

“Built for Mind and Spirit”: The Socialization of Race through Higher Education at Fisk
University and Spelman College, 1881-1930

By
Melissa M. Horne, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History

Carleton University
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Abstract

This thesis examines the socialization of blacks in higher education from 1881 to 1930. In doing so, the evolution of both the formal and informal curriculum at two prominent black higher education institutions—Fisk University and Spelman College—will be explored to highlight ways in which the cultural, social, and economic factors effected change at these institutions. Further, this study looks at the various roles students played in shaping and *re*-shaping their scholastic environment. Primary sources such as course catalogs, student newspapers, administrator correspondences, and alumni files, are used to gain a fuller understanding of the context and content of these academic environments. This work also engages with a body of literature that seeks to understand how race ideology was formed and taught amongst the black middle class. Ultimately, this thesis will underscore the significance of the dynamic nature of race ideologies in black higher education.

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Introduction

*“The impending crisis and the future of the race demands the education of the Negro...the intellectual development of the race is no more to be questioned...there are scores of men and women among our race who are accomplishing great results in uplifting the uneducated masses in most parts of the South.”*¹

How is race taught? This is a question that has both contemporary and historical implications. The search for a greater understanding of how race, racism and prejudice are learned is a question that scholars across the fields of education, psychology, sociology and history have endeavored to answer. Much work is currently being done in both the fields of education and history to broaden our understanding of the various ways parents, teachers, and different racial groups teach children and youth about race.² Historians like Jennifer Ritterhouse have focused their analyses on identifying the various ways that black and white parents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries taught their children about race through different child rearing strategies. Ritterhouse explains that “Every child born into a society has to learn race anew, that every child begins life innocent of the very *idea* that there *are* different ‘races’, much less the idea that ‘race’ ought to matter in certain specific ways as an organizing principle for his or her society.”³ It is from both contemporary studies of race and education along with historical analyses like Ritterhouse that I situate myself. Yet while Ritterhouse looks at the role that parents and families played in teaching children about race, I am interested

¹ “Education a Potent Factor in the Redemption of the Negro” *The Fisk Herald*, Vol. XXXI, No. 7, May 1914.

² H. A. Williams, *Self Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), S.J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to be and to do: Black Professional Workers during the Jim Crow Era*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), Y.L. Watson and S.T. Gegory, *Daring to Educate: the Legacy of Early Spelman College Presidents*, (Virginia: Stylus, 2005), K.K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

³ J. Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 9.

in examining how race was taught in formal educational settings, specifically at institutions of higher education.

The concept of race gained much of its power as a means for the classification and often the subordination of different ethnic groups in the nineteenth century. The power of race is located in its fluidity and ability to shift with other dominant ideological changes. In nineteenth and twentieth century America questions arose regarding the distinction between race as a social category and race as a natural category. Around the mid-nineteenth century, ideas of scientific racism emerged and postulated that one's race was biologically determined. The theories posited by scientific racism gained popularity and authority in both the academy and amongst the wider public. These supposed differences were used by the dominant white culture to justify the subjugation of African Americans and for denying them civil rights.⁴

Among those civil liberties denied to blacks was the right to education. Emancipation, however, complicated the racialized caste system in America. The deconstruction of southern society led to new opportunities where newly legislated freedoms complicated the previously well-defined racial, social and class definitions of the Antebellum South. The successful reformation of southern society was dependent on the delicate negotiation between old and new definitions of race and class implicit in the building and rebuilding of social institutions. Education—an institution which explicitly functioned to inculcate American civic values—was particularly responsive to these tensions.

⁴ A.S. Winston ed., *Defining Difference: Race and Racism in the History of Psychology*, (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004), G. Richards, *Putting Psychology in its Place: A Critical Historical Introduction*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), G. Richards, *Race, Racism and Psychology: Towards a Reflexive History*, (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Questions concerning the meaning of education were heightened by the racial and class tensions brought about by the recently conferred rights and privileges bestowed on the freedmen and women. The system of slavery that had previously existed in the South served to create an artificial binary whereby society was divided into whites and blacks, free and enslaved.

Emancipation made visible the artificiality of this system and exposed the variations within the white society, while the freedmen complicated the previous system as they in theory had access to the same rights as white society. One's race, in theory, was no longer a legitimate unit of categorization, as it was no longer possible to withhold rights based on one's racial make-up. With the supposed equality of the races, class differentiations amongst the southern white population were made visible. This was a particular historical moment where the merits of biological racism were in conflict with declarations for black social, political and economic equality. At the center of all this was education, where these tensions were made visible. Education, a right previously held by whites, was seen as an important means of upward mobility. Thus, the questions surrounding the nature of black education were grounded in larger social, cultural, political and economic debates.⁵

Based on the premise that the idea of race and race differences have been socially constructed, and that this concept must be learned, the question of how race is taught becomes especially interesting when considering black higher education in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To address the original inquiry, "how is race taught", the real questions become, what role does education play in inculcating in

⁵ W.E.B., Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Russell, 1935), E. Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1988)

students certain racialized identities? To what extent do external factors such as contemporary race ideologies, class and gender norms impact educational philosophies? And to what degree must students be complicit or active participants in the education process? Education has the ability to be both a powerful socializing agent that allows educators to transmit the desired norms and values upon students, and conversely can be a potent force for facilitating personal and group uplift. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, justifications for the higher education of blacks in America were based on a delicate balance between these principles. On the one hand, white northern missionaries and educators argued that they could use the formal and informal curriculum to inculcate in students certain middle-class race ideologies that would assist their assimilation into American society and in turn support the process of racial uplift. On the other hand, black men and women sought higher education because it was the main vehicle for obtaining political, social and civic rights. But just as importantly, it conferred a certain class status and provided them with the necessary skills for self-improvement as well as those needed to help advance the rest of the race.

Black Higher Education: A Historical Overview

The project of higher education for blacks began in the early days of the Reconstruction era. After Emancipation, the freedmen and women began the process of institution building. These initiatives included the founding of churches, health care services and educational facilities. Legally denied the right to education during their enslavement, African Americans saw education as the main vehicle to improve the status

of their people.⁶ Moreover, this was a time when the racial classification system supported by scientific racism was challenged by the idea that blacks *could* and *should* be educated. White educators believed in the inherent racial equality between whites and blacks, and as such set out to inculcate students with a racial identity based on middle class values that would in turn facilitate racial advancement. They promoted ideals of racial equality during a time where race differences were becoming increasingly quantifiable through the aid of social science research. Race differences were also becoming entrenched in the political, social and economic arena of the South through Jim Crow laws and segregation.

As active participants in the pursuit of literacy and knowledge, the freed men and women were integral to the education process. Historian Jacqueline Jones explains the significance of education for the freed men and women, stating that since education was prohibited by law during slavery, “for black people, schooling represented individual and collective defiance to white authority and a means of expanding their horizons beyond the limits of the cotton plantation. Slavery had been a form of intellectual as well as physical bondage.”⁷ To the freed men and women education was more than literacy; it was an expression of their freedom and access to previously denied civil rights. With support and monetary aid from the Freedmen’s Bureau and various missionary societies,

⁶ J.D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1865-1935*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), Best, R.E Burchart, “‘Outthinking and Outflanking the Owner’s of the World’: A Historiography of the African American Struggle for Education”, *History of Education Quarterly*, 1988, 28, 3, J.H.Best, “Education in the Forming of the American South”, *History of Education Quarterly*, 1996, 36, 1.

⁷ J.Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980, 49.

educational facilities were established throughout the South.⁸ Part of this institution building involved the founding of a number of black colleges and universities. Both white educators and black race leaders believed that higher education was the most effective vehicle for race advancement. The function of black colleges and universities then, was to provide men and women with a liberal arts education that would enable them to obtain the necessary skills to enter into the professions and also to advance the rest of the race.

These educators attempted to instill in southern black men and women a racialized identity based on white middle-class Victorian ideas of respectability such as thrift, temperance, self help, racial uplift, education, proper gender roles, and missionary work. Gender played an important part in the type of education men and women received. As men and women were both complicit in the project of race advancement, they had clearly defined roles in this process that required specialized training. As such, the nature of one's educational experience was dependent upon the contemporary gender ideologies. The courses and extracurricular activities available to male and female students were based on similar gender norms that guided white men and women. Women's education emphasized domesticity and trained students for professions in social work, nursing and teaching. Male students were likewise streamed into traditionally masculine professions.

Objectives

This thesis will examine the period of higher education for blacks between 1880 and 1930. I have selected this particular period because it was a time of significant

⁸ Du Bois, W.E.B., *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: 1935), L. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction*, (Chicago:1997).

cultural changes and ideological shifts that impacted black education. During this time, a number of important transitions occurred in American social and cultural thought that affected ideas about black education. Opinions about the nature and purpose of black education were influenced by widespread ideological shifts from the late-Victorian and progressive ideals of respectability to a more consumer oriented middle-class culture, changing definitions of masculinity and femininity, the strengthening of racial differences with the rise of the social sciences, and debates between the merits of industrial education versus liberal arts education for blacks. To examine how these broader cultural trends affected the formal and informal socialization of race in black higher education, I have drawn on a diverse body of scholarship.

Historians such as Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Stephanie Shaw, Kevin Gaines, and Deborah Gray White, have demonstrated that respectability was important to race advancement for educated black men and women.⁹ These scholars have focused their research on how educated middle-class black men and women “uplifted the race”. Their research focuses on how the educated class promoted ideas of respectability and the ways higher education prepared them for this work. Higher education was identified as the most effective means for transmitting cultural, moral and religious values that would provide these men and women with the tools needed for both personal and group advancement. Higginbotham and Shaw specifically demonstrate the way that educators attempted to impart the ideas of respectability, and in turn how students drew on these formal and informal teachings to embody the ideals of respectability and also to form

⁹ E.B. Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: the Woman's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), S. J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to be and to do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*.

clubs and organizations for the specific purpose of uplift. They demonstrate that through a liberal arts education imbued with Christian values, black men, and more specifically, black women were socialized as cultural carriers responsible for the improvement of the race. Accordingly, black women's education was tailored to train them for careers in service positions including teachers, social workers, nurses and librarians. Higginbotham writes that "college-bred women, like their male counterparts, interpreted scripture, contributed to and published newspapers, and promoted tract literature among the masses."¹⁰ More importantly, educational institutions provided black women with a forum in which to participate in the academic and public debates on race.¹¹ Historian of education, Lynn Gordon, has examined the interplay between gender and higher education in the Progressive Era, noting how curricular changes reflected shifts in the wider American society's ideas of gender.¹² Through education, men and women were socialized through both the formal curriculum and the structure of campus life in middle-class ideals consistent with their prescribed gender roles.

During the 1880s and early 1900s middle-class black constructions of racialized identities were relatively consistent with educators' goals. However, as blacks began to articulate a view of race that differed from those of the administrative bodies', their ability to socialize students in these older ideals became increasing difficult. Middle-class ideals began to shift around 1915-1920 with mass consumerism, the migration of black men and women to urban centers in the North and South, the new youth culture and the emergence of the New Negro era. Historians such as Martin Summers, Gale

¹⁰ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 44.

¹¹ D.C. Hine, *Hine Sight: Black women and the Re-Construction of American History* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to be and to do*.

¹² L.D. Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

Bederman, Kathy Peiss and Deborah White explore the impact these social and cultural events had on black constructions of class and changes in gender ideology.¹³ Locating these events as major forces of change, these historians in turn investigate the influence this had on black strategies for race advancement. Summers, and White, note how the New Negro movement, along with changes in ideas of black masculinity, resulted in a more male-centered race leadership which subsequently altered black women's role in race advancement. Summers traces how these changes created a more militant style of black leadership and the way this translated to students' desire for more autonomy and self-determination on college campuses. While education does not figure prominently in either of Peiss or White's analyses, I draw on their work in so far as they reveal the impact that consumerism, especially changes in women's beauty and fashion, had on black ideals of femininity.

Educational philosophies were influenced by these larger social and cultural trends, but other forces were also in play. Andrew Winston and Graham Richards discuss in their respective works, the rise of "Race Psychology" in the early twentieth century and its implications on both academic and popular notions of race. Through intelligence testing and other experimental means, psychologists were able to demonstrate quantifiable race differences which were in turn used to denounce blacks' intellectual abilities. Most educators at black institutions opposed these claims, citing instead, social and environmental factors as possible indicators of race differences. However, as

¹³ M. Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents: Manliness and its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), G. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), K. Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998, D.G. White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of themselves, 1894-1994*, (New York: Norton, 1999).

Winston and Graham discuss, the objective language of psychology and the weight given to the statistical evidence provided by intelligence tests had an impact on black education. Historians such as Francille Rusan Wilson, Michelle Mitchell, and Daylene K. English have examined how black scholars and prominent race leaders engaged with theories of race.¹⁴ These scholars highlight how black men and women advocated racial differences based on the cultural and environmental factors that continued to render blacks as second class citizens rather than any inherent biological differences. Wilson in particular examines how the “segregated scholars,” as she terms black academics, turned to the methodology of the social sciences to attempt to understand and solve the social and cultural ills of the black masses.

The scholarship on black race ideologies and black higher education has largely been limited to histories of educational institutions, the educational philosophies of white educators as well as a few prominent black men and, to a lesser extent, black women, and the various ways blacks were engaged in racial uplift.¹⁵ While these works provide in depth information regarding the formation of both white and black race ideologies, what is not immediately clear from previous scholarship is the way that education, through both the formal and informal curriculum, functioned to socialize students. More

¹⁴ F.R. Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars: Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890-1950*, (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2006), M. Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Chapel Press, 2004), D.K. English, *Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

¹⁵ S.H. Case, “Renegotiating Race and Respectability in the Classroom: Women and Education in the New South” PhD Dissertation, (University of California Santa Barbara, December 2002), A.C. Collins “Socialization at Two Black Women’s Colleges: Bennet College and Spelman College”, PhD Dissertation, (University of Pittsburgh 2001), S.Y. Evans, “Living Legacies: Black Women, Educational Philosophies, and Community Service, 1865-1965”. PhD Dissertation, (University of Massachusetts Amherst, May 2003). G.D. Graham, “The Founding of an All Black Female Seminary: Spelman 1881-1927”, PhD Dissertation, (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1996). S.Y. Evans *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954: An Intellectual History*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007)

specifically, how did curricular content, the faculty, rules and regulations interact? Additionally, while much of the scholarship has focused on the white educators and black race leaders ideas about the purpose of black education, comparatively little exists that gives attention to the impact that these educational philosophies and curricular decisions had on students. Questions arise such as, how did the larger cultural and academic race, gender and class ideologies converge to affect both educators goals and students reception of these formal and informal lessons? How did student's own conceptions of class and gender affect their willingness to accept the lessons that educators tried to impart?

The nature of the thesis is two-fold. I am interested in first, exploring the context and the content of students' education. I wish to review the ideologies that influenced black education during this period including the pedagogical methods employed by the faculty and how they were impacted by larger social and cultural trends in American society. Additionally, this project will explore how these ideas affected the structure of the academic curriculum and campus life. Second, this thesis will explore the various students' responses and reactions to their educational experiences and the active role they played in the education process. Overall then, this thesis will show how the university setting was one of the main socializing agents for the black middle class and the training ground on which young men and women in America received gendered and racialized instruction and prepared for their future roles in life.

To try to answer these questions this study focuses on two southern black educational institutes: Fisk University in Nashville, which had a co-ed student body, and Spelman College in Atlanta, an all female institute. These two institutions were chosen

for a number of specific reasons. First, they have been well documented in the literature and represent two of the most prominent institutions of black higher education during this period. Second, Fisk and Spelman represent the co-educational or single sex educational options available to men and women who desired a liberal arts education. Comparing the formal and informal curriculum at both institutions allows for an analysis of the role that gender played in black men and women's educational experience. Third, these schools were chosen as case studies because of the substantial archival material available. Administrative records, course catalogs, and personal papers produced by alumnae and faculty were useful in constructing portraits of campus life. Student newspapers served as valuable primary resources; the *Fisk Herald* and *Spelman Messenger* revealed how students responded to and spoke out against the changing definitions of race and race relations in the South. The course catalogs produced by the individual institutions were used to gain an understanding of the content of students' education.

Chapter Outline

Chapter one focuses on the initial efforts of educators to establish a formal curriculum, and the ways in which this curriculum was affected by social, cultural, and economical factors. While initially educators desired to establish a curriculum with a strong liberal arts emphasis, shifts in educational thought led to a rise in industrial training in the formal curriculum. This change in curricular emphasis was met with mixed feelings in the educational community by educators and students alike, sparking a debate between two racial uplift philosophies: one that championed liberal arts training, and another that called for industrial education. While most educational research focuses on

polarizing these two different philosophies, this chapter will emphasize the ways black higher education institutions blended these two philosophies in practice via their formal curriculum. In addition to examining the effects of these changes in educational philosophies, this chapter will also look at the ways in which the rise in social sciences affected both the curriculum and the overall intellectual environment of black higher education.

While chapter one focuses on the formal curriculum at Fisk and Spelman, chapter two looks at the informal curriculum. I will look at how the notions of uplift, embraced by both white educators and blacks alike, affected the extracurricular activities available to students and the structure of the campus environment of black schools from 1880-1915. The educational philosophies of white educators and black race leaders were largely guided by the late-Victorian and Progressive Era's emphasis on respectability and self-help as defining characteristics of the middle class. As blacks were focused on achieving racial up-lift, the notion of respectability was seen as the dominant means to achieve this goal. Therefore, black middle-class communities and white educators often tried to instill ideas of respectability into black students through various means. For example, campus life for students at Fisk and Spelman socialized them for their proper race, class and gender roles through the use of various extracurricular activities and through the rules and regulations which structured students' daily activities and the guidelines which governed students' dress codes. Overall, this chapter seeks to explore the effects of uplift educational philosophies on the informal curriculum and the ways in which the formal curriculum operated as a means to transmit ideas of respectability, uplift, and racial advancement to black students.

Chapter three focuses on black higher education within the context of 1915 to 1925. During this time, America was going through many cultural changes, affecting every aspect of American society including black middle class racial thought. Factors such as the rise in consumer culture and the New Negro movement, created a different cultural and political climate on black university campus. Moreover, they fostered a notable generational gap which would inevitably lead to tension between the older generation of administrators and the new generation of black students. This chapter will explore the role that students had in reshaping the formal and informal learning environment. I will use instances such as the Fisk Rebellion—the most notable rebellion in black education—to highlight the ways the new cultural climate in America affected the political and social environment on black college campuses. Further, I will address the impact of these changes on black higher education institutions and illustrate how this led to an increased demand for more autonomy among students.

Chapter 1

Teaching Race: The Formal Curriculum, 1881-1930

“From the very beginning of mankind and the origin of a society, even in its crudest state, the chief means of group preservation, or group advancement, has been education.”¹ - Andrew G. Paschal

For the aspiring black middle-class of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, higher education was unquestionably the most important vehicle for personal and racial uplift.² Education was an instrument for the transmission and reinforcement of race and gender ideologies in black and white youths alike. With the failure of Reconstruction to achieve the intended social, political and economic gains it had promised, education became the focus of southern blacks. As Joe M. Richardson explains, “learning was viewed as the greatest single opportunity to escape the increasing prescriptions and indignities being heaped upon them. Moreover, with increased segregation, professional people and leaders were more needed than ever.”³ Southern society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was sensitive to the delicate negotiation between old and new definitions of race, class and gender implicit in the construction of social institutions. Further, education was seen as a powerful socializing agent and through the formal academic curriculum teachers could inculcate students in the desired class, gender and race norms.

¹ A. G. Paschal, “The Paradox of Negro Progress”, *The Journal of Negro History*, 16 3, (Jul. 1931): 251-265.

² J.D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1865-1935*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), R.E Burchart, “‘Outthinking and Outflanking the Owner’s of the World’: A Historiography of the African American Struggle for Education”, *History of Education Quarterly*, 1988, 28, 3, J.H.Best, “Education in the Forming of the American South”, *History of Education Quarterly*, 1996, 36, 1.

H.A. Williams, *Self Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*,(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

³ J.M. Richardson, *A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946*, (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1980) 47-48.

A liberal arts education conferred black men and women with a certain class status that indicated to others, black and white alike, a level of respectability that distinguished them from the masses. If blacks could master the same curriculum as whites, this would demonstrate their intellectual capacity. Thus, in this sense the white missionary educators and race leaders who promoted a classical liberal arts education for the aspiring and elite class of blacks advocated the equality of blacks.⁴ The educators at Fisk and Spelman were among those white men and women who believed in the intrinsic equality between whites and blacks. They believed that blacks' supposed inferiority was not due to any inherent racial differences, but that their degraded position in America was the result of their enslavement. This view was counter to the dominant race ideology of the day that sited racial differences in the innate or biological inferiority of blacks. These white educators, on the other hand, argued that the uplift of blacks could indeed be achieved through a formal academic curriculum rooted in white middle-class values. Even the suggestion of black and white racial equality was a bold statement during a time when the dominant race ideology based the rationale for white supremacy on the innate inferiority of blacks. A system of higher education that was designed to educate middle-

⁴ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, V.P. Franklin, & C.J. Savage, eds. *Cultural Capital and Black Education: African American Communities and the Funding of Black Schooling, 1865 to the Present*, (Greenwich, Conn.: 2004), S.J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to be and to do: Black Professional Workers during the Jim Crow Era*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), J. B Cross. "Bricks Without Straw: Missionary Sponsored Black Higher Education in the Post-Emancipation Era", *Journal of Higher Education*, 63 (January/February, 1992): 26-49. S.J. Shaw, "We Are Not Educating Individuals but Manufacturing Levers": Creating a Black Female Professional Class during the Jim Crow Era," *Magazine of History*, 18 2 (2004): 17-21. L.D. Gordon, "Race, Class, and the Bonds of Womanhood at Spelman Seminary, 1881-1923. *History of Higher Education Annual*, 9 (1989), 7-33.

class black men and women in the same way as whites had powerful implications regarding race equality: if blacks could be taught and successfully learn the same classical liberal arts curriculum as whites, then it follows that blacks should be granted the same cultural, political, and economic privileges.

The northern missionaries who traveled south to educate black men and women threatened to destabilize the social and racial hierarchy through their advocacy of the innate mental equality of blacks and whites. Both Fisk and Spelman were founded on the principle that black men and women deserved the same rights and privileges as other American citizens. This position countered the popular and academic ideas of race. Slavery, they argued, had stagnated both the mental and social growth of the black population. In this way, they attributed the present social, economic and political condition of blacks, not to any inherent biological inferiority—as most whites believed—but rather to environmental and cultural factors beyond their control. Spelman co-founders Sophia Packard and Harriet Giles believed that with a higher education based on white middle class values would enable blacks, and especially black women, transition out of their present state.⁵ Fisk Principal Adam K. Spence is noted to have often remarked to the whites of Nashville, “if the Negro is inferior to whites, give him a superior training; and if he is superior, give him inferior training: but if equal, give him the same.”⁶ It was this principle of racial equality that the northern missionaries ascribed to that propelled them to adopt an academic curriculum that reflected the same courses seen in white institutions of higher education.

⁵ J.B. Cross, “Education as a Tool of Socialization: Agnes Scott Institute and Spelman Seminary, 1881-1910, PhD Dissertation, (The University of Michigan, 1991), 60. Gordon, “Race, Class and the Bonds of Womanhood,” 7.

⁶ Richardson, *History of Fisk*, 20.

Fisk and Spelman were founded with the specific mission to provide a liberal arts education for black men and women. It was believed that by educating a black middle-class in the same Victorian and Progressive ideals as middle-class whites that this educated elite would be equipped with the necessary skills to uplift the masses. As such, the content of the academic curriculum was designed to create a middle-class race identity that was reflected in white educators' desire to socialize black men and women for specific class and gender roles.⁷ The goals of the educators, however, were constantly challenged by the changing notions of race, class and gender in the wider American culture. Educational philosophies during this period were mediated by academic trends and shifts in the wider American culture and society. A two-way interaction developed between the educational aims of the white educators and black students and the popular notions of race held by the larger American society. These ideas were informed by emerging social sciences—psychology in particular—and began to permeate the popular American discourse providing “scientific facts” for already established racist ideas.

As notions of race changed between 1880-1930, so did the ideas regarding education for blacks, and the curriculum at Fisk and Spelman reflected these larger paradigm shifts. This chapter seeks to address three major issues. The first goal is to locate and describe the interplay between the educators' goals and the impact that external ideologies had on curricular change. The rise of mental testing and the results of intelligence tests provided the necessary “scientific evidence” to demonstrate the inherent inferiority of blacks. This information provided white philanthropists with the necessary “scientific” evidence to rationalize the increase in industrial curricular content in black

⁷ S.R. Wright, “Education and the Changing Social Identities of Black Southerners, 1865-1915), PhD Dissertation, (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey), October, 2004. See especially Chapters 1 and 2.

colleges and universities. As Spelman and Fisk relied heavily on philanthropic support, the curriculum at both institutions reflected this change. Second, this chapter seeks to demonstrate how the academic curriculum functioned as a socializing agent that aided in the construction of the black middle-class. Looking at the course content, and the streaming of men and women into different courses demonstrates the gendered nature of education. Further, the education students received was imbued with racialized overtones and was specifically designed to train men and women for specific gender roles to enable them to participate in the unique task of race uplift.

Education is a dynamic process that requires the active reception and participation of students for the pedagogical agenda to be successful. Students were not passive recipients of education process; rather they were actively engaged in the socialization in middle-class culture that was taking place. At both institutions, students wrote about and discussed educational philosophies, ideas of race, and were aware of the expectations and the responsibility placed on them after graduation. Thus, an examination of the effects of the academic curriculum cannot be assessed without looking at how students at Fisk and Spelman thought about their education. The third goal then is to explore how students responded to popular and academic constructions of race as well as the curricular content and the degree to which discussions of race can be found in student writings in the school newspapers.

“Industrial Fisk”: 1884-1910

When Fisk was founded in the early days of Reconstruction it bore the title of university. In reality though, students were taking primary, normal school and high

school courses.⁸ Although by 1869, a college curriculum at Fisk had been outlined no students were considered qualified to enroll in the college courses until 1871. During these early years, freshman took courses in Latin, Greek, and Mathematics. Sophmores, in addition to the first three subjects, took a course in natural sciences. Juniors took additional classes in German, natural philosophy, history, English, and astronomy. Finally, seniors took courses in mental and moral science and political sciences.⁹ The curriculum offered to college and preparatory classes was comparable to many contemporary liberal arts schools. By the early 1880s, however, educational philosophies regarding higher education began to shift. Both whites and blacks agreed that education was essential for black racial uplift; however, the subject of black education stimulated much debate regarding the curricular content and the proper methods for dispensing education. The debate largely centered on the issue of industrial education versus liberal arts education.¹⁰

At the center of this discussion was an important underlying question: which type of formal instruction was the best means to uplift African Americans? Some white reformers along with northern philanthropists maintained that industrial training and vocational training were more appropriate and beneficial for blacks. Proponents of industrial education would equip black men and women with the basic skills required for southern agriculture and industry. This rudimentary education also ensured the continuation of black subordination in southern society. As historian Michael Dennis

⁸ In this period, prospective teachers received their training in the normal school.

⁹ See the Fisk University Catalogues from 1875 to 1884.

¹⁰ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, D.P. Alridge, "Of Victorianism, Civilizationism, and Progressivism: The Educational Ideals of Anna Julia Cooper and W.E.B. Du Bois, 1892-1940, *History of Education Quarterly*, 47 4, (November 2007), 416-446, M. Dennis, "Schooling Along the Color Line: Progressives and the Education of Blacks in the New South", *The Journal of Negro Education*, 67 2, (Spring, 1998), 142-156., D. Johnson, "W.E.B. Du Bois, Thomas Jesse Jones and the Struggle for Social Education, 1900-1930", *The Journal of Negro History*, 85 3, (Summer, 2000), 71-95.

explains, white southerners and northern philanthropists supported industrial education because, it “would prepare African Americans for survival in a competitive marketplace, stamp out black indolence and immorality, and foster economic self-reliance.” But more importantly Dennis notes that, “industrial training pandered to their racial paternalism.”¹¹ Support for industrial education also came from race leader Booker T. Washington, who along with white philanthropists argued that providing blacks with manual training and practical work skills was the most effective means of improving blacks’ status in America because it would provide them with skills to get high demand jobs and also because it was well-suited for the perceived intellect of blacks. The opposing camp, led by race leader, sociologist, and Fisk alumnus, W.E.B. Du Bois, contended that the only way to “uplift the race” was through a traditional liberal arts education. Du Bois, along with many white northern missionaries, who supported classical liberal education for blacks, argued that this form of higher education was the only means to achieve racial social, economic and political equality.¹² A liberal arts education fostered important ways of thinking, was equal to white education and would produce leaders and not just manual laborers who would be subordinate to white interests.¹³ Scholarship has traditionally presented the debate between industrial education and liberal arts education as separate and distinct, if not conflicting enterprises. However, framing black education in this way does not reflect the reality of black higher education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rather, as evidenced by course catalogs at liberal arts institutions like

¹¹ Dennis, “Schooling Along the Color Line,” 145-146.

¹² Alridge, “Of Victorianism, Civilizationism, and Progressivism,” 142-156, Johnson, “W.E.B. Du Bois, Thomas Jesse Jones and the Struggle for Social Education”, 71-95.

¹³ See Anderson for a more complete account of the Washington and Du Bois debate.

Fisk and Spelman, the curricula, in reality, often reflected a blending of the two ideologies.

As Johnetta Brazell Cross suggests, industrial education at this time manifested itself in several significant forms.¹⁴ The type most prevalent in higher education, as evidenced by Cross, was hands on manual training which was supplemental to the traditional curriculum. Many women's Colleges like Mt. Holyoke and Wellesley, incorporated this type of training in their curriculum. Cross indicates that "the main intent of this instruction was to inculcate in the students habits of industry, thrift and moral correctness"¹⁵—desired middle-class values. It was this type of industrial training that usually manifested itself at black colleges and universities, and served as a compromise for those who would argue that industrial training alone was sufficient to educate blacks.

The year 1884 saw the introduction of the first industrial classes at Fisk University. The value and dignity of manual labor had always been a part of the Fisk educational ideology. From the school's early beginnings, students were expected to devote at least an hour of their labor daily to aid in the maintenance of the school. Aside from this daily work, no formally organized classes in Industrial Education existed. In 1884, the Fisk Course Calendar listed five areas where students could receive industrial training, including the Printing Department for men, Nursing and Hygiene, Cooking, Dress Making and Plain Sewing for female students. The printing course was funded by

¹⁴ J.B. Cross, "Bricks Without Straw: Missionary Sponsored Black Higher Education in the Post-Emancipation Era", *Journal of Higher Education*, 63 (January/February, 1992), 26-49.

Cross describes three different ways that industrial education was conceptualized during this period. First, industrial training was used in institutions of applied science and technology that trained engineers and architects. Second, industrial training pertained to the type of education reserved for schools that trained lower level workers for industrial positions. The third type of industrial training as Cross describes, "involved schools using manual instruction (learning to work with the hands) as a supplement to the traditional academic curriculum."

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 39.

the John F. Slater fund, and provided instruction in the “art of printing.” Young men could continue their regular studies while participating in the daily hour session of the printing class. By 1887, it seemed that industrial education was becoming well-established at Fisk as plans were made to construct a Mechanical Laboratory. The calendar explained that the laboratory would provide the facilities to “teach carpentry and some other useful handicrafts to those students that may desire such instruction” and that “when the conditions of the people demand it, Fisk University proposes to establish a Department of Mechanical Engineering.” The calendar further read, “it is believed that most young men who are seeking a liberal arts education can learn the use of tools and gain considerable skill even in some of the simpler kinds of mechanical work without detriment to their scholarship.”¹⁶ Industrial training courses for female students were also meant to supplement their regular course work. Although the inclusion of industrial training was minimal, the courses nonetheless represented a challenge to the ideal of a liberal arts education.

While the industrial courses were not officially a part of the curriculum, their presence incited feelings of unrest amongst the men and women who attended Fisk and their parents who feared that students would soon be streamlined into industrial labor fields. In what can be seen as an attempt to assuage fear in the parents and students and to assure them that the industrial courses were merely supplemental to the liberal arts curriculum, the course calendar printed a notice of the new addition of Industrial Education. For example, one Fisk course catalog assures,

Industrial training is not made a prominent or characteristic feature of the education methods of Fisk University. High Mental discipline and broad, genuine culture, combined with noble purpose and consecrated Christian character, are

¹⁶ Fisk University Calendar, 1887-1888, 45.

sought after in all plans of work. But in the pursuit of the highest ends of education, practical training is not over looked.¹⁷

Indeed, industrial training was starting to become a permanent fixture in black higher education curriculums. Furthermore, the inclusion of such training was met with a notable level of apprehension in the homes and schools of black students and their advocates.

Despite attempts to address and allay student concerns, the addition of the industrial classes stimulated much discussion and debate amongst Fisk students. Articles in the student publication, *The Fisk Herald* (which coincidentally had been founded the same year and was supported by the monetary aid of the John F. Slater Fund) began printing articles debating the question of “Higher Education vs. Industrial Training.” The response to the inclusion of industrial training was mixed. Some students embraced the addition of industrial courses. Others were more skeptical and saw these courses as a threat to the quality of their education. Writing in support of the industrial classes, one student reported that, “This year the industrial work has been something of an experiment, but the popularity it has won and the success that has already attended the class furnish the ground for the hope that another year will see it firmly established as a permanent department of the university.”¹⁸ Another Fisk student, William Cocolugh echoed these sentiments, stating “In order to reach higher attainments, we must equip ourselves by special preparation for this purpose. We must not neglect industrial training, but the two must be born in mind. I believe a college graduate should have some

¹⁷ Ibid.,44.

¹⁸ “Industrial Training”, *The Fisk Herald*, Vol.1 No.6, May 1884.

knowledge of industrial education...”¹⁹ Cocolugh’s words reflect an awareness of the practical applications for both liberal arts education and industrial training. Thus, some students did not fully resist the inclusion of industrial education into their schools; instead, they advocated a balance of the two educational ideologies—liberal arts and industrial education.

The acceptance of industrial training by a number of students at Fisk can be attributed to this reality: industrial training was an essential practicality for a notable portion of Fisk students and alumni. Most students who attended Fisk did not have the economic means to sustain themselves during the school year. Students often had to seek employment during the summer months and in some instances were forced to delay their studies to seek employment to be able to pay their tuition and board. The most readily available jobs were often those that required students to perform some form of manual labor or required a skill for which the classical courses in Greek and Latin could not prepare students. Thus, the industrial classes provided practical skills enabling students to obtain the necessary employment to continue their liberal arts education. Students also had to consider the problem of obtaining employment after graduation. While a Fisk degree may have conferred on students a certain class status, this did not always translate directly to monetary gains. It was highly likely that a portion of Fisk students would be required to seek employment in the industrial sector. The social, political and economic realities of the South were such that black men and women were often required to seek employment unrelated to the intellectual skills for which they were trained.²⁰

¹⁹ William Atlas Cocolugh, “Is Higher Education Essential,” *The Fisk Herald*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, November.1896, 11-12.

²⁰ Correspondence between Fisk students and the Fayette A. McKenzie administration highlight a number of instances where students were forced to delay their academic studies because of financial need. Students

Although some supported the inclusion of industrial classes, the majority of Fisk students were not so optimistic about the curricular changes. For those students who saw themselves as the “talented tenth”, higher education was the means to obtaining this elite status. It is reasonable to assume then, that for this group, the institution of industrial education not only challenged Fisk students’ claim to an elite class status but also compromised the integrity of the liberal arts mission. Moreover, some students deplored the imposition of industrial education because of the implicit implications of this type of education. As historian Stephanie Y. Evans notes, “an image of exceptionalism was central to the middle-class black movement: in order to be acknowledged as a member of civil society, one had to remain distant from the baseness of the majority black group.”²¹ Supporters of industrial training reserved this type of education for those groups they felt were both socially and mentally inferior to the rigorous skills required for attaining Higher Education. Students questioned the benefit that industrial education would have on higher education, but more importantly their concern rested mostly on the fear that the classical courses would become subordinate to industrial work.²² Students acknowledged that they were living in an industrial age that required the skilled labor of artisans and lauded the quality of education that industrial schools such as Tuskegee and Hampton were providing. Fisk students supported industrial education for the training of skilled workers, but they did not support the idea of combining these courses in liberal arts institutions. Those students who sought a liberal arts education saw this as a means to

and parents often wrote Fisk administrators seeking council and aid to help the students continue their education.

²¹ S.Y. Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1865-1954: An Intellectual History*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007), 65

²² “Industrial Training,” *The Fisk Herald*, Vol.1 No.7, February. 1884, 3

obtaining a particular class status that this type of education provided. Writing about the differences between industrial and liberal arts training one student stated,

Some think that all the Negro needs is simply to know how to make a living. That is a mistake, for he is just like other folks in tastes, wants and aspirations. The Negroes in order to follow the different professions in the higher walks of life, must have the proper training. All do not expect to follow the same calling, and hence all do not need nor desire the same preparation.²³

The student further argued the merits of keeping industrial training separate from college work stating, “we want first class artisans and must have first class scholars, and the wiser way is to train them in separate schools.”²⁴ Although this was an age of industry that required an educated labor force, Fisk students argued that the advancement of the race also required trained college graduates. These men and women were seen as vital to the uplift and maintenance of the black community as they provided essential services as doctors and lawyers, pastors, principals, and teachers.²⁵

The *Fisk Herald* provided both male and female students at Fisk with an outlet to air their concerns. In the same way that male students felt the intrusion of industrial education, female students were even more deeply affected by these courses than their male counterparts.²⁶ Black women were already at a disadvantage when industrial education entered Fisk’s campus. Although Fisk boasted in its course calendar equal educational opportunities for women, the reality was that the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century gender ideologies were such that men and women were directed into gender specific curriculum. For example, the normal courses were tailored to train

²³ *Ibid.* 3, This argument countered the proponents of industrial education’s claims that graduates of industrial schools were better fit to earn a living than those who attended colleges and universities.

²⁴ *Fisk Herald*, Vol. No. 7, Feb 1884, p.4.

²⁵ Eugene Harris, “Higher Education for the Negro”, *Fisk Herald*, Vol. XVII, No.2, Nov. 1897.

²⁶ Wright, “Not the boys less, but the girls more” in “Education and the Changing Identities of Black Southerners, 179-255.

women to be teachers, and as such, did not offer the same classical courses that were seen as essential to “building the disciplined gentlemen.”²⁷ As gender ideologies defined the limits of male students’, education so too did the Victorian ideal of “true womanhood” dictate the type of education that women received. This gender ideology placed women as guardians of culture and the home, and for black women, their guardianship extended to the larger black community.²⁸ As a result, women were educated in fields that would aid them in their service as teachers, missionary workers and nurses.

As black women struggled to attain equal education, the implementation of industrial classes served to further thwart their educational goals. In an article titled, “Industrial Fisk,” student Mary A. McClellan described in detail the benefits of the newly offered cooking course and the practical application the class would have for female students. Yet, in the final section of the article McClellan notes the negative implications of having this course. McClellan noted a shift in male students’ attitudes and ideas about the purpose of education of women, “Some of our young men seem to think that cooking should be our highest aim in life...Our highest aim is *not* to know how to cook for ‘somebody’ though we greatly desire to be proficient in this art.”²⁹ Conceivably this gender division was frustrating for some female students who sought the opportunity to take the same courses as the male student. And with the addition of industrial courses

²⁷ Wright, “Education and the Changing Identities of Black Southerners,” 83-85.

²⁸ J. Ritterhouse, “Growing up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), M. Mitchell, “Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), D.G. White “Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994, (New York: Norton, 1999), S.J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to be and to do: Black Professional Workers during the Jim Crow Era*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), E.B. Higginbotham, “The Politics of Respectability”, in *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), S.J. Carlson, “Black Ideals of Womanhood in the Late Victorian Era”, *The Journal of Negro History*, 77 2, (Spring 1992), 61-73.

²⁹ Mary A. McClellan, “Industrial Fisk”, *The Fisk Herald*, Vol. V. No.5, January 1888, 5.

specifically for women, this served to further widen the gulf between men and women's education.

From the public debates and documented student responses, three themes emerge about the effects of industrial training at Fisk. First, industrial education threatened students' already precarious claim to an elite class status. If a liberal arts education was for the select few, or "talented tenth" and industrial education was for the other ninety percent, the inclusion of industrial classes challenged Fisk students position as the elite of their race. Second, industrial training courses were in opposition to black men's sense of Victorian manliness. Offering courses in handicrafts and carpentry served to destabilize the middle-class gender ideology with which male students at Fisk identified with. These were not the pursuits of the elite; middle-class men were educated professionals who were learned in the classics such as Greek and Latin. While industrial courses were antagonistic to black men's claims to manliness, the inclusion of industrial training created a unique paradox for black women. Industrial courses were designed to inculcate in black women Victorian ideals of femininity and womanhood. However, these courses also provided further rationale for streaming women into courses that would educate them for careers in service, limiting their ability to advance in careers outside of their prescribed gender roles.

Finally, although not explicitly stated, the student articles reveal concerns about the industrial courses challenge to Fisk students' claims to racial equality. Most of the justifications for industrial education were premised on black's racial inferiority, a stance that was counter to the arguments for liberal arts education. Using the rhetoric of social inheritance which posited that the progress of a race was the result of social and cultural

conditions rather than innate organic traits, students were able to argue that “if given home training, intellectual training, and religious training to the same extent as the Caucasian race, than the two races will march shoulder to shoulder in the ranks of civilization.”³⁰ As the student articles demonstrate the first attempt at industrializing the Fisk curriculum did not meet great success as students defended their right to a liberal arts education. However, when the question of industrial education surfaced again around 1915, backed with the support of the social sciences and mental testing, Fisk University, under the leadership of Fayette Avery McKenzie would succumb to outside pressures and would be forced to add these courses to the core curriculum.

“Our Great Aim is to Make Education Practical”: Industrial Education at Spelman 1881-1910

In 1881, when co-founders Sophia Packard and Harriet Giles established Spelman as a school for the higher education of black women, the purpose and nature of black education was shifting. During the Reconstruction period, white northerners’ enthusiasm and support for black higher education had been at its height. Prior to the Civil War, the opportunities for the higher education for women were minimal.³¹ It was not until the 1880s and 1890s that legitimate colleges for women in the South were founded. The rationale for providing education for women was that with proper moral and academic training they could better fulfill their womanly duties of social responsibility as mothers and as part of the larger community. For black women, this was especially important;

³⁰ R.C. Bailey, *The Fisk Herald*, Vol. XXI, No. 7, May 1904, 20.

³¹ Evans, “‘A Plea for the Oppressed’ : Educational Strivings, Pre-1865” in *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954*, 21-35, Brazell, “The South and Higher Education: Changing Landscapes” in “Education as a Tool of Socialization”, 7-32.

their role in the advancement of the race was based on their own personal uplift which in turn would enable them in their service to the wider black community.

As highlighted in the previous section, debates between higher education and industrial training affected opinions about higher education for black women as well. With the failure of the Reconstruction period to bring out the intended social, political, economic and cultural change, along with the re-instatement of the Democratic Party and the institution of Jim Crow laws, the initial zeal that white missionaries and northern philanthropists had displayed for the higher education of blacks had gone to a low simmer. In the 1880s, there was a surge of support for industrial training as the popular or preferred method of education for blacks, immigrants, and the lower classes.³² With the increased need for skilled workers and the social sciences findings of quantifiable race differences many philanthropists turned their attention and funding to supporting industrial training initiatives.

Despite these challenges, Packard and Giles endeavored to provide the black women of Atlanta with a similar education to white middle-class women, one that reflected the academic conventions of the classical curriculum but were also infused with the practical skills, values and mores of the middle-class. A letter from the Baptist Home Missionary Association designed to garner support for Packard and Giles's education mission described the nature of their work in Atlanta, as "provid[ing] for girls and women as thorough instruction in the higher branches as can be secured in any institution at the South conducted in the interest of that race...to help forward an enterprise which

³² Anderson, "Education and the Race Problem in the New South: The Struggle for Ideological Hegemony" in *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 79-109.

looks only to the promotion of intelligence, pure morals and sound Christian faith.”³³ Higher education for black women at Spelman was also based on a negotiation between academic and practical training. However, unlike Fisk where industrial education slowly worked its way into the curriculum, industrial education was a permanent part of the curriculum from the school’s inception. In this instance too, inclusion of industrial courses was seen as a necessary complement to the academic curriculum for educating black women.

Three factors then can be seen to have led to the incorporation of industrial courses at Spelman. First, the school was founded at the same time that industrial training was in vogue for black education. Second, Victorian gender norms required that women be skillful in domestic arts so that they could properly care for their family. Third, the social realities of the South required black women to have practical skills that would enable them to obtain employment. Most of the students who attended Spelman were unable to afford the cost of prolonged education. Yet, as Spelman’s name grew in reputation, obtaining any form of education from the school automatically signaled to whites and blacks alike a certain level of respectability and status on the part of the individual.

In the early years, as with Fisk, students who attended Spelman were capable of receiving little more than a primary and high school education. However, as students’ ability to take more advanced courses quickly increased, the scope of the curriculum was expanded to match the students’ growth.³⁴ As early as 1885, Packard and Giles

³³,Harriet E. Giles Collection, Correspondence, April, 1881. Giles Box 1. Folder 1. December 19,1872-Nov.12, 1881.

³⁴ F. M. Read, “Problems and Progress:1883-1891” in *The Story of Spelman College*, (Atlanta, 1961), 77-111.

augmented the rudimentary curriculum to include preparatory courses, normal courses, and scientific or higher normal courses. Spelman women in the Scientific Course were subject to a rigorous curriculum that featured classes in natural history, algebra, astronomy, chemistry, English Literature and Geology. Spelman also boasted a Music Department, a Missionary Department, and a Training School for Nurses. Describing the academic endeavors of Spelman, Reverend T. J. Morgan of the American Baptist Home Missionary Society wrote,

Spelman Seminary is aiming to do, as far as practicable, for the Negro women precisely what is being done for white women by Smith, Vassar, Wellesley, and other institutions of Christian learning, which for decades have been contributing most liberally and potently to their preparation, not only for the homely duties of life, but for the large sphere of activity to which the age calls them...³⁵

Morgan further noted that the education women were receiving at Spelman not only had cultural value and trained them for service and racial uplift, but provided the women with employable skills as well.

Spelman's rapid growth and improvement to its academic curriculum drew much attention from the press, northern missionaries and other white educators. As historians Yolanda Watson and Sheila Gregory report "the desire for validation or comparison of curricular rigor with northern seminaries and colleges is a pervasive theme during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly among women's colleges (Black and White alike)."³⁶ The *Spelman Messenger* and Course Catalogue often re-printed articles written in local and national magazines that featured the institution. For example, in a *Harper's Weekly* article, columnist Charles Dudley Warner remarked that Spelman was "one of the best schools anywhere, tried by several standards...for colored women

³⁵ Rev. T.J. Morgan, "What Spelman Stands For," *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.18, No.3, December 1901, 4-6.

³⁶ Watson & Gregory, *Daring to Educate*, 71-72.

and girls.” Warner continued to praise the work that Packard and Giles were doing stating, “it is the course and thoroughness of instruction and the character of its scholars [that] is worthy of special mention among the most beneficent educational institution in the country.”³⁷ While Warner praised the academic work done at Spelman, he was especially impressed by the industrial features of the school’s curriculum.

Spelman students were responsible for the daily chores associated with the boarding school in addition to general maintenance and up-keep. While cooking, laundry and other repair activities were required of the students to instill middle-class values of industry and work, these duties were not formal elements of the curriculum. However, in 1883, with a donation from the John F. Slater Fund, industrial training became a featured part of the Spelman curriculum.³⁸ Monetary assistance from the Slater fund came with stipulations concerning how the funds could be used, as the primary purpose of the fund was to provide financial support for industrial and manual training at black institutions. In fact, in a letter from Miss Giles to Mrs. Pollard of the WABHMA, Giles complained that “we could not get a cent of the Slater Fund if the Industrial Department was not made a prominent feature of the school.”³⁹ Thus, white philanthropic perspectives about industrial education and the role it should play in black education, in conjunction with their financial backing, helped influence the formal curriculum.

³⁷ Charles Dudley Warner, “Colored Schools, South”, in Spelman Course Catalog, 1886-1887, 37.

³⁸ Founded in 1882, the Slater Fund was established to “promote effort and self-reliance on the part of its beneficiaries.” U.W. Leavell, “Trends of Philanthropy in Negro Education: A Survey,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, 2 1, (January, 1933), 42.

³⁹ Letter from Giles to Mrs. Pollard of the American Baptist Home Mission, November 9, 1883, Harriet E. Giles Collection, Correspondence, Giles Box 1, Folder 2. March 10, 1882-Dec.8, 1884.

While privately, Harriet Giles may have resented the limits the Slater Fund put on the donation, publicly, she and Miss Packard lauded the philanthropic agency for its support. In addition to the Slater Fund, Spelman received large donations from John F. Rockefeller (later the General Education Board), and The Peabody Education Fund. Regardless of Giles and Packard’s personal feelings concerning industrial courses, the funding that white philanthropic foundations provided black institutions of higher education like Spelman, was essential.

Accordingly, Packard and Giles made the necessary changes to include industrial training in the curriculum. The Spelman Course Calendar described the objectives of the Industrial Department stating that, “for all, especially for those who are to be teachers and mothers, we believe industrial training is essential in making them *self-reliant* and *self-supporting*; yea, necessary for the best intellectual and moral discipline of the colored people. Our great *aim is to make education practical.*”⁴⁰ In addition to their academic studies, Spelman students could also receive certification in a number of vocations. For those students who wished to focus solely on the industrial arts, a two year course was also established. Setting up the industrial curriculum in this way had several practical benefits for Spelman students. For students pursuing academic studies, they could fulfill the industrial requirements by receiving certification in the various areas. Those students who perhaps lacked the requisite funds to pursue full length academic training, the two year courses allowed them to receive certification in specialized areas. The students in the two year industrial courses thus received the necessary skills to obtain employment, but more importantly were associated with the Spelman name- one that not only signaled the mark of a good education but also of good moral character.

In addition to the traditionally feminine courses, Spelman’s Industrial Department trained students in what were considered more masculine skills. The “Industrial Laboratory” provided women with access to a carpentry training and other practical building skills. The rationale behind teaching students these skills was that as teachers, Spelman graduates would be required to teach both boys and girls and it was necessary for them to be proficient in all areas. At an even more practical level, funding for black education in the South was minimal and as teachers in the rural South, Spelman graduates

⁴⁰ Spelman Course Catalogue 1885-1886, 30

would likely be teaching in conditions that would require that they also provide the general maintenance and upkeep of the schools.⁴¹ With the donation of a printing press from the John F. Slater Fund in 1885, Spelman students were also exposed to another characteristically masculine profession—printing. At Fisk, the printing department was accessible to male students only. However at Spelman all promotional material and the monthly publication of the *Spelman Messenger* was done through the printing department which was run by the female faculty and students. Teaching the female students type setting and composition opened up yet another avenue for employment. The social, economic and political structure of the South was such that black women of all classes were forced to seek employment to supplement their husband's income. Hence the skills students acquired in the Industrial Department were not only necessary for a woman's own personal gains, but were essential for helping support the family.

Industrial work also served to reinforce gender and class norms. For Spelman students who ascribed to middle-class ideals Victorian femininity, being proficient in domestic work and manual training was essential to their sense of womanhood. To dispel the negative connotations associated with industrial training, domestic work and manual training were portrayed as noble endeavors. Moreover, a woman's worth as a mother, wife, and worker was placed on her competence in these areas. Expertise in domestic work and industrial training was to be seen as a source of pride and Spelman students interpreted the inclusion of these courses as a means to improve their skills. Articles in the *Spelman Messenger* do not convey the same sort of dismay with the inclusion of industrial training as was seen at Fisk. Instead, students encouraged one another to take up industrial and domestic work with the same kind of pride and tenacity that they put

⁴¹ Ibid, 31

into their academic endeavors. In an article titled “Every Woman Should Have a Trade”, Spelman Student R.S. Jones writes that, “it is essential to woman’s happiness that she should have a noble aim in life and that she would work with her hands as well as her mind.” Moreover, Jones writes, “every woman should not only have a trade, but should endeavor to reach perfection in occupation for it has been said that in every trade and in every profession there is room enough at the top if only one will reach it.”⁴²

Industrial training, an integral component in Spelman’s curriculum from early on, did not seem to be viewed by these students as a threat to their educational endeavors. There are several possible reasons for the acceptance of industrial education by Spelman students. First, industrial education was a part of the Spelman curriculum from the very beginning. Therefore, unlike students at Fisk who saw industrial courses as a deviation from the original liberal arts mission, students at Spelman would have been more inclined to accept industrial education as a standard feature of the curriculum. Second, student’s economic circumstances were important factors in determining their ability to acquire higher education. While most students aspired to achieve middle-class status, some came from families with little money. These women were sponsored by their families and communities for the main purpose of receiving industrial training, which they would in turn use to fulfill a needed role in the community. Therefore, industrial training would not have been seen as an affront to their intellect or educational endeavors. Third, the domestic and industrial skills that women were being taught were already internalized by students. These courses reflected American society’s proscribed roles for women as wives, mothers and homemakers. Spelman students, who had been socialized to believe in the value and importance of proper domestic training, saw these courses as an essential

⁴² R.S. Jones, “Every Woman Should Have a Trade”, *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.6, No.4, February, 1890, 2.

component of their education. Minnie Lee Thomas, a student in the Industrial Department, wrote that

Of the several departments of this institution, we consider the industrial one of great importance. Before the students have finished the academic course, they have special training in this department; so that, as they enter lives of useful service, they may have higher ideas of true living. They are taught how to prepare the food properly, how to avoid wastefulness, to do neat laundry work, to make their own clothing, and above all, to keep themselves and things about them tidy, neat and clean; or, in other words, how to be good housekeepers. There can not be any thing more necessary in a home than a good keeper of that home.

Commenting further on the necessity of industrial education, Thomas stated that “education only prepares one to be more useful, and, in this preparation, industry is just as important as book-knowledge. Without the one as well as the other, education is a failure, and can not prove to be what it should be.”⁴³ Also, as Spelman was an all women’s college, there were not the same gender inequalities as there were at Fisk. Instead, what divided women at Spelman was class. Women’s access to education was not hindered by their gender but rather by their financial ability to continue to pursue higher education. For those students who could only afford the time and money to receive a certificate or diploma in industrial courses before that had to directly enter the work force, this was a viable option. Finally, the role that women had in race advancement made it easier for Spelman women to accept that industrial training was necessary for their own personal betterment but more importantly for the betterment of the race. The formal curriculum inculcated in Spelman women a sense of duty and responsibility to the race to be productive, good mothers, housewives, workers, and teachers.

⁴³ Minnie Lee Thomas, “The Work of the Industrial Training Department of Spelman Seminary,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.12, No.6, April 1896, 5.

Social Sciences and the Academic Curriculum

Despite outside pressures to incorporate industrial education into the Fisk and Spelman curriculums in the early 1880s and 1890s this did not hinder the academic growth of either institution. In fact, during the early 1900s both Fisk and Spelman continued to show considerable improvements to, and diversification of, the core academic curriculum. As education philosophies shifted away from the classical curriculum that had characterized the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Spelman and Fisk accordingly adapted to these changes. Both institutions began to incorporate separate scientific and educational courses that provided specialized training in these fields. Students were also able to select electives, and later major in areas that reflected the growing professionalization of a number of disciplines, including education, history, philosophy, political science, sociology, and psychology.

Around 1910, however, the question of industrial education versus liberal arts education for blacks was renewed with the professionalization of the social sciences, specifically psychology and sociology. The initial justifications for industrial training—that blacks lacked the mental intelligence for a traditional college curriculum—received renewed support from the social sciences through Intelligence Tests, mental testing, and social problems research that sought to locate and define racial differences between whites and blacks, and also to define social differences among blacks themselves. Psychology especially, provided the necessary theoretical and methodological frameworks for defining race difference.⁴⁴ As psychologist and historian Graham

⁴⁴ A.S. Winston ed., *Defining Difference: Race and Racism in the History of Psychology*, (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004), G. Richards, *Putting Psychology in its Place: A Critical Historical Introduction*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), G. Richards, *Race, Racism and Psychology: Towards a Reflexive History*, (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Richards describes, “The most intense exploration of psychological race differences, known as Race (or Racial) Psychology, was undertaken by US psychologists between 1910 and 1940.”⁴⁵ Richards further highlights that “around 1910-1914 the advent of intelligence testing trigger[ed] an immediate flurry of interest in comparing ‘Negro’ and white scores among school children, thus hooking psychology firmly into the, by then stalled, ‘Negro Education’ debate.”⁴⁶ Psychologist and historian of psychology, Andrew Winston explains that, “adopting an empiricist language for the discussion of racial differences meant that the discourse could not be termed ‘racist’...hatred and support for oppression could be wrapped in a value-neutral cloak. A hierarchy of groups could be said to emerge from the ‘facts’; not from prejudice.”⁴⁷ The quantification of race differences through mental testing and intelligence tests along with other research worked to define what was termed as the ‘Negro Problem’ as an innate feature of African Americans.

During this period, social sciences both reinforced ideas of inferiority, which in turn provided support for the increasing emphasis on industrial training. Moreover, it also generated a great demand for the study of social sciences in black institutions. The growing concentration of blacks in urban centers and the need to educate the masses were cited as two of the primary causes of the social ills of black Americans. Fisk reported “the increasing concentration of Negroes in urban centers demands that teachers, ministers, doctors, and those entering other professions, should have a thorough equipment to enable them to understand and to meet successfully the problems which

⁴⁵ Richards, *Putting Psychology in its Place*, 65.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.75

⁴⁷ Winston, *Defining Difference*, 8.

they will have to deal.”⁴⁸ Thus, while social scientific research promoted the increase of industrial education at black institutions of higher education, these disciplines, psychology and sociology in particular, also became prominent features of the academic curriculum as well.

The social sciences could and were most often used as an oppressive instrument to further racist ideas. By attributing blacks’ subordinate position in American society to biological deficiencies, and by pathologizing the social and environmental circumstances of blacks they claimed to have identified the so-called “Negro-Problem.” Together, these ideologies were used to further justify the subjugation of black men and women. The identification of a quantifiable and measurable “Negro Problem” was largely accepted by blacks and was certainly problematic as it served to mask white racism, and required that blacks take responsibility to prove their equality. Despite the negative outcomes of mental testing and sociological studies, social scientific research, conversely, stimulated research by white and black social scientists to challenge claims to blacks’ inherent inferiority, and provided these researchers with the tools they needed to counter the racist findings.⁴⁹ Education was central to solving the so-called ‘Negro Problem’, as it was a vehicle for racial uplift in and of itself, but it also provided blacks with the resources to understand and attempt to solve this problem.

Educators and black race leaders looked to train their own cadre of social scientists and professionals in the areas of education, sociology, and the social services. The rationale for blacks and educators behind incorporating the objective, critical social analysis of the social sciences was two-fold. First, blacks were distrustful of the

⁴⁸ Fisk University News, Catalog Number, Vol. VI, No.5, 1914-1915, 51.

⁴⁹ See for example, Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower*, Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars*, English, *Unnatural Selections*, Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*.

scholarship produced by whites, and were hesitant to rely on the accuracy of these findings. Second, black intellectuals believed that it was important that this work be done by black scholars to demonstrate to the dominant white society their capabilities of racial uplift and of higher intellectual achievements.⁵⁰ As education was perhaps the most important tool for both self and racial improvement, educators sought to provide in the teacher training courses the most advanced pedagogical tools and theories. Psychology as a discipline was particularly well suited for this as theoretical and methodological advancements were consistently occurring in the areas of child development, and intelligence testing.

Beginning in the early 1900s psychology and sociology courses could be found in the education and social science departments at Fisk and Spelman. As early as 1909-1910, psychology entered the curriculum in the college department at Spelman. The “Psychology” course description reveals that students learned about “the nervous system; sensation and the organs of sense; the facts of consciousness [were] studied from the natural science point of view; [along with] perception, memory, imagination, emotion, the will and [the] relation of psychology to ethics.”⁵¹ Psychology courses were found in the Education Departments at both institutions. In these classes, students studied topics such as the psychological principles of teaching and mental development. They also received instruction and training in the latest research and testing measures, including mental and intelligence tests. Using the tests and measures to demonstrate Spelman women’s intellectual advancement, and also as tools to improve the education of black school children were two important functions of this discipline.

⁵⁰ Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars*, 17.

⁵¹ Spelman Course Catalogue, 1909-1910, 15.

In 1921, Spelman teacher, Miss Edna E. Lamson who had left the school in 1916 to attend Teacher's College at Columbia University in New York, returned bringing with her the latest pedagogical theories and methodologies. This began the use of intelligence tests at Spelman. Educational and intelligence tests were seen as yardsticks to measure student's abilities and progress. For example, new students at Spelman completed an intelligence test in the fall semester and one in the spring. As Florence Read recounts, Spelman students were subjected to a number of tests including among the many the Binet-Simon Tests; the Stanford Revision of Binet-Simon; Otis Group Intelligence Scale; Thorndike-McCall Reading Scale; Ayres Spelling Scale.⁵² These tests were of extreme interests to both faculty and students. The 1922-1923 Annual Report in the *Spelman Messenger* makes special references to the use of intelligence and educational tests. President Tapley wrote, "Faculty and students are interested in comparing achievement at Spelman with that of schools at large." Students took intelligence tests to compare their scores with other white and black institutions around the country. Tapley further reasoned that these tests were particularly useful: "since Spelman is essentially a training school for leaders, she must discover her pupils of unusual ability as early as possible that they may be given her best."⁵³ Both faculty and students believed in the tests' predictive abilities and their value as diagnostic tools. At Spelman faculty and students treated intelligence tests as tools that could help them construct more efficient curriculums, as they were used to determine grade classification, and chart students' progress.

⁵² Read, *The Story of Spelman*, 196

⁵³ Lucy Hale Tapley, "Annual Report," *Spelman Messenger*, April 1923, Vol. 39, No. 7. 2.

The same principles behind intelligence and educational tests at Spelman were emphasized in the teacher training courses. Both Fisk and Spelman implemented classes where students learned to be proficient at administering and interpreting tests and measurements. For example, in the “Education Tests and Measurements” courses, students studied the “general technique of giving and scoring tests, the interpretation and applications and results of tests in school work.”⁵⁴ In addition to the study of psychological tests and measures, educational psychology courses covered the biological and social development of children and adolescences in such courses as, “Educational Psychology” and “Psychology of Childhood”. In these courses, the topics covered included, “analysis of general bodily growth; biological background; influence of heredity and environmental growth of the child; the development of innate tendencies and capacities and their bearing upon physical, mental, and moral development.”⁵⁵ Educational Psychology further applied the ideas of child development with pedagogical theories in such courses as “Psychology and the Principles of Teaching” and “Psychology of Elementary School Subjects”, where the stated purpose of these courses was “to bring to the student a resume of the results of scientific investigation in each of the various elementary school subjects.”⁵⁶ Psychology became a permanent feature of the education department and not only guided Fisk and Spelman educator’s educational philosophies, but also gave the graduates of the teacher training program’s scientific tools and measures to develop age specific curriculum, and provide the best education possible.

While psychology became firmly established in the education departments at Fisk and Spelman, sociology and social work was also gaining a foothold in the curriculum.

⁵⁴ Fisk University Bulletin, Annual Catalog Number, June, 1927, 81

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁵⁶ Spelman College Bulletin, 1924, 60.

To keep up with current academic trends in 1909 and 1910, Spelman and Fisk began to offer courses in sociology. In 1910, George Edmund Haynes, a Yale-trained sociologist was hired at Fisk, where he promptly set to work to establish a department of social sciences. In the 1911-1912 Fisk Course Catalogue, the new Social Science and Social Work courses were introduced stating that,

In the study of Sociology and Economics and the scientific approach to social problems Fisk is making every effort to keep abreast of the leading developments, especially is there need for thorough training in scientific methods for the study of social problems and the development of the spirit of social service among Negro college youth.⁵⁷

Courses were offered under the heading of Sociology and Social Problems, and students took courses in “The General History and Theory in Sociology” and “Statistics and Research Methods.” Students could also take a course on the “History of the Negro in America”. This class provided a “rapid” survey of the early period of the slave trade citing the social and economic factors that led to the rise and development of slavery and also covered 1820-1860 and 1860 to the “present day”. The course description read that the purpose of this class was to give students “historical perspective for the understanding of the present conditions, an appreciation of honored names of the Negroes of the past, and an estimate of the genuine contributions the Negro people have made to the labor force, military strength, musical culture, etc., of American Civilization.”⁵⁸ Students were exposed to the works of prominent black scholars such as W.E.B Du Bois’, “Suppression of the Slave Trade” and Booker T. Washington’s “Story of the Negro.” In a course titled “Problems of Negro Life”, students studied the history of the “Negro” in Africa and in

⁵⁷ Fisk University News, Catalog Number, Vol. III, No.3, 1911-1912, 47.

⁵⁸ Fisk University News, Catalog Number, Vol. VI, No.4, 1914-1915, 52.

America, and the current economic, political, intellectual, and religious factors that contributed to white and black relations in America.⁵⁹

Imparted with an appreciation of the historical context of their status in American society, students also learned about the contemporary issues affecting blacks and the appropriate methods needed to aid workers in the social services. Courses such as “Practical Sociology”, “The Method of Social Case Work”, and “Advanced Practical Sociology” were offered. Special emphasis was placed on the study of the family, living standards, community work, mental hygiene, and criminology. In addition to class work, students at Fisk were required to participate in laboratory work and perform field studies in the Nashville community as part of their practical training. The “Social Training Courses” offered a practical component that complemented the theoretical foundation students received in their sociology courses. Courses in sociology along with the social training courses were intended to provide both the theoretical and practical training for those men and women who would enter service positions such as probation officers, settlement workers, kindergarten directors, executive secretaries of social betterment and civic organizations.

At Spelman, a similar line of classes were offered to those students interested in pursuing careers in social work. As at Fisk, students at Spelman took courses in both theoretical and practical research methods in sociology. For example their course calendar included Sociology 121, an introductory course taught with the purpose to instill in students an understanding of “the place of education in the general social scheme and of the relation of the school to other agencies of social welfare.”⁶⁰ In Sociology 323-324,

⁵⁹ Fisk University News, Vol. XII, No.7, April 1922, 71.

⁶⁰ Spelman College Catalogue, 1925-1926, 68.

a senior level course, students were introduced to the principles of sociology where they studied concepts such as “socialization” and the individual in society. For those who wished to take more advanced sociology courses, students at Spelman had the opportunity to take courses in conjunction with the Atlanta School of Social Service headed by prominent black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier. Students studying with Frazier took courses in “Social Case Work”, “Rural Sociology”, “Social Investigation”, “Social Problems”, “Human Behavior”, and “Medical Social Science” which led to attaining a one year diploma.⁶¹ While sociology did not figure as prominently at Spelman as educational psychology, many students went on to use their training to work in charity and community organizations as social workers and nurses.⁶²

Implications of Social Sciences

The disciplinary theories and methodologies of Psychology and Sociology which in this case were essentially diagnostic tools that identified individual and societal problems, and prescribed the remedies to alleviate or amend black social problems-allowed blacks to re-envision and redefine what was thought of as the “Negro Problem.” As historian Francille Rusan Wilson argues, “black social scientists’ redefinition of the “Negro Problem” as a set of measurable social and economic indicators that could be used to guide reforms, was meant to provide an objective, moderate, and intellectualized basis for discussions between black and white elites.”⁶³ Drawing upon the theories and methodologies of Psychology and Sociology it was hoped that the educated class to

⁶¹ Spelman College Catalogue, 1922-1923

⁶² Information about the employment of Spelman graduates was found in the The Deceased Alumnae Files at Spelman as well as in numerous editions of the *Spelman Messenger*.

⁶³ Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars*, 17.

improve education standards and understand the social problems that plagued black racial advancement. Thus, Psychology and Sociology courses became important features at black colleges and universities where the purpose was to train an educated class of men and women for racial uplift.

Racial uplift underwent a transition from a moral project in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century to one that required trained professionals. No longer was uplift the task of improving the moral character of the lower masses. Instead, the Negro Problem as it was now defined was seen as quantifiable and measurable phenomenon that required sophisticated analysis. The problem was such that it required specialized education and training in the social sciences. The idea that men and women needed to be trained in specialized areas led to the increasing professionalization of racial uplift. The professionalization of uplift had two important consequences. First, this led to a shift in the gender roles of men and women in race advancement. As the type of training students received served to delineate the type of work men and women did, this in turn affected the duties that men and women had in uplift work. Second, professionalizing uplift further reinforced educated blacks status as the “talented tenth,” a group that was quantifiably and qualitatively separate from the uneducated masses.

As we have seen earlier, the academic curriculums at Fisk and Spelman were designed to prepare men and women for their gender specific work. The gender divisions that occurred in course work led to men and women being trained for different work. Women were socialized into normative gender roles and were discouraged, through the type of education they received, from deviating from their prescribed roles.⁶⁴ At Fisk and Spelman, the emphasis was placed on training women for work as either teachers or in

⁶⁴ Wright, “Education and the Changing Identities of Black Southerners, 207.

social service, areas that did not require advanced degrees. Before the professionalization of uplift, most of the work in race advancement was performed by women who worked as teachers, nurses, and in other social service positions. With the increasing emphasis of social sciences in the academic curriculum, and the pathologization of the “Negro Problem”, racial uplift increasingly became the purview of educated black men. This masculinization of racial uplift occurred as a result of the conventions that guided gender norms. Black women’s dual responsibilities to home and race, along with the lack of educational opportunities limited their access advancing their education beyond the bachelor’s degree. While the work that women performed carried a certain cultural currency, women lacked the same opportunities as men to attain advanced degrees. Indeed as Francille Wilson notes, “at Fisk, female students were explicitly instructed that they had two spheres, home and work, in which they were expected to lead, while male students were encouraged to link their individual achievements to the fulfillment of racial responsibility.”⁶⁵ This ideal combined with greater curricular opportunities allowed men to attain advanced degrees that put them in high status positions as trained academics in sociology and psychology.

The professionalization of uplift also served to further reinforce the educated class status that attaining a degree at Fisk and Spelman represented. By attributing the “Negro Problem” as a pathology of the lower classes, this allowed middle-class blacks to separate themselves from the uneducated masses. Through the intelligence tests that students took, the black educated class was able to demonstrate that these differences occurred only among the uneducated class, thus reinforcing their positions as the elite, and also further exemplified the need for uplift. Andrew Winston further describes that

⁶⁵ Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars*, 108.

the language of overlapping distributions of intelligence pioneered by [Francis] Galton in the nineteenth century, allowed a form of scientific racism that did not assert that all members of a group were inferior, and this new language sounded far less harsh than nineteenth century conceptions of mutually exclusive racial categories.⁶⁶

If, as Galton demonstrated, there were intellectual variations within a racial group, those blacks who sought a liberal arts education were justified in doing so, as they were members of the population whose intelligence was superior to the rest of the masses. With this information, it justified the notion of the “talented tenth” and their quest for higher education. Indeed as Stephanie Wright explains, “black college students expected that education would fundamentally change the world’s perception of them and would produce greater class differential.”⁶⁷ Higher education was an important symbol of blacks Americans’ intellectual aptitude and provided the necessary grounds to argue for equal citizenship rights; further, it necessitated that this elite group be responsible for uplifting the rest of the race.

Conclusion

As Johnetta B. Cross states, “Education is not a neutral process. Whenever decisions are made about what is taught and how it is taught, a political statement is made. Those who create educational institutions have in mind outcomes that are shaped by their value-laden orientation.”⁶⁸ Certainly the educators at Fisk and Spelman made a strong statement about race and education when they proclaimed that they would provide for their students a liberal arts curriculum modeled after white colleges and universities. By providing a liberal arts education comparable to white colleges and universities, these

⁶⁶ A. S. Winston, “Introduction: Histories of Psychology and Race” in *Defining Difference*, 9.

⁶⁷ Wright, “Education and the Changing Identities of Black Southerners,” 98.

⁶⁸ Cross, “Education as a Tool of Socialization” 13, Cross, “Bricks Without Straw,” 45.

white educators sought to instill a sense of racial equality in their students. Supporters of industrial education worked to undermine the idea of liberal arts education for blacks, using findings of intelligence and mental tests to support their claim. Despite these challenges, the formal academic curriculum continued to reflect the same pedagogical advances seen in white institutions. Through the formal curriculum, educators attempted to infuse in students a racialized identity that was based on white middle-class values and behaviors that would aid them in race advancement. Courses in education, the social sciences and social work reinforced gender ideals for both men and women. With the rise of the social sciences, the work of uplift became a professionalized endeavor, which served to reinforce these black men and women's gender roles as well as their educated class status.

The formal academic curriculum functioned as an important socializing agent to inculcate in students at Fisk and Spelman those middle-class values. However, as we will see the race, class and gender ideologies that educators attempted to instill via the formal curriculum were further reinforced through other pedagogical mechanisms. In conjunction with the formalized training that students received, the structure of campus life and activities the extracurricular activities black youth were afforded the opportunity and encouraged to develop their organizational and leadership skills. For students at Fisk and Spelman, education, the structure of campus life, and the various extracurricular activities students participated in were all connected to creating a respectable middle-class culture infused with the progressive ideals of civic reform and social activism. The curricular changes during this period took place alongside shifts in popular ideas of race, gender and class norms. Students, who were active participants in the education project,

were similarly affected by the larger social and cultural conditions during the period from 1880-1930. As the nature and purpose of education went through transitions, so too did students' ideas about the purpose of education, and their role in this project.

Chapter 2

The Rules of Respectability: The Informal Curriculum, 1881-1915

“Her life is to be one of service. This is what her education has been for. So she goes forth with her whole heart and mind to do whatever there is for her to do the very best she can.”¹ - Jessie Mae Gross

The language of “respectability”, “uplift” and “self-help” were part of the shared spirit of progressivism that permeated white and black American culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The social language of progressivism was rooted in a desire to bring back a sense of morality and civic purity that was thought to have once existed in early America. To achieve these ends, progressives, who were largely white and middle class, developed a set of criteria that guarded claims to citizenship and access to social status. These criteria were commonly understood to be linked to the idea of respectability, which was based on Christian notions of morality, purity, temperance, chastity, piety, and self-reliance. In post-Reconstruction southern society, the idea of respectability was a means for excluding blacks and others from infringing on middle class and elite whites’ claims to power. The language of respectability could be an exclusionary force, but for sympathetic whites and members of the black aspiring and elite class respectability and the belief in uplift meant that achieving equality was possible.² Determined to obtain equal rights to citizenship, the aspiring and elite class

¹ “What Now”, Jessie Mae Gross, *Spelman Messenger*, Vol. 26, No. 1, October, 1909, 3.

² Throughout this chapter I use Michele Mitchell’s definitions of the terms *aspiring* class and *elite* to denote that the common labels applied to class at this time held a different meaning for blacks than for whites. Mitchell states that she uses the term *aspiring*, “as a means of differentiating African American strivers from contemporaneous middle-class white Americans and to acknowledge the quickening of class stratification within African American communities.” Mitchell’s definition for *elite* is also useful. For Mitchell *elite* “indicates the relatively wealthy descendants of free people of color as well as college educated professionals, many of whom were prominent in national organizations, owned well-appointed homes, or had successful businesses.” M. Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), xx.

drew on the ideas of respectability to furnish proof of their equality with whites. Education was seen to be one of the most effective ways to achieve respectability. Glenda Gilmore states, “As white men recast class by arguing for the capability of educated and industrious people, African Americans furnished living proof of their theories. Because education represented the key to class mobility, African Americans came to see it as nothing less than sacred, a spiritual duty.”³ Attaining higher education became a central component of blacks’ quest for racial equality.

At Fisk University and Spelman College education was more than an intellectual pursuit. Administrators and faculty at these institutions and other black liberal arts colleges were concerned with training well-rounded students and imbuing a generation of race workers with the progressive spirit of reform. As such, racial uplift and respectability represented central tenets in black education and core components of the college curriculum during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While debates were waged throughout the post-Reconstruction era over the formal content of the black college curriculum, there was a consensus amongst educators that their duty was to train men and women who, after graduation, would go out into the community and uplift the masses.⁴ Foremost amongst the goals of educators at black colleges, was the realization of an atmosphere that emphasized education for what some called the *head, heart, and hand*. The liberal arts education that students received entailed both intellectual and social training. At Fisk and Spelman education enhanced not only students’ intellect, but also aimed to provide a Christian education with the practical skills necessary for their future

³ G.E. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 14.

⁴ J.D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1865-1935*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 241.

“race work.” Religious instruction and training in racial uplift were not necessarily part of the formal academic curriculum; rather a parallel *informal* curriculum governed the moral and practical components of students’ education and was incorporated into the daily operations of the campus and students’ lives.

According to the educators at Fisk and Spelman and the members of the black aspiring and elite class, higher education was meant to train students for their role as leaders of a vanguard for racial advancement. Through the daily structure of students’ activities the ideas of “reform”, “uplift,” and “respectability” were reinforced to become part of students’ identities. This involved both the internalization and performance of the principles of respectability. Students learned that respectability was more than a belief system, but rather it was a way of life based on cultural markers and practices. Through the structure of campus life, by regulating students’ dress and encouraging involvement in extracurricular activities, educators imparted upon students the importance of temperance, thrift, piety, hard work, self-reliance and self-control through discipline. More importantly, as members of the aspiring and elite class, students at Fisk and Spelman believed that they were engaged in a self-conscious strategy to improve their status in American society. To be a Fisk or Spelman student carried a significant amount of weight amongst whites and blacks. Being a student or graduate of Fisk or Spelman was more than the sign of having received a good education; it marked one’s social class, demonstrated a level of respectability, and communicated a belief in middle-class values.

This chapter discusses the strategies employed by educators to transmit the ideas of respectability, uplift and racial advancement to students at Fisk and Spelman. First, I explore the concept of “uplift” and the ideology of respectability as a strategy for racial

advancement and how these ideas permeated the Fisk and Spelman campuses from 1880-1915. I examine the notion of uplift as an educational philosophy and how it was embraced not only by the faculty and administrators, but also by members of the aspiring and elite black community, parents and finally students themselves. Next, I turn to an explanation of the *informal* curriculum as a way of understanding how Fisk and Spelman educators taught uplift and incorporated the ideology of respectability into the social fabric of student life. In *Daring to Educate*, Yolanda Watson and Sheila Gregory define the *informal* curriculum as being composed of two parts, the extra-curriculum and the hidden curriculum. The extra-curriculum is defined as, “learning experiences provided informally through recreational, social, and cultural activities sponsored by colleges or by college-related organizations.” Whereas the hidden curriculum is understood to be, “learning that is informally and sometimes inadvertently acquired by students in interactions with fellow students and faculty members and inferred from the rules and traditions of the institution.”⁵ The informal curriculum at Fisk and Spelman first involved teaching students to *look* respectable. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century visual culture of respectability dictated that one’s interior could be expressed outwardly. For students at both institutions, this meant demonstrating their respectability visually by their dress and through photographic images in the schools’ promotional material. Campus life was an important part of the informal curriculum. Under the instruction of the administration and faculty, students were taught the virtues of manhood and womanhood. Life on campus reflected as closely as possible the components of living a respectable life. Participation in extracurricular activities was an important part of

⁵ Watson and Gregory use the terms extra- and hidden curriculum as they are defined by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Y.L. Watson & S.T. Gregory, *Daring to Educate: the Legacy of the Early Spelman College Presidents*, (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2005), 18-19.

training students for their future roles as race workers. Through their involvement in these activities, students gained practical experience in forming clubs and societies and valuable missionary experience. Overall, the informal curriculum was an important component in socializing students to value the ideas of uplift and respectability and to give them the necessary tools to continue to uphold these practices after graduation.

Respectable According to Whom?

The spirit of reform and racial destiny permeated the ideologies of the black aspiring and elite classes. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, blacks' efforts for racial advancement increasingly turned inward with a deliberate concentration on intra-racial reform through the enhancement of both individual and group characteristics.⁶ Michele Mitchell explains that, "activists, many of whom were ambitious strivers, took it upon themselves to convince their sisters and brothers that progressive individuals behaved in certain ways, that proper homes had strong patriarchs, pure mothers, and children schooled in racial pride."⁷ Race activists' centered their reform agenda on ameliorating poverty, and instilling in the masses middle-class ideas of sobriety, chastity, domesticity, and adherence to the mainstream gender norms.

Faith in the ability of uplift to improve the social, spiritual, moral and material conditions of blacks provided a tangible concept around which all factions of the black community could aspire. In *Growing Up Jim Crow*, Jennifer Ritterhouse describes how respectability functioned as a child-rearing strategy for blacks. According to Ritterhouse,

⁶Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, 9., E.B. Higginbotham, "The Politics of Respectability", in *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 185-230.

⁷Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, 12.

“embracing respectability did help many African Americans maintain an inward sense of integrity and self-respect as they lived their lives in the shadow of Jim Crow.”⁸ Instilling a sense of respectability was meant to impart a sense of self and race pride which would act as a buffer against the inevitable discrimination blacks would face. Kevin Gaines also states that for the aspiring and middle-class blacks respectability was a means of “turning the pejorative designation of race into a source of dignity and self-affirmation through an ideology of class, differentiation, self-help, and interdependence.”⁹ As an ideology that could benefit blacks of all classes, respectability became a source of racial pride and a way to shore up racial cohesion.

While respectability was framed as a goal that all blacks could achieve, the idea that it was a means to racial unity or would lead to equality amongst blacks is a source of contention that has engendered much debate among historians. The appeal of respectability and uplift were that these were ideologies that transcended popular biological definitions of race. Instead respectability and uplift emphasized upward mobility through acquired culture and class. At the same time however, it was the emphasis on using cultural performance as a means of “differentiation” that divided blacks from each other. In her study of Post-Reconstruction racial advancement strategies, Michele Mitchell underlines that “the concept of racial destiny stressed collectivity, yet it enabled African American men and women to judge—often harshly—what they perceived as weaknesses, failings, and pathologies on the part of other black

⁸ J. Ritterhouse, *Growing up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 57.

⁹ K.K.Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*,(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 3.

people.”¹⁰ Gaines also points out that racial uplift was limiting insofar as it only allowed blacks a *conditional* claim to equality and citizenship. The notion of uplift created and held a light to class differences within the black community, which were based on racial and cultural assumptions that did not necessarily reflect the material reality of most African Americans.

While many aspiring and middle-class blacks saw uplift as an answer to the challenge of biological determinism, Gaines has argued that by positing culture as a measure of respectability, race activists were prone to echo “racist social science arguments,[that] frequently faulted blacks for supposed weaknesses branded into the race’s moral fiber by slavery.”¹¹ By appealing to the sense of respectability that was largely middle class and white they actually loaned authority to their ideals of respectability. In turn, white and black progressives aligned against racial cohesion arguments that portrayed blacks as innately inferior. The irony of this stance is that by embracing the liberalism—or more specifically the atomism—of this ideal, all parties actually created a tension between individual uplift and racial cohesion.

An assault on racial cohesion allowed blacks to attack white supremacist notions of biological or natural inferiority by arguing that all people could achieve a level of respectability. But by adhering to white notions of respectability black reformers ended up reinforcing the hegemonic power of white ideals of respectability—largely placing it out of reach of the majority of blacks who lacked the fiscal and social opportunity that progressives took for granted. Respectability was turned into an individualistic and

¹⁰ Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, 15.

¹¹ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 5.

largely unattainable ideal.¹² While this in part is true, those members of the aspiring and elite class, who did reap the benefits of education, by adhering to respectability continued to predicate the idea of racial advancement was best achieved through a liberal arts education at institutions like Fisk and Spelman. Moreover, despite these negative implications, the ideology of respectability did allow blacks a platform on which to develop a sense of self-respect and derive identity through the practice of respectability. In this effort, the faculty at Fisk and Spelman saw themselves as conduits for providing the social and cultural marks of respectability to students who did not necessarily have the economic means to do so.

Imperative to the success of the black education enterprise was a certainty in the capability of uplift to facilitate racial progress, however defined, that helped to create a shared ideology and common goals between the educated black community and white educators. Fisk and Spelman were founded upon the principles that African American advancement in American society could be best achieved through proper socialization and moral training. Fisk president J.G. Merrill stated in his inaugural address that “it has been proved beyond peradventure that the underlying principles of our institution are sound; that there is no such difference between the negro and the Caucasian brain as would make it necessary to give the two races a different type of education.”¹³ The administration and faculty at black colleges like Fisk and Spelman believed that it was “slavery, not race, [which] kept blacks from acquiring the important moral and social values of thrift, industry, frugality, and sobriety, all of which were necessary to live a

¹² Gaines' and Mitchell's work highlights the tension surrounding the ideology of respectability, as being both an way of trying to demonstrate their class and cultural equality with whites, but at the same time respectability pathologizes and attributes internal failures in those lower class blacks who were unable to gain status as respectable citizens.

¹³President J.G. Merrill “The Inauguration,” *Fisk Herald*, Vo.19, No.3 January 1902, 9.

sustained Christian life.”¹⁴ Faculty were responsible for instilling in the students the values of self-help and a consciousness of the rules of respectability to ensure they would be prepared to fulfill the aspiring and elite blacks expectations for them.

These educators understood that while they could not reach the entire black community, if they provided a select group of students with a liberal arts education they could be relied upon to use their training to instruct the remainder of the black population.¹⁵ This of course was the concept of the “talented tenth”, a term coined by race leader and academic, W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois argued that it was the explicit duty of the elite segment of the black community to attain a higher education for the purpose of uplifting the rest of the race.¹⁶ Course catalogues at both Fisk and Spelman explicitly pointed to this cultural percolation as a desired outcome for students emerging from their programs. Fisk’s 1884-1885 catalogue posited that:

Fisk University aims to be a great center of the best Christian Education forces for the training of the colored youth of the south, that they may be rightly disciplined and inspired leaders in the vitally important work, that needs to be done for their race in this country and on the continent of Africa.¹⁷

Similarly, the founders of Spelman declared that “Christianity and morality are the foundation of all our teaching, for if *these* are neglected all else is in vain. To this end we train habits of industry and a desire for general information, inspire a love for the true and beautiful, and prepare the pupils for practical duties of life.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 241.

¹⁵ For further discussion of the foundational philosophies of Fisk and Spelman, see F.M. Read, *The Story of Spelman College*, (Atlanta, 1961), J.M. Richardson, *A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946*, (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1980), Watson & Gregory, *Daring to Educate*.

¹⁶ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 19-46.

¹⁷ Fisk University Catalogue, 1884-1885, 5.

¹⁸ Spelman Seminary Catalogue, 1887-1888, 33.

For men and especially women, of the aspiring and elite class, attending schools like Fisk and Spelman signified a certain class and cultural status. Armed with their education, men and, women were to work on behalf of the rest of the black community and serve as ambassadors to white society as examples of racial advancement.¹⁹ At an address given at Spelman's twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations, the editor of *The Voice of the Negro* proclaimed that, "Spelman Seminary stands for a trained hand in domestic science, for a cultured brain in liberal education, for a pure heart in biblical morality and for a consecrated life in the battle of life for the womanhood of her race."²⁰ Lessons in uplift and respectability were certainly not new to the students at Spelman and Fisk. Members of the black community and parents sent their children to Fisk and Spelman because their educational ideologies reflected their own values and goals for their children.²¹

The parents of Fisk and Spelman students were particularly invested in their children's education. Parents remained involved in the lives of their children partially because of the substantial financial costs they incurred. But more importantly, education was an investment in the individual student's future, for the future of the family, and ultimately the race itself. Historian Stephanie Shaw notes the importance that families placed on their daughters saying that "on completing their education, in addition to serving as good examples of the consequence of individual effort, ambition, and ability,

¹⁹ S. J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to be and to do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996),90.

²⁰ J.W.E. Bowen, "Our Virgin Queen Spelman Seminary," *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.22, No.8, May 1906, 5.

²¹ For a more detailed discussion about the various reasons parents sent their children to schools like Spelman and Fisk see "We are not educating individuals but manufacturing levers": Schooling Reinforcements" in Shaw *What a Woman Ought to be and to do*, 68-103.

these young women also represented one of the best traditions of the community.”²²

Wholly invested in their children’s education, parents would often write inquiring about their children’s progress, as letters in the *Spelman Messenger* and the presidential correspondence at Fisk reiterate the sacrifices and desires of parents for their children’s education. The *Spelman Messenger* often included letters from parents to their daughters, encouraging their continued devotion to their studies. One father wrote to his daughter:

It is from institutions similar to Spelman that our girls, taught how to labor with the hand, Christianity, true virtue, and honesty, are to come forth and be leaders among their people, and hew out a path for posterity. This is the only lever that will remove the veil of ostracism, hatred and antagonisms that exists between the two races to-day, and bring them to a true realization of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.²³

Concerned about his daughter’s appreciation for her education, the father of a Fisk student wrote to the administration:

...she continues to show that she is developing and being helped at Fisk, but the thing that bothers us is that she has not yet awakened to the full opportunity which is hers to be able to attend Fisk and receive all that Fisk is able to give her. She does not yet seem to appreciate that her parents are sacrificing in every way to keep her there, pay her bills and make it possible for her to make of herself such a person as will make Fisk glad that she has received her diploma and therefore be prepared for a life that will reflected credit to our race and make the older years of her parents happy and restful because she has developed into such a woman that those with whom she comes in contact with will be proud to be near, and that she has it in her to make the world a little better because she has been in it.²⁴

Students were constantly reminded of the sacrifices being made for their education and their duty to the family and community upon their graduation.

Uplift for the students of Fisk and Spelman was more than a personal endeavor.

Each student’s individual success served as a measure of the overall achievements of the

²² Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to be and to do*, 67.

²³ A letter from Mr. J.J. Jackson, a father of a Spelman pupil published in the *Spelman Messenger*, Vol. 6, No.4, February, 1890, 6.

²⁴ G.W.A. Johnston to Thomas E. Jones, January 4, 1928, Presidential Correspondence, Box 66. Folder 17.

wider black community. Students were responsive to the responsibilities outlined for them by educators and the black community, and were actively engaged in the process of their own advancement. Writing for the *Spelman Messenger*, student Della M. Richardson described the necessity for educated blacks to engage in self-help. Richardson argued, “we understand each other better than it is possible for any other race to understand us; therefore, we that have been enlightened better understand how to uplift the others.”²⁵ Echoing these sentiments, Fisk student M.H. Neal expresses that

...with unselfish devotion, we act well our part upon the stage of life: if, everywhere we promote to the best of our ability those virtues indispensable to the welfare of our people, our ensign of intellectual and moral power shall...develop that perfect type of manhood and womanhood which she so earnestly sought.²⁶

These and similar writings of Fisk and Spelman students demonstrate that students understood the significance of their education. Students displayed an awareness that their individual education was part of the larger project of racial advancement. Students like Della Richardson and M.H. Neal realized that to be seen as “respectable” was more than just obtaining an education; it was displaying to educators, and the members of the aspiring and elite black community their embodiment of these values.

Looking Respectable: The Dress code and Visual Culture

Respectability was more than a mindset; it was a way of life, one that was visually demonstrated by one’s actions and through one’s physical appearance. To be considered respectable was more than believing in the principles and values of uplift and self help. One important way that faculty and students worked together to achieve racial progress

²⁵Della M. Richardson, “Practical Ways to Help Ourselves” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.11, No.2, December 1894, 2.

²⁶ Oration By M.H. Neal on Emancipation Day “The Negro’s Place in American Life” *Fisk Herald* Vol.17, No.6 March 1898, 11.

was through visual representation of students' respectability. The visual culture of the nineteenth and early twentieth century was based on the premise that one's exterior image could visually represent the interiority of an individual's character.²⁷ For the aspiring and elite class, this was an important component of respectability, as one's individual comportment was a reflection of how well the rest of the race lived up to middle-class standards. At this time, the dominant white culture often used visual markers as support for segregation and evidence of blacks supposed inferiority. Understood to be objects of irrefutable evidence photographs were often employed as accomplices to the racist endeavors of white men and women to maintain their superior position.²⁸

One of the significant obstacles to African American advancement was the relatively degraded position held by black women in American society. Among the many lingering aspects of slavery were the negative depictions of black women and their sexuality. The education of black women, therefore, was crucial to racial advancement for blacks as both white and African American culture marked the success of the race through the achievements of these women.²⁹ Much like their white women counter-parts, African American women were regarded as the producers of family values and the guardians of their culture.³⁰ Black men were also portrayed negatively in photographic images, as Fisk student Matthew V. Boutte wrote about caricatures of black men in the media, "look at the pictures and cartoons that we constantly see of him. They are the old

²⁷ For a detailed discussion of nineteenth century racialized visual culture see, S.M. Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture*.(Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), L. Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), S.M. Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

²⁸ Wexler, *Tender Violence*,52-93.

²⁹ Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to be and to Do*, 76.

³⁰ Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*,77-112, Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*,19-46, Shaw, *What A Woman Ought to be and to Do*, 69-103.

type of course features, the unexpressive countenance the sad heritage of slavery.”³¹ To counter these damaging and essentialist notions about blacks, the administration enforced strict rules regarding dress and only showed photographs portraying students in positive settings to counter negative stereotypes. Through visual markers, they endeavored to demonstrate the internalization of these middle-class values in the images of students in the school’s promotional material, course catalogues and newspapers. Through these efforts faculty and students used the visual discourse to demonstrate that the virtues of middle-class manhood and womanhood were synonymous with Fisk and Spelman students.

Together the faculty and students were engaged in a culture making enterprise that sought to counter the dominant racialized notions of innate African American inferiority. Imperative to this process was the necessity of creating a new visual vernacular, one which would challenge that of the dominant white middle class and counter this white gaze. W.E.B. Du Bois spearheaded the campaign that challenged the racialized visual discourse around blacks. To counter the notions of racial inferiority, Du Bois challenged the color line by visually demonstrating that African Americans could achieve middle-class status. By taking photographs and publicly displaying images of blacks in middle-class settings, Du Bois argued that one’s social standing was a more valid indicator than race of one’s character.³² Using the photographic images as his proof, Du Bois asserted that blacks were economically and culturally equal to their white counterparts.³³ The images of Fisk and Spelman students in the print material can be seen

³¹ “The Vital Point in Education for the Negro”, *Fisk Herald*, Vol. 25, No. 9, June 1908, 24.

³² Smith, *Photography Along the Color Line*, 79.

³³ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 19-46, Smith, *Photography Along the Color Line*, 77-112, Smith, *American Archives*, 157-186.

to follow Du Bois' strategies. Looking at the Fisk and Spelman catalogues and pictures of the school buildings and students hard at work, it is possible to think that administrators were conscious of how these images could be used to indicate equality with white institutions of higher education. Photographs acted as visual evidence to signify the culture, refinement and sophistication of the students and as proof of the students' and more importantly the race's maturity and growth. Thus, images of students wearing the same attire as the white middle-class were used to denote class equality. Other photographic images captured students hard at work, a demonstration of their commitment to uplift and self help and progress. Pictures depicting students working hard or engaging in the activities of the middle class were invariably communicating a message, one which stated that black students were culturally and socially equal to their white counterparts.

Central to the success of Du Bois' endeavor was the desire to re-fashion the image of black women. Claiming that women were the custodians of culture and markers of African American progress, "Du Bois thus [fought] the exclusive racialization of the (white) middle classes by appealing to a model of gendered class identities upheld by the figures of the 'true' woman and the preserving patriarch."³⁴ Du Bois believed that the successful advancement of the African American community was contingent upon the ability to demonstrate that African American women had achieved middle-class virtues.³⁵ He insisted these ideas could be countered if blacks and, more importantly, if black women, could be seen to have embodied white middle class values. Students were taught that their actions were under constant scrutiny by the faculty and their peers. For

³⁴ Smith, *Photography Along the Color Line*, 104.

³⁵ Smith, *American Archives*, 30.

example, the 1886-1887 Spelman course catalogue stated that, “pupils [are] expected to be courteous and polite to both school mates and teachers” and to always display, “neatness, cleanliness, industry and economy”³⁶ Whether they were attending morning devotions, class, society and club meetings, or nightly study hall, students were taught to represent themselves well at all times. This meant using proper speech, appearing neat and tidy, wearing modest and tasteful clothing, and interacting appropriately with other students and faculty.

One of the ways that Fisk and Spelman educators sought to demonstrate their students’ middle class virtues was by monitoring what students wore. Adhering to the proper rules regulating both men’s and women’s fashion was a serious concern for educators. Stephanie Wright notes that, “as the most visible marker of gender and class, dress was of supreme importance on black college campuses. Administrators wanted to ensure that their students were dressed like the moderate, temperate models of Victorian deportment that they were to become.”³⁷ Clothing was used as an indicator of a woman or man’s adherence to propriety, thrift, and piety. For aspiring and elite blacks they were expected to dress in a manner that coincided with white middle class ideas of fashion.

The rules of respectability dictated that men and women were to wear plain and simple clothing that displayed their modesty, humility and refinement in taste. Students and parents could find the guidelines for clothing clearly outlined in detail in the course catalogues. While there were general guidelines for male clothing, a closer look at the Fisk catalogue indicates that the directions for women’s clothing were given significantly more attention. Men were certainly expected to dress according to the same standards as

³⁶ Spelman Course Catalogue, 1886-1887,31.

³⁷ S.R. Wright, “Education and the Changing Social Identities of Black Southerners, 1865-1915” PhD Dissertation (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, October, 2004), 79.

their white male counterparts. However the implications for women who deviated from the fashion norms had much more serious consequences than they did for men. For example, in the 1905-1906 Fisk catalogue the administration indicated that, “the clothing of students must be warm, becoming, plain and substantial. Those who bring extravagant and unnecessary finery will be required to lay it aside while in university.”³⁸ Deviation from the standardized uniform or embellishing the uniform with finery like silk or satin was forbidden. Although there was no explicit uniform for men, the administrators outlined the details for the women’s uniform. Women were expected to wear a navy blue suit, jacket and skirt with a white shirt, and a hat furnished by the school. At Spelman a similar, but unofficial uniform was in place. Students were expected to follow a dress code consisting of a simple dark wash dress, dark petticoats and aprons, skirts, one pair of substantial high shoes, strong cotton stockings, an umbrella, and rubber overshoes.³⁹ On the whole students did follow the guidelines of the dress code. But for some the task was difficult, and many attempted to infuse their individuality into what they wore. At Spelman, students often tried to manipulate their uniforms by improvising and adding details and extra finery. Deviation from the mandated dress code became such a widespread problem that it brought about a reaction from the Spelman administration. A letter to the parents and family members of Spelman students was included in the school catalogue. The letter addressed their concerns with students’ clothing and asked for parental help in ensuring their daughter’s compliance with the stated dress regulations. The letter read: “while girls are young they should learn that much jewelry, cheap jewelry, clothing that is injurious to health and showy and immodest styles and materials

³⁸ “General Regulations”, Fisk University Catalogue, 1905-06, 24.

³⁹ “General Information” Spelman Seminary Course Catalogue, 1913-1914, 11.

will be carefully avoided by the cultured and virtuous.”⁴⁰ But wanting female students to dress modestly was more than an indication of good values and it also served a more practical purpose.

Standardizing the dress code was as a way to blur class distinction. Students came from disparate backgrounds, and many came from modest means. The administrators were sympathetic to the economic situations of their students and indicated that the uniform was in part a consideration of these factors. Looking the part of the middle-class was one strategy for countering the negative stereotypes about black women’s sexuality, and was also used to protect black women from black and white men.

Campus Life

The college campus and campus life were important for the socialization of students. Life on campus was organized in a purposeful way and to model for students how they were supposed to live their lives once they graduated. Glenda Gilmore notes that higher education prepared students for “the world’s work, not simply by showing them better ways to work but by showing them a better world.”⁴¹ Educators structured campus life and daily activities so that they would serve as continual reinforcements of the ideas of respectability and uplift. Part of uplift and respectability was that it was a self-conscious performance and commitment to the demonstration of these middle-class values at all times.

An essential component of uplift ideology was the belief that the first step in racial advancement was in the home. While many students claimed to come from middle-

⁴⁰ “Requirements Concerning Student’s Clothing”, Spelman Seminary Course Calendar, 1917-1918.

⁴¹ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 31.

class families, the majority came from very modest means. Administrators believed that by simulating home life on campus, they would be able to teach students the requisite skills to successfully run their own homes. Spelman's 1909-1910 college calendar stated that, "every boarding pupil must take a daily share in the necessary work of the institution, so that she may acquire habits of industry and neatness, and prepare herself for homemaking."⁴² Students were required to board on campus during the school year where they could be under the careful watch of the faculty. The 1884-1885 catalogue of Fisk University stated that "all students except those who live in Nashville are required to board in the University, except by special arrangement."⁴³ Similar rules were in place for women at Spelman, as all non-Atlanta residents were required to live on campus unless they had written permission, and an approved address of residence.⁴⁴ Women reflected the status of the race, so they needed to be protected men trained for life in the public sphere, while women trained for life in the both the public and private sphere. For women of the aspiring and elite class this meant learning how to run a proper "Christian home." For men, this meant learning how to conduct oneself in the public sphere.

The boarding departments were made to simulate the familial setting and provide practical training that men and women would require to properly manage their own homes. The faculty lived with or close to the students so that they could keep a constant watch on student behavior and activity. But also so that they could act as role models as many were products of the northern white universities and displayed the types of behaviors and mores that they were trying to instill in the students. Since the goals of Fisk and Spelman educators were to imbue in their students a sense of respectability and to

⁴² Spelman Seminary Course Catalogue, 1909-1910, 9.

⁴³ "Admission", Fisk University Catalogue, 1884-1885, 20.

⁴⁴ "General Information" Spelman Seminary Course Catalogue, 1914-1914, 11.

improve their character, it was imperative that these values and characteristics be proven to exist amongst the faculty and administration. Students were taught the dignity of all labor. At Spelman, they “aim[ed] to make cheerful workers, who [would] look upon every kind of labor as honorable.”⁴⁵ At Fisk they outlined these ideals by stating “the boarding department is conducted as a Christian home. The discipline is parental in character and aims to develop Christian manhood and womanhood. The rules are few, and in general those of a well-regulated household, and are administered with firmness and impartiality.”⁴⁶ Each boarder was expected to devote an hour of service each day. Men were expected to help with the general upkeep of the facilities, while women were taught the components of running a home.

While it was important for male students to acquire an appreciation for the value of domestic labor, adherence to the values of domesticity was an integral part of the ideology of respectability that centered on the woman’s role in the home. In a letter to a Mrs. Pollard of the American Baptist Home Mission, Spelman co-founder Harriet Giles wrote about Spelman stating, “Our great object in coming South was to give this poor people religious instruction and teach them how to live and we found we could do it more effectually by gathering the girls and women in school where we could have them daily under our instruction.”⁴⁷ In an article dedicated to the students of Spelman, W.E.B. Du Bois carefully outlined the responsibilities for black women stating

I wish to impress upon these young women of Spelman, both graduates and under-graduates, the duty of motherhood.... the work of to-day and the *one* work of to-day is the establishment and the strengthening of home life...A real home is a way of thinking, a habit of doing; a system of human education...she not only

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 9.

⁴⁶ Fisk University Catalogue, 1889-1888, 48.

⁴⁷ Letter from Harriet E. Giles to Mrs. Crous, Harriet E. Giles Collection, Correspondence, March 10, 1882-Dec.8,1884, Folder 2.

bears children and makes a home but seeks in various ways to bring the homes of the neighborhood, the social circle, and the city into such helpful relation with each other as mutually to strengthen them and bind them together.⁴⁸

Fisk University was also dedicated to the providing the “*right* education [for] the girls and young women of the race whose elevation and advancement it was founded to promote.” Stating that, “the highest interest of every race and community depends largely upon the intelligence, frugality, virtue and noble aspirations of its women.”⁴⁹ Although it may seem incongruous that women at Fisk and Spelman who were receiving a liberal arts education would be expected to learn the practical tasks of home making, the economic and social realities of the south meant that women would more than likely have to seek work. Their domestic training was to prepare them for their future roles as wives and mothers, but also so that they would be able to pass on these lessons to their students. Students were learning the rules of respectability, more importantly they were being molded into representatives of respectability.

Extra-Curricular Activities

Respectability was more than a belief system; it was entrenched in the framework of cultural activities, such as clubs and societies. Educators prepared students for race work informally through extracurricular activities. Through their membership and participation in the various clubs and societies students developed the leadership skills and practical experience to help them in their future “race work.” Spelman president Lucy Hale Tapley explained that “the experience given in the management of these societies is intended to enable the student to organize and conduct religious work so as to

⁴⁸ W.E. B Du Bois “The Work of Negro Women in Society,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.18, February 1902, No.5.

⁴⁹ “General Regulations”, Fisk University Catalogue, 1905-1906, 14.

make it effective in its influence on community life.”⁵⁰ This practical experience was invaluable for students who learned how to balance their academic responsibilities with their extracurricular commitments. These skills would be transferable to their future life, since as members of the aspiring and elite class they would be expected to be adept at balancing their careers, race work and families.

The administration and faculty strictly governed the extracurricular activities in which students were allowed to partake. Societies and clubs were approved by the administration on the basis that they were purposeful and related to the greater goals of uplift. At Fisk, the clubs and societies were gendered. Male students were involved in activities that centered on preparing them for life in the public sphere such as debating societies. On the other hand, extracurricular activities for female students were supposed to train them for their lives in both the public and private sphere. Although the societies and clubs were segregated according to gender, male and female students participated in activities that reflected the values intrinsic to respectability, which at that time was a belief in temperance, thrift, piety, perseverance, and chastity.

The temperance movement and religious societies were particularly strong on the campuses. At Fisk, there were strict rules regarding the use of alcohol on and off campus. Students who failed to abstain from the use of alcohol during the school year or summer months were subject to punishment.⁵¹ Students at Spelman signed a pledge book marking their support of temperance. Articles in the *Fisk Herald* and *Spelman Messenger* occurred frequently discussing the necessity of abstaining from alcohol consumption. For blacks it was particularly important that they refrain from the use of alcohol. During the late

⁵⁰ Lucy Hale Tapley, “President’s Annual Report,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.28, No.7, April 1912, 1.

⁵¹ Fisk University Catalogue, 1890-1891, 33.

nineteenth and early twentieth century the use of alcohol was correlated with being degenerate and was seen to induce laziness and corrupt the character.⁵² Religious societies also permeated the campuses. Both schools were founded by religious missionary societies with the expressed aim of developing in students a good Christian character. Voluntary societies such as the YMCA and YWCA were founded during the early years of each school. These societies were organized around many issues, which included temperance and missionary work. Other groups, like the Christian Endeavor Society, were forums for discussion of various contemporary issues, including race. The religious life on campus also included attending chapel services, prayer meetings, Bible study, and personal devotion exercises. Chastity was closely linked to the religious culture of campus life. For example, the White Shield Society at Spelman was organized so to provide students with practical experience and to teach them how to “lead its members to desire and strive for purity of heart, which will manifest itself in conversation, dress and conduct...members pledge not only to aim for person purity, but to win as many others as possible to this high standard of living.”⁵³ Temperance groups and organizations like the YMCA-YWCA, and the White Shield Society encouraged the development of good character, but also helped students to learn how to budget their time and commitments between school work and organizational engagements.

Educators were concerned with ensuring that students learn the importance of balance; therefore leisure time was limited and strictly monitored. The administration at Spelman was especially attentive to their students’ progress. Each dormitory was monitored by a faculty member who was responsible for charting the students’ academic

⁵² *Spelman Messenger*, Vol. 5, No.8, June 1889, 6.

⁵³ *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.25, No.8, May 1909, 3.

and personal progress. Students were evaluated on a number of criteria including their work, health, study habits, personality, extra-curricular activities, and dress. Under the section pertaining to extracurricular activities, the evaluator was required to answer these questions, “Does she take an active part in extra-curricular activities? In what type or activity is she most interested? Does she have a fair sense of proportion as to the relative importance of work, play, or social activities?”⁵⁴ Articles written by students in the *Fisk Herald* and *Spelman Messenger* reflect an awareness that a key component of their education was to become involved in extracurricular activities. The various societies used the publications to promote their societies and report the various achievements of the students. Students immersed themselves in the spirit of racial uplift as the values of respectability permeated the social fabric of the schools’ campuses. A student article in the *Fisk Herald* encouraged students to be engaged members of the academic and social community, “the person who takes advantage of the many opportunities afforded by Fisk comes out fully developed intellectually, socially, physically, and religiously.”⁵⁵ Thus the students’ work in temperance groups, missionary service, bible study groups reflect an appreciation that they were being trained as instruments of uplift and were more than willing to be held accountable to both the white and black middle-class for the uplift of the remainder of African American society.

⁵⁴ From the start faculty at Spelman were required to keep daily records of students regarding their scholarly development, punctuality, and degree of proficiency in certain tasks. This was called the Credit System and the information gathered was for the benefits of parents and patrons who could assess the progress of the student. Although, these particular set of questions were from a questionnaire from the 1933-1934 academic year, it is most likely that they are representative of the types of questions that would have been pertinent to the Credit system. This questionnaire was found in the files of Bernice Smith, who stayed in Morgan hall during the 1933-1934 academic year. Deceased Alumnae Files, Spelman College.

⁵⁵ J.G. Green, *Fisk Herald* Vol.23, No.3, December 1905.

Conclusion

Respectability as a late nineteenth and early twentieth century ideology was a belief grounded in the possibility of social and cultural mobility, through a demonstration of and compliance with the principles of temperance, piety, self-control, hard work and chastity. Through the socialization process of campus life the lessons in respectability that students had learned early on in the homes of their parents were further reinforced. Students also learned that respectability was deeply embedded in the visual vernacular of southern society. Faculty and students both worked to challenge the negative racialized discourse around blacks supposed inferiority through visual representations of their class status. Students learned that appropriating the fashion of the middle-class or that appearing to be respectable in photographic images was one strategy for racial advancement. Moreover, the administration and faculty as well as parents and members of the aspiring and elite black community impressed upon students the value of action. By joining the various volunteer groups, clubs and societies, students gained the necessary leadership skills, experience and an appreciation for the value of race work. Together, with the administration and faculty, the support of the aspiring and elite members of the black community and their parents, the students at Fisk and Spelman were active agents in their own movement towards respectability and uplift.

The terms “respectability”, “uplift”, and “self-help” were more than a set of ideals. For the students at Fisk and Spelman, these were principles that took concrete form and were believed by educators, members of the elite and aspiring class and parents to be the necessary steps to racial advancement. From 1880-1915, the ideology of respectability had an important purpose as it helped to form a collective ideology and

organized students around a set of beliefs that as a community they could strive to advance their own future. By 1915, students began to feel restricted and constrained by the ideals that were once supposed to denote freedom and equality. Instead students became increasingly restless with the continual performance of these ideals, which promised advancement that forever seemed unattainable. As students continued to develop their organizational skills and began to find their voice on the college campuses, they began to rally around their own causes and to seek alternative routes to racial advancement.

Chapter 3

Re-Envisioning Race: Fisk, Spelman and the New Negro 1915-1925

“The youth of today is tired of sham, tired of mock modesty, tired of hypocrisy.”¹

In the cool spring days of 1925, Fisk University became the site of heated relations between the administration and students. On the evening of February 4, a group of Fisk students gathered outside the school’s chapel after a speech given by Fisk’s (white) President Fayette Avery McKenzie. This disturbance was caused by a group of students outraged by McKenzie’s latest affront to the Fisk student body. Earlier, McKenzie had announced that neither he, nor the administration would honor the agreement he had made to students the previous fall. In November 1924, a group of seven students led by Nashville native and Fisk senior, George Streater, approached McKenzie and the board of trustees requesting that the board consider allowing students to have more of an active role in their education. Among their requests, students asked that Fisk students be allowed to have a student government, an athletic council, and a less stringent dress code. With the news that McKenzie had reneged on his earlier promise, a group of students took to the school grounds shouting and yelling, banging on trash cans and breaking windows. Fearing for his safety and that of the faculty, McKenzie called in the Nashville police and had the students arrested. This initial incident sparked a two month long ordeal that brought student allegations of McKenzie’s questionable educational and racial policies to the fore. For two months, over three quarters of the student population went on strike, boycotting classes, refusing to attend mandatory chapel in an effort to

¹ “Modern Youth and the Sex Problem, *The Greater Fisk Herald*, Vol. II. No.5, February 1927, 8.

seek “recognition of their status as men and women” and relief from “increased white paternalism in the form of curricular and extracurricular restriction.”²

For nine years, conflict between students and the administration had been escalating. Throughout this period, most incidents remained a private institutional matter in which students served as their own advocates, requesting amendments to the rules and regulations and largely failing to find a sympathetic ear for their formal complaints against Fisk President McKenzie. In the two years preceding the strike, tensions between the Fisk administration and the student body had become frequent and confrontational.³ McKenzie abolished student government, forbid the formation of fraternities and sororities, and closed the *Herald*. However, by the fall of 1924 those tensions that had been allowed to fester for so long under the surface of the campus’s social and political life erupted in the form of open and organized rebellion against the administration’s policies.

The rebellion was further sparked by a media campaign headed up by W.E.B. Du Bois. A Fisk alumnus, founder of the NAACP organ *The Crisis*, and distinguished sociologist, Du Bois publicly condemned Fayette McKenzie for his mistreatment of students and his racial politics. In an address given before the Fisk Alumni association in June of 1924, Du Bois publicly spoke out against the Fisk administration stating, “in Fisk today discipline is choking freedom; threats are replacing inspiration, iron clad rules, suspicion, tale bearing are almost universal.”⁴ Du Bois addressed other student concerns relating to the outdated dress codes for women, calling the method of enforcement at Fisk

² L.C. Lamon, “The Black Community in Nashville and the Fisk University Student Strike of 1924-1925”, *The Journal of Southern History*, 40 2, (May, 1974), 225.

³ *Chicago Defender*, “‘Oust Dr. M’Kenzie’, Fisk U. Students Insist”, February 14, 1925, p.1, col.1

⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Editorial”, *The Fisk Herald*, Vol.33 No. 1, 1924, 3.

“humiliating and silly.” Further, Du Bois spoke about the lack of student-run organizations and commented on the suppression of the *Fisk Herald* and athletics.

Finally, he attended to McKenzie’s racial politics. Du Bois argued:

[Fisk] has deliberately embraced a propaganda which discredits all of the hard work which the forward looking fighters of Negro freedom have been doing. It overpraises the liberal white South. It continually teaches its students and constituency that this liberal white South is in the ascendancy and that it is ruling; and that the only thing required of the black man is acquiescence and submission.⁵

Now, suddenly backed by the influential Du Bois, both local and national support from the black press grew almost overnight and the student cause was bestowed with a new legitimacy.

Du Bois appeared before Fisk Alumni Clubs across the country echoing the students’ charges against McKenzie. Du Bois called for McKenzie’s removal from the institution, citing McKenzie’s numerous offences against the students’ and faculty. The *Chicago Defender*, a national black newspaper, followed the events at Fisk closely reporting Du Bois’ efforts. The paper printed Du Bois’ criticisms of McKenzie and denounced the Fisk president as a detriment to the black race. It reported McKenzie’s systematic censorship of the black press as he banned “colored” newspapers from the library. The *Defender* also recorded Du Bois’ accusations that McKenzie had not secured the Million Dollar Endowment Fund for Fisk as he had claimed, and cited instead a William Baldwin as the man responsible for fundraising. Du Bois also criticized the president of instituting a spy system, “to brow-beat teachers and students who criticized his manner of conducting affairs.”⁶ Du Bois skillfully used his position of power with the black press to inform Fisk alumni, members of the Nashville black community, and

⁵*Ibid*, 1-6.

⁶*Chicago Defender* “Fisk Alumni Hears Du Bois on M’Kenzie,” Jan 24, 1925, p.3, col.1.

readers nationwide of the ongoing struggle between Fisk's authoritarian administration and the students. Soon, the nation's attention focused on the small Southern institution.

In the late fall of 1924, a group of seven students, led by senior George Streater, created a formal list of grievances against McKenzie and requested an audience with the school's board of trustees. Paramount in the students' demands was the request for relief from, or reform of, McKenzie's autocratic rule. General discontent among students was not uncommon during this period as their desire for autonomy increasingly clashed with the rules and regulations. Despite their organized front, the administration chose to ignore the students and tensions quickly reached a boiling point. The ingredients for campus revolt were all in place; austere and often outdated rules that continued to govern all aspects of student life and a more rebellious student population resulted in almost inevitable upheaval.

While other black colleges experienced some form of conflict, the Fisk rebellion was unprecedented and unmatched in scale and vigor.⁷ The list of grievances against McKenzie was extensive and while no singular cause can be attributed to the Fisk February revolt, a number of specific sources of discontent need to be highlighted and explored to gain a fuller picture of what drove students to the point of open dissent and protest. Key to the driving concerns leading up to the February revolt was the growing divide between what administrators and students saw as punishable offences. While administrators attempted to clamp down on low marks, dress code infractions, interactions between students of the opposite sex, and failure to attend compulsory

⁷ Historian Martin Summers notes that in addition to the Fisk strike, throughout the 1920s a total of thirteen strikes broke out at several black institutions, including one at Howard University in 1925, M. Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

chapel, students increasingly construed these matters less as punishable offences and more as petty misdemeanors.⁸ Students had also been, and remained, outraged over the suppression of the *Fisk Herald* in 1916, the only outlet for the student voice on campus. This action was not the only administrative act aimed at quashing extra-curricular student organizations. By 1918, the student council had been forced to disband student requests for fraternities and sororities had been repressed and ignored, and the founding of a local campus NAACP chapter was repeatedly denied. When contrasted to the democratic administrative policies of previous Fisk President Erastus Milo Cravath, the authoritarian leadership style of McKenzie demanded a complete loyalty from students and staff that few were willing to tolerate.

Student activities including the literary clubs and societies were under constant surveillance by faculty; athletic competitions, which had been suspended for the duration of the World War, were stifled and prevented from realizing their pre-war scale with baseball and track meets actually being forbidden in 1921 and 1923 respectively. Fisk historian Joe Richardson writes that “worse than the rules, the students thought, was the atmosphere of distrust and suspicion created by the watchfulness of the faculty.”⁹ The McKenzie administration was described as a “reign of terror” by some students, which bred a spirit of distrust and oppression amongst the students and faculty.¹⁰ Seeing that there was little recourse within the channels of appeal and advocacy that had been made available to them by the administration, students rebelled against what they saw as the repressive and outdated identity that the administration was trying so hard to press onto

⁸ Lamon, “The Black Community in Nashville,” 233-234.

⁹ Richardson, *A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946*, (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1980), 87.

¹⁰ *Chicago Defender*, “Students Say Fisk Prexy Held Grudge,” Mar 21, 1925, p.A1, col.8, Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 84-89.

them. An ideological gap had formed between the older generation of the McKenzie era and the younger generation of up and coming student leaders. The Fisk rebellion was the product of its time emerging from new ideas and discourses about race, identity and politics.

It is important to understand that the strike at Fisk was more than a group of disgruntled youth acting out. The students' actions symbolized a rejection of "the paternalism of black college administrations and white philanthropic boards" and "in the militant spirit of the New Negro, [these] angry students rejected the disciplinary, pietistic emphasis of black colleges, which to them came at the expense of quality education and professional training."¹¹ Central among these issues was the nature of the University's curriculum, the lack of freedom for student initiatives and activities, and an under representation of black faculty. During McKenzie's tenure, Fisk's curriculum increasingly took the form of industrial education. The industrial curriculum taught at Fisk was indicative of the influence of white philanthropists who supported a certain type of educational framework. The incidents at Fisk also brought into question the paternalistic nature of the relationship between white educators and black students. Paternalism kept the students in a racially and socially subordinate role that stifled the growing desire amongst students for more racial autonomy and student-directed organizations on campuses. The antagonism between the McKenzie administration and student body was symptomatic of wider cultural issues in American society during this period. The ideological gap between the students and the older generation was the product of the changing cultural landscape in America.

¹¹K.K.Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 237.

The years from 1915-1925 marked a significant period of transition in America. The moral codes and progressive ideals that had guided the social and cultural framework of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries gave way to a new mentality.¹² This was the Jazz Age, the era of youth culture, and the age of the New Negro.¹³ The war in Europe, the rise in consumerism, changes in cultural aesthetics, and new attitudes towards gender shaped the ideology of the new generation of middle-class blacks. Further, ideological change was brought about by the mass migration of African Americans from the South, an increase of black immigrants from the West Indies, an expanding black professional class, growing race violence, as well as the failure of the First World War to bring about equal rights and the democratic ideals it had promised. These larger demographic, social, and cultural changes led to a re-thinking of ideologies of race advancement as Kevin Gaines writes that the “racial uplift ideology and its assumptions could not keep pace with the whirlwind forces of change.”¹⁴ The sweeping cultural change along with the disillusionment with current race ideology created the right conditions for a more militant New Negro. Uplift ideology’s assimilationist approach to race advancement was increasingly criticized by the militant rhetoric of the New Negro ideology. In line with these greater changes, black youth rebelled against the restrictive moral codes of their parent’s generation that attempted to govern and

¹²A. Douglas, *Terrible honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, 1995), N.F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), K. Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), A. Locke ed., *The New Negro*, (New York: Atheneum, 1968).

¹³ J.W. Trotter, “African Americans in the City, The Industrial Era, 1900-1950”, *Journal of Urban History*, 21 4, (May 1995), 438-457, M. Fultz, “‘The Morning Cometh’: African-American Periodicals, Education and the Black Middle-Class, 1900-930,” *Journal of Negro History*, 80 3, (Summer, 1995), 97-112, V.P. Franklin, “Introduction: African American Student Activism”, *The Journal of African American History*, 88 12, (Spring, 2003), 105-109, H.A. Baker, Jr., “Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance,” *American Quarterly*, 39 1, (Spring, 1987), 84-97.

¹⁴ Gaines, *Uplifting the Race*, 234.

discipline their behavior; and instead, opted for a way of life that placed a renewed value on individual expression and autonomy.

The students at Fisk were affected by these larger cultural changes and acted out against what they argued to be a set of repressive and conservative educational philosophies held by white educators that forbid “political associations and activities amongst their students, and restrict[ed] the number of black faculty.”¹⁵ Writing about the student strike, historian Lester C. Lamon remarks that, “the actions of the Fisk students rested within the changing framework of higher education for Negroes, and had close kinship to similar ‘strikes’ and ‘disturbances’ on other Negro college campuses during the 1920s.” Lamon further states that, “a ‘new’ generation of black Americans emerged during this decade and black colleges often served as incubators of discontent.”¹⁶ Student protests during this period were centered around a number of similar issues. Commenting on this Martin Summers observed,

Among other things, young men and women incorporated into their protests against their respective administrations a call for the end of compulsory chapel attendance, mandatory participation in military training, strict dress codes, bans against the consumption of alcohol and tobacco, prohibition against playing, listening and dancing to jazz and the blues and the strict surveillance of male-female socializing.¹⁷

Placing the rebellion within this context, Joe M. Richardson has argued that “the 1920s witness[ed] a revolution in morals and manners throughout the United States. The post-war period—the Roaring Twenties—was a time of disillusionment and cynicism, of flappers and hip flasks, of bathtub gin and speakeasies, of revolt against old codes.”¹⁸

¹⁵ L.D. Gordon, “Race, Class, and the Bonds of Womanhood at Spelman Seminary, 1881-1923. *History of Higher Education Annual*, 9 (1989), 9.

¹⁶ Lamon, “The Black Community in Nashville,” 225.

¹⁷ Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents*, 243.

¹⁸ Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, p.90.

Changing attitudes about appropriate fashion, music and leisure affected American youth, black and white alike.

The Fisk rebellion serves as an ideal starting point for exploring the complexities of the ideological shift from the progressive rules of respectability to the New Negro ideology. This chapter will look at the re-envisioning of black middle-class race ideologies by examining how respectability as the dominant strategy for racial advancement gave way to the New Negro movement.¹⁹ It is possible to see the points of contrast between the various strategies of race advancement as envisioned by the white administrators, the older generation of middle class blacks, and the young generation of students. Moreover, comparing student life at Fisk and Spelman offers another point of contrast for how the changing attitudes affected women and men differently. The racial, gender and cultural ideologies for African Americans from 1915 to 1925 were not a uniform set of ideals. Looking at the revolt that occurred at Fisk and comparing the way that Spelman students responded to similarly strict rule provides an opportunity to investigate the diversity of race ideologies. This chapter then, has two goals overarching goals, first, to investigate the construction of the black middle-class race ideology during a period of ideological upheaval. Second this chapter will explore how the shift affected the way gender was conceptualized and the role that men and women were assigned in terms of race advancement. By looking at this transition on the campuses of Spelman and Fisk, it is possible to see where students placed themselves along the spectrum of race

¹⁹ This chapter also indirectly looks at how the New Negro movement operated outside of the boundaries of Harlem and other northern cities, specifically within these institutions of higher education in the South. Locating the New Negro ideology outside of the intellectual and cultural circles of the North, de-centers the traditional narrative of the New Negro movement, and also marks the South as a center of cultural and intellectual activity and change. A more in-depth discussion of the regional variations of the New Negro movement is beyond the boundaries of this chapter.

ideology and to assess the impact that consumerism, the new youth culture, and the reconfiguration of gender roles had on students' ideas of race advancement.

“Progress” with McKenzie

On Tuesday January 19, 1925, the Fisk student body was officially notified that Dr. Fayette Avery McKenzie had been elected by the Board of Trustees as the new President. Originally from Pennsylvania, McKenzie earned his Bachelor of Science degree from Leigh University and PhD at the University of Pennsylvania. Before coming to Fisk, McKenzie had been teaching at Ohio State University where he researched the area of white and Indian relations. Although he had no previous experience in the area of black higher education, the board felt that McKenzie's sympathies towards the American Indians made him a good candidate for Fisk. McKenzie's vision for Fisk had yet to be seen but his appointment signaled the promise of sustaining the tradition of academic excellence and continued growth. In his inaugural address, McKenzie spoke of the functions of higher education stating, “Education should serve two purposes. First, it should give us great body or content of ideas; secondly it should enable us to do straight thinking.” Moreover he declared, “we must have more than an industrial education if we would have a higher civilization. And because I believe in a higher education, I believe in Fisk.”²⁰ The Board had selected a man they believed would raise the standards and bring the school in line with current academic trends, while also maintaining the integrity of the school's founding principles.

Fisk students similarly shared the board's desire for continued progress. This was a conscientious group of students who understood that the progress of the institution

²⁰ “President-Elect F.A. McKenzie,” *The Fisk Herald* Vol. XXII, No.1, February 1915, 12.

hinged on the values and ideals of the administrators. Their confidence in Dr. McKenzie's abilities to lead the prominent black institution was greeted with a sense of hesitancy. Editor-In-Chief, W.S. Grant Jr. wrote in the February edition of the *Herald*,

it is indeed gratifying to know that our president elect is a believer in the higher education of the Negro... [as] the ideas and opinions which are held by a man at the head of an institution like Fisk will largely determine whether the institution will move forward or backward.

Grant cautiously spoke of the future of Fisk and the McKenzie presidency stating,

and when we know that in the future we shall still have a leader who is a through believer in higher education, not just for white people nor black people; when we know that our new president is to be a man who believes in the equality, justice and liberty, we know that we can expect nothing but continued progress at Fisk.²¹

Grant's guarded optimism stemmed from strained relations between the student body and the previous president, George A. Gates. During Gates' short term as president (1909-1912) many advances were made to Fisk's curriculum; academic standards were raised, the number of college students increased and the financial situation improved. Progress however, came at the expense of alienating many of Nashville's local black community. To attain the much needed white philanthropic support, Gates had supported segregation at Fisk functions.²² The segregationist policies had offended local blacks among those the editors of the *Nashville Globe*, a local black newspaper known to be outspoken about race issues. *Globe* editors, along with some Fisk alumni and students had been vocal about the questionable racial policies of Fisk administrators since before Gates' presidency. Gates' actions added further weight to their cause, calling attention to the

²¹ Ibid, 12.

²² Gates' support of segregation at Fisk functions further fueled calls for a black administration. Aware of the need for white financial support, the *Globe* charged that it need not come at the expense of compromising the integrity of the institution. They called for a black president at Fisk, claiming that there were many qualified black academics, pointing to Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois and the success they had in raising finances as indicative of the fact that a black president could adequately run the institution and secure the necessary funds.

need for a black president at Fisk. In light of Gates' failures, the board agreed that change was needed at Fisk. The continued growth of the institution required strong leadership and they felt that the white northerner, F.A. McKenzie was well suited for the job.²³

As the third president in less than ten years, McKenzie was under the careful watch of the students, faculty and the board of trustees. He immediately stepped into action and within his first year he had set the tone for his administration. McKenzie made several amendments to the curriculum, and worked to improve the college course selection, and increase the communication between the school and community. Starting in October of 1915, college students could choose between four college courses; science, classical, education and home economics. McKenzie also added special training for social service, offering courses in religious pedagogy, sociology, recreation, statistics, manual training and domestic sciences.²⁴ He also set out to improve the relations between the University and the Nashville community by enacting outreach programs to the local white and black communities. Commenting on the need to bring the University in line with the current trends in social sciences and social service McKenzie wrote, "The growing urban concentration of Negroes demands special study and the development of methods of social settlement to meet the problem attendant upon the increasing migration to the conditions in cities, North and South." Further adding, "besides, the time has come for the Negro college to become closely articulated with the community in which it is located."²⁵ Improvements made to the Sociology Department signaled the beginning of a strong tradition of sociology and of community outreach at Fisk. Throughout his tenure, McKenzie worked to continually improve Fisk's regional and national reputation. His

²³ Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 64-70.

²⁴ Fisk University News, Catalog Number, Vol. VII No.9, 1915-1916, 32.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

efforts resulted in recognition of northern institutions such as Columbia University which began to receive Fisk students to their graduate programs.

Along with improvements in the academic standards and curriculum, McKenzie succeeded in attaining local and national white philanthropic support. The fund raising efforts resulted in bringing a million dollar endowment to Fisk in 1924, ensuring the financial future of the institution. While some financial support came from Fisk alumni and members of the black community, the majority of support came from whites. Although white philanthropic financial aid was necessary to ensuring the survival of the institution, these donations often came with stipulations as many white philanthropists only supported industrial education. For Fisk, this meant that during McKenzie's presidency, the academic curriculum increasingly resembled that of many of the industrial schools. Moreover, while McKenzie boasted of the improved academic standards at Fisk, the students claimed otherwise. In fact, they argued that McKenzie's reports of academic progress to the board of trustees, parents and alumni were based on false information. In the statement of grievances against McKenzie, the students alleged that, "there is deception in the actions of the president. The academic standard claimed by Fisk is not justified by its present work. The college enrollment as stated in the catalogue is not a statement of truth. The college department both in administration and discipline, is submerged by the lower departments."²⁶ Speaking out further against what they saw as a decline in the academic standards at Fisk, the students maintained that McKenzie put white faculty in positions of power at the expense of the academic integrity of the school. They indicted the president stating that,

²⁶ A Statement of Grievances against Fayette A. McKenzie as President of Fisk University, Box 14, Folder 18.

the teaching force is unsatisfactory...Colored teachers are gradually being forced out and no-well trained successors are appointed. Immature white undergraduates are repeatedly brought in as teachers and Southern white persons are being gradually put into positions of authority, persons whose attitudes toward the Negro race is not satisfactory.²⁷

These and other actions by McKenzie that had been done in the name of improving the quality of academics at Fisk, had in fact hindered progress and alienated the student body.

Summing up the growth Fisk accomplished under McKenzie, Fisk historian Joe Richardson observed,

He had won the confidence of educational foundations, thereby gaining for the university a considerable increase in its support and endowment. He had raised standards and teachers' salaries. But his methods in doing so had alienated a large proportion of the people he was serving. There was a question of how long a black university, dominated by a white president and white trustees and supported by white wealth, could carry on in defiance of the wishes of its black constituency...The time had passed when a paternalistic and dictatorial white president could successfully head the school.²⁸

The so-called improvements made during McKenzie's tenure would be part of his legacy, but he would be remembered at Fisk for far more than these advancements. Progress had come, but at the expense of alienating much of the student body.

Academically and financially Fisk may have experienced growth with McKenzie, but the social and cultural life at Fisk stagnated and was repressed by his authoritarian rule. In the eyes of the students, McKenzie had made little effort to improve the quality of campus life or to expand extra-curricular activities. In fact, under McKenzie, Fisk students saw many of their previously enjoyed freedoms diminish in the name of academics and character building. The merger of the student-run *Fisk Herald* with the University publication *Fisk University News* was but one example of McKenzie's control over the student population. Like the white educators at many black institutions of higher

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 100.

education, McKenzie ascribed to the belief in the moral and cultural superiority of whites who were entrusted with the responsibility of guiding blacks in the uplift of their race. His educational philosophy was founded upon the same missionary paternalism that had guided the founders of Fisk.²⁹ Rooted in progressive middle-class ideals that privileged the strength of one's character and display of self-restraint, McKenzie upheld the tradition of order and efficiency that was the premise of students' regimented daily routines. Simplicity and thrift rationalized the austere dress codes in place for women and stringent rules were deemed necessary to teach students proper deportment and to regulate the interactions between the sexes. The disciplinary policies at Fisk reflected McKenzie's Victorian and progressive sensibility, and placing him within this context can shed light on why he instituted these strict policies and perhaps can help explain his subsequent actions. McKenzie enforced strict rules based on the belief that they were necessary to help students gain self-control and prepare them for their future race work.

McKenzie's emphasis on raising the academic standards translated to the elimination of any extracurricular activities that were inconsequential to attaining these ends. Extracurricular activities were important educational tools used to help build character and collegiality, but they were seen as secondary academic endeavors. McKenzie restricted the number of groups or societies an individual student could be involved in, and all activities were strictly supervised by him and other Fisk faculty. He

²⁹Martin Summers describes the idea of missionary paternalism stating "the missionary educational philosophy, which drew on both the 'civilizing mission' ethos of patrician nineteenth-century New England reformers and the environmentalist explanations of racial inequality advanced by twentieth-century progressives, started from the premise that blacks were in dire need of instruction in the moral precepts of the dominant culture. The idea that African Americans suffered from a group pathology, environmental or otherwise, was the starting point of most conversations about the role of education in the black community." Further he argues that, "missionary educators argued that schools such as Fisk... would produce individuals who would strip away the pathology of black communities by delivering a 'gospel of manners and morals,'" 247-248.

required complete obedience to all rules, and had little tolerance for those not willing to comply. This was evidenced by a section of the course calendar warned all students that, “those not willing to give his promise and to keep it are urged not to come, as their presence here would be a great handicap to the efficiency of our work.”³⁰ Students were accountable for any infractions of the general regulations committed both on and off campus, as the calendar read, “all students are subject to the discipline of the University for immoral and unworthy conduct during absence from the institution.”³¹ A prudential committee was established to handle various infractions, and to ensure that the rules were properly enforced. McKenzie along with the Dean of Men and the Dean of Women kept a close record of students’ behavior. As was the common practice at the time, a letter would be sent to a student informing him or her of the reported transgression. The letter would outline in detail their infractions and the subsequent consequences they would face; oftentimes this resulted in a student being placed on probation or suspension. One such letter written to Nathaniel Fearonce in December of 1921, listed the charges against him by the University and warning him of his impending suspension. In the letter McKenzie wrote,

It is perfectly clear that you had an overabundance of caution and warning and that you failed to regard either...I am informed that you have overcut daily chapel exercises. I have grave reason to believe that you are smoking and then trying to cover up the fact by the use of heavy doses of cloves and spices. I am sorry to say that, generally speaking, your record is quite unsatisfactory. For these, and sundry other reasons, I am writing this note to inform you that you will not be allowed to register for the second quarter without giving me very definite assurances as to your attitude and conduct in every respect.³²

³⁰ See the Fisk Catalogs from 1915-1924.

³¹ Fisk University News, Annual Calendar, Vol. X, No.7, March 1920, 25.

³² McKenzie to Mr. Nathaniel Fearonce, December 26, 1921, F.A. McKenzie Collection, Box 12, Folder 6.

In most instances, these letters and the threat of suspension or dismissal from the University were used to ensure the future cooperation of the student. Most students could ill afford the financial and social recourse of suspension from school.

In certain cases, McKenzie wrote directly to the student's parents to inform them of their children's misconduct. Without complete certainty, it is possible to assume that McKenzie's strategy in these instances was based on the knowledge that the humiliation of having the president of the University write to one's parents would ensure that student would not re-offend. It is also possible to reason that the effect of these letters had consequences that went beyond the desire to ensure student conformity. The subtle threats and implications of such letters went beyond the student's disobedience. McKenzie's letters were rife with subtle critiques and insults regarding Fisk parents' child rearing abilities, but also their personal character. McKenzie's letters were well known, as W.E.B. Du Bois stated in his 1924 speech that parents of Fisk students were not consulted in disciplinary matters, but, "on the contrary, they are curtly preached at and threatened."³³ As members of the black-middle class whose identity was very much rooted in appearing respectable and on personal character, an attack from a white man in power, such as McKenzie was seen as a serious insult to their sense of self. In one letter to Mrs. Hunt, a mother of two Fisk students, McKenzie made several charges against her and her husband's character. McKenzie directed his comments first to Mrs. Hunt's son, remarking on his inability to find employment, lack of dedication to school, and questioning the company he was keeping. Next, McKenzie took the liberty to inform Mrs. Hunt of her daughter's moral backsliding. In his letter McKenzie wrote, "I am sorry to take this occasion to express my regret that your daughter seems to be resentful over

³³ Du Bois, "Editorial" p.7

our rules of chaperonage. If she should not quickly change her point of view, would it not be better or her to go to some school which was looser in its discipline?"³⁴ Fisk students, like Mrs. Hunt's daughter, frequently displayed their displeasure over the regulations governing male and female interaction. Students' felt chaperonage was an insult to their status as young adults. Fisk students often engaged in what the University deemed were illicit interactions. Comparable letters like Nathaniel Fearonce's and Mrs. Hunt's were common throughout McKenzie's presidency as these tactics were used to ensure the students' compliance to rules on campus.

The letters also reveal that Fisk students, both male and female, were acting out against the rules imposed upon them. The letter to Mrs. Hunt reveals as much about McKenzie's disciplinary tactics as it does about female Fisk students' reactions to the regulations. As evidenced by the revolt, the student committee and other disciplinary incidents, male students at Fisk could both publicly and privately denounce what they saw as unjust rules. The students' complaints against McKenzie's oppressive administration were made by male students and were thus seen as claims to black manhood. Female students, however, still operated within an ideological framework that privileged femininity over feminism and required their compliance to maintaining a respectable appearance and behavior. Thus, female students did not have the same outlets for airing their discontents as black men, and like Mrs. Hunt's daughter, privately disobeyed. The outcome of McKenzie's control of students' social life and his ideas about race are hard to separate from the larger cultural changes that were occurring in American society. It is true that McKenzie's aloof manner and authoritarian style of leadership antagonized an already tense situation; but, the resultant strike of 1925 was

³⁴ Letter from McKenzie to Mrs. H.A. Hunt, March 25, 1920. F.A. McKenzie collection, Box 13, Folder 8

much more than a clash between disgruntled youth and an overbearing President. The McKenzie presidency (1915-1925) overlapped with a significant period of transition in black middle-class racial ideology. Attempting to sweep back a much larger sea of cultural change, the clamp down on Fisk's student culture and the subsequent backlash of students might be seen as a microcosm of the generational divide and ideological change that was emerging in this period.

McKenzie's approach to race advancement was rooted in older notions of white paternalism. As one historian described it, McKenzie's racial politics, were "paternalistic to the core" and "had no place for Negro assertiveness."³⁵ In a statement of grievances against McKenzie students called attention to the President's racist practices,

President McKenzie is making every effort to increase the power and influence of the white South at Fisk and is catering to southern white prejudice. He has done this so openly and with such evident disregard of Negro public opinion, that the matter has brought comment even from white southerners and astonishment at the president's lack of faith in the Negro race or regard for what it thinks.³⁶

The student's sense of injustice stemmed from a growing resentment of educational and racial philosophies that were based on white missionary paternalism and white middle-class values. Fisk students articulated a new race consciousness that was in contrast with the old strategies of race advancement. The accusations made by the students and the eventual strike were indicative of greater ideological differences between the white educators and middle-class blacks who believed in racial advancement through the display of good moral character, respectability, and uplift. Once the dominant ideology, these ideals were now seen as antagonistic to those of the younger generation of middle-class black youth. The ideas of race advancement held by the Fisk students were

³⁵ Lamon, *The Black Community in Nashville*, 231

³⁶ A Statement of Grievances against Fayette A. McKenzie as President of Fisk University. Fisk University Archives, Box 14, Folder 18.

increasingly taking on the ideology of the New Negro era which advanced a more militant style of race ideology.

The New Negro at Fisk

Over the course of the McKenzie administration students began to reject what they reasoned were “unjust” and “unreasonable” rules. McKenzie policies were rooted in a framework that was out of touch with new race and gender ideologies. Campus life for Fisk students of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century closely resembled that of McKenzie’s administration. The Fisk students of the progressive era were guided by the rules of respectability that emphasized good character and self-restraint. A belief in these values ensured students’ compliance to the university’s rules. However, the student population attending Fisk during McKenzie’s presidency was significantly different from the previous generations. The black middle class experienced an ideological shift during this period that was stimulated by the numerous changes in American society. The New Negro era coincided with the rise of the consumer economy, the World War and the mass migration of blacks from rural areas to urban cities of the South and North, and changes to gender norms. These events caused a great deal of ideological upheaval amongst the black and white middle class. The New Negroes were a diverse group that comprised members of the black middle class, intellectuals, artists, labor advocates and black nationalists. The New Negro movement was critical of racial politics that accommodated the dominant white culture. These students were often the sons and daughters of college graduates and members of the aspiring or middle class. Students like those who attended Fisk were as historian Michael Fultz describes, “more attuned to the spirit of freedom on

college campuses nationwide and more likely to express their dissatisfaction with notions of piety increasingly irrelevant to the maintenance of their social status.”³⁷ That agitation occurred on Fisk’s campus during this era was not surprising as the school was known to attract those students from the black middle-class. Fisk students were certainly a part of this larger cultural shift and their reactions to McKenzie and the regulations imposed on them can be read in this way.

Beginning around 1915, the black middle-class began to undergo a number of transitions. One of the most significant changes was the diversification in ideas of race advancement. The strategy of uplift and respectability that had dominated the progressive era gave way to the New Negro era. As one *Chicago Defender* journalist put it, “much is said of the ‘new Negro’; we haven’t such a critter, just the same old tinted individual roused into self-consciousness, awakened to his own possibilities, with stiffened backbone, with new ambitions, new desires, new hopes for the future.”³⁸ The New Negro was not so much *new* as the name would suggest, but rather it was a re-envisioning of race advancement. Where the late-Victorian and progressive era had used respectability and black women as markers of race progress, the New Negro’s era equated advancement through the achievements of black manhood. The New Negro then, was a term that referred to a new sense of black manhood. The New Negro strategy for race advancement was critical of accommodationist black leadership and demanded black Americans qualification for equal rights.³⁹ The New Negro was involved in anti-lynching organizations and fought segregation and discrimination through other local and national

³⁷ Fultz, “*The Morning Commeth*,” 104.

³⁸ *Chicago Defender*, “The Old and the New,” Jan 03, 1920, p.16, col.1.

³⁹ The accommodationist black leadership implied here is in reference to Booker T. Washington, as he was often criticized racial politics and pandering to white philanthropists.

organizations.⁴⁰ Although these organizations articulated a similar ideology of uplift as the previous generation, they were staffed with professionals trained in the social sciences and areas of social service as opposed to the volunteer associations associated with black women's clubs. As Deborah Gray White explains, the New Negro was "militant in search of civil rights and economic opportunities, and eagerly embraced a culture that celebrated its African origins and African American traditions."⁴¹ In one of his more radical pieces, Du Bois wrote in the *Souls of White Folk*,

When the black man begins to dispute the white man's title to certain alleged bequests of the Fathers in wage and position, authority and training; and when his attitude toward charity is sullen anger rather than humble jollity; when he insists on his human right to swagger and swear and waste,- then the spell is suddenly broken and the philanthropist is ready to believe that Negroes are impudent.⁴²

What further differentiated the New Negro from the previous generation and other American youth at the time was what Robert Haden described as "their race consciousness, their group awareness, [and] their sense of sharing a common purpose."⁴³

Although the New Negro's race ideology was based on older models of advancement, they were markedly different from the previous generation as Alain Locke, prominent black intellectual and major public face of the New Negro movement, wrote,

the sociologist, the philanthropist, the race-leader are not unaware of the New Negro, but they are at a loss to account for him...For the younger generation is vibrant with a new psychology; the new spirit is awake in the masses and under the very eyes of the professional observers is transforming what has been a perennial problem into the progressive phases of contemporary Negro life.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Among those male-led organizations were Marcus Garvy's Universal Negro Improvement Association, The NAACP, The National Race Congress, and the National Baptist Convention.

⁴¹ D.G. White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: Norton, 1999), 114.

⁴² W.E.B. Du Bois "The souls of White Folk" in, *Black on White: Black Writers on What it Means to be White*, D. Roediger, ed. (New York: Schocken, 1998) 186.

⁴³ R. Hayden, "Preface to the New Negro", *The New Negro*, A. Locke, ed., (New York: Atheneum, 1968), xi.

⁴⁴ A. Locke, "The New Negro", in *The New Negro*, p.3.

As the new generation of race leaders, the New Negroes articulated a race and class consciousness that was expressed in their support for equal citizenship rights, involvement in labor movements, politics as well as through the arts, literature, and on college campuses.

The movement began in Harlem and was intricately linked to the Negro Renaissance (later known as the Harlem Renaissance), a cultural and artistic project initiated by young black artists and intellectuals. The Harlem Renaissance and New Negro movement espoused a racial ideology that centered on race solidarity and race pride. Writing about the importance of the Harlem Renaissance to New Negro ideology, Jeffrey C. Stewart explains that, "Through art blacks could build social solidarity and race consciousness, without overtly threatening the white power structure. Moreover, by developing their cultural productivity, blacks would contradict the notion that African Americans were a people without culture, whose only choice was complete assimilation."⁴⁵ In his 1925 book, *The New Negro*, Alain Locke, prominent black intellectual and major proponent of the New Negro era called for a celebration of black culture, writing, "Negro life is not only establishing new contacts and founding new centers, it is finding a new soul. There is a fresh spiritual and cultural focusing. We have, as the heralding sing, an unusual outburst of creative expression. There is a renewed race spirit that consciously and proudly sets itself apart."⁴⁶ From Harlem, the ideals embodied by this new Renaissance spread to other urban cities in the North and made their way South and also to the campuses of black colleges and universities.

⁴⁵ J.C. Stewart, ed., "Race Contacts and Interracial Relations"- Alain LeRoy Locke, Moorland-Spingarn Series, xxxii.

⁴⁶ Hayden, "Preface to the New Negro", in *The New Negro*, xvii

The black press played a significant role in the dissemination of the New Negro ideology. The magazines and periodicals of the New Negro era featured the artwork and literature of Renaissance artists and intellectuals. The black press also helped to further the cause of college and university students, and gave special attention to their struggles, as their strife on the college campuses represented a microcosm of larger racial issues. The many campus outbursts that occurred during this period were covered extensively in the black magazines and periodicals including Du Bois' *Crisis*, Sociologist Charles S. Johnson's *The Opportunity*, and *The Messenger*. Michael Fultz notes that "although the specific issues included acquiescence to segregation, draconian campus policies, and the hiring of black administrators and professors, the major interpretive theme in these protests was the new-found self-determination on the part of African-American middle class parents and students of the 1920s."⁴⁷ The content in these magazines and periodicals was considerably more radical than any race publications before. Censorship of the new race ideology was practiced at Fisk, as McKenzie banned all New Negro publications except for content edited issues of Du Bois' *The Crisis*. Despite the censorship it is highly likely that students were still able to keep connected to the happenings in the North and throughout the South through these influential magazines and periodicals. University and college students were some of the main advocates for the new ideas of race advances as the militancy and rhetoric of New Negro movement appealed to the younger generation. The strikes and protests on the black college campuses throughout the era reflected the emphasis on self-determination and race pride and embodied the new militant approach to race advancement.

⁴⁷ Fultz, "The Morning Cometh", 104.

The New Negro's more radical and militant strategy for race advancement differed greatly when compared to the self-restraint practiced by the race leaders of the previous generation. Part of the militancy of the movement can be attributed to the ideology's emphasis on re-defining black manhood. The New Negro movement occurred at the same time that America was experiencing dramatic changes in ideas of class and gender. Much of the New Negro ideology was veiled in gendered terms that placed race advancement in the hands of black men, while relegating women to a more subordinate and supportive role, a definitive change from the previous era where women were seen as the markers of race progress. This was a strategy for race advancement that worked to increase the rights of black men. Instead of volunteer organizations headed by women, uplift took on a professional character, as Chapman notes in her dissertation on gender, culture and the New Negro era. "Male dominated organizations set the agenda for racial advancement, revising the earlier Victorian black feminist vision of uplift for the benefit of a man-centered conception of racial equality based largely on economic rather than gender considerations."⁴⁸ Uplift and respectability remained a dominant theme of black race ideology, but took on a new form in the New Negro era.

The New Negro race ideology was also tied to constructions of a middle-class identity that differed greatly from the previous era. For black men, late-Victorian virtues of manliness were such that it created a docile and genteel group of black middle class men, who demonstrated race advancement through their accommodation to white middle class standards. However, as the Progressive Era came to a close the ideological framework upon which respectability was founded became increasingly associated with

⁴⁸ E.D. Chapman, "To Be Young, a Woman, and Colored: Gender, Popular Culture, and Politics in the New Negro Era, PhD dissertation, (Yale University, 2006), 5.

feminine ideals. Respectability—a one-time favored approach to race advancement—had lost its appeal to a generation of men whose middle-class identity was intimately and increasingly tied to masculinity. Chapman describes this new brand of race ideology as a

formulation [that] dictated that black men win the economic opportunities, civil rights, and social potency that would enable them to act as patriarchs in their homes and in society. This achievement of patriarchal authority on the part of black men would advance the whole race as black women and children were protected and provided for by their husbands, fathers, and brothers.⁴⁹

The New Negro movement's rhetoric thus offered a vision of race advancement through the recognition of black manhood.

This vision for race advancement was affected by the larger cultural shifts among the middle-class; among which was the rise of the new consumer culture. The ideals of self-restraint and good character were becoming less relevant during a time when the American economic philosophy was shifting to a consumer oriented model. The Victorian ideals of thrift were in opposition to what Gail Bederman states was, “the consumer cultures ethos of pleasure and frivolity [that] clashed with the ideas of manly self restraint, [that] further undermin[ed] the potency of middle-class manliness.”⁵⁰ This shift had a significant effect on America as a whole, and also on African Americans who had to re-articulate a new definition of class identity, race politics and gender roles. Describing this change Martin Summers notes that “this shift from an ethos of producer to one of consumption, from character to personality, from self-denial to self-expression and fulfillment, produced cultural reverberations within the black middle-class”.⁵¹ The emphasis on consumerism legitimized previously unsanctioned leisure activities

⁴⁹ Ibid., 41

⁵⁰ G. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 13.

⁵¹ Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents*, 289.

including dancing, listening to jazz and the blues, frequenting clubs and speakeasies. Black youth, and especially black men expressed their desire for individual freedoms in the form of cultural productions of dress, music, art, and sexuality.

Fisk students were an integral part of the cultural change, both as producers and consumers of the new cultural movements. The 1925 strike can be seen as the interaction between the New Negro movement's re-envisioning of race advancement, the shift in middle-class values and the rise of consumer culture. The allegations against McKenzie and the requests made by students to the administration regarding regulations governing fashion trends, social activities, music, dance and interactions between the sexes reflected the impact of these mass cultural changes. The desire for self-government and increased rights for students were articulated in male centered rhetoric of the New Negro movement. In his speech to the Fisk Alumni in 1924, Du Bois argued that the stringent rules enforced by the McKenzie administration had stifled Fisk students' manhood and self-expression.⁵² Further, the committee members who approached McKenzie and the Board of Trustees consisted of all male students. While little information exists regarding how female students at Fisk felt about the McKenzie administration, it is reasonable to assume through the presidential correspondence and disciplinary records that they were similarly frustrated as their male compatriots. The social and cultural conventions that dictated the decorum for female behavior of the time, along with the new male-centered New Negro ideology, were not conducive with creating the same space for the black female voice as it did for men. Taking these factors into consideration, although female students were equally affected by McKenzie's rules, they did not figure prominently in the struggles with the administration.

⁵² Du Bois, "Editorial," 5.

The male students at Fisk acted according to the standards set by other New Negro race leaders, and as such took on the role of advocating on behalf of the entire student body. While struggling to increase their own rights, these male students also maintained a respect for the interests of the female students. Amongst the many listed grievances, improving the quality of life for women students at Fisk was atop their priorities. Looking at the way that gender operated for women in the New Negro race ideology, and the subordinate place that women held in the New Negro's plan for race advancement explains why Fisk women did not figure prominently in the rebellion. While little exists in the Fisk records, looking at Spelman, where similar rules and regulations governing student life persisted, offers a way to begin to look at the way gender and race advancement operated for women in the New Negro era.

The New Negro Woman: Spelman 1915-1925

The re-envisioning of race ideology during the New Negro era displaced the previously dominant ideals of respectability and the role of black women who were previously seen as the signifiers of race progress. As Stephanie Evans notes, in the previous era, black middle-class ideas of race advancement held that, "black women were more biologically capable than black men (or white people) of setting moral standards—which therefore made them more responsible to do so."⁵³ As we have seen, the term "New Negro" predominately denoted black men, as it was derived from male-centered ideology. Considering these dynamic shifts in the ways in which race and gender were being rethought, two significant questions arise. Having been displaced as the

⁵³ S.Y. Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954: An Intellectual History*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007), 35.

predominant markers of race progress, what was to be the role for women in the New Negro era? Further, how did the new youth culture, mass consumerism, shifts in gender norms, and changes of race ideology impact these women's sense of self and race in this new era? A brief look at student life at Spelman during this period of transitional change offers one point of insight into the ways that the young generation of middle-class black women tried to reconcile these tensions.

In 1910, a year after the death of Spelman co-founder Harriet Giles, Lucy Hale Tapley became president of Spelman. Like Fayette A. McKenzie, Tapley was a part of the generation of white northern administrators who ascribed to missionary paternalism. Tapley was born in West Brooksville, Maine in 1857. She received her early education at a private school in Maine, and later attended Bucksport Seminary also in the North. In the 1890s, Tapley moved to Atlanta and began her teaching career at Spelman. As a teacher at Spelman, she had many duties, including hall matron, practice school principal, and administrator of the teacher training department.⁵⁴ Tapley, who had dedicated her teaching career to the educational mission of uplifting black women, continued to lead Spelman with the same Christian mission as outlined by the founders of the school.

While maintaining the integrity of the school's missionary spirit, Tapley made a number of significant changes to Spelman's academic curriculum. She incorporated more vocational training into the curriculum, reflecting the educational philosophies championed by white philanthropists. The utilitarian nature that Spelman's curriculum began to take on under Tapley was a significant change from the academic curriculum established by co-founders Sophia Packard and Harriett Giles, as it emphasized practical

⁵⁴ F.M Read, *The Story of Spelman College* (Atlanta: 1961) p.187.

training for teachers.⁵⁵ As at Fisk, white philanthropists were the main funding support for Spelman, and the increased vocational nature of the academic curriculum is indicative of this support. Yolanda L. Watson and Sheila T. Gregory note that, “the vocationalism of the Spelman curriculum did not disintegrate the progress made toward the realization of a strong academic curriculum; however, it did encourage the socialization of Spelman students for greater service in their homes, social lives, and church.”⁵⁶ In this way then, Tapley continued the tradition of uplift and progress that characterized the vision of black women’s progress held by the founders.⁵⁷

At Spelman the terms “respectability”, “uplift”, and “self-help” were more than a set of ideals. These were principles that took concrete form in the organization of regimented daily schedules, in the rules that governed students’ interactions with one another and with faculty, through dress codes and extra curricular activities. During Tapley’s tenure (1910-1927), Spelman’s campus life remained consistent in terms of the educational goals and racial politics of the earlier period, even as the larger cultural changes began to permeate students’ mentalities. Authoritarian rule was the norm at black institutions of higher education, and the rules enforced at Spelman were no less severe than any other schools. Tapley refused to allow an NAACP chapter to form on Spelman’s campus, political activity including debates was prohibited, formal calls from

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 191-193.

⁵⁶ Watson & Gregory, *Daring to Educate*, 83.

⁵⁷ Academic progress was achieved under Tapley, as Spelman received collegiate status in 1924.

Watson and Gregory argue that the vocationalism at Spelman had less to do with Tapley’s educational philosophies, but more to do with Spelman’s need for funding from white philanthropists, who at this time, supported vocational training for blacks. Watson and Gregory further argue that Tapley had been a long-time member of the Spelman faculty before becoming president, and had supported the academic vision advanced by Packard and Giles. Watson and Gregory further propose that Tapley’s support of vocationalism in the academic curriculum was merely to show conformity to white philanthropists. They argue that out of the public eye, Tapley was working to continue to honor the academic vision for Spelman held by the founders, “that Spelman women and girls would be educated for professional aims as well as to uplift the Black race.” 85

men were strictly chaperoned and limited to twenty minutes once a week.⁵⁸ Under Tapley, Spelman students experienced an increase in regulations governing campus life. What became increasingly problematic however was that Tapley, like McKenzie at Fisk, continued to uphold older practices during a time when these regulations were becoming antagonistic with the changing cultural attitudes.

More than any other president, Tapley's tenure has been characterized as one of strict moral order and discipline. Florence Read reported that a teacher had once commented about Miss Tapley's physical appearance and demeanor, that she "had a brother who was a sea-captain but looked like a school teacher, while Miss Tapley was a school teacher but looked like a sea-captain." About Tapley, Read wrote that "in all matters of discipline, Miss Tapley required strict obedience to the rules; nor were the rules adjusted much as the times changed." Yet Read maintained that, "Her loyalty to her own convictions and her sincerity of purpose commanded admiration from students, parents, and teachers."⁵⁹ Former students echoed these sentiments, and upon her death in 1932 many alumnae eulogized the late Spelman president by stating that her dedication to the education of black women had been paramount and many reminisced that her stern manner had commanded a great deal of respect from students. Troas Lewis Latimer, a former student wrote to Spelman upon hearing of Tapley's death stating,

Miss Tapley lives in the hearts and lives of all who knew her. Her very name inspires reverence and veneration. She lives as the embodiment of noble womanhood, lofty ideals and Christian service. Miss Tapley's personality reflected the rugged nature of her native state and her sailor ancestry. Nevertheless, a warm smile always radiated from her genial and humorous soul. She communicated courage and confidence to all who touched her life. She made us feel that we could not fail her. Spelman daughters must be true, loyal and noble, if they would succeed. Miss Tapley was a woman of broad human

⁵⁸Gordon, "Race, Class and the Bonds of Womanhood", 7-33.

⁵⁹ Read, *The Story of Spelman*, 188.

sympathies. Her understanding of human nature as well as her sympathy for our oppressed minority group aided her with every phase of her work. She realized that no group could do the best work when daily crushed, misunderstood and underrated. I can hear her in my imagination saying in a clear and convincing accent, 'My girls are not inferior to any group of girls in the world.'⁶⁰

Mrs. Latimer's words describe Tapley's educational and racial philosophy. That Spelman girls were taught a sense of equality and race pride may perhaps explain Miss Tapley's ability to maintain order and discipline at Spelman. Mrs. Latimer's words signal the power of respectability and uplift as integral components of middle-class black women's identity. These ideals would continue to shape black women's role in race advancement throughout the New Negro era, as the woman-centered emphasis of respectability and uplift became replaced by the male-centered New Negro race ideology.

As the New Negro race ideology called for black men to become more militant public leaders of the race, black men trained in the burgeoning fields of the social sciences and in social services began to professionalize and organized agencies, such as the National Urban League and the NAACP at the national rather than community level. Consequently, uplift positions previously held by black women began to be taken over by black men. And volunteer activities associated with community uplift and outreach that were once the purview of middle-class black women became professionalized-male spaces. These shifts in the uplift-roles in black culture, fostered by the male-centered ideologies of the New Negro movement, prompted a re-envisioning and reworking of the woman's role of uplifting the race. The gender ideologies for women that materialized during the New Negro era drew on the established values of motherhood, domesticity,

⁶⁰Letter to President Read from Troas Lewis Latimer November, "Our Appreciation for Miss Tapley" Spelman College, 22, 1933, Deceased Alumnae Files.

and piety, era and focused on supporting the foundation of the race in the homes first and primarily.

In an article titled “The Efficient Housewife and Mother”, Spelman student Carmen E. Trent writes about the role of women in the household, “we find in the countries where civilization has long held sway that woman, the housewife and mother, the ‘Queen’ of the home, stands aloof on her throne devising plans and setting examples whereby the members of her household may find happiness and contentment.” Trent further explicates that, “a wife’s responsibility is weighty” and that “she knows that the essentials of the ideal home and family must be won first through service to her husband”⁶¹ As historian Erin Chapman states regarding the new role of women,

rather than formulate a modern, New Negro feminism to replace the Victorian black feminism of the previous generation or to define an independent black woman’s self-determination within the New Negro ethos, black women were to support the patriarchal aspirations...the New Negro defined the ideal New Negro woman as a Race mother, a woman devoted to the race’s interests, even to the exclusion of her own aspirations.⁶²

What differentiated the New Negro’s conception of the woman in racial uplift from the previous generation was that it relegated women’s role in race advancement as separate to black men’s race work.

While the gendered roles in the New Negro era became separate, women of the time still viewed their newly articulated positions as equally important. The writings in the Spelman student newspaper, suggest that Spelman women took on their re-envisioned role with the same pride and vigor that they had in the earlier period. For middle-class black women, a college education was the primary vehicle for training women for their

⁶¹ Carmen E. Trent, “The Efficient Housewife and Mother,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.43, No.2, November 1926, 17-19.

⁶² Chapman, “To be Young, a Woman, and Colored,”⁶³.

roles as mothers and wives. The successful outcome of their training was seen as a heavy responsibility as is reflected in an article written by Spelman student Myrtle Dona Hull, outlining the duties of college women,

The Negro woman, unlike any other woman of any race, started off equally yoked with Negro men. From slavery they have journeyed side by side. Equal educational advantages have been given both. Therefore rests a peculiar and tremendous responsibility...we are resolved to scale the loftiest heights with our brothers and thus lend that companionship which is so much needed if our struggling race is to reach the goal toward which it is plodding.⁶³

As is evidenced by Hull, Spelman women saw themselves on equal terrain as black men, and their roles as equally important in the new era of race advancement.

Middle-class black women, like those at Spelman, continued to see race advancement as part of their duty as women; therefore, they continued their work in the area of uplift, and their education at Spelman reflected this continuity. What did change though in the New Negro era was an intensified emphasis on beginning this uplift first within their own homes. The vocational emphasis of Spelman's curriculum, and the extracurricular activities that were geared to training women for their future roles as mothers of the race, reflected the era's new race ideology. Sarah H. Case suggests, in her dissertation on race, respectability and women's education in the New South, "like contemporary African American leaders, Spelman women pointed to good homes, clean neighborhoods, and hard work as evidence of blacks' fitness for full citizenship rights."⁶⁴ Drawing on the rhetoric of uplift ideology and respectability, black women created a space for themselves in the New Negro era.

⁶³ Myrtle Dona Hull, "The College Woman of To-Day," *Spelman Messenger*, Vol. 38, No.3, December 1921, 8.

⁶⁴S.H. Case, "Renegotiating Race and Respectability in the Classroom: Women and Education in the New South" PhD Dissertation, (University of California Santa Barbara, December 2002), 168

The New Negro era's strategy for race advancement was aligned with the previous generation's ideals of uplift and respectability; in fact, it re-emphasized the late-Victorian and progressive ideals of femininity and domesticity, as the New Negro era's vision for women deemed that their work for the race was best served in the home and community. Further, these ideals required that women continue to exercise modesty in dress, maintain good character, display piety, have temperance and be thrifty. However, as respectability and uplift were becoming the purview of black women's role in race advancement, these older ideals were becoming increasingly antagonistic with changes in conceptions of women's sexuality and gender norms, new fashion trends, and a burgeoning beauty culture promoted by the rise in mass consumerism.

The New Woman of the 1920s represented a re-thinking of femininity that was in direct opposition to the Victorian ideals of modesty. Adhering to the tenets of respectability had been an important part of middle-class women's identity. Conforming to white America's standards of femininity was one way that enabled black women to dispel white stereotypes of black women's sexuality. Like black men in America, women underwent a similar re-envisioning of gender roles. The New Woman of the 1920s challenged women's gender roles and ideas regarding beauty, fashion, sexuality and politics.⁶⁵ This shift coincided with the rise of consumerism, women's entrance into the labor force in areas previously reserved for men during the First World War, as well as changes to women's fashions and new beauty aesthetics. As such, the new woman of the 1920s stood in opposition to the restrained femininity that governed woman of the previous generation. She was college educated, self-confident, espoused feminist ideals,

⁶⁵ Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 11-50.

championed equal rights for women and was fashionably contemporary in her dress and appearance.

It was in the urban centers of the North that the New Woman along with images of the flapper girl and the Blues Woman came to stand as new symbols for womanhood. Deborah Gray White notes that the Blues Woman's representation of sexual liberation, independence and individualism threatened the older generation's sensibilities in a way that was akin to the ideologies associated with the New Negro.⁶⁶ These images threatened the vision of respectability and self-restraint that middle-class black women had worked to cultivate. With the rise of consumerism and national advertising, images of these controversial women were constantly reproduced for the younger generation's visual consumption.

Changes in women's fashions and beauty coincided with this image of independence transmitted by the New Woman and Blues Woman. The new consumer culture helped to further ideas of individualism, as women had an array of skin creams, hair products, rouges and lipsticks which they could use to create their own individual looks.⁶⁷ The visual culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century linking women's outward appearances to their internal values persisted. In this way, women made powerful statements about their character through their choice of dress and personal style. Writing about beauty culture in American during this period, Kathy Peiss notes that for black women, the beauty culture was linked to race pride and advancement. Advertisements aimed at black middle-class women by black cosmetic entrepreneurs like

⁶⁶ White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 128.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 125.

Madame C.J. Walker promoted their products in a way that made beauty synonymous with respectability.⁶⁸

At Spelman, fashion and beauty were central concerns of both the faculty and students. Clothing was seen too as an important indicator of the personality of the wearer. Beauty was a woman's duty and indicated a certain level of self-respect. This included wearing the appropriate clothing, having one's hair neatly done and incorporated a regime of personal hygiene. The focus on beauty and fashion was at times misconstrued as women's vanity, however, Spelman student Lillian Walker, a Home Economics student writes that "this criticism should be that women do not spend enough intelligent thought on dress. To understand the art of good dressing shows wisdom not vanity."⁶⁹ Students were affected by the rise in consumerism and were aware of the latest fashion trends and what the new styles for women and what certain styles might convey about a woman's character. As part of the socialization in respectability and modesty, students learned how to dress appropriately for different occasions; they learned what colors, patterns and materials suited particular body types. It was expected that they learn to judge the appropriateness of their attire. In fact, a woman's appearance was viewed as an indicator of her level of intelligence. The rules concerning fashion on Spelman's campus remained consistent with the mission of creating respectable women, and as such were at odds with the new styles.

These new fashion trends, however, went against the virtues of modesty and respectability that students had been socialized to believe were to apply in all aspects of their lives, including their dress. In one particular article in the *Spelman Messenger*,

⁶⁸ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 221.

⁶⁹Lillian B. Walker, "Appropriate Clothing for Different Occasions," *Spelman Messenger*, Vol. 41, No.3, December 1924, 2.

Lillian Walker comments on the way that new styles are impacting women, and the need for continued discretion and moderation in one's dress,

The love for adornment and display in the female sex- the desire to attract, to be beautiful is also responsible for many changes. Each generation is in the grip of social customs; we submit unconsciously to the survivals of style. Change we want, but let us accept only such change as it is for the better, either in direction of comfort or beauty, or both.⁷⁰

For Spelman students, fashion and one's outward appearance were more than keeping up with the recent trends; they indicated to others a woman's sense of herself and provided an important measure of her character. The simplicity and modesty in dress as advocated by the Spelman administration required students' conformity and repressed individual expression, ideals which were in opposition with the ideals of the 1920s that promoted women's individualism.

Lucy Hale Tapley continued to uphold an austere dress code during a time when women's fashions were drastically different from the previous era. Without further archival evidence it is difficult to determine whether Tapley's rejections of the new fashions were the result of a generational gap or her desire to protect her students from visual scrutiny.⁷¹ Whatever the case may be, in a period where individualism and freedoms were exalted by the younger generation, Tapley continued to enforce strict rules that limited students' individual expression. Most students at Spelman did comply with the regulations and dress requirements; however, there were some students who rejected them, and their non-compliance was met with disciplinary action. This is evidenced by a

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.2

⁷¹ In the racially oppressive South, where stereotypes regarding black women's sexuality persisted, it is reasonable to assume that Tapley's enforcement of strict dress codes was in line with the belief that these rules would foster good moral character amongst Spelman women which would mark them as respectable women, thus protecting them against future harm.

letter from Tapley to one student's parents regarding her dress infraction. In her letter Tapley writes,

Lyda has not measured up to the mark reached by the others, and on Class Day, when she was expected to be a part of the high school and take her place in her class in the entrance to chapel and in the march she came dressed as she knew our girls were not permitted to dress. We do not expect Spelman girls to be ashamed to wear plain cotton stockings or oxford shoes, and Lyda came with the strap slippers and silk stockings. I regret this, and I feel quite sure that her parents would deplore her attitude in matters like this, too. Lyda must understand what we expect of our girls and be willing to conform to our requirements if she continues to be a student of the Seminary. The extravagances and thoughtlessness of some of the young people are certainly matters for thoughtful consideration as they surely point to unhappy future homes. We shall continue to require simple clothing and a cheerful obedience to our rules in this as in other matters...I sincerely hope and trust that Lyda will awaken and be more really earnest in the matter of preparing herself for the work of life. I know that she has a better chance than many of the girls who have not been favored within as good a home.⁷²

Lyda's nonconformity serves as an example that the rules of respectability conflicted with the new markers of middle class and women's desire for more self-determination and desire to participate in the new trends in fashion and beauty for some students. Students' also rebelled against the general regulations which were seen as restrictions on their individual expression, as is seen in a letter to college student Inez Johnson's father,

Inez has passed her work and has enough credits to become a senior next year, candidate for a degree. We are much distressed, however, about Inez's general attitude and spirit. She is not especially helpful. She seems to have a chip on her shoulder, and objects to lining up with regulations. I wish you might talk with her to see if she can make a supreme effort to be more sunshiny and sweeter. We would like to have her pleasant as a senior.⁷³

While these letters represent only two students' dissatisfaction with the dress code and general regulations, it is possible to assume that for other students the clothing styles of

⁷² Letter from President Tapley to Mr. John Mc Cree May 31, 1922, Deceased Alumnae Files.

⁷³ Letter from Tapley to Mr. Johnson, May 30, 1924, Deceased Alumnae Files.

late Victorian era no longer matched the trends of women's fashion in the early 1920s. Indeed, the rules governing fashion stifled many students individual expression.⁷⁴

It is difficult to assess how Spelman students felt, as the records that were left behind are mainly administrative in nature. The *Spelman Messenger*, a publication meant to provide an outlet for student voices, was also subject to the censorship of the faculty and administration. Thus the main sources of recorded protests that exist are disciplinary records, which cite few cases of dissent from students. This lack of recorded disciplinary action against students in the records could indicate two things: first, it is highly probable that Spelman students internalized the woman-centered philosophy of race advancement and truly believed in the ideology of respectability and uplift that guided the dress codes and regulations. Second, Spelman students had little to gain from fighting the established conventions, as these actions came with severe consequences, both at school and at home. Unlike their male counterparts whose actions were not only supported but demanded by the ideologies embodied by the idea of the New Negro, the women at Spelman had not such backing in the movement. In fact, principles in the movement anchored women to ideologies that discouraged public actions of dissent by women (as this was now a job for men) and encouraged solely private uplift endeavors for women.

In addition to a lack of ideological backing, women at Spelman also had a lot to lose by dissenting, as the consequences for breaking rules were severe on both the scholastic and social level. Those who failed to adhere to the established rules faced suspension or expulsion and also stood to lose the opportunities that a Spelman education afforded them. Spelman kept close contact with their alumnae and their activities post-

⁷⁴ Chapman, "The Whirlpools of Representation: New Negro Women and the Sex Race Marketplace", in "To Be Young, a Woman, and Colored", 108-161.

graduation. In the 1917 annual report published in the *Messenger*, Lucy Hale Tapley reported that the majority of graduates continued to live according to the Spelman ideal. She also noted that “not all are going to catch the real spirit and be willing to sacrifice personal comfort and social standing for the sake of others,” she added, “we admit it with sadness, but this number is in the minority.”⁷⁵ Even after graduation, students were subject to the scrutiny of Spelman authority and were expected to uphold the standards of the social education they had received—most continued to do so.

Indeed while students had much to lose by dissenting at Spelman, they stood to gain a great deal more by adhering to and internalizing the woman centered philosophies that inspired such things as the dress codes. As Lynn D. Gordon notes in her article on race, class and womanhood at Spelman, “Spelman students worked hard for their education, appreciated the opportunities offered by the seminary.” Moreover, Gordon writes that, “For African American women in the early twentieth century, Spelman Seminary represented a haven from a society where most whites did not believe blacks had the capacity for academic and professional work.”⁷⁶ In the 1921 annual report, Tapley commented on the atmosphere on Spelman’s campus, writing, “The fine spirit and hearty co-operation of many of the students with the teachers in both work and discipline was never more marked. It is doubtless due in large measure to these earnest, conscientious, and courageous Christian girls that cases of serious discipline have been so very few.”⁷⁷ Students did comply with the extracurricular activities set up by the faculty and the regulations governing school attire and with good reason--respectability as both a

⁷⁵ Lucy Hale Tapley, “Annual Report to the Trustees of Spelman Seminary,” *Spelman Messenger*, Vol.33, April 17, No.7, 3.

⁷⁶ Gordon, “Race, Class and the Bonds of Womanhood,” 18-19.

⁷⁷ Lucy Hale Tapley, “Annual Report,” *The Spelman Messenger*, Vol.37, No.7, 5.

strategy for racial and gender advancement in a sense worked, and women who graduated from Spelman were often found in positions of prominence. Spelman women took positions as teachers in schools across the South; others were involved in religious missions in American and abroad. Most graduates reported involvement with a local club and some rose to positions of prominence within these organizations.⁷⁸

Student life for women at Spelman under the leadership of Lucy Hale Tapley was based on the old generation's progressive ideals of womanly virtue and respectability. This philosophy stood alongside the re-articulation of women's role in the New Negro era's race ideology and the new definitions of womanhood promoted by the New Woman of the 1920s. Spelman women reconciled these ideological differences by maintaining the basic elements of respectability; students fused the older traditions with the new fashion trends, and changes in race and gender ideologies. There was a re-articulation of the progressive ideology that valued women as the moral guardians and leaders of the race. Spelman women continued to train and work in areas of racial uplift within their homes and in the surrounding community. Working within the established rules of respectability and blending the new trends students were able to dress in a manner that gave them self-confidence, agency, and autonomy while also allowing them to enter public spaces in the name of uplift. Although under the strict leadership of president Tapley, students were able to work within the confines of the old ideologies promoted in their scholastic environment.

⁷⁸ Virginia Hulsey Brown, "The Religious Influence of Spelman," *The Spelman Messenger*, Vol.33. No.2, November 1916,7-8. See also other annual reports of Tapley where she mentions the type of work Spelman graduates are involved in. For example, in 1916 all of the offices of the women's department of the National Baptist Convention Second were held by Spelman graduates. The Deceased Alumnae Files are another source for establishing information about the Spelman alumnae.

Conclusion

When Presidents Fayette Avery McKenzie and Lucy Hale Tapley resigned from their administrative positions in April 1925 and 1927 respectively, their retirements signaled the end of an era in black higher education. The missionary paternalism that had guided their regimes was repressive and decidedly out of touch with the changing cultural currents in American society. By the mid-1920s, the Victorian and Progressive Era's middle-class values that dictated campus life and delineated male and female gender norms were not the same as those held by the younger generation. The Fisk and Spelman student of the 1920s was imbued with the ideals of a new middle-class ethos that was informed by the youth culture, new definitions of gender roles and the rise of consumerism. Moreover, the philosophies that guided black education were antagonistic to the idealism of the New Negro era and emphasis of race pride that this movement advocated. So, when Fisk students took to the campus on February 4 1925 in open protest, their actions forced a re-thinking of the direction that the liberal arts institution was taking. Although the circumstances at Spelman were comparably less harsh, students nonetheless found reasons for discontent which they displayed through less overt means (i.e. breaking dress codes). Influenced by this wave of cultural change, Fisk and Spelman students demonstrated in varying capacities, their desire for more autonomy and self-determination.

Fisk and Spelman's academic training always reflected the latest developments. Although there was some cause for concern, the quality of Fisk and Spelman's education was among the best in black colleges and universities. Yet, when it came to the philosophies regarding the rules and regulations that governed students' social lives on

campus and the extracurricular activities, the administrators' stance on these issues had barely changed from the early days. The New Negro race ideology had a profound impact on students' racialized identities, and they would no longer tolerate paternalistic administrators who failed to promote racial equality in both the academic curriculum and in the daily happenings of campus life. What significant occurrences like the Fisk Strike conveyed was that students were no longer as willing to endure a stagnant higher-education environment characterized by what they felt were outdated rules and regulations. Furthermore, the Fisk Strike highlighted the need for administrative bodies at both schools to become more sensitive to the changing social and cultural trends, acknowledge the need for student autonomy, and more importantly, create an environment that recognized the needs of their students in this era of change. Campus life did not reflect the reality that Fisk and Spelman graduates would face after graduation. Students were socialized and trained to be the leaders of the race. In order to properly succeed in their intended goals, Fisk and Spelman needed proper academic training and also the social life at school to reflect this reality. By recognizing the intellectual, social and cultural needs and abilities of the black men and women who attended these schools, educators had a responsibility to provide a quality liberal arts education that continued to socialize students for their further race work. The next administrations at Fisk and Spelman would be given the difficult task of shedding the cloak of paternalism that had guided the educational philosophies of these institutions for so long.

Epilogue New Directions

“Now new curiosity was awakened. The New Negro described by Alain Locke and others stirred Negro students into more awareness of their lacks and their opportunities; and at the same time created a greater enthusiasm to enlarge their capacities, greater self-confidence, and a greater sense of responsibility to develop their latent abilities”¹ - Florence M. Read

In the late 1920s, the hiring of Thomas Elsa Jones at Fisk (March 1926), and Florence Matilda Read at Spelman (September 1927), signified the beginning of a new era at the two institutions. Both presidents worked to maintain a balance between upholding the founding principles of Fisk and Spelman while also incorporating modern ideas in the institutions. The educational philosophies’ of Jones and Read differed greatly from the missionary ethos that had characterized the administrative regimes of their predecessors. Jones and Read were selected to lead the schools in a new direction, one that would help them realize the ideal of providing a true liberal arts education for black men and women. The new presidents were sensitive to the need to modernize Fisk and Spelman, and worked to improve both the academic and social life at their respective institutions by changing out-dated rules and giving the students more freedom and control over their education.

In his welcoming address to the student at Fisk, Jones summed up his educational ideals stating, “no subject is too profound, nor ideal too high for Fisk students to strive for...it plans to give as good a college education as can be found anywhere in the United States.”² Similarly at Spelman, Florence Read stated that the new focus of the institution

¹ F.M. Read, *The Story of Spelman*, (Atlanta: 1961),249.

² Dr. Thomas E. Jones, “The Meaning of a Fisk Welcome,” *The Greater Fisk Herald*, Vol. 11, No.1, October 1926, 9.

would be to provide as good an education as any liberal arts college.³ They began with amending the academic curriculum, eliminating all the lower level grades schools that had previously been offered.⁴ As coursework became more rigorous, both schools reduced the amount of domestic work required of students to further facilitate scholastic achievement. There was also an increase in the number and scope of college courses and majors available to students in the areas of the social sciences, humanities, and sciences. They also worked to achieve the ideal of racial equality on which the schools' were originally premised by hiring more black faculty members and allowing students more autonomy in the area of student run organizations. These administrative and faculty hires demonstrated Jones' and Read's commitment to racial equality, and more importantly their commitment to ensuring that Fisk and Spelman students received what *they* felt was the highest quality education from the top academics in their fields.

The new spirit demonstrated by the new presidents was based on a pedagogical perspective that recognized the importance of fostering a balance between academic and extracurricular activities. To improve campus life, both presidents sought to ameliorate the outdated rules and regulations that governed student life by enacting curricular changes and expanding the realm of extracurricular activities available to students. Education had always been an important socializing agent and tool for racial uplift. As blacks were seen to have suffered moral and cultural stagnation from slavery, faculty and the administrators saw their duty to guide students in the right direction. All activities on campus then were devised as training tools to help facilitate uplift training. However, under Thomas Jones and Florence Read, extracurricular activities and social events were

³ Read, *The Story of Spelman*, 215-216.

⁴ Both Fisk and Spelman had previously offered High School training for students. By 1927 and 1928, Fisk and Spelman respectively had eliminated these courses.

more reflective of the new youth culture that had been developing since the early 1920s. Activities such as dancing, and the institution of fraternities and sororities, that were banned at one time were now allowed to foster students' individuality and also to encourage greater collegiality.

For aspiring and middle-class blacks of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, higher education was an important vehicle for personal and racial uplift. The formal academic curriculum, as well as the structure of campus life and extracurricular activities, functioned as important socializing agents for students and provided the tools needed for racial uplift. While the goals for black education remained consistent—creating an educated middle-class responsible for race advancement—the means for achieving those ends shifted alongside larger cultural changes in America. Thus, the educational philosophies that guided black higher education underwent a number of changes between 1880 and 1930, ranging from missionary paternalism to an ideology more in tune with black empowerment.

Changes in educational philosophies and practices also coincided with social trends, including the surge of industrial training, the rise of the social sciences, the shift from respectability to the New Negro as the dominant race ideology, the impact of consumerism on the black middle-class, and the re-envisioning of the gender norms for men and women that occurred over time. Furthermore, the effects of these wider social and cultural changes impacted both the formal and informal academic socialization and influenced students' ideas about the meaning of education and their role in the process. While these changes had different implications for black men and black women, this new

climate fostered a black higher education environment where students expected more say and autonomy when it came to their education and racial uplift.

Throughout, this thesis has sought to move beyond institutional histories by exploring the ways students worked as active agents in shaping their educational environment. By exploring the components of the formal socialization process, it has become clear that more research is needed that takes a deeper look at other tools of socialization to get a better understanding of all of the forces shaping students' racialized identity. For example, a more thorough study of course material, specifically textbooks, would help achieve this goal. While course catalogs are good places to start, they are not enough as they are not very detailed and merely outline what the course intends to teach the student. Through looking at the textbooks white educators selected for the southern black students, historians can get a better understanding of the curricular content and not only see what students were taught but how the course information was framed.

Closer examinations of the more informal components of socialization are also needed. Educators used extracurricular activities and organizations to instill in students ideas of respectability and uplift. While the scholarship has examined the rationale behind educators' use of extracurricular activities for these purposes and also how male and female students became involved in race work through clubs and organizations post graduation, research is needed that looks at the student organizations on campus. A more in-depth look about the inner workings of these student-run organizations would answer questions about how they helped further reinforce preferred racial ideologies and prepared the students for their tasks of racial uplift.

Further, the body of research concerning race socialization in education would be greatly enhanced by a closer look at how New Negro ideology manifested itself in the South. Traditionally the New Negro movement is studied as an urban Northern phenomenon. However, as this work suggests, many facets of this movement and its ideologies were being expressed in the South as well. So while the North may have had a more "welcoming" climate for the emergence of these ideas, they should not be attributed solely to Northern artists and intellectuals. While regional differences may have occurred, it is clear that the New Negro movement was equally significant in the South. An exploration into the ways in which the ideas were expressed and re-shaped to fit the cultural conditions of southern society can add a new dimension both to our understanding of the New Negro movement and to our understanding of southern culture.

This thesis has demonstrated the interaction between larger cultural, social, and economic factors and their impact on educators and both the formal and informal curriculums. As these ideas shifted over time, so too did educational philosophies. As an instrument for socialization, higher education was particularly sensitive to these ideological shifts. In order for educators to continue to effectively instill the desired middle-class ideals they needed to structure both the formal and informal curriculum to keep in line with contemporary ideologies. As we have seen, when educators failed to keep in line with the current cultural practices and ideas, students demonstrated their discontent through both open protest as well as less direct forms of insubordination. Students' notions of race, class and gender affected their willingness to submit to formal and informal socialization practices that failed to comply with their own world views. Thus, through their belief and participation in contemporary ideologies and practices

students directly impacted their educational environment affecting both the formal and informal socialization process.

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