet the social, economic, and cultural demands of the African American community. The YMCA for black men opened in 1913, and the Chicago Urban League was established in 1916. This lack of funds, coupled with waning public support, forced Wells-Barnett to move the league to smaller quarters. Determined to maintain the association, she financed it with money earned from her appointment as a probation officer. She subsequently used the league as a reporting station for her probationers. After she lost her job, the league disbanded.<sup>42</sup>

On the west side of Chicago, a group of blacks and whites established a settlement house in 1908 for the enrichment of black life. The Wendell Phillips Settlement was similar to the Douglass Center in that it had an interracial board of directors and relied on white financial support. Julius Rosenwald, a wealthy philanthropist, contributed 25 percent of the operating budget for the settlement from 1912 until its closing in the twenties. Under the administration of black social worker Birdye Henrietta Haynes, one of the first graduates of the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, the settlement provided recreational activities for more than three hundred children.<sup>43</sup>

In rural communities, inadequate funding deterred African American women from building large facilities. But because they too had an interest in “rescuing” children from the juvenile court system and from the other corruptible vices, they rented or purchased houses for recreation. The Woman’s Aid Club, a group with branches in several cities and towns, was in the forefront of the battle. For example, the Woman’s Aid Club of Danville purchased the Woman’s Aid Club House in 1907 to hold club meetings and to serve as a recreation center for youth, and the Woman’s Aid Club branch of Peoria bought a nine-room house for similar purposes.<sup>44</sup>

One of the most important reform activities of African



American women was health care. Preventive medical care was virtually nonexistent for blacks. They were excluded from most hospitals, or assigned to small, inadequate facilities. Most white doctors were reluctant to treat black patients for fear of white retaliation or because of their own prejudices. Consequently, the black community was responsible for constructing facilities and for training its own people. Hospitals providing care for African Americans opened in Philadelphia, Chicago, Savannah, and many other cities across the country. Staffed by black doctors, nurses, and administrators, these institutions supplied both the black community and the national health care profession with trained personnel.<sup>45</sup>

The Nurses Training School at Provident Hospital in Chicago and Yates Memorial Hospital of Cairo exemplify the concerns of black women about the inadequacy of medical treatment facilities available for black Americans. Black women assisted in developing programs, opening hospitals, providing funding, and administering services.

In 1891, Dr. Daniel Hale Williams founded Provident Hospital and successfully made it a model of black and white cooperation. It had an interracial staff, admitted patients of all races, and was governed by an interracial board of trustees. In its first five years, Provident served more than six hundred patients. It also offered one of the few schools in the nation at which black women could train for a nursing career. Although trained nursing had become an acceptable profession for white women by 1870, racial discrimination severely limited the entry of black women into the field. They were refused admission to nursing schools and nurses' associations. Aware of these obstacles, Fannie Barrier Williams assisted Daniel Hale Williams with the planning of the nurses' training program at Provident. She served as a consultant and fundraiser.

Women from twenty-four states, Canada, and the West Indies enrolled in the new two-year nursing program. Students attended daily classes and performed regular hospital duties. In addition, they visited the poor and the infirm who were unable to enter the hospital, and they administered medicine and

medical advice. By 1913, 118 nurses had graduated. Many went to work in the South. Others practiced in the North.

The success of the nursing program at Provident prompted Daniel Hale Williams to establish a similar school at Freedmen's Hospital in Washington, D.C. Opened in 1894, it provided health-care services to blacks and was another option for black women seeking a career in nursing.<sup>46</sup>

Blocked from joining the national organizations created by white women, nurses from Provident and Freedmen's were integral in the establishment of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN). It was organized in 1908 with twenty-six charter members. The NACGN played a major role in establishing a professional identity for African American women in health care.<sup>47</sup>

Another health-care facility in Illinois was Yates Memorial Hospital in Cairo. Located in the southern part of the state, on the Kentucky-Missouri border, Yates Memorial was one of three hospitals in Cairo, and the only one that served the more than five thousand blacks in Cairo and the surrounding area. The hospital opened in December 1916 under the direction of the Yates Woman's Club, the oldest (est. 1905) black women's organization in the city. The president of the club for eleven years, Florence Sprague Fields, initiated the project. She served as superintendent of the hospital until the late teens or early twenties. Fields, her husband, Williams H. Fields, a surgeon, and the other black physician in Cairo, E. S. Dickerson, probably staffed the hospital.

Like most facilities in the black community, Yates was plagued by financial limitations. Fundraising drives were essential for its survival. The Yates Club held musicals and bazaars to encourage black support and ensure "efficient and fair treatment, highly skilled medical service and a congenial environment" regardless of economic status. Yates Memorial remained open until 1928.<sup>48</sup>

The social agency demonstrated by black club women between 1890 and 1915 made them the largest providers of social welfare services to African Americans in the state. They creat-

ed, modified, and transformed their reform programs to fit the needs of most black Americans. In doing so, they laid the foundation for the delivery of basic social welfare services to blacks long before federal or statewide assistance was available. Black women decided what was most critical, and they raised the money, built the buildings, solicited white aid, and administered to the needy. They implemented these programs, as Fannie Barrier Williams asserted, “in the same independent spirit” as they had the black female club movement.<sup>49</sup> Clearly their “independent spirit” produced tangible benefits in education, orphanages, homes for the elderly, homes for girls, settlement houses, health care, and recreational centers. Moreover, these women played a major role in raising the level of race consciousness and instilling race pride. Self-determination motivated them to sponsor picnics and open playgrounds for children, and to take care of the elderly. It was their commitment to Victorian mores and the negative images of African American women that persuaded them to rescue young African American women from the streets.

To enhance their reform efforts, club women would embrace yet another aspect of progressivism—female suffrage. When the national drive for the franchise gained momentum during the second decade of the twentieth century, black Illinois club women joined in the push. Some joined forces with white state suffragists, while others continued to work in groups stratified by race and gender. Regardless, both groups recognized that enfranchisement offered organized black club women the chance to further entrench themselves in both the local and the state communities. For them, exercising the franchise would strengthen their expanding visibility, reinforce their ability to do social service work, and limit the escalating violence directed against blacks in the Midwest.

## FOUR



### *Race Riots, the NAACP, and Female Suffrage*

THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

In 1909, Ida B. Wells-Barnett boarded a train in Chicago bound for Cairo, a small river town located at the southern tip of the state. She was going there to investigate the lynching of a black man.<sup>1</sup> As the most active anti-lynching crusader in the country, Wells-Barnett had learned through her investigations that racial hatred and mob violence had long been a painful part of Illinois history. The steady pace of African American out-migration from the South between 1890 and 1910, coupled with a pervasive fear of economic competition, succeeded in transferring problems once believed limited to Southern culture to Middle America. During the first decade of the twentieth century, the heightened racial tensions between African Americans and whites led to an alarming increase in violent attacks against blacks. Fearing the lynchings and beatings, and forced out of towns and cities throughout the region, many blacks fled.

The brutal crimes directed against blacks in Illinois proved to be a watershed in race relations. Between 1900 and 1915, the quality of life for African Americans in the state deteriorated. At least twelve lynchings took place, and the number of racially motivated incidents continued to climb. In each case

the victim was an African American man. Yet the entire black community was affected, because the rioting occurred in their neighborhoods, bringing with it property damage and loss of life.

The first of these incidents occurred on June 6, 1903, in Belleville. David Wyatt, a black teacher, was hanged, doused with kerosene, and set on fire for shooting a white superintendent who refused to renew his teaching certificate. Later that summer, John Metcalf of Danville, accused of murdering a white man, was hanged from a telephone pole while a mob of citizens fired shots at his body. Unsatiated, the mob then dragged Metcalf's body to the county jail and burned it.

Before it became the site of yet another mob murder, Cairo, situated at the convergence of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, had bustled with river and railway commercialism during the second half of the nineteenth century. By 1890 its population stood at more than ten thousand, of which African Americans accounted for more than one-third.<sup>2</sup> The majority of the black populace consisted of Southern migrants who had come seeking economic opportunity, social equality, and political freedom. Illinois offered them jobs, equal access to education and public accommodations, and voting privileges.<sup>3</sup> As a result, many African Americans found success in Cairo. John J. Bird won an appointment to the Trustee Board of the Illinois Industrial University at Champaign. William H. Fields opened a medical practice. Others gained employment as police officers, mail carriers, and state civil servants.<sup>4</sup> Yet Cairo, like other Midwestern towns, was not free of racial problems. In 1909 William James, a black coal driver, was arrested and charged with the rape and murder of Anna Pelley, a saleswoman in a local store. A white mob dragged James out of the jail, hanged him, and shot him several times. Mob participants also cut out his heart and chopped it into pieces, carrying them away as souvenirs, then torched his body. There were no arrests.<sup>5</sup>

The most famous and one of the most brutal racially motivated incidents occurred in the state capital, Springfield. In the summer of 1908, Joe James, a young African American drifter,

allegedly stabbed to death Clergy A. Ballard, a white middle-aged miner. Reportedly caught in the bedroom of Ballard's sixteen-year-old daughter, James attempted to flee, struggling with Ballard in the process. He then stabbed the miner several times. A few hours later, Ballard died of his wounds. Before James was taken into custody, a group of Ballard's friends and relatives severely beat him. Admittedly too intoxicated at the time of his arrest to remember the crime or the beating, James steadfastly maintained his innocence. He remained in jail for the next few months.

The James-Ballard incident represented more than a simple case of assault, murder, and random violence. According to scholar Roberta Senechal, it indicated a pervasive attitude that "emphasized the issues of black crime and miscegenation, reflecting white concerns about the social control of blacks in the North." James's alleged rape of a white woman heightened white men's anxieties about maintaining the innocence and virtuousness of the mothers of their race, who symbolized piety. James had defiled this romanticized ideal. Moreover, James was not a model citizen. A vagrant who drank excessively and a man with questionable associates, he epitomized the stereotypical African American male criminal.<sup>6</sup> For Springfield residents, he was the convenient scapegoat for their mounting apprehension caused by the influx of African Americans into the Midwestern region. Fears of race mixing and competition for jobs played on xenophobic tendencies. Pent-up racial fears eventually spilled into the streets of the city in the form of a race riot.

Nearly five weeks after James's arrest, just before midnight on August 13, 1908, a white woman, Nellie Hallam, reportedly was assaulted and raped by a black man. She told police that when the man entered her bedroom, he grabbed and gagged her. He then dragged her into an outside building, where the alleged assault took place. When the ordeal ended, Hallam's screams alerted neighbors, who promptly summoned the police. On the basis of a positive identification by Hallam, the police arrested George Richardson. Interestingly, he became the jailmate of Joe James.

Within hours after the Hallam assault was reported, an angry crowd gathered outside the jail. To ensure the safety of the prisoners, the sheriff, aided by a local citizen, put James and Richardson on a train to the state prison in Bloomington, Illinois. The crowd grew and became violent after learning that the perpetrators of the crimes were no longer in the city jail. Incensed, they attacked the restaurant of the man who had helped the prisoners escape to Bloomington. Looting, shooting, burning, and destruction of property continued well into the night.

Still unsatiated, the mob turned their rage on the black citizens of Springfield, destroying black-owned businesses and homes, and killing several African Americans. Scott Burton was beaten unconscious, then lynched, and his body was mutilated. William Donegan, nearly eighty years old, was also beaten and lynched. Though still alive when he was rushed to the hospital, he died the next day. By the time that 3,700 militia had arrived to restore order, four whites were included among the dead, and more than a hundred were injured. The property loss totaled approximately \$120,000. Scores of white citizens were arrested; only a few were ever taken to trial, however, and for the most part they pleaded guilty to a lesser charge and received fines. Nellie Hallam retracted her previous accusation against George Richardson but refused to identify the person who really had assaulted her. There were rumors that she had concocted the story to cover up an adulterous affair.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the riot, Joe James, the young man arrested earlier in the summer for murder, remained incarcerated. The court convened in mid-September to determine his guilt or innocence. In light of the riot and James's dubious status as an alcoholic drifter, Senechal argues that because "the press and city authorities worried that his acquittal might spark yet another riot, his conviction appears to have been a foregone conclusion for many in Springfield." An all-white jury convicted him on mostly circumstantial evidence and sentenced him to death. The following month, James was executed.<sup>8</sup>

The black residents of Springfield remained ambivalent

about living there. Some left the city permanently, while others who had sought refuge with friends and relatives during the riots returned weeks later to reclaim their lives. Public denunciation from the local black community was sparse. Speaking for the larger community, the black weekly *The Forum* called the acquittals of the rioters a “farce” and a “travesty.”<sup>9</sup> Nearly seven years later, the paper was still asserting that “there is entirely too much prejudice and hatred,” and that “the future is ominous.”<sup>10</sup>

For whites in the city, the riot served notice that racial segregation was necessary for calm. This practice legitimized discrimination against blacks and encouraged their exclusion from restaurants, theaters, and hotels. It continued throughout much of the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

The riot in the state capital, a historic Northern city that was preparing to celebrate the centennial of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, the president who issued the Emancipation Proclamation, did generate an enormous outcry from an outraged national black and white community. The riot seemed the epitome of race hatred and represented the culmination of years of white rage aimed at the African American population. African Americans constituted significantly less than a tenth of the population of Springfield, only 2,961 of the 51,678 residents; they resided primarily in the densely populated wards one and six, commanded little political and economic power, and in this case could not possibly have represented a threat to white supremacy.<sup>12</sup>

Noted crusader and reporter Ida B. Wells-Barnett, when asked for comments, was hard-pressed to deal adequately with the riot, especially since blacks “had not yet perfected an organization which was prepared to take hold of this situation, which seemed to be becoming as bad in Illinois as it had hitherto been in Georgia.”<sup>13</sup> Her personal response to the ordeal was to create a local forum for young African American males, in which they could openly discuss the atrocities directed at them. The forum later became known as the Negro Fellowship League.<sup>14</sup>

Wells-Barnett was not alone in her assessment that the state



had become a hostile environment for African Americans as a result of deteriorating race relations. The official journal of the Niagara Movement, *The Horizon*, concluded that Illinois had become “infected with the mob spirit” evident throughout the country.<sup>15</sup> William English Wallings, a wealthy former slave owner from Kentucky, a socialist, writer, and settlement-house worker, arrived in Springfield in the aftermath of the riot. He maintained that whites not only had abdicated their duty to protect citizens but also had closed their eyes to “the whole awful and menacing truth—that a large part of the white population of Lincoln’s home . . . have initiated a permanent warfare with the negro race.” White Illinoisans, he argued, justified their mob actions by fooling themselves into believing that the problem was not racially motivated but one that lay with the criminal elements. In reality, whites had adopted and embraced an approach “like that of the South, on which it is modeled.” Lynchings, race riots, and acquittals of white murderers symbolized the white South’s ideology of supremacy. The events in Springfield resembled white Southern attempts to control black Southerners. Wallings concluded, “Race hatred . . . is really the cause of it all.”<sup>16</sup>

Wallings issued a nationwide call for concerned parties to address white rage and to unite blacks and whites in meaningful dialogue with hopes of curtailing these problems. Mary White Ovington, a Unitarian socialist and social worker in New York, and Henry Moskowitz, a New York social worker, accepted the challenge. By January 1909, Oswald Garrison Villard, grandson of abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, had joined the group. The four adopted three primary goals: to increase white awareness of the race problem; to bring about effective political changes for the benefit of the black community, including woman suffrage; and to hold a national conference to address those concerns.

For the first National Negro Conference, Wallings and his colleagues called on several noted leaders, including Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. DuBois, Mary Church Terrell, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett. DuBois, Terrell, and Wells-Barnett accept-

ed the invitations. Washington, the leading African American spokesperson, did not.<sup>17</sup>

Unimpressed with the group's leaders and their activities, Washington continued to advocate accommodation over protest, vocational training over intellectual development, and provisional franchise over full political rights for men and women.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, Oswald Villard, a friend of Washington, attempted to win the Tuskegee educator's support. Villard believed that in order for the organization to be successful, it was imperative for black leaders from all arenas to take part in it. Perhaps to appease Washington—especially since Washington's antitheses, W. E. B. DuBois and Ida Wells-Barnett, were participants—Villard steadfastly maintained that “there is not the slightest intention of tying this movement with either of the two factions in the negro race. It is not to be a Washington movement, or a DuBois movement.”<sup>19</sup>

Despite Villard's claims, the presence of DuBois and Wells-Barnett, neither of whom espoused the ideology of accommodation to white interests, signaled to Washington the direction of the conference. He decided that the new organization would be a radical political movement and would dismantle the limited gains that Southern blacks had achieved under his accommodationist approach. Washington tactfully declined the invitation, stating that his participation “might restrict freedom of discussion, and might, also, tend to make the conference go in directions which it would not like to go.”<sup>20</sup>

The majority of those invited to the conference, Washington charged, really did not understand Southern culture as he did, and could not truly aid black Southerners. “There is a work which those of us who live here in the South can do, which persons who do not live in the South cannot do. If we recognize fairly and squarely this, then it seems to me that we have gone a long ways.” Washington criticized the group for its opposition to his strategies of accommodation and warned that the newly formed association might create more problems than solutions. He “recognized the value of some agitation and criticism, but not to the extent of having our race feel that we can

depend upon this to cure all the evils surrounding us.” In the long run, he believed, the group would not survive, and he would continue to reign in black circles.<sup>21</sup> Washington’s refusal to join the association, coupled with the fact that accommodation subsequently produced few gains and in effect contributed to the violence against blacks, paved the way for a stronger protest group to take charge and lead blacks into the second decade of the twentieth century. Although Washington remained a powerful figure among white philanthropists, his prominence in the African American community had been severely challenged.

Those who spoke at the conference echoed the sentiments of Wells-Barnett. Calling lynching a national crime, she lambasted white Springfield residents and the legal system in the city. She argued that both had ceased to be a credible source of support for the African American citizens of Springfield. The need to subordinate blacks and preserve white supremacy had been the rationale for the lynching of two men, the forced out-migration of blacks from their homes, and the acquittal of murderers, “all because a white woman said a Negro had assaulted her.” The riot and the increasing number of lynchings, she declared, showed the pervasiveness of white racism and underscored black Americans’ subordinate place in the United States. Moreover, these acts demonstrated how negative racial attitudes had infiltrated a judicial system that was supposed to protect all its citizens. Murderers were not prosecuted because they were white, while black lives were at the mercy of perpetrators who trampled on their civil rights.<sup>22</sup>

Soon after the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Wells-Barnett offered a solid approach to fighting racial violence. Enfranchisement, she believed, was the answer. The disfranchised were, quite simply, marginalized, and pawns in the hands of those with political power. Mobilization in an organization such as the NAACP, coupled with political empowerment, would generate social and economic opportunity as well as stop racially motivated violence. Pressure from interracial groups and the election of black officeholders who would push for the pas-

sage of anti-lynching legislation would bring an end to mob rule.<sup>23</sup>

Other women joined Wells-Barnett in her push for mobilization and political activism. Nearly one-third of the sixty people who signed Wallings's call to action were women. They held positions on the executive and general committees and on the board of directors.<sup>24</sup> Because of the roles occupied by women in the organization, the association was forced to address women's causes as humanitarian issues rather than as issues unique to women.<sup>25</sup> In addition to assisting in the creation of the NAACP, Illinois club women joined the ranks of blacks nationwide who endorsed or held membership in the association. As branches opened across the country, club women supported those as well. In 1911, the IFCWC endorsed the NAACP. Fannie Barrier Williams and Mary F. Waring joined the successful cooperative efforts of numerous African Americans in Chicago in opening a branch there.<sup>26</sup> Club women sought membership in the organization primarily because it championed racial cooperation and furthered the cause of blacks and women in the political arena.

W. E. B. DuBois launched a massive campaign for the enfranchisement of Southern blacks and of women in every region of the country. A longtime protest activist, DuBois had always propagated his views on the disfranchisement of black men in the South and on his belief in equal suffrage for women. He believed that when the Fifteenth Amendment was reinstated, black men's vote would deter white manipulation, open doors to educational opportunity, and renew self-respect among the black masses. Disfranchised blacks, DuBois asserted, were "a provocation, an invitation to oppression, a plaything for mobs and a bonanza for demagogues."<sup>27</sup>

Relentless in his crusade against political oppression, DuBois constantly and consistently agitated for change. The publication in 1910 of the first official journal for the NAACP, *The Crisis*, provided him with another vehicle to further his own method of protest.<sup>28</sup> Throughout much of the first two

decades of the twentieth century, DuBois argued that the in-

equities that plagued African Americans were humanitarian problems that had evolved from racism. He warned that “the caste system which attempts to exclude Negroes from the benefit of the general social and political organization of a great modern state is strong and growing both north and south, and is not only a hindrance to Negro Americans but a serious menace to American democracy.”<sup>29</sup> The “problem,” he had long believed, was that the white community did not seem to understand that the obstacles for blacks were human problems bound by poverty and ignorance, and were not defined solely by race: “There is in America today, no human problem of advance and uplift which does not in a more or less subtle way involve the Negro American and his condition.” And as long as black Americans were “systematically degraded,” he declared, such degradation would also affect “large numbers of [their] fellow white citizens.”<sup>30</sup>

DuBois was even more relentless in his devotion to a federal amendment to enfranchise women, especially African American women. Early on, he recognized the potential benefit of black women’s attaining the vote, particularly in Southern states. “Votes for women, means votes for Black women,” he stated in 1912. Total political empowerment for blacks required the cooperative effort of black men and women. “Nothing human must be foreign, uninteresting or unimportant,” he told his male readers, because “whatever concerns half mankind concerns us.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore he urged black men to modify their Victorian political ideas about a woman’s place, because blacks could ill afford to adhere to a white male ideal of a woman’s sphere in a racially segregated, politically disfranchised society.

Scholar Deborah Gray White suggests that many men, threatened by women’s push into the male domain, were reluctant to ally themselves with women. She argues that whereas women’s status in the black community derived primarily from their club network, the political arena afforded black men their only public means of exercising real power. Men’s organizations seldom did public domestic housekeeping, except in connection with women’s efforts, because that duty was thought to

be among women's natural abilities. For men to move into that arena meant redefining gender roles. So men secured their position in the community in the only public venue left solely to them precisely because women lacked the ballot.<sup>32</sup>

DuBois was sympathetic to male fears, such as those expressed in an Illinois black weekly:

After all, when you take a close analytical view of [the] situation, you will find that the addition of women to the suffrage arena has not improved the "reformation" very preceptably [*sic*].

It is true, that in some inconsequential localities the results from the women's vote have been improved, that is the "drys" have gained, and certain issues, supposed to be "reformatory" have carried which would not have carried had women not been voting. But by their influence and logical reasoning, the government was intended to be run by the men, assisted by the "ladies." We challenge any one to prove that granting to women the franchise has made any permanent reforms. The tendency to the world is to reformation.<sup>33</sup>

He assured his male audience that politically active black women would not seriously encroach upon the separate sphere ideology; instead, their work would further the betterment of the entire race. "The enfranchisement of these women will not be a mere doubling of our vote and voice in the nation" but would represent "stronger and more normal political life, the rapid dethronement of the 'heeler' and 'grafter' and the making of politics a method of broadest philanthropic race betterment, rather than a disreputable means of private gain."<sup>34</sup>

In 1915, DuBois presented "A Symposium of Leading Thinkers of Colored America" to his readers, both to placate male egos and to substantiate his view that political activism and racial progress were linked. He introduced the ideas of some of the most distinguished women in the country. The guests included Mary B. Talbert, vice president-at-large of the NACW, Nannie H. Burroughs, secretary of the Woman's Auxiliary to the National Baptist Convention, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Mary Church Terrell, and Illinoisan Dr. Mary F. Waring. Each

appealed to the common sense of enlightened, racially conscious African American men by suggesting that the notion of separate spheres had no place in the African American community. The shared experience of racism proved that the concept was antithetical to race progress.

For Talbert, the issue was the dual discrimination of racism and sexism. She wrote:

It should not be necessary to struggle forever against popular prejudice, and with us as colored women, this struggle becomes two-fold, first, because we are women and second, because we are colored women. Although some resistance is experienced in portions of our country against the ballot for women, because colored women will be included, I firmly believe that enlightened men, are now numerous enough everywhere to encourage this just privilege of the ballot for women, ignoring prejudice of all kinds.<sup>35</sup>

Burroughs suggested that the ballot offered African American women a weapon against sexual assault. Stigmatized as immoral and promiscuous, black women often found little justice against their attackers in the courts. For Burroughs, the franchise would “bring to her the respect and protection that she needs,” because it would be “her weapon of moral defense.”<sup>36</sup>

Terrell also invited African American men to consider the absurdity of opposing female suffrage. “Precisely the same arguments used to prove that the ballot be withheld from women are advanced to prove that colored men should not be allowed to vote. The reasons for repealing the Fifteenth Amendment differ but little from the argument advanced by those who oppose the enfranchisement of women.” She concluded, “Nothing could be more inconsistent than that colored people should use their influence against granting the ballot to women, if they believe that colored men should enjoy this right which citizenship confers.”<sup>37</sup>

Waring argued that the ability to make sound decisions should be the only requirements for enfranchisement. “The ability to weigh the merits of the persons to fill office and the

value of ordinances which govern the people, requires a knowledge of men and affairs. A trained mind, no matter in what profession, is more capable of making logical deductions; therefore the people naturally turn for information to the enlightened. The question of sex is of no importance," she wrote.<sup>38</sup> "The work of the professional woman just as that of the professional man places her in a position to help the many with whom she necessarily comes in contact, and therefore her influence is a power to be reckoned with." "Trained judgement," she continued, "is needed every where and it should always be armed with the ballot."<sup>39</sup> For Waring, education, economic standing, and expertise in assisting others, not sex, were the factors that should determine voting competency.

By suggesting that the needs of black women were essential to the welfare of the race, the women assured black men that they were not seeking to usurp men's power in politics. None of the women proposed the formation of a party of black women for the purpose of developing African American female politicians. They made it clear that black women posed no threat to the inside players in the political realm—men. Instead, they proposed the promotion of female political activists, whose goal it would be to curb the negative effects of racism and sexism on the African American community as a whole.

But to gain suffrage, African American women had to cross race lines and join forces with white women, who also were fighting for enfranchisement. Well aware of this double-edged sword, DuBois highlighted the hazards of racial alliances for his national audience. On the basis of the history of the white female suffrage movement, he questioned the political motives of many white suffragists, because, he maintained, they espoused the same racist views as white men. In an effort to gain the approval of the white male electorate, white female suffragists not only challenged the validity of granting the ballot to blacks but also questioned the franchise for the poor. He warned that white female suffragists "have continually been in great danger of asking the ballot not because they are citizens, but because they occupy a certain social position, are of a certain grade of



intelligence, or are ‘white.’” These factors often resulted in discrimination and continued ostracism of African American women in their club activities and rhetoric.<sup>40</sup>

African American female suffrage advocates had long known what DuBois printed for his audience. The historical evidence showed clearly that the “race question” had created barriers between black and white suffragists and plagued the movement until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. Indeed, in her pioneering studies, historian Rosalyn Terborg-Penn asserts that for black women, “discrimination . . . was the rule rather than the exception within the women’s rights movement.”<sup>41</sup> The women who gathered at Seneca Falls in 1848 launched the national woman suffrage movement and adopted two primary goals: suffrage for all women and the abolition of slavery. These goals, however, changed soon after slavery ended. In 1869, with the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, which granted suffrage to black men, white feminists became disillusioned. Black men won the right to vote, but white women did not. The black vote and women’s suffrage became two separate issues.

Internal disagreement over the issue gave rise to two groups, the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) and the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA). NWSA, led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, believed that suffrage for women, specifically white women, took priority over the disfranchisement of black men. AWSA, led by Lucy Stone and her husband, Henry Blackwell, promoted universal suffrage.

In 1890 the two groups merged, becoming the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), and new strategies were adopted. The new suffrage argument, which appeared at the beginning of the Progressive Era, ceased to advocate suffrage as a reform and a right for women, but instead advocated it as a means to reform and as an expression of the duty of women. Stressing the differences between men and women rather than the similarities, the rhetoric emphasized women’s special skills as nurturers and caretakers. Moreover, white suffragists divorced themselves from issues concerning

blacks, adopting racist and nationalist arguments in an effort to dissociate the suffrage movement from the mid-nineteenth-century abolitionist movement. The new policy actively courted white Southern women and embraced the states' rights stance taken by most Southerners. In effect, this action by NAWSA repudiated the political freedoms of minority males and advocated the withholding of suffrage from minority women.<sup>42</sup>

By 1893, NAWSA was openly and actively pursuing a policy of white supremacy by calling for the disfranchisement of black and immigrant male voters through an educational qualification. At the annual convention, the association passed a resolution:

Resolved, that without expressing any opinion on the proper qualifications for voting, we call attention to the significant facts that in every State there are more women who can read and write than all negro voters; more white women who can read and write than all negro voters; more American women who can read and write than all foreign voters; so that the enfranchisement of such women would settle the vexed question of rule by illiteracy, whether of home-grown or foreign born production.<sup>43</sup>

The adoption of this resolution suggests that the common bond of being middle-class, native-born, white Anglo-Saxon Protestants superseded citizenship rights and shifted the argument from what the vote could do for women to what white women could do with the vote. This new argument became known as expediency.<sup>44</sup>

By the second decade of the twentieth century, it was becoming increasingly clear that NAWSA would not change its policy. As the opportunities for suffrage extended beyond the Western states, African American women remained vigilant in scrutinizing the activities of white women. White women continued to sidestep the race issue in order to placate their Southern white colleagues. During the presidential reign of Anna Shaw from 1910 to 1915, NAWSA consistently defended its policy and suggested that if African American women “do not belong to us,” then “it is merely because they have not organized and have not made application for membership.”

NAWSA's platform, Shaw argued, was to seek avenues for attaining "justice to women, white and colored." Despite the challenges of African American women, she refused to admit that the association's states' rights policy was an endorsement of Jim Crow, though she did concede that state branches retained the right to reject black membership. "I do not feel that we should go into a Southern state to hold our national convention and then introduce any subject which we know beforehand will do nothing but create discord and inharmony in the convention." These strong-arm tactics, she concluded, "would do more to harm the success of our convention . . . than all the other things that we do good."<sup>45</sup>

The centralized bureaucracy of the national organization also ensured a unity of purpose among the many local suffrage branches. State affiliates were often forced to adhere to the national association's racist policy. Although Midwestern and Northern suffragists often admitted black females into their clubs and did not publicly endorse a policy of white supremacy, they nevertheless, perhaps by default, embraced white Southern supporters and never publicly denounced white supremacy. In other words, state organizations sidestepped the issue primarily because they did not want to lose their ties with the national organization. Most white suffragists believed that ratification of a federal amendment was possible only through organized regional efforts. Alienating the large Southern constituency would surely doom the passage of a federal amendment that needed ratification by thirty-six states.

Because the major suffrage clubs in Illinois did include black women in their membership, there was little debate about the role of race in the state or the national movements. After the passage of the 1913 Illinois suffrage bill, the two most prominent white suffrage leaders and their organizations channeled most of their energies into getting legislators to endorse the Nineteenth Amendment while ignoring the brewing debate over the inclusion of African American women in the national suffrage association. The chair of the Suffrage Amendment Alliance, Catharine W. McCulloch, for example, indicated in a

letter to Senator Lawrence Y. Sherman in 1916, "You may be interested to know that in Illinois we are pushing for the submission of an Illinois Suffrage Amendment so that we may no longer present to the world the absurd picture of being able to vote for Mayor and Alderman but not for Constable."<sup>46</sup> Grace Wilbur Trout of the Illinois Equal Suffrage Association encouraged the senator to help make Illinois "the first state to ratify the Federal Suffrage Amendment."<sup>47</sup> Silence on the race question, however, did not eliminate the controversy. Tacit acceptance of the states' rights policy reinforced NAWSA's platform and increased the likelihood of racial conflict at nationally sponsored functions when black female suffragists demanded the same treatment as their white counterparts.

The ideological split between the roles of the state and national suffrage organizations highlighted both implied and overt attempts to bifurcate gender and race. The unwillingness of the state and national community of white suffragists to coordinate a comprehensive plan that would include black women's concerns reflected their belief that black women were no more than marginal to their cause. Caught between the bureaucracy of state and national white suffragists, African American female activists viewed the hypocrisy in NAWSA's fight for "woman" suffrage as DuBois did—as "not only a hindrance to Negro Americans but a serious menace to American democracy," because the expediency argument revealed that "the Negro problem is the door which bars progress in the United States and which makes us liars and hypocrites."<sup>48</sup> Like DuBois, race women believed that "every argument for Negro suffrage is an argument for woman's suffrage; every argument for woman suffrage is an argument for Negro suffrage."<sup>49</sup> For those reasons, race women became active political agents.

## FIVE



### *“I Am Doing It for the Future Benefit of My Whole Race”*

AGENTS OF POLITICAL INCLUSION

Social agency coupled with political astuteness brought Illinois club women their greatest successes. As black women became increasingly aware of political issues, they joined and created organizations devoted to enhancing their political power. Heartened by the passage of the Woman’s Suffrage Act in 1891, various other legislation that expanded women’s opportunities in electing members on school boards and university trustees, and the Presidential and Municipal Suffrage Bill in 1913, black women both joined their white female colleagues on the front lines of the suffrage battle and sought alternative ways to expand opportunities for their race.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett, for example, traveled the state delivering political speeches for the Women’s State Central Committee.<sup>1</sup> Surprised at the fact that, during her many trips, “in only a few instances did I see any of my own people,” she posited that “if the white women were backward in political matters, our own women were even more so.” A lack of the skills needed to understand the political process, she reasoned, hindered African American women from full participation in civic affairs.<sup>2</sup> Wells-Barnett strongly supported the notion of a correlation between lynching and disfranchisement. In her essay

“How Enfranchisement Stops Lynching,” she argued that because the majority of blacks were without the ballot, they could do little to white supremacists who committed violent attacks. Political empowerment would help lead to the election of representatives sensitive to African American issues and to the passage of anti-lynching legislation.<sup>3</sup>

Fannie Barrier Williams held membership in and served as secretary and vice president of the Illinois Woman’s Alliance, an interracial state umbrella association consisting of suffrage, social, temperance, and labor organizations.<sup>4</sup> Excited at the prospect that women might be granted unrestricted suffrage, she made this enthusiastic prediction in November 1894:

American women are beginning to see the end of their years of struggle for equality of suffrage. The arguments are nearly all in and the signs of favorable verdict are everywhere apparent to those who understand the trend of things.

Fragmentary suffrage, now possessed by women in nearly all the states of the union, carries with it the triumph of the princip[le] contended for, and [whether] its extension to complete enfranchisement of women will be realized depends largely upon the use we make of our present gains. The false reasoning of the opposition having been overcome, we have now to fight only the prejudices in opposition. When the opposing man sees women actually voting, and looks in vain for the evils predicted, his prejudices will yield and he will gladly join the forces that are fast making for their complete emancipation.<sup>5</sup>

Williams’s projection was incorrect, of course. It would take almost twenty-six years for women to obtain suffrage by federal mandate, so the “fragmentary suffrage” conceded by state governments to appease female suffragists would continue to be the only way for the majority of women to gain any measure of political empowerment.

Williams believed that full suffrage would be the turning point for African American female reformers in their quest for racial uplift. Complete enfranchisement would further their moral mission by providing them with the means to repair the

damage caused by black men who had failed in their duty to the race. "Must we begin our political duties with no better or higher conceptions of our citizenship than that shown by our men when they were first enfranchised? Are we to bring any refinement of individuality to the ballot box? Shall we learn our politics from spoilsmen and bigoted partisans, or shall we learn it from the school of patriotism and an enlightened self-interest?" she asked. Suggesting that black men were pledging their allegiance to parties over the race, she warned black women that "if our enfranchisement means only a few more votes added to the republican and democratic sides, respectively, of political issues, there certainly has been no gain for the cause of principle in American politics." Enfranchisement, she concluded, was the opportunity for black women to become "corrective forces" in the political arena. If they chose instead to follow the same path as men, "there will be much disappointment among those who believed that the cause of temperance, municipal reform and better education would be more surely advanced when the finer virtues of women became a part of the political forces of the country."<sup>6</sup>

Other women, under the auspices of the IFCWC, began to actively lobby the governor and members of the legislature. Concerned over the "alarming increase" in discrimination, the IFCWC voted at its 1913 convention to send letters to each member of the Illinois House and Senate demanding some redress. Two years later, the federation appointed a committee to appeal to the state legislature to appropriate monies "to build suitable housing" for the state's growing number of young female wards. By 1916, like many progressive women across the nation, the IFCWC members were pressing hard for the endorsement of Prohibition. In 1919, the club turned its attention to the economic plight of blacks by seeking to increase employment opportunities for African Americans. It created a committee "to urge the appointment of a Colored Home Visitor in the department of State Welfare." Delegates were exhorted to educate themselves and their club members on political issues and, of course, to register to vote.<sup>7</sup>

The IFCWC also enlarged both its political and its social sphere by establishing a coalition of women in the Midwest. At the state meeting held in Moline in 1914, the federation adopted the following resolution:

Whereas, the women of the Western Country are becoming to be recognized as a power because of their political franchise, and the old adage "In Union There Is Strength" has been found to be true in what ever line it has been tried, and since that Constitutional privilege has been granted to the women of Illinois and other states hereinafter named, it is highly necessary that the women of the Northwest join themselves together in a compact body, the better to work, to promote religious, social and civic conditions and to make a stronger protest against unwise legislation.<sup>8</sup>

A committee composed of Joanna Snowden Porter, Melissa Elam, Jessie Johnson, Eva Monroe, Carrie Lee Hamilton, Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, and Infelice B. Thompson was appointed to determine the feasibility of such an alliance. The following year, at St. Marks ME Church, the Northwestern Federation held its first meeting. Women from Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Wyoming convened. Some of the most notable attendants were Hallie Q. Brown from Ohio, former dean of women at Tuskegee Institute, president of the Ohio Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, and NACW president from 1920 to 1924, and Lucy Thurman, a Michigan resident and a former national superintendent of and spokesperson for the Women's Christian Temperance Union.<sup>9</sup>

This was not the first such regional federation—there already was a Northeastern Federation in existence. What was unique about the new Northwestern Federation was its geographical scope and the fact that the women openly acknowledged that the shared empowerment of the franchise distinguished them from any other group. The organization included eleven very large Midwestern states. Suffrage for women in Wyoming had come as early as 1890, while Kansas and Illinois



women gained the right to vote in 1912 and 1913, respectively. Between 1918 and 1920, with the exception of Iowa, the remaining states followed suit. Each state, because of industrial growth, attracted large numbers of African American migrants, and along with them came the typical problems caused by overcrowding and poverty. The consolidation of Midwestern women's efforts enlarged their sphere of influence by combining their resources and enhancing their ability to ensure better social, economic, and political opportunities for the race.

One approach taken by the women to the problems plaguing the black community involved bringing politicians and corporate executives around to a position of sympathy to the needs of African Americans. Club women on the local level employed moral suasion and grassroots direct action to this end. The club women's primary duty, Elizabeth Lindsay Davis argued, was to focus the attention of corporate heads and philanthropists on "the serious consequences of present day industrial and social unrest, the crime, disease, and poverty emanating from bad housing and unwholesome environment," and to "train their hands to give systematically to the cause of human betterment."<sup>10</sup> The affiliates of the IFCWC joined the national club women's movement (NACW) and set up departments to monitor companies that discriminated against black men and women. As purchasers of many products and services, they found that a boycott was one of the most effective means of conveying their dissatisfaction with company policies.<sup>11</sup>

The IFCWC also became a formidable lobbying organization on behalf of African American women. Its effectiveness in this regard was most clearly evidenced during the planning stages of the historic Illinois National Half-Century Exposition commemorating fifty years of freedom for African Americans. In mid-summer 1913, Illinoisans began preparations for celebrating the progress of African Americans since the end of slavery. On July 1, Governor Edward F. Dunne appointed a nine-member commission to govern and organize the exposition. The state legislature appropriated twenty-five thousand dollars for the venture. The month-long event, to be held in

Chicago, was scheduled to begin on August 1, 1915. Its mission was “not to emphasize differences, and to formulate platforms,” but “to come together in a spirit of human brotherhood and to work for those things about which there exists no difference of opinion.”<sup>12</sup> The experiment in racial cooperation was endorsed by President Woodrow Wilson and two former presidents, Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft. There were honorary vice presidents from all over the country. The governors of Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, New Mexico, Texas, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming appointed delegates to attend the exposition. The Advisory Council included representatives from as far away as Rhodesia and Liberia, Africa.<sup>13</sup>

Because the exposition was devoted to the progress of the race, African American women secured influential positions in the departments that addressed their concerns. Black women were appointed to administrative positions in four of the twelve units. Mary F. Waring served as vice chair of the Department of Education. Eva T. Jenifer was appointed vice chair of the Department of Industry, with Elizabeth Lindsay Davis serving as her first assistant. The Miscellaneous Department was headed by Sarah F. Sheppard. Theresa G. Macon took the helm of the Department of Social Progress, while Fannie Barrier Williams served in the Bureau of Literature under Macon’s direction.<sup>14</sup> The movement of black women into positions of influence and power in the exposition shows quite clearly how they combined their efforts in the cause of mobilizing and gaining assignments for their allies. They thereby had major input into the implementation of policies, procedures, and programs and how those would be delivered to the masses.

But club women did not secure a position on the highest administrative board, the commission appointed by the governor. His recommendations included four white men—the Reverend Samuel Fallows as president, plus John Daley, W. Duff Piercy, and Medill McCormick; one white woman—Susan Lawrence Joergen-Dahl; and four African American men—A. J.

Carey, George W. Ford, R. R. Jackson, and Thomas Wallace Swann.<sup>15</sup> As with the board appointments at the World's Columbian Exposition twenty-three years earlier, African American women had been ignored. Joergen-Dahl, like Mary Cantrill on the earlier fair's Board of Lady Managers, was chosen to represent the interests of all women, including black women.

Joergen-Dahl's appointment caused some controversy, although she appeased some African American club women. Because of her family's long, cordial history with African Americans in the state's capital, Springfield, that city's club women warmly embraced her. Joergen-Dahl's relationship with blacks was primarily a legacy of her parents' political and philanthropic aid. Her father, Rheuna Lawrence, was a Republican who won the mayoral seat in 1891. He developed close political ties with blacks as they in turn supported his political aspirations.<sup>16</sup> Joergen-Dahl's mother, Mary Lawrence, held the deed to the Lincoln Colored Home. The creation of the Mary A. Lawrence Industrial School for Girls by Eva Monroe and of the Mary A. Lawrence Woman's Club in 1915 by a group of African American club women attested to the strong ties that the family continued to have with the home and with black women in the city.<sup>17</sup> As the only child, Susan inherited her parents' holdings and their ties to the African American community upon their deaths. She continued to contribute to the home throughout the next several decades, and in May 1913 she sang at the Lincoln Colored Home's own celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of black freedom.<sup>18</sup> When her husband died that year, she held a segregated service for African Americans at her home. Approximately three hundred blacks attended.<sup>19</sup>

Because of Joergen-Dahl's warm reception by the Springfield club women, her appointment was endorsed by the IFCWC.<sup>20</sup> But those who had no ties to the Springfield community found the recommendation disconcerting. Ida B. Wells-Barnett was so outraged that she altered an address that she was to give on the morning that the names appeared in the newspaper. "Instead of giving my scheduled address," she wrote, "I lectured about the appointment of that commission and how

Negro women, who were the only organized force in the state for civic work, had been ignored.” Her impassioned speech, she claimed, aroused many of the women and compelled them to write to the governor demanding that a black woman be appointed to the committee.<sup>21</sup>

Whether or not Wells-Barnett overstated her role in the matter, black club women jumped at the opportunity to appoint one of their own when Joergen-Dahl resigned. Succumbing to an exhaustive schedule of traveling to Chicago, Peoria, and New York for the exposition, and fatigue caused by a relapse from a severe cold she had contracted earlier, she, upon the advice of her physician, removed herself from the commission. The IFCWC quickly mustered its forces and recommended that Dr. Mary F. Waring take Joergen-Dahl’s place. The governor accepted the recommendation, and Waring took her seat in early 1915.<sup>22</sup>

Waring, a Chicago resident, was one of the IFCWC’s best representatives. A longtime member of the IFCWC, she had been elected to serve as chair of the executive board, corresponding secretary, treasurer, and statistician. A graduate of Louisville National Medical College and Chicago Medical School, she held a teaching post at the Wendell Phillips School, chaired the Health and Hygiene Committee of the NACW, and served as the administrator of the Dunbar Sanatorium. An active club woman, she founded and presided over the Necessity Club, which operated a day nursery in Chicago, and was elected president of the Woman’s Second Ward Suffrage League.<sup>23</sup>

Political activism among African American women intensified after a shift in the balance of political power to the Progressives in the state legislature resulted in a successful outcome for those in the state’s Equal Suffrage Association. On May 7, 1913, the Illinois Senate passed the Presidential and Municipal Suffrage Bill by a vote of twenty-nine to fifteen. On June 11, the House, by a vote of eighty-three to fifty-eight, approved the measure. Before the month ended, the legislature had ratified the bill, which granted partial suffrage to female citizens twenty-one years of age or older. Illinois became

the first state east of the Mississippi River to enfranchise its female populace.<sup>24</sup>

The suffrage bill was limited in scope and pushed women voters toward municipal affairs. Women could not vote for the highest elected state officials, such as governor and lieutenant governor, or for any members of the legislature; nor could they vote for those in top judicial positions, such as county or district judges. But what seemed restrictive on the surface ultimately became the catalyst in transforming the nature of city politics. Specifically, the bill allowed women to vote in all elections governed by the state constitution, including those for presidential electors, mayors, aldermen, municipal court judges, sanitary trustees, and most local officers.<sup>25</sup> Having a smaller pool of candidates from which to choose gave women the opportunity to pool their resources and become intimately familiar with individuals and their platforms. Locked out at the state level, they became actively involved in local elections, and with their knowledge and interest, they could be either powerful allies or formidable foes. The number of voters doubled in many areas, forcing politicians to alter their platforms and cater to the needs of their new electors. For the first time, women had a direct voice in the governance of their own wards and neighborhoods.

Club women seized the opportunity to promote their causes. In Peoria, the Woman's Aid Club, under the leadership of Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, investigated jails and juvenile courts and joined with other groups in demanding the establishment of the Peoria County Detention Home. The Frederick Douglass Center Woman's Club of Chicago held meetings twice a month to discuss political and social equality issues. The Elizabeth Lindsay Charity Club, also in Chicago, provided information on legal counsel.<sup>26</sup> Near the end of the decade, women in Springfield began strongly pushing for a gender-integrated law enforcement staff. In a letter sent to the sheriff, they requested that a woman fill the post of deputy.<sup>27</sup>

Black women in Springfield also allied themselves politically with men who were endorsing a second power generator

for the city to lower the cost of electricity in black homes. The reserve generator, a *Forum* editorial suggested, would appeal to the industrialized woman because it would provide not only lighting but also electricity for irons, toasters, and washing machines.<sup>28</sup>

Individuals became much more politically sensitized, and increased their activities as well. Sadie Lewis Adams, for example, served on the election board, attended the National Equal Rights League and the Illinois Equal Suffrage League conferences, and held offices in the Alpha Suffrage Club.<sup>29</sup> Ella G. Berry became a state organizer of African American women for the National Republican Party.<sup>30</sup>

But it was in Chicago where women's grassroots political progress was most evident. In many ways the club women awakened the black community to its ability to determine how best to advance the race. Black women's entrance into municipal politics simultaneously boosted both gender and racial consciousness. The development of suffrage clubs heightened awareness and sensitized the community to race and gender issues, permanently changing the political climate. To a large degree, club women came to symbolize the black community's political liberation from white ward bosses.

The suffrage legislation resulted in a doubling of the African American vote. For the first time, black men and women shared the same space in municipal affairs, contributing to the creation of a political agenda that was racially based and gender-inclusive, and that encouraged racial responsibility. There were 17,845 African American males of voting age out of a city-wide male constituency of 700,590 in 1910. Whereas only 2.5 percent of black males were eligible to vote in 1910, that number jumped to nearly 5 percent, or 42,837, by 1920. Black women twenty-one and older totaled 39,035 by 1920, or 4.7 percent of the female constituency.<sup>31</sup> The notion of a black political force became a real possibility, as these high numbers of African American women and men could wield considerable power if they voted as a bloc. Congregated in densely populated segregated wards, enfranchised black women would be able to dy-

namically converge with an astute and racially conscious black male voting populace to pursue a self-directed political agenda.

Club women in Chicago established the most and the largest gender-segregated suffrage clubs in the nation. The Alpha Suffrage Club, the Aloha Political Club, the Colored Woman's Party of Cook County, the Mary Walker Thompson Political Club, the 3rd Ward Political Club, and the Woman's 25th Precinct Political Club were a few of the organizations that resulted from women's interest in politics. Little is known about most of these clubs. Some acted primarily as the female counterparts to Republican male political associations.<sup>32</sup> Others, such as the Aloha Political Club, the Colored Woman's Party, and the Alpha Suffrage Club, were autonomous organizations concerned chiefly with educating black women in civic affairs and advancing women's opportunities in municipal reform.

Led by Josephine Crawford, the Aloha Political Club was organized sometime before the 1914 aldermanic primary. Members participated in suffrage parades and worked toward electing an African American to the city council.<sup>33</sup> The Colored Woman's Party in Chicago's Thirtieth Ward, also established in June 1914, was a non-partisan organization whose members pledged "to vote for the best men at all elections regardless of their politics." It boasted a membership of nearly one hundred politically active women. The first slate of officers included Blanch M. Gilmer, president; Katherine Johnson, first vice president; Carrie Warner, second vice president; Charlotte Ross, treasurer; Maud Johnson, recording secretary; Susan A. Woodland, corresponding secretary; Mary Perryman, financial secretary; and Laura Smith, chaplain.<sup>34</sup>

One of the most important African American suffrage clubs in the state was the first one, the Alpha Suffrage Club (ASC), which was established in January 1913 by Wells-Barnett and a white colleague, Belle Squire, a member of the No Vote No Tax League.<sup>35</sup> The alliance between the two women was symbolic of the cooperation between black and white state suffragists. At the organizational meeting, Squire encouraged this cooperation by declaring, "The time has come when we suffragists

must broaden our views and enlist all women to our cause, regardless of race or color, if we are to be successful.” For that reason, she added, “We want every colored woman in Chicago to become a suffragist. We need them and they need us.”<sup>36</sup>

From the beginning, Wells-Barnett assumed leadership of the organization. She made sure that it remained controlled by blacks, and that they made all the decisions. All of the elected officers were black, and the meeting place was located in the heart of one of the largest black communities in the city, the Second Ward. The first officers included Ida B. Wells-Barnett, president; Mary Jackson, vice president; Viola Hill, second vice president; Vera Wesley Green, recording secretary; Sadie Lewis Adams, corresponding secretary; Laura Beasley, treasurer; and K. J. Bills, editor. Three years later, Wells-Barnett and Beasley remained in their posts as president and treasurer, while Adams had replaced Jackson as vice president. Other officers included F. D. Wyatt, secretary; J. E. Hughes, assistant secretary; and W. N. Mills, corresponding secretary.<sup>37</sup>

The forums at ASC meetings provided honored guests and political candidates with an engaging audience. Jane Addams of Hull House, a longtime advocate of female suffrage; Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, former president of the IFCWC; and George C. Hall, chief of staff at Provident Hospital, were among the many who interacted with individual members. The political candidates who visited the forums discussed their platforms and sought votes. The exchange proved beneficial to both groups.<sup>38</sup> The women learned canvassing techniques, met candidates seeking office, and developed analytical skills. In turn, the candidates gained insight into the issues important to women. The popularity of the club was so great that less than three years after its establishment, it claimed a membership of nearly two hundred women.

One of the first official acts of the ASC was to send Wells-Barnett to the nationally sponsored suffrage parade in the nation’s capital on March 3, 1913. Unfortunately, it proved to be one of the most divisive public occasions in the suffrage movement’s history. As a black woman, Wells-Barnett was



forced to challenge the Jim Crow policy of both the national and the state suffrage organizations, and her white colleagues learned the painful lesson that they had little control over the institutional policies of the national suffrage organization. In a show of solidarity, black and white women joined in the parade down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. Representing almost every state in the union, the marchers highlighted the demand for female enfranchisement. Interestingly, in this demonstration of gender unity, African American women were relegated to the back of the line, regardless of state residency. This instance of discrimination exemplified the contradiction between the ideal of gender equality and the reality of racism within the suffrage movement.

Like many African American women nationwide, Wells-Barnett had long been an advocate of female suffrage. And like so many others, she expressed an enthusiastic interest in the parade. As the founder of the first African American female suffrage organization in Illinois, she traveled to Washington to join with other women from her state. To her surprise, however, as the sixty-five delegates from Illinois prepared for the march along Pennsylvania Avenue, Grace Wilbur Trout, president of the Illinois Equal Suffrage Association and chairperson of the Illinois delegation, informed the group that “many of the eastern and southern women have greatly resented the fact that there are to be colored women in the delegations.” Because of their concern, she stated, “Mrs. Stone of the National Suffrage Association and the woman in charge of the entire parade has advised us to keep our delegation entirely white. So far as Illinois is concerned, we should like to have Mrs. Barnett march in the delegation, but if the national association has decided it is unwise to include the colored women, I think we should abide by its decision.”<sup>39</sup>

Dismayed by the stance Trout had taken, Virginia Brooks, a colleague from West Hammond and a friend of Wells-Barnett, pleaded for a reconsideration. “We have come down here to march for equal rights,” she declared. “It would be autocratic to exclude men or women of any color.” She continued, “I think

that we should allow Mrs. Barnett to walk in our delegation. If the women of other states lack moral courage, we should show them that we are not afraid of public opinion. We should stand by our principles. If we do not the parade will be a farce."<sup>40</sup>

While the delegates pondered Brooks's recommendation, Wells-Barnett, her cheeks stained with tears and her voice quavering, told the group, "The southern women have tried to evade the question time and again by giving some excuse or other every time it has been brought up. If the Illinois women do not take a stand now in this great democratic parade then the colored women are lost."<sup>41</sup> After listening to Wells-Barnett and objections from Brooks, Trout reconsidered her position. "It is time for Illinois to recognize the colored woman as a political equal and you shall march with the delegation," she told Wells-Barnett.<sup>42</sup>

Trout's words were bittersweet. One of the delegates immediately pulled her aside and explained that she could not make such a promise without consulting with the NAWSA leadership first.<sup>43</sup> While Trout went to confer with the officials, the other delegates discussed the situation. Though some were sympathetic to Wells-Barnett, they were unwilling to challenge the national segregationist policy. One delegate told the group that although "it will be undemocratic if we do not let Mrs. Barnett march with us," obedience and expediency ranked higher than democratic principles. "We should not go against the law of the national association," she declared, because "we are only a small part in the great line of march, and we must not cause any confusion by disobeying orders."<sup>44</sup> When Trout returned, it was to renege on her earlier promise. "I am afraid," she told Wells-Barnett, "that we shall not be able to have you march with us." "Personally," she continued, "I should like nothing more than to have you represent our Illinois suffrage organization. But I feel that we are responsible to the national association and cannot do as we choose. After talking again with Mrs. Stone, I shall have to ask you to march with the colored delegation. I am sorry, but I feel that it is the right thing to do."<sup>45</sup>

*Angry and deeply disappointed in her colleagues, with*

whom she had worked so closely on the suffrage issue, Wells-Barnett told Trout and the other delegates, "I shall not march at all unless I can march under the Illinois banner. . . . When I was asked to come down here I was asked to march with the other women of our state, and I intend to do so or not take part in the parade at all." In response, one member of the group retorted, "If I were a colored woman, I should be willing to march with the other women of my race." Wells-Barnett replied, "There is a difference, . . . which you probably do not see. . . . I shall not march with the colored women. Either I go with you or not at all. I am not taking this stand because I personally wish for recognition. I am doing it for the future benefit of my whole race."<sup>46</sup>

When Wells-Barnett later disappeared from the parade site, her colleagues assumed that she had admitted defeat and decided not to march at all. But as the delegates began moving down Pennsylvania Avenue, she quietly stepped out from the crowd of spectators and joined them. So important was the event that a photograph of her, flanked by two white Illinois women, Belle Squire and Virginia Brooks, appeared in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, giving the event and its participants local and national exposure.<sup>47</sup> As the marchers proceeded, none of the Southerners defected, perhaps in part because they were not aware of the event until after the parade had ended. At any rate, the press coverage underscored the tenuous place that black women nationwide held in the suffrage movement, and it probably convinced many whites, despite NAWSA's insistence, that "the Negro question" and female suffrage were not separate issues.

Wells-Barnett's ordeal was a clear indication of discriminatory policy. It was the fear of antagonizing Southern white women, whose support was worth more to NAWSA's cause than the support of African American women, that prompted Wells-Barnett's Illinois colleagues to deny her participation. Viewing black women as a threat to white supremacy, white women in the South rejected the legitimacy of black female state delegates' marching with white state delegates. As historian Steven Buechler argues, Southern white women required absolute control

of black women's visibility within the movement in exchange for their own participation. In an attempt to convince state legislatures that African American suffrage and women suffrage were unconnected, they devised a strategy to "maximize white women's votes, minimize black women's votes, and leave restrictions on black male voters intact."<sup>48</sup> Wells-Barnett's inclusion in the state delegation to the parade threatened to impede that tactic by lifting the veil of Jim Crow and opening the door to other African American women. NAWSA's acquiescence to Southern white women and the submission of the white Illinois delegates clearly proved that the racist agenda was expedient.

It also demonstrated the benefits that white state suffragists were reaping by following NAWSA's policy. They could discriminate against African American women on racial grounds while simultaneously embracing them along gender lines. They could enlist the aid of black women such as Wells-Barnett in their cause while denying them access to the national arena. Wells-Barnett had participated in the state movement for more than twenty years. In the late 1890s she had toured for the Women's State Central Committee, making political speeches. Although she was often the only African American present at these meetings, she enjoyed them. She received no salary for her commitment, and she had to nurse her six-month-old child during one of the trips.<sup>49</sup> For Wells-Barnett and the countless African American women like her, the complicity of state suffrage clubs in the racist policy adopted by NAWSA was a cruel blow.

Wells-Barnett was not afraid to confront the duplicity. In many ways, she defined the battle for African American women by raising questions concerning her right as a state citizen, an (African) American, and a woman to participate in the struggle for universal suffrage. As an Illinoisan, she held membership in integrated clubs and spoke on behalf of all women gaining the ballot. As an American, however, she failed to persuade suffragists on a national level to embrace her as an African American woman seeking the vote for all women. Despite the setback, Wells-Barnett did affirm black women's place in the fight

for the ballot by marching despite her anger. She and her two white colleagues provided a better model of gender unity than NAWSA or the state delegates could offer.

Recognition of the valiant efforts of Wells-Barnett, Squire, and Brooks came from black club women. When the trio returned to Chicago, members of the ASC and the Progressive Club celebrated their triumphant return at Quinn Chapel on Monday evening, April 7, presenting the three to a crowd of spectators. For an admission fee of twenty-five cents, the audience heard speeches from the women, were entertained by a choir, received refreshments at a reception, and contributed to the reimbursement of expenses incurred by Wells-Barnett.<sup>50</sup>

The promotion of black female political activism in Chicago had other immediate effects as well. Like the Aloha Political Club, the ASC made no secret of the fact that its members, while non-partisan, supported the candidacy of an African American for the city council. Black male politicians who had long been disgruntled about their lack of power within the white-dominated Republican Party viewed the female vote as an opportunity to shed their confinement by both the party line and the party's patronizing posture. The first viable black candidate ran as an independent early in 1914, less than a year after the Presidential and Municipal Suffrage Bill was passed.

## SIX



# *The Politics of Race*

CHICAGO

In October 1914, Fannie Barrier Williams, a resident of Chicago's Second Ward, wrote in the *Southern Workman*,

A new and important responsibility has come to Chicago women in the franchise. It is believed that this power granted to the women of the state of Illinois is going to lift colored women to new importance as citizens. They appreciate what it means and are eagerly preparing themselves to do their whole duty. They believe that they now have an effective weapon with which to combat prejudice and discrimination of all kinds.<sup>1</sup>

The franchise for African American women in the Second Ward indeed became “an effective weapon” in the divisive arena of patronage politics in Chicago, one that challenged the Republican Party's white leadership and enabled both women and black male Republicans to become aggressive participants in municipal politics.

They succeeded primarily because most of the African Americans in Illinois lived on the south side of Chicago, mainly in the Second Ward. In 1910, African Americans constituted 25 percent of the 42,801 residents of that ward, and by 1915 that proportion had risen to nearly 40 percent of the 63,342 resi-

dents.<sup>2</sup> This high concentration gave African American voters a large enough voting bloc that Republican Party leaders were forced to nominate blacks to key elective offices.

Several other factors contributed to their success. African American women who joined the racially based coalition canvassed the neighborhood seeking voters who would cast their ballots for “race man” candidates. The black press, particularly the *Chicago Defender*, aroused public interest in the possibility of black representation on the all-white city council and highlighted the participation of women in the election process. And the predominantly white Republican machine, adopting a pragmatic agenda, delivered on a promise to support an African American nominee for alderman.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the fact that African American male voters tended to be loyal Republicans, the Party of Lincoln had conceded few key political positions to them. Instead, white party bosses manipulated and monopolized the Second Ward, denying autonomy to the African Americans living there, downplaying concerns unique to the segregated black neighborhood and stifling the political voice of thousands.

As the black population in Chicago continued to increase, still concentrated in the Second Ward, black Republicans escalated their vocal protests about the party’s failure to place African Americans in key areas that more directly affected the masses. They believed that accommodating to the interests of the Republican machine was depriving them of the opportunity to use politics as a vehicle for the public expression of grievances, particularly racial ones, and denying them any hope of representative government.

The discourse about black representation centered on the powerful post of alderman. Aldermen assisted in planning the city budget, granted franchises to businesses, appointed officials to municipal posts, and supervised administrative policies for the wards in the city. An African American alderman, then, could play an important role in achieving better social, political, and economic conditions for blacks in the city.<sup>4</sup> But white patriachs had always held that position, governing the ward ac-

ording to the dictates of the machine. Therefore, if blacks hoped to have any political clout, they had to enlarge their sphere of influence either within the party structure or outside to gain control of the aldermanic post.

A leading critic of the machine was Edward Wright. A lawyer, Wright was born in New York City in 1864 and settled in Chicago in the mid-1880s, at the age of twenty. Over the course of a decade, his loyalty earned him several positions. He was appointed to the State Central Committee, and by 1887 he held a post in the county clerk's office. The following year he became the first black bookkeeper and railroad incorporation clerk in the office of the secretary of state in Springfield, Illinois. He later moved back to Chicago, to the city clerk's Office. In 1894, Wright made an unsuccessful bid for the nomination of county commissioner. Two years later he ran again and was victorious, becoming only the third African American to fill the post.<sup>5</sup>

Wright and some other disgruntled colleagues spent much of the first decade of the twentieth century building a strong black coalition within the Republican ranks. Their primary goals were to force change from within and to develop their own monopoly over the predominantly black ward. In 1910, Wright stepped out of the shadows of the machine and declared himself a candidate for alderman. Securing the black vote and garnering support from sympathetic whites would be imperative to his success. Black males of voting age constituted only about 28 percent of the population of the ward, making it essential for him to receive some white votes or hope that the white vote would be split among the other candidates.<sup>6</sup> Although his chances for victory were slim, his supporters believed that he would be the first black alderman, and that his election to the city council was in the best interests of Chicago's black community within municipal government.<sup>7</sup>

Wright's detractors, however, worried that his bid would lead to the loss of the few favors granted to blacks by the Republican machine. Wedded to the party's patronage policy, they hesitated to ostracize themselves and refused to endorse



Wright's candidacy. Rather than expressing concern about blacks' dependence on the limited favors provided by the white ward boss, the opposition highlighted the long history of Republican assistance. For them, Wright's bid for this post would divide a fragile community already heavily stressed by poverty, crime, and overcrowding.

Wright's campaign had its early boosters as well. The black press chastised his detractors and non-voters alike, promoted the cause of male responsibility, and appealed to African American pride. A headline in one of the major black newspapers, the *Chicago Defender*, asked, "Do You Want a Colored Alderman?" To elect one, the paper contended, men who had never used their power at the ballot box would have to think about the consequences of their actions. The opportunity to elect a black alderman depended on their vote. Black men should go to the polls, not just to vote for Wright as an individual, but primarily "for the sake of the race of which you are a part, of which your fathers, mothers, sisters and children are members." The paper called upon black men to "arouse from your slumber and realize that on your shoulders rests a responsibility as a man . . . and help push the cause of the Negro forward by securing every position of advantage possible."<sup>8</sup>

The *Defender's* focus on advancing "the cause of the Negro" played to the race consciousness of African American men of voting age by linking the race man concept to civic duty. True citizens, the *Defender* made clear, must set aside all other considerations to "fight for the common cause, a Negro in the City Council." The paper instructed "good people of color, men of influence, apostles of civil rights and advocates of political liberty, [to] get together and get together quickly and nominate and elect a Negro alderman."<sup>9</sup> The message was clear: African Americans were not rejecting the party, but instead were opting for one of their own, a candidate who could voice their unique concerns.

But it was virtually impossible to win without the machine's support. Those who nominated and campaigned for Wright were well aware that unless he emerged as a dark horse candi-

date, he would not be able to beat the favored ward nominee, Wilson Shufelt. At best, they hoped for a respectable showing. Wright did not win. But neither did he finish in last place. The recorded vote was Wilson Shufelt, 3,619; John Montgomery, 2,376; Edward Wright, 1,583; and Edward Wentworth, 1,081. Wright's third-place showing was indeed a respectable achievement.<sup>10</sup> His candidacy attracted attention, was endorsed by the major black newspaper, and earned him a significant number of black votes despite his lack of recognition by the machine. He may not have won the election, but the votes he got revealed a discontent among the black masses. A vote for Wright was the clearest way they could voice their dissatisfaction.

An ambitious Wright ran again in the 1912 aldermanic primary. This time, however, some of the black politicians who had previously supported him backed away from his candidacy. Their marginal status within the party structure and their reluctance to alienate themselves from the machine, a powerful political ally, governed their decision. Without key black Republican support for Wright, his defeat was inevitable.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, the 1910 and 1912 contests were successful in highlighting black dissatisfaction and making it an issue within the Republican ranks. The actions of black Republicans and the increased interest of black males in the electoral process emphasized the necessity for the machine to change its tactics if it was to maintain a monopoly over the predominantly African American ward.

The passage by the Illinois General Assembly of the state woman suffrage amendment in 1913 marked the entrance of black women onto the political battlefield.<sup>12</sup> Initial concerns among men about women's participation in civic affairs diminished as politicized women assured their male counterparts that their interests lay in bolstering, not usurping, men's role in the public domain of politics.

The struggle over the female vote began a year after the suffrage amendment was passed. When the Republican machine endorsed the candidacy of incumbent Hugh Norris in the February 1914 primary, it expected African American wom-

en as well as most men to cast their ballots for him.<sup>13</sup> Many black Republicans, however, saw the female vote as a means of electing a race man to the city council. They backed William Randolph Cowan, a prominent African American real estate businessman who was running as an independent, and pushed hard for women to join their crusade.

While many professional politicians hailed the new gender-integrated electorate, other ward men challenged women's incursion into their domain. As members of the Alpha Suffrage Club marshaled their forces and canvassed the black community to register women for the primary, some men "jeered at them and told them they ought to be at home taking care of the babies." Others accused them of "trying to take the place of men and wear the trousers."<sup>14</sup> The criticism had an impact on these Victorian club women. In public declarations, they reasserted their established roles and their view of the franchise as a way to extend their moral duty to the race. In an attempt to calm these men's fears about women's newly acquired role, Fannie Barrier Williams assured them that "there need be no anxiety as to the conduct of these newly made colored citizens. They have had a large and varied experience in organizations and we expect to see in them an exhibition of the best there is in the colored race."<sup>15</sup>

Ida B. Wells-Barnett made no such pronouncements. Instead, she insisted that those women who questioned the legitimacy of their place in the political arena must remain focused on the goal of electing a black man. Because of her loyalty to the "race man" concept, she refused to allow black women in the ASC to cave in to male pressure. She urged each of the workers to return to her neighborhood and continue registering women. Under Wells-Barnett's tutelage, most of the women stuck to their convictions, continued the registration efforts, and in the process realized the importance of their participation in politics. When forms were counted after the primary, some 7,290 female and 16,327 male voters had registered.<sup>16</sup> Wells-Barnett proudly proclaimed that as a result of the respectable showing by women, "our men politicians were sur-

prised because not one of them, even our ministers, had said one word to influence women to take advantage of the suffrage opportunity Illinois had given to her daughters.”<sup>17</sup>

Other African Americans, however, particularly women, fought gallantly for the election of the white candidate, Hugh Norris, arguing that remaining loyal to the white Republican machine was the most expedient means of achieving equality for the community.<sup>18</sup> Several days before the February primary, the Second Ward held a Republican rally for Norris. A prominent Chicago club woman, Marie Mitchell, presided. When Edward Wright disrupted the meeting and attempted to speak on behalf of William R. Cowan, Mitchell exercised her political clout, reportedly chastising Wright on the grounds that “if he could not be a gentleman in the presence of the ladies present; that they would vote against him if he ever ran for office; in this city or county.”<sup>19</sup> The incident served to bolster Norris’s campaign and established Mitchell as a major political leader in the black community. About two weeks after the meeting, Mitchell and several other club women created their own female Republican suffrage organization. As president, Mitchell led the women in resolving that

WHEREAS In that through organization comes to all classes of Citizens that which they fail to secure through independence of action, and since the Second Ward organization has presented the name of Hon. Hugh Norris as being a fit person to succeed himself in the City Council,

THEREFORE be it resolved that this Auxiliary club join hands with the main body, and cast our lot with theirs in the endorsement of Mr. Norris for the place he has so honestly . . . filled for the past two years, believing that he possess the sterling work, honesty of purpose, and all those qualities which warrant us in using all our influence in re-electing him to the City Council.<sup>20</sup>

Affirmation of the white Republican candidate did not suggest that Mitchell and her cohorts were any less “race women” than Wells-Barnett and her backers. On the contrary, they, like

their counterparts, based their advocacy on what they believed was best for the race. The difference lay in the strategies of the two camps. Norris supporters feared that attempts to force the Republican Party to back a black candidate were tantamount to political suicide for the community. African Americans had attained a large measure of influence in the Republican Party because it was one of the few political parties that actively recruited black members, provided employment opportunities, solicited black women's input, and served the neighborhoods. Upsetting this powerful group might mean a reduction in or even the termination of the limited flow of resources. Ultimately, for this group, the concept of the "race man" went beyond traditional notions of color to include one who could clear a path for African Americans to derive benefits from an oppressive system. Pro-Norris constituents echoed the *Broad Ax's* warning that Cowan backers did not "realize the fact that they are engaged in mighty bad and dangerous business in stirring up racial strife or ill feeling setting the Whites and the Blacks against each other in their effort to establish the 'color line' in the great city of Chicago."<sup>21</sup>

Invigorated by the events at the Republican rally, the *Broad Ax* editorials, and black women's efforts to re-elect Norris, the ASC and other proponents of a black alderman increased their efforts. Exhorting women to "put a colored man in the city council," ASC members stepped up their canvassing efforts and campaigned vigorously for Cowan. Other Cowan supporters mastered the election laws with literature provided by the Board of Election Commissioners, then formed committees to instruct other black women about race politics. They adopted the slogan "Race interest first, last and all the time." While polling potential black voters, many female solicitors discovered that many women knew about Cowan and were impressed that a race man was in the running. They concluded that "the candidate's name did not matter, so long as he was a Republican and an Afro-American."<sup>22</sup>

The *Chicago Defender* captured the sentiments of many women with its sensationalized headlines for February 21, 1914:

“Women to Show Loyalty by Casting First Ballot for Cowan for Alderman,” “Second Ward Women Determine to Use Their Power to Better Themselves and Strengthen the Race,” “Asserted Men Needed Their Assistance,” and “Garbage Question, Children’s Playgrounds, Ventilation in Public Places, Supervision of ‘Movies’ Important Matters to Them.” The paper triumphantly predicted that black women would become “the balance of power” in the aldermanic campaign and would “see their first vote make race history in Chicago.”<sup>23</sup>

On primary day, almost three thousand women cast ballots in the Second Ward. While William Cowan lost the election, to the disappointment of the Suffrage Club women, he amassed 45 percent of the votes—and many of those votes came from women. According to the *Defender*, this showed that black women understood better than their men the interconnection between duty and politics: “They were actuated by principle in politics just as they are in everything else. . . . The women’s vote was a revelation to everyone, and after analysis shows them still actuated by the sense of duty to do more.” Only through the women, the paper said, could the ward “be purified.” Concluding that because of women, “traitorous leaders are to be relegated to the background and citizens of strength and character are to take their places,” the *Defender* vigorously promoted both Victorian ideals and female participation in the electoral process.<sup>24</sup>

The female vote even compelled the *Broad Ax* to acknowledge that “Cowan and his followers woke things up . . . for he received 2700 votes[,] more than one thousand of that number being cast by the ladies.” The vote “plainly brought to the front one thing and that is that within the next two or four years at the longest a high class popular solid Colored man of affairs can and will be elected to the city council from that ward.” If only three hundred of the black votes for Norris had been transferred to Cowan, the paper concluded, “nothing could have prevented him from breaking into the city council.”<sup>25</sup>

Impressed by women’s strong crusade for Cowan, many black men began to adjust to the new sexual context of local

politics. Black Republicans saw that female suffrage might provide them the leverage they needed to achieve the coveted prize of alderman. Loyalists to the race man concept adopted the women's strategies, welcomed women into their fold, and agitated the Republican ward machine. Second Ward political organizations began advertising their weekly meetings in local black newspapers, hoping to appeal to a larger audience. In all probability, these meetings were gender-integrated. The purposes of the gatherings were threefold: first, they provided an opportunity for black men and women to speak about issues of interest to blacks; second, "County Commissioners Night" and "Municipal Judges Night" allowed black women and men to listen to and question candidates; and finally, stronger appeals could be made to women to register and vote.<sup>26</sup>

The machine was troubled by the newly unified male-female political strength in the ward. At an ASC meeting a few days after Cowan's defeat, a black Republican, Oscar Stanton DePriest, joined the president of the ward organization, Samuel Ettelson, in an appeal for the women to campaign and vote for the machine candidate in the next election.<sup>27</sup> Women were urged not to support an independent candidate for alderman as they had in the Cowan primary, because doing so might split the black vote and lead to a win for the Democratic candidate. In turn, the party, "having realized that there was now a demand for a colored man, would itself nominate one at the next vacancy"—probably, they were told, in 1915. In November 1914, George Harding, a Second Ward alderman, was elected state senator. Keeping its promise, the organization pushed DePriest to the forefront by endorsing him as its candidate for alderman.<sup>28</sup>

Oscar Stanton DePriest was born in 1871 in Florence, Alabama. His father, Neander R. DePriest, a teamster and farmer, and his mother, Martha Karsner, a laundress, were former slaves who had joined the thousands of "exodusters" who left the South at the end of Reconstruction.<sup>29</sup> Because of a series of lynchings and economic hardships, they were forced to move the family from Florence to Salina, Kansas, in 1878. But rac-

ism and discrimination continued to haunt the family. As one of only two black families in Salina, they encountered open hostility from white schoolchildren and neighbors. Nevertheless, DePriest learned how to successfully maneuver his way in the predominantly white world. He attended Salina Normal School and studied business and bookkeeping. In 1889 he took those skills to Chicago, where he became a painter, decorator, and independent contractor. In 1903, he won \$25,000 worth of contracts from the Chicago Board of Education. By the age of thirty-three, he was well entrenched in the Republican machine and had become the fourth African American to serve on the Cook County Board of Commissioners. As a two-term board member, DePriest attended to the needs of the poor by publicizing relief resources in the city and county.<sup>30</sup>

DePriest's success in the party was due primarily to patronage politics and his ability to build a viable black Republican faction. Between 1906 and 1910, he joined forces with Wright, and together they built a strong black group and successfully gained leverage with several factions within the party. But by 1912, personal jealousies had shattered the coalition. DePriest did not support Wright's second primary bid; instead, he shrewdly cultivated support for himself within the ranks of the party, becoming its choice for alderman in 1915.<sup>31</sup> He paid a price for his ambitions and maneuvering, however: his commitment to the race was often questioned by the masses, and other prominent black political figures publicly challenged him.

Despite the machine's endorsement of DePriest, his candidacy was contested. In fact, his nomination opened the door for other African American candidates seeking the coveted post. For the first time in Chicago's political history, three black candidates campaigned for alderman in the primary. Joining DePriest were Louis B. Anderson, a former journalist from Washington, D.C., and Charles Griffin, an insurance and real estate broker. Disgruntled with the expanded slate of black primary candidates and fearing a split black vote, DePriest attempted in January 1915 to limit the number of black candi-



dates by arguing that he was the Republican organization's choice for alderman, so Anderson and Griffin should bow out of the race.<sup>32</sup> Neither Griffin nor Anderson withdrew.

Public denunciation of DePriest was swift. In a letter to the *Defender*, one reader cautioned that "the candidacy of Mr. Oscar DePriest, who is familiar with all the tricks of the game, and looked upon as one of the political leaders of the so-called black belt, should mark a new era in the political history of the intelligent self respecting Negroes of the Second ward. . . . Hypocritical boss-ridden demagogues have abandoned self-respect and race pride in order that their selfish aims may be obtained. Such men are unworthy of either confidence, or respect, and in my opinion can no longer control or influence the intelligent electorate of the Second ward."<sup>33</sup>

With the battle lines drawn, the candidates began seeking votes. One of the first forums for the three politicians was at the Alpha Suffrage Club's headquarters. The men presented their political platforms and entertained questions. Afterward, according to one historian, members passed a resolution to expel anyone who supported a white candidate.<sup>34</sup> The club also decided to "endorse" the Republican ticket and "our young giant Oscar DePriest for alderman of the Second Ward." They pledged "to leave no stone unturned" for his election, because "we realize that in no other way can we safeguard our own rights than by holding up the hands of those who fight our battles."<sup>35</sup> Other clubs in the ward were urged to "become a DePriest club," and the slogan "Elect Oscar DePriest to the City Council" was adopted.<sup>36</sup>

Some African American women opted to support the other candidates. With three blacks running in the primary, African American voters could focus on choosing the best "race" man as alderman. DePriest, some women felt, was not that person because he was an organization man first and a race man second, and would ultimately abandon his race if he was elected. As "one of the newly emancipated citizens of the Second Ward" explained, "The one thing above and beyond all, and to me of

most concern, was to be sure that there would be one of our race nominated for this important office." But, she added, DePriest was not her favorite; rather, "Louis B. Anderson is the one candidate upon whom they can safely depend." Even though this woman endorsed Anderson, she still insisted that the way to achieve power in the black community was to get a black man in office. Consequently, she and other Second Ward women concluded that "there is too much at stake to vote for any other man but a race man."<sup>37</sup>

On February 27, 1915, Oscar DePriest was declared the winner of the Republican primary. He garnered 3,194 votes, to Anderson's 2,632 and Griffin's 1,432. Of the 7,258 votes cast, black females accounted for one-third: 1,093 of the votes for DePriest, 762 of those for Anderson, and 500 of those for Griffin. After the victory, DePriest called for unification among blacks in the ward: "To those who saw fit to support other candidates of them I have nothing to say save of the highest respect, but since they have acted in accordance with the spirit of the primary law and have failed of nomination of their choice, I now appeal to them, hoping that they will, as all good Republicans, give me in my coming fight for election their heartiest loyalty and support."<sup>38</sup>

Despite DePriest's appeal, dissent lingered. On February 28, Edward Wright, disgruntled over DePriest's victory and his own failed bids for the post of alderman, requested that the Political Equality League endorse William Cowan as an independent candidate against DePriest. As a member of the league and on behalf of the Alpha Suffrage Club, Ida B. Wells-Barnett repudiated the appeal. She argued that this scheme had been conjured up by "this nameless white man" who "had not been prompted by the desire to secure a better man for nomination. It simply was to get two colored men to fight against each other, and the result would be that neither one of them would secure the place." The league agreed, and the Wright-Cowan challenge ended.<sup>39</sup>

The contest between DePriest and three white candidates—**Al Russell, Simon P. Gary, and Samuel Block**—drew a large

turnout. In April, thousands of African Americans in the Second Ward went to the polls to cast their ballots. When the votes were tabulated, Oscar DePriest was the clear winner, becoming the first black alderman of Chicago. He received 10,599 votes, to Russell's 6,893, Gary's 3,697, and Block's 433.<sup>40</sup>

DePriest's victory extended beyond the city. In the state capital, Springfield, the *Forum* complimented blacks in Chicago and proudly announced that "for the first time in her history, the second largest city in the Union has a Colored Council man, Oscar DePriest, from the 2nd Ward. This is quite an honor and adds much to the advancement, politically of the Colored people. . . . The Colored people of Chicago are to be congratulated for their pluck and aggressiveness. That Mr. DePriest will wear the honors worthily is beyond question."<sup>41</sup>

DePriest's victory also fostered public discussion of the significance of the female electorate. Women voters had been a decisive factor; without them, DePriest would not have won. Their ballots accounted for 3,899, or more than one-third, of the votes cast for him. Of the remaining votes, 2,313 went to Russell, 1,443 to Gary, and 187 to Block.<sup>42</sup> Again, more than a third of the votes for these candidates had come from women: 3,943 of 11,023. Aware of the debt owed to Second Ward women, DePriest asserted in the national black journal, *The Crisis*, "I favor extension of the right of suffrage to women" because the women in Chicago "cast as intelligent a vote as the men." Although there had been a certain degree of "timidity" during the first campaign in Chicago in which women were allowed to vote, women had educated themselves, and in the 1914 and 1915 campaigns, "the work of the women was as earnest and the interest as keen as that of the men and in some instances the partisanship was almost bitter." Moreover, in the campaign of 1915, "when colored men were primary candidates for alderman, the women of the race seemed to realize fully what was expected of them, and, with the men, rolled up a very large and significant vote for the colored candidates; and they were consistent at the election, contributing to a plurality of over 3,000 votes for the successful colored candidate in a field of

five. Personally, I am more than thankful for their work and as electors believe they have every necessary qualification that the men possess.”<sup>43</sup> DePriest’s public advocacy of female suffrage signaled to other ambitious politicians that black women could be either their best ally or their most ardent foe. The ASC’s earnest attempt to elect Cowan as an independent against the established party’s candidate, and the fact that they had delivered on their promise to elect DePriest, showed these women to be as committed to the cause as male voters. A shrewd politician, DePriest appreciated their role in enabling him to make history; thus he had no objection to women’s newly prominent place in the political landscape.

African American women won a considerable measure of acceptance in Chicago politics primarily because of their tenacity, the passage of a suffrage bill by the state legislature, the creation of organized suffrage clubs, and the development of a distinct politically conscious reform agenda. They appealed black men who felt threatened by their presence by highlighting woman’s traditional role as municipal housekeeper, and they proved race loyalty by voting for the “race man.” By blending what seemed to be the disparate concepts of race, gender, enfranchisement, and urbanization into a new paradigm for group politics, they were able to bridge gaps, merge voices, and consolidate energies into a powerful political bloc. As a result, gender conflict was suppressed, and a male-female alliance was created that kept in check the resistance of the Republican machine to the leadership of African Americans over their own people.

The racially charged events of 1914 and 1915 reflected the growing trend among African Americans toward self-determination and resistance. Determined that the kind of political exploitation that haunted thousands of blacks in the South would not be a part of the lives of urban Illinois blacks, those Second Ward residents of voting age pursued one objective—to make history by electing one of their own. This challenge to the Republican machine played a key role in the machine’s re-engineering. Recognizing the shift in black ideology, the platform of white patriarchy gave way to one of pragmatic politics. The

promise to back a black candidate in 1915 was a positive response to an increasingly concentrated black population, a rise in black assertiveness, and the extension of the vote to women. Moreover, by complying with the demands of the black press, black Republicans, and black women, the machine's endorsement of DePriest paved the way for the candidacy of other blacks in the Second Ward, as evidenced by the nominations of Anderson and Griffin. Had African Americans, particularly black women, failed to lead a vigorous grassroots campaign, cast ballots, influence black male voters, and cooperate with black Republicans in their efforts to elect a man of the race, it is unlikely that DePriest would have become the first African American alderman in Chicago.

As black women and men continued to migrate to the Chicago area, drawn by the promise of economic opportunity, African Americans remained a permanent fixture in municipal politics throughout the decade. The fact that they congregated primarily on the south side and harbored a "strong racial self-identification," scholar Dianne Pinderhughes argues, "minimized the extent to which intraracial conflicts invaded electoral politics. With increasingly large numbers of black Republican voters concentrated in the south side city council and state legislation districts, there were few head-to-head contests that divided the black vote and allowed the white candidate to win."<sup>44</sup>

## SEVEN



### *“To Fill a Reported Industrial Need”*

THE GREAT MIGRATION, RACE WOMEN,  
AND THE END OF AN ERA

The mass migration of African Americans out of the South, the riots that continued to plague the state, and the onset of World War I were sharp reminders to Illinois race women that their collective club activities had become indispensable to the sustenance and viability of black life. These events, more than anything else, boosted the resolve of club women and tested their endurance, as the migration simultaneously transformed and centered the state's black population, and the war accentuated both black patriotism and black anguish. The percentage of blacks in Illinois increased, from 2.5 percent to 3.7 percent, while that of whites decreased slightly, from 97.5 percent to 96.2 percent. And while nearly half of whites resided in rural areas, only 1 percent of the African American populace did so.<sup>1</sup>

Encumbered by their mostly rural and poor backgrounds, the migrants faced an uncertain future. As agents of uplift, race women were especially cognizant of the difficulties brought by the largest mass migration of African American people in history, and they were conscious of the dilemma that America's entrance into World War I posed for black citizens, who still had not attained equity. Race women met both challenges through collective action. They joined forces with newly creat-

ed organizations, enhanced their own programs, and eagerly participated in the war effort.

Thousands of African Americans migrated to Illinois between 1915 and 1920, primarily, as Elizabeth Lindsay Davis says, “to fill a reported industrial need which was widely advertised in the south.”<sup>2</sup> The *Chicago Defender*, one of the nation’s major black newspapers, vigorously encouraged Southern blacks to head north. The advertisements generated interest in the Lower South states such as Alabama, Louisiana, Florida, and Mississippi, inspiring hope among people who continued to live under the oppressive system of Jim Crow. The possibility of an improvement in their economic standing and less discrimination induced many to make the trip to the Midwest.<sup>3</sup> Another reason was the railway lines that converged in Chicago, which provided easy access to the city for Southern black migrants seeking employment in the state’s industries. By 1920, Illinois had a black population of 182,274, an increase of almost 74,000 over the black population in 1910.<sup>4</sup> In Aurora, the African American population more than doubled, from 293 to 627. In Danville, it jumped from 1,465 to 2,366; in East St. Louis, from 5,882 to 7,437; and in Peoria, from 1,569 to 2,130. The largest increase occurred in Chicago, from 44,103 to 109,458.<sup>5</sup>

Club women were especially interested in a unique aspect of this massive movement—the influx of black female migrants. Noted historian Darlene Clark Hine suggests that the significant rise in the number of female migrants—the “gender dimension”—marked this period of movement among African Americans as distinctive.<sup>6</sup> The black female population of Illinois alone jumped from 56,140 to 88,439 in a ten-year period. The number of black women twenty-one years of age and over was 60,604 by 1920. Most of these women were in the prime of their lives, ranging in age between eighteen and forty-four. As with the men, nearly 60 percent of them took up residence in Chicago, contributing to the city’s entrenchment as the most metropolitan city in the state, as well as the city with the densest African American population.<sup>7</sup>

From the outset, women migrants faced greater challenges than their male counterparts. Desperate for employment opportunities and better wages, they willingly distanced themselves from both family and familiar surroundings.<sup>8</sup> “A woman traveling alone was surely at greater risk than a man,” Hine argues. “After all, a man could and did, with less approbation and threat of bodily harm, spend nights outdoors. More importantly, men were better suited to defend themselves against attackers. However, given the low esteem in which the general society held black women, even the courts and law officials would have ridiculed and dismissed assault complaints from a black female traveling alone, regardless of her social status.”<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, inquiries to the *Defender* suggest that the pull of the North was stronger than their fears. A fifteen-year-old in New Orleans with four younger siblings sought work to earn much-needed income for her family, requesting that “a pass” be sent ahead of time, and assuring prospective employers that “you will not be sorry I am not no lazy girl I am smart i have got very much learning but i can do any work that come to my hand to do.”<sup>10</sup> A seventeen-year-old from Selma, Alabama, wrote, “I am a reader of the Chicago Defender I think it is one of the Most Wonderful Papers of our race printed. Sirs I am writeing to see if You will please get me a job. And Sir I can wash dishes, wash iron nursing work in groceries and dry good stores. Just any of these I can do. Sir, who so ever you get the job from please tell them to send me a ticket and I will pay them When I get their as I have not got enough money to pay my way.”<sup>11</sup> A twenty-seven-year-old woman from Jacksonville, Florida, seeking “any kind of housework,” dismissed any threat to her personal being because she believed that the North offered her better economic opportunity.<sup>12</sup>

Many of the women migrants would have brought children with them. An interested mother from Florida wrote, “I take grate pleazer in writing you as I found in your Chicago Defender this morning where you are secure job for men as I realey didn no if you can get a good job for me as am a woman and a widowe with two girls and would like to no if you can



get one for me and the girls. We will do any kind of work and I would like to hear from you at once not any of us has any husbands.”<sup>13</sup> And from Moss Point, Mississippi, a reader requested “in formation towards a first class cookeing job or washing job I wand a job as soon as you can find one for me also I wand a job for three young girls ages 13 to 16 years. Please oblidge.”<sup>14</sup> It was a difficult situation for those who wanted to keep their families intact during the migration process. “I seen your name in the Chicago Defender,” wrote one woman who was seeking refuge for her entire family. “I am real anxious to go north I and my family I am a married womon with family my husbon and 3 children my oders boy 15 younger 13 baby 4 my sister 20. I can wash chambe mad dishwasher nurse or wash and my boy can work my sister can cook or wash or nurse my husband is a good work and swift to lern we are colloed pepel a good family wonts a job with good pepel pleasanser soon.”<sup>15</sup>

But even for those who successfully made the journey, life was not easy. Alone in unfamiliar surroundings, many of these young women, often at the mercy of strangers, became easy prey for pimps and criminals. African American women often had difficulty obtaining adequate housing, and gainful employment, though somewhat diversified, continued to be concentrated in domestic service. Most became part of a larger group of what scholar Joanne J. Meyerowitz calls “women adrift.” Separated from family, they joined the rapidly expanding female labor force. In Chicago alone, the number of single women, regardless of race, employed outside the home increased more than 1,000 percent between 1880 and 1930.<sup>16</sup> Limited access to child care, educational institutions, and social services restricted their children’s opportunities for a better life.

To alleviate some of these problems, club women expanded their social services. The Lillian Jameson Home opened in Decatur in 1918 to help meet the needs of dependent black women and their children. The Community Club of Carbondale and the Benevolent Workers of Marion formed children’s auxiliaries. The Sunshine Workers of Harrisburg, formed in 1919, maintained a bank fund specifically to aid children and the el-

derly at Christmas.<sup>17</sup> Because more than 60 percent of these women settled in Chicago, the club women there were the largest contributors to their welfare. They established charities such as the Diana Charity Club, the Gaudeamus Charity Club, and the Giles Charity Club to clothe and feed families. The Improvement Club provided counsel to mothers on the rearing of their children.<sup>18</sup> The Amanda Smith Industrial School for Girls continued its work in the suburbs of Chicago. The Alpha Home, the Old People's Home, the Old Soldiers' Widows Rest, and the Church of God and Saints of Christ Orphanage and Home also became part of the link between the community and the welfare work of club women.<sup>19</sup>

The club women did not limit their services to women. To meet the needs of the steady influx of African American men, the women augmented their social service network and forged alliances with agencies that dealt specifically with problems associated with minorities in urban areas. Club women looked favorably on the Urban League movement that had begun during the early part of the decade. By 1916, offices were established in East St. Louis and Chicago. Some women volunteered their services, while others contributed monetarily through clubs. For example, the Gaudeamus Charity Club made an annual contribution of five dollars to the Chicago branch.<sup>20</sup>

The Urban League was a refuge for those who were adrift, becoming one of the most important links in the migration process. Volunteers helped migrants obtain housing, offered work-related lectures, and investigated workers' complaints. The league also established day nurseries for children and contributed financially to settlement homes in the area.<sup>21</sup> Among the list of volunteers were club women Jennie Lawrence, Joanna Snowden-Porter, and Irene Goins.<sup>22</sup> They joined other workers in welcoming new migrants to the city. As the migrants disembarked from the trains, league members directed them to the homes of relatives or friends, or guided them to "proper homes for lodging." They also distributed business cards, offering the league as a troubleshooting, problem-solving agency for all new migrants.<sup>23</sup> Club women handed out their own busi-

ness cards, referring the newcomers to similar city services and strongly encouraging a middle class code of conduct: "cleanliness, respect for public property, orderly conduct in the street and the best possible upkeep of the household."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, they urged young men and women to utilize the facilities of the YMCA for black men, which had opened in 1913, and the YWCA for black women, established in 1915.<sup>25</sup>

Lawrence, Snowden-Porter, and Goins had long been active in volunteerism and uplift work and were therefore proficient representatives of social activism. Involvement with the league was merely one aspect of their work. Lawrence was born in Salisbury, North Carolina, the daughter of a Presbyterian minister. After graduating from Scotia Seminary and Livingstone College, she migrated to Chicago, where she became a teacher, a social worker, and superintendent of the Phyllis Wheatley Home.<sup>26</sup> Snowden-Porter, a native of Chicago, was a member of the Juvenile Protection Association. An active club woman, she was elected treasurer of the Phyllis Wheatley Home and president of the Northwestern Federation, to which the IFCWC belonged. She also served as editor for the IFCWC from 1914 to 1916.<sup>27</sup> Goins was born in Quincy, Illinois, and attended schools there and in Springfield. She and her husband, Henry Sherman Goins, settled in Chicago in 1895. An entrepreneur, she had once owned a millinery business. Goins was active in club work, presiding over the City Federation of Colored Women's Clubs from 1919 to 1921, and serving as second vice president of the IFCWC from 1920 to 1922.<sup>28</sup>

Another important effort in aiding the migrants was the promotion of public health. The Department of Health and Hygiene of the IFCWC, at one time headed by Mary F. Waring, played a pivotal role in directing new migrants to health facilities. The federation contributed financially to Yates Memorial Hospital in Cairo, which cared for blacks living along the Illinois-Missouri border, and championed the health care provided by Provident Hospital in Chicago. By 1920, the IFCWC had become a bulwark in its emphasis on preventive medical practices. It strongly urged mothers to register the

births of their babies so that the health records of all newborns would be available to parents and public health officials.<sup>29</sup> The goal was to reduce the number of major health problems associated with poverty and racism.

Related to their health concerns was the moral decline resulting from alcoholism and prostitution. Because of the devastating consequences of these vices for the black community, race women were urged to lead a vigorous campaign against them. In strong alliance with the Women's Christian Temperance Union's fight for Prohibition, the IFCWC recommended that "departments of Temperance and Child Welfare be particularly encouraged in every club in the State," and its members campaigned for the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, ratified in 1919, which prohibited the sale or manufacture of alcoholic beverages.<sup>30</sup> The belief that only government legislation could bring tangible results led these women to conclude that closing down the saloons would move the red-light district out of their neighborhoods. Their hope was that a clean, wholesome environment would translate into an abatement in the vices that were destroying black families. Despite their best efforts, however, the red-light district remained centered in neighborhoods with limited economic and political clout.

The increase in and concentration of the black population did have a strong positive impact on both the local and the state levels. The vast majority of African Americans continued to flock to the racially segregated Second Ward in Chicago, which further strengthened the black electoral voice. Even when the district lines were redrawn during the 1920s, much of the black community remained concentrated in the Second and Third wards. Moreover, municipal suffrage for women, combined with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, helped blacks in Chicago to establish themselves within the city's political structure. The influx of female migrants increased the number of female voters, thus ensuring that black women would remain integral political players. And with the simultaneous rise in the number of black male voters, blacks were virtually ensured a prominent role in Republican circles. Depen-

dent on black votes, the Republican Party could not retreat from continuing to support the candidacy of at least one African American in the Second Ward.

Even the problems stemming from DePriest's criminal indictments did not hamper support from black and white Republicans. Despite having been accused of gambling and bribery between 1915 and 1917, DePriest remained a favorite among many African Americans, primarily because racial polarization led to the belief that he had been deliberately persecuted by whites because he was the only black on the city council. Even though he was acquitted of the criminal charges, his solid base of support in the black community gradually began to erode, black Republicans began jockeying for his position within the party, and the machine's interest waned. Without the support of these two significant groups, DePriest's bid for an aldermanic post in 1918 and 1919 was doomed.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the significance of his being the first race man to win a city post bore fruit in subsequent years.

By the end of the decade, African American politicians and their constituents had elected two more black aldermen. Louis B. Anderson was elected in 1917, and Robert R. Jackson in 1918.<sup>32</sup> Those successes, coupled with the continuous growth of the black population, spilled over into other areas. The election of white Republican Big Bill Thompson, dubbed "the Negro Mayor," increased the number of blacks in the city's legal department as well as the number of black police. With the support of Thompson, race women and men led a campaign to stop Chicago theaters from showing *Birth Of A Nation*, a racist film that glorified a united white South during Reconstruction.<sup>33</sup> Long after DePriest's victory, African American men and women continued to hold positions in city government, making it possible for blacks to reap some of the benefits of patronage politics.

African Americans sought political power on the state level as well. With the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, black women were no longer limited in their political agency. Their entrance into the state electoral arena opened

new doors for black politicians seeking to broaden their personal ambitions. The number of blacks in the legislature had increased to five by 1928, helping to shape the new political landscape of the state. Moreover, partly on the strength of black women's votes, Oscar DePriest, nearly thirteen years after his aldermanic success, was elected to the United States Congress. His victory represented a triumph both for black Illinoisans and for African Americans throughout the United States. A "race man" once again, DePriest was the first black elected outside the South, and the first in nearly three decades to be elected to the House. Continuing a tradition that had begun more than three decades before, race and club woman Sarah Gordon Walker created a social club in his honor, the Oscar DePriest Charity Club. Under the motto "We Help Ourselves Only As We Help Others," the club sought ways to improve educational opportunities and health-care facilities. It provided scholarships to public school students and contributed funds to Provident Hospital.<sup>34</sup>

While the rising black population and the movement of blacks into positions of influence on the local and state levels benefited many African Americans, it also generated enormous anxieties among white Illinoisans. Racial equality remained elusive, and race riots became common occurrences. Beyond their concern over the competition for employment and housing, whites in East St. Louis, for example, feared the political clout that blacks seemed to be gaining in the city. Newspapers incited whites by charging that Republicans in the city had imported Southern blacks to win elections in 1916. Indeed, by 1920, of the eight wards in East St. Louis, the majority of blacks resided in the Second Ward: 1,456 women and 1,545 men, for a total of 3,001. By comparison, there were only 3,773 native-born whites, plus 425 foreign-born whites.

Though outnumbered by native whites, the African American community held the edge in an important political category: Of the 1,837 women of voting age in the Second Ward, African American women accounted for 805, or 44 percent; native-born white women of native parentage accounted for

634, or 35 percent; and those of mixed parentage accounted for 242, or 13 percent. Foreign-born and naturalized women made up the remaining 156. Of 2,383 male voters, 951, or 40 percent, were black; 816, or 34 percent, were white men of native parentage; 256, or 11 percent, were whites of foreign or mixed parentage; and 241, or 10 percent, were foreign-born whites. The 119 naturalized men made up the remaining 5 percent.<sup>35</sup> Together, African American women and men totaled 43 percent of the voting-age residents of the ward. It would have been politically expedient for any party hoping to attract their vote to cater to their interests. Although blacks in the area did not wield the same kind of political clout as those in Chicago, they did constitute a political force.

Despite the fact that a one-year residency requirement kept many black migrants from the polls, a large number of whites chose to believe newspaper accounts of an alleged “colonization” attempt on the part of blacks who were wanting to take over the city. The real truth, Elliot Rudwick argues, is that employers, who often were Republicans, imported blacks as cheap labor.<sup>36</sup> The continued use of African Americans to replace striking white union workers further exacerbated racial tensions. By late May 1917, vocal protests against Southern black migration had escalated. One group filed a formal complaint with the city council, calling for a public meeting to voice their concerns. On the 28th of that month, frustrated with their lack of power over the situation and enraged by rumors that a mob of angry blacks had harmed whites in the area, some of the incensed workers retaliated. A mob of whites attacked and beat innocent blacks and demolished several African American businesses. The riots produced few substantial gains for white workers. Although those who participated received little punishment, and no effective measures were implemented by city officials to prevent future disorder, they nevertheless were not assured of job security, and employers continued to hire black migrants.<sup>37</sup>

The combination of angry white workers and heightened black fears increased the likelihood of more conflict. By mid-

summer, those tensions boiled over into chaos. On July 2, city newspapers reported a shooting incident involving several police officers and black patrons in a black neighborhood. The following day, angry white mobs attacked and killed at least thirty-nine blacks, and did thousands of dollars' worth of damage to homes and businesses in black neighborhoods. Approximately nine whites were killed.<sup>38</sup>

In the aftermath, African American women in the city joined the Urban League in its efforts to tend to the needs of the black community. But the women and the league faced massive obstacles. The league was forced to close its doors because of waning white support, and black women were hampered by the chaos that had erupted in the city following the riot. Nevertheless, they continued their relief work. For example, the Colored Old Folk's Home Association dispensed clothing and household necessities to African Americans who had lost all their possessions in the riot. The IFCWC, on the other hand, denounced the mob actions of white East St. Louisans and sent a letter of protest to the governor and to President Wilson.<sup>39</sup> Other women voiced their protest and appeals in local newspapers. In the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Ida B. Wells-Barnett editorialized that East St. Louis was simply a harbinger of the kind of violence that was likely to erupt in urbanized, racially polarized Chicago.

With one Negro dead as the result of a race riot last week, another one very badly injured in the county hospital; with a half dozen attacks upon Negro children, and one on the Thirty-fifth street car Tuesday, in which four white men beat one colored man, it looks very much like Chicago is trying to rival the South in its race hatred against the Negro. Especially does this seem so when we consider the bombing of Negro homes and the indifference of the public to these outrages. It is just such a situation as this which led up to the East St. Louis riot two years ago. There had been a half dozen outbreaks against the colored people by whites. Two different committees waited upon Gov. Lowden and asked him to investigate the outrages against Negroes before the riot took place. Nobody paid any attention. Will the



legal, moral, and civic forces of this town stand idly by and take no notice here of these preliminary outbreaks? Will no action be taken to prevent these law breakers until further disaster has occurred? An ounce of prevention beats a pound of cure. And in all earnestness I implore Chicago to set the wheels of justice in motion before it is too late, and Chicago be disgraced by some of the bloody outrages that have disgraced East St. Louis.<sup>40</sup>

Wells-Barnett was clearly frustrated with the white administrators at the city and state levels. Her pronouncement that “an ounce of prevention beats a pound of cure” expressed her strong belief that redressing the crimes committed against African Americans would diminish the number of violent outbreaks in East St. Louis and other urban areas. But women such as she had little chance of forcing political leaders to heed their concerns, because they could not vote for state officials. At that time their political clout was still centralized in their own communities. As a result, administrators implemented no procedures for halting the attacks, and they worried little about the warnings of black women.

A race riot in Chicago—only one in a series of riots during the “Red Summer” of 1919—exemplified the heightened racial tensions throughout the nation.<sup>41</sup> Racial animosity boiled to the surface in Chicago late in July, when a young black boy was struck on the forehead by white onlookers while swimming in Lake Michigan. The young boy drowned, and the sensationalistic newspaper coverage further inflamed an already heated situation. Allegations that black men were retaliating by raping white women and murdering whites fueled the fire. For fourteen days in late July and early August, black and white Chicagoans battled. In the end, 38 were dead and 537 were injured. It was the African American community that suffered most: 23 of the dead and 342 of the injured were black.<sup>42</sup>

In the aftermath of the riot, club women stepped in to help. In Sparta, they distributed clothes, food, and money. Others denounced the riots and concluded that the cure for racial discord was the creation of “constructive program[s] to provide

proper housing, full recreational privileges and increased educational opportunities for all where they are now lacking.” Had programs geared to training the mind and the body been in place before 1919, they believed, it would have been “impossible” for Chicago to have been one of the scenes of the rioting.<sup>43</sup> Some women, committed to racial cooperation and the institution of change, joined forces with the Chicago Commission on Race Relations to study ways of reducing or halting racial violence. Ella G. Berry, acting as one of the many investigators for the commission, found that many African Americans believed that race relations were deteriorating rapidly.<sup>44</sup> One interviewee suggested that the race riot had resulted from a heightened sense of black consciousness, increased migration, black participation in World War I, and white anxieties:

The present relations between the races seem more tense than formerly. This is due to the fact that Negroes have developed within the past few years a greater race consciousness, a great race respect. The immigration from the South which permitted him to enter into the industrial life of the North with very few hindrances, to partake of its civic life without an ever-constant reminder of race, was one of the main factors in increasing race consciousness and race respect. Another factor was the treatment as equals and fellow human beings of the Negro soldiers by the French soldiery and people. These things have caused the Negro to demand the respect which he is entitled to as a man and the privileges due him as a citizen. The whites at the present time still object to giving him these. This causes friction. I believe, however, that it will be lessened as soon as the whites realize that these demands of the Negro will not be withdrawn but will continue to be made with greater insistence.<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, black participation in the war effort did have a major impact. Black men joined and fought as part of the Illinois infantries. For example, Ferdinand L. Barnett, Jr., the son of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, entered the military in 1917.<sup>46</sup> The son of Sadie Lewis and James P. Adams served in the 365th Infantry.<sup>47</sup> For their sons, and because of their own patriotism, race women,

like most African Americans, championed the cause of democracy on the home front and “shared the glory won by our boys, who fought on the battle fields of France, first, to make the world a decent place for others to live in, second, to make it a safe place for themselves and theirs.”<sup>48</sup>

On the state level, club women worked with the Woman’s Committee of the Council of National Defense. In cooperation with the committee, the IFCWC registered women for war-relief work.<sup>49</sup> Federation members presented patriotic programs, made garments for soldiers, purchased and sent hundreds of cigarettes, and staffed the Red Cross and railroad canteens. They participated in the purchase of thrift stamps and liberty bonds, encouraged blacks to conserve the existing food supply, and continued social welfare reform work.<sup>50</sup>

The local efforts were equally impressive. The Gaudeamus Charity Club, the Young Matron’s Culture Club, and the Union Charity Club of Chicago adopted the Eighth Illinois Infantry, which served with other African Americans on the French front.<sup>51</sup> The Duncan Auxiliary of Springfield and the Louise D. Marshall Auxiliary of Chicago were formed soon after the war ended, to continue assisting the African American men of the 8th Infantry.<sup>52</sup> In addition to providing care packages for healthy soldiers, black women saw to the needs of the disabled. Visits to hospitals and the provision of refreshments and cigarettes were daily activities. The dead were honored as well. The Louise D. Marshall Auxiliary raised one thousand dollars to improve the lighting in the armory and purchased flowers to be planted in memory of blacks who died in the war.<sup>53</sup>

The Peoria Woman’s Aid Club invested money in war savings stamps and liberty bonds. The Springfield Colored Woman’s Club, the Domestic Art Club of Bloomington, and the Violet Thimble Club of East St. Louis worked with the Red Cross to ease war-related problems. The Frederick Douglass Center Woman’s Club in Chicago opened a war office for the Second Ward. The club registered women for service with the Woman’s Committee, provided an exemption board for drafted men, managed a Red Cross auxiliary, distributed food, and operated

a parcel post office for Christmas packages sent to soldiers.<sup>54</sup> Individuals such as Mary F. Waring also had a major impact. Professional expertise enabled Waring to supervise an auxiliary that knitted and sewed hundreds of garments for soldiers. She also served on the Illinois State Committee of the National Council of Defense, and she was appointed to the Mayor's Committee of Chicago to greet returning black soldiers.<sup>55</sup>

In spite of the hopes of African American men and women, the patriotism they showed during the war had little if any impact on race relations in the United States. Soldiers returned home in 1919 to find race hatred and intolerance. Nativism had gained a strong political voice, resulting in the passage of more restrictive immigration laws. The backlash against African Americans, Jews, and Catholics brought increasing demands for segregation and racial purity. The riots of 1919 and other violent attacks were manifestations of a larger climate of racial intolerance. Returning soldiers found few employment opportunities, and other blacks in Illinois and other Northern industrial areas, historian Florette Henri argues, "found themselves pushed out of jobs they had held during the war, especially the better jobs."<sup>56</sup> Along with the race riots, returning black soldiers were greeted with the rise of the new Ku Klux Klan, which was organized in 1915 and had dedicated itself to terrifying not only blacks but immigrants, Catholics, and Jews as well.<sup>57</sup> Even more disturbing to African American women was the subsequent creation of Women of the Ku Klux Klan. Like its male counterpart, the WKKK promoted racial purity, the superiority of Anglo-Saxon Americans, and segregation.<sup>58</sup>

To meet these new challenges, black women and men became more defiant and willing to challenge the social order. According to Allain Locke, it was a quest by African Americans to define themselves and control their own destiny. "This radicalism," Locke noted, meant "no limitation or reservation with respect to American life." He interpreted it as "a constructive effort to build the obstructions in the stream of his progress into an efficient dam of social energy and power."<sup>59</sup> That energy and power also contributed to the sudden rise of Jamai-

can-born Marcus Garvey. Garvey's flamboyant style and fiery speeches inspired blacks to rise up and determine their own path. He successfully coordinated the largest economic movement of blacks in history through the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which enabled blacks to own and operate stores, laundries, and restaurants. In 1919 he opened the first of his Liberty Halls in New York, where nightly mass meetings were held to instill race pride and encourage black community identity, solidarity, and unity. Garvey denounced organizations such as the NAACP and the Urban League because he felt that they were white-run and offered little help to the black masses. As a Washingtonian, he believed in segregation and championed economic prosperity. Unlike his predecessor, however, who had been an outspoken critic of white supremacy, Garvey believed that most white Americans felt an affinity with Klan ideology.<sup>60</sup>

Garvey's huge following included nearly nine thousand women and men from Illinois.<sup>61</sup> Although few prominent blacks publicly embraced his movement, Ida B. Wells-Barnett did. It was his philosophy of self-determination rather than his segregationist rhetoric that attracted her. She shared his belief that blacks had to organize for themselves and had to take the lead in fighting for their own independence from white oppression. She did not hesitate to speak to UNIA audiences when requested to do so by Garvey. She hailed Garvey as the person who had "made an impression on this country as no Negro before him had ever done. He has been able to solidify the masses of our people and endow them with racial consciousness and racial solidarity."<sup>62</sup> By the mid-twenties, Garvey had been indicted, imprisoned, and deported for mail fraud. But Wells-Barnett continued to appreciate the fact that his strong will, much like her own, and his unprecedented ability to inspire blacks had provided the basis for African American advancement in a racist culture: Had he enjoyed "the support which his wonderful movement deserved, had he not become drunk with power too soon, there is no telling what the result would have been."<sup>63</sup>

Unlike Wells-Barnett, most club women distanced them-

selves from Garvey and his segregationist ideas. They believed that as race women they could encourage race consciousness and self-determination while also soliciting assistance from white-controlled groups. They were assimilationists, not segregationists. Thus they did not denounce the Urban League and the NAACP, because these organizations assisted them in their pursuit for racial equality. When the Woman's Opportunity Club of Mounds, for example, held a "colored doll contest" to generate funds for future projects, it saw itself as "instilling Race pride," not supporting racism.<sup>64</sup> When the IFCWC strongly recommended "that all clubs urge their members to read race literature," it was attempting to instill self-esteem and championing race pride for black achievements, not denigrating the literary talents of white authors. And to counteract the rhetoric and actions of Garvey and other segregationists, the IFCWC encouraged "the organization in every community of committees on inter-racial relations."<sup>65</sup> For women who viewed their club activities and their association with whites as a necessary part of their "race work," these assertions reflected both the twenty year continuity in their commitment to uplift and their recognition of their own vulnerability in a racist and sexist culture.



## *Conclusion*

What began in 1890 as a protest against the underrepresentation of African American women on the planning committee for the nation's celebration of its founding grew into a grassroots movement to empower both African American women and all African Americans. The voluntary association movement that gained momentum in Illinois during the late nineteenth century became a link in a chain that had originated with the national black women's club movement. The creation of the IFCWC and its network of local and regional affiliates broadened the base and the vision of the middle-class women who cultivated, nurtured, and maintained the clubs and provided a viable means of sustaining, supporting, and improving the lives of the African American masses.

Dominated by a single huge metropolitan community that was surrounded by small rural communities, the state of Illinois presented unique challenges and offered numerous opportunities for club women. Chicago housed the majority of both the poorest and the wealthiest blacks in Illinois, segregated its communities by race, and offered the greatest number of employment opportunities in the state. Because it required the most in the way of charitable resources, the city was home

to the largest regional black female association, the largest number of clubs, and the most politically powerful group of black women in Illinois. The lack of available resources makes it impossible to ascertain whether women debated among themselves about Chicago's influence. What is clear, however, is that women in the metropolis as well as in the rural areas understood that it was because of racism and sexism, not regional residence, that blacks were denied equal opportunity.

Through mutual association, club women inserted themselves into first the social and then the political infrastructure of black communities, making their activism vital to these communities' survival. Establishing a network of social agents in both rural and urban areas, they fed, clothed, housed, and provided medical services to thousands of poor blacks. These successes prompted Elizabeth Lindsay Davis to write, "Our women in this State are alive three hundred and sixty-five days in the year, their hearts filled with enthusiasm and inspiration, each doing her level best to make the world better because she has lived."<sup>1</sup>

Because they were oppressed and marginalized on the basis of both their race and their sex, club women decided that their movement, while primarily emphasizing black women's empowerment, would cut across the lines of gender, class, and race. Black men, though not members of their associations, were expected to contribute equally in their attempts to further racial progress. The women encouraged and accepted both financial contributions and public support. Although they acknowledged the inherent differences between men and women, they rejected any notion that race women could not be social and political partners with their men.

Though some men resisted women's entrance into the male domain of the voting constituency, most recognized what club women had before the dawn of the new century—that it was a prerequisite for any kind of political success. Although race women had become sociopolitical agents by 1913, they still yielded to Victorian mores that dictated that as women, they

attempt to usurp neither the prominent political role that black



males played nor their limited gains. To assuage male egos, Fannie Barrier Williams reassured the men of Chicago that they need have “no anxiety as to the conduct” of black female voters. The implication, of course, was that the women would not attempt to publicly challenge male leadership. Still, the members of the Alpha Suffrage Club were “jeered” by some men when they tried to register voters.<sup>2</sup>

This kind of discrimination from black men did receive attention from women. While they chastised their men and sometimes questioned their moral character, they continued to adhere to their philosophy about their place as women. Although they didn’t seek political office, their supporting roles as club organizers and canvassers were equally important. As race women, they did not believe that it was necessary to dispossess black men of their valued position in order to be successful. But they did believe that it was essential to augment that role with female political and social activism in order to achieve racial progress. Instead of challenging black men for organizational leadership, they politicized by developing female-centered organizations that addressed their unique concerns, just as they had done in their social welfare work. They tended to vote along race lines, just as their men did. And like most women, they benefited from the political process by being able to highlight issues relevant to the lives of families and communities.

While these women were middle-class, they catered to the needs of the poor. Because residential segregation did not afford the middle class the opportunity to insulate themselves from the poor, club women could not have distanced themselves from those who needed to be helped even if they had wanted to. That is not to suggest that they did not favor imposing their mores on the masses; rather, the majority of their clubs were founded for the purpose of service rather than purely for cultural enrichment. Even the few cultural clubs that developed eventually added social service work to their missions.

Club women eschewed the black nationalist and separatist ideology in favor of interracial cooperation despite discrimination and their own reservations. They interacted with whites

both out of necessity and out of a genuine belief that collaboration between the races was important. Lacking economic clout, they enlisted the financial aid of white philanthropists. Lacking political influence, they accepted assistance from white women. Out of political expediency, they supported the candidacy of white male Republicans for upper-level administrative positions. And they joined white female organizations. Yet they espoused a racially conscious agenda by maintaining their commitment to self-determination and by creating and joining racially segregated clubs.

Ultimately, these social and political agents believed that their efforts would further the cause of racial equality. Neither the rise in racial tensions nor their own dual oppression as black women could dampen their resolve. If anything, the heightened tensions, coupled with the increased demands of a migrating populace, reinforced the club women's resolve to continue their public protest and their mutually interdependent activities. These women succeeded in spite of the racism and sexism that shaped their life experiences. It was not the push of external constraints that motivated them in their reform work; rather, it was the pull of internal forces that encouraged them to develop and maintain clubs and institutions that could provide a service to the community and nourish their desire to be good race women.

# NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

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3. *Ibid.*
4. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 March 1913.

## ONE. THE MOVEMENT TO ORGANIZE RACE WOMEN

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2. *Indianapolis Freeman*, 27 December 1890.
3. Rudwick and Meier, “Black Man in the ‘White City,’” pp. 354–355.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Massa, “Black Women in the ‘White City,’” p. 323; Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 130; Gayle Gullett, “‘Our Great Opportunity’: Organized Women Advance Women’s Work at the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893,” *Illinois Historical Journal* 87 (Winter 1994): 270–272.
6. *New York Age*, 24 October 1891.
7. Paddon and Turner, “African Americans and the World’s Columbian Exposition,” p. 24; a detailed description and analysis of Williams’s life is in chapter 2.
8. Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography,” *The Independent* 14 (July 1904): 91; Anne Meis Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Hu-*

*manity and a Noble Womanhood: African American Women's Clubs in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 34–35.

9. Massa, "Black Women in the 'White City,'" p. 334; Weimann, *Fair Women*, pp. 117–119.

10. Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation," in *The World's Congress of Representative Women*, ed. Mary Wright Sewall (Chicago: Rand, McNally and Co., 1894), p. 696.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 698.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 698, 699.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 702–703.

14. Sewall, *The World's Congress of Representative Women*, pp. 433, 696–729.

15. Fannie Barrier Williams, "What Can Religion Further Do to Advance the Condition of the American Negro?" in *The World's Parliament of Religions*, 2 vols., ed. John Henry Barrows (Chicago: Parliament Publishing Co., 1893), vol. 2, p. 1115.

16. Alfreda Duster, ed., *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 115–117; *The Baltimore Afro-American*, 29 April 1893.

17. Ida B. Wells, *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago, 1893).

18. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

19. Rudwick and Meier, "Black Man in the 'White City,'" p. 356.

20. Duster, *Crusade*, pp. 118–119. Wells later regretted her public denunciation, because her friend, statesman and orator Frederick Douglass, successfully highlighted the successes as well as the problems and concerns facing black people on that day.

21. Duster, *Crusade*, pp. 7–8.

22. See Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

23. *Ibid.*, p. 9; N. F. Mossell, *The Work of Afro-American Women* (Philadelphia: George S. Ferguson Co., 1894), p. 32.

24. Duster, *Crusade*, pp. 9–16; Monroe A. Majors, *Noted Negro Women: Their Triumphs and Activities* (Chicago: Donohue and Henneberry, 1893; reprint ed., Nashville: Fisk University Library Negro Collection, 1971), pp. 187–188.

25. Duster, *Crusade*, pp. 16–18.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. xvii, 18–20; Mildred Thompson, "Ida B. Wells-Barnett: An Exploratory Study of An American Black Woman, 1893–1930" (Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, 1979), pp. 26–28.

27. Duster, *Crusade*, pp. 22–24; Thompson, "Ida B. Wells-Barnett," pp. 29–31; Majors, *Noted Negro Women*, p. 189.

28. Duster, *Crusade*, pp. 35–37, 39.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 37–42.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–51; Ida B. Wells, "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in

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32. *Ibid.*, pp. 53–58.

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34. *Ibid.*, pp. 61–67.

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36. Wells, "Southern Horrors," Preface.

37. Duster, *Crusade*, p. 78; Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1984), p. 30.

38. Duster, *Crusade*, pp. 79–80.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 80–82.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 81; Tulia Kay Brown Hamilton, "The National Association of Colored Women, 1896–1926" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1978), p. 13.

43. *Woman's Era*, May 1894; Hamilton, "The National Association," p. 13; Giddings *When and Where I Enter*, pp. 30, 83.

44. *Woman's Era*, November 1894. Reporters included Fannie Barrier Williams, Chicago; Josephine Silone Yates, Kansas City; Victoria Earle Matthews, New York; Mary Church Terrell, Washington; Elizabeth Ensley, Denver; and Alice Ruth Moore, New Orleans.

45. *Woman's Era*, 1 June 1894, p. 5.

46. Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (Chicago, 1922), pp. 26–28.

47. Duster, *Crusade*, pp. 112, 136, 151; Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, pp. 89–92; *Woman's Era*, August 1894.

48. *Woman's Era*, July 1895.

49. Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Club Movement among Colored Women of America," in *A New Negro for a New Century: An Accurate and Up-to-Date Record of the Upward Struggle of the Negro Race*, ed. Booker T. Washington (Chicago: American Publishing House, 1900), pp. 396–397; Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *Lifting as They Climb* (Washington, D.C.: The National Association of Colored Women, 1933), pp. 14–15; Hamilton, "The National Association," p. 14.

50. Davis, *Lifting*, pp. 14–15, 18.

51. Williams, "Club Movement among Colored Women," p. 397.

52. *Ibid.*; *Woman's Era*, May 1894.

53. Fannie Barrier Williams, "Opportunities and Responsibilities of Colored Women," in *Afro-American Encyclopedia; or, The Thoughts, Doings, and Sayings of the Race*, ed. James T. Haley (Nashville: Haley and Florida, 1895), p. 153.

54. Ibid.
55. *Woman's Era*, August 1895; Davis, *Lifting*, p. 16; Williams, "Club Movement among Colored Women," pp. 397, 400.
56. Duster, *Crusade*, pp. 239, 242.
57. Davis, *Lifting*, pp. 20–21; Thompson, "Ida B. Wells-Barnett," pp. 131–135; Hamilton, "The National Association," pp. 16–21; Beverly Jones, "Mary Church Terrell and the National Association of Colored Women, 1896–1901," *Journal of Negro History* 67 (1982): 21–22.
58. Duster, *Crusade*, p. 243.
59. Davis, *Illinois Federation*. Phillis Wheatley was a famous black female poet. The clubs often named in her honor used the spelling Phyllis instead of Phillis.
60. Davis, *Lifting*, p. 11; "The Negro in Illinois," Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration, George Cleveland Hall Library, Chicago, Illinois, n.d.
61. Davis, *Illinois Federation*, pp. 2, 51; "The Illinois Federated Club Movement," Illinois Association of Club Women and Girls, Inc., Papers, p. 1, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield, Illinois.
62. Davis, *Lifting*, pp. 2, 33, 132; *The Broad Ax*, 15 July, 12 August 1899; "The Illinois Federated Club Movement," p. 1.
63. Williams, "Opportunities and Responsibilities," p. 161; Davis, *Lifting*, p. 33; Davis, *Illinois Federation*, p. 1.
64. *The Broad Ax*, 29 July 1899; Duster, *Crusade*, pp. 258–260; Thornbrough, "National Afro-American League," pp. 503–504.
65. Davis, *Lifting*, pp. 33–37; Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, p. 106; Davis, *Illinois Federation*, p. 51.

## TWO. THE ILLINOIS FEDERATION OF COLORED WOMEN'S CLUBS

1. This meeting set the stage for an unprecedented number of black club women in the Midwest to become actively involved in the national black club women's movement.

2. Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (Chicago, 1922), p. 2; "The Illinois Federated Club Movement," Illinois Association of Club Women and Girls, Inc., Papers, p. 1, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield, Illinois. For a discussion of the Midwestern experience of black club women, see Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Women in the Middle West: The Michigan Experience," in *Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Publishing, 1994), pp. 59–85; Stephanie J. Shaw, in "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women," in *We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women's History* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1995), pp. 433–447, argues that the NACW was not the beginning of the black women's club movement. The NACW originated from the grassroots efforts of club women who had already created and developed clubs of their own. See also Anne Firor Scott, "Most Invisible of All: Black Women's Voluntary Associations," *Journal of Southern His-*

tory 56 (1990): 3–22, about the marginalization of black women's associations in the larger club women's movement.

Elizabeth Lindsay Davis refers to this organization as the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, while the incorporation papers filed on September 5, 1912, refer to the organization as the Illinois State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. I have chosen to use Davis's reference throughout the book.

3. Davis, *Illinois Federation*, p. 123.

4. See Davis, *Illinois Federation*, and Illinois Association of Club Women and Girls, Inc., Papers.

5. Davis, *Illinois Federation*, p. 121.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 42; Anne Meis Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood: African American Women's Clubs in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1996), p. 150.

7. Davis, *Illinois Federation*, p. 110.

8. *The Broad Ax*, 19 October 1901; Davis, *Illinois Federation*, pp. 113–114.

9. Davis, *Illinois Federation*, pp. 113–114.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 111–118.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 3; "Constitution, Article III, Funds," Illinois Association of Club Women and Girls, Inc., Papers.

17. "Constitution, Article III, Funds," Davis, *Illinois Federation*, pp. 110, 122.

18. Davis, *Illinois Federation*, pp. 119, 121; "Constitution, Article III, Membership," Illinois Association of Club Women and Girls, Inc., Papers.

19. "Fifty Year History of the Chicago and Northern District Association of Colored Women, Inc.," Illinois Association of Club Women and Girls, Inc., Papers, p. 7.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 23; Davis, *Illinois Federation*, pp. 60, 110–118.

21. "Fifty Year History," p. 25; Davis, *Illinois Federation*, p. 67.

22. "Fifty Year History," pp. 24–25.

23. Davis, *Illinois Federation*, pp. 9–10.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 9.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 20.

26. See, for example, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), for a discussion of the role that the religious movement among African American women, particularly in the Baptist church, played in the women's club movement during the Progressive years.

27. Davis, *Illinois Federation*, pp. 47–48, 116–117.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 42, 110–111.
30. *The Forum*, 11 December 1909; Davis, *Illinois Federation*, p. 122.
31. Fannie Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography,” *The Independent* 14 (July 1904): 91. For a discussion of the black elite, see Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880–1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), and Darlene Clark Hine, ed., *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1993), s.v. “The Middle Class,” by Sharon Harley.
32. Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography,” p. 91.
33. *Ibid.*; Bert James Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin, eds., *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life: Their Words, Their Thoughts, Their Feelings* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), p. 263; Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer, eds., *Notable American Women, 1607–1950: A Biographical Dictionary*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), vol. 3, p. 620; Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *Lifting As They Climb* (Washington, D.C.: The National Association of Colored Women, 1933), p. 266.
34. Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography,” p. 91. Williams reveals few other details about her Southern ordeal. She does not divulge where she went or when she visited the region.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 91–92.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
39. Loewenberg and Bogin, *Black Women*, p. 263; James, James, and Boyer, *Notable American Women*, pp. 620–621; N. F. Mossell, *The Work of Afro-American Women* (Philadelphia: George S. Ferguson Co., 1894), pp. 111–112; Harold Gosnell, *Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), p. 217; Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 69–70; Gatewood, *Aristocrats*, p. 267.
40. Adade Mitchell Wheeler and Marlene Stein Wortman, *The Roads They Made: Women in Illinois History* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Co., 1977), pp. 70–71; Hine, *Black Women in America*, s.v. “Fannie Barrier Williams,” by Wanda Hendricks; Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890–1950* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 28; Jay David, ed., *Black Defiance: Black Profiles in Courage* (New York: William Morrow, 1972), pp. 64, 70.
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42. Chicago Woman’s Club Papers, Boxes 20, 45, 46, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois; Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Club Movement among Negro Women,” in *The Colored American from Slavery to Hon-*



orable *Citizenship*, ed. J. W. Gibson and W. H. Crogman (Atlanta: J. L. Nichols and Co., 1903), p. 217.

43. Williams, "Club Movement among Negro Women," p. 218; Williams, "A Northern Negro's Autobiography," p. 94.

44. See, for example, "The Frederic Douglass Centre," *The Voice of the Negro* 1 (December 1904): 601–604; "The Need for Social Settlement Work for the City Negro," *Southern Workman* 33 (September 1904): 501–506; "The Negro and Public Opinion," *The Voice of the Negro* 1 (January 1904): 31–32; "A Woman's Part in a Man's Business," *The Voice of the Negro* 1 (November 1904): 543–547; "The Colored Girl," *The Voice of the Negro* 2 (June 1905): 401–403; "Social Bonds in the Black Belt of Chicago," *Charities* (7 October 1905): 40–44; "Colored Women in Chicago," *Southern Workman* 63 (October 1914): 564–566.

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51. Davis, *Illinois Federation*, pp. 33–34.

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### THREE. AGENTS OF SOCIAL WELFARE

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3. Florette Henri, *Black Migration: Movement North, 1900–1920* (New York: Anchor Press, 1976), pp. 108–113.

4. Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (Chicago, 1922); see also Elsa Barkley Brown, "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of Saint Luke," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14 (1989): 610–633.

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23. McClain, *Springfield Colored Woman’s Club*; Davis, *Illinois Federation*,

pp. 28–29, 44–45; Kwedar, *Unsung Heroines*, p. 10; Phillips, “In Reality,” pp. 4–6.

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33. Davis, *Illinois Federation*, pp. 7, 47–48, 97; see also Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, pp. 21–42.

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#### FOUR. RACE RIOTS, THE NAACP, AND FEMALE SUFFRAGE

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