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Stephanie Evans

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African American Women's Intellectual Legacy

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Abstract: In this article, the author explores educational and intellectual histories of African American women. First, the author views Black women's college participation before the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court desegregation case. Next, she explores historic Black women's scholarship in master's and doctoral programs. Third, she discusses Anna Cooper's and Mary Bethune's definitions of research, teaching, and service. Last, the author considers the link between cultural identity and moral responsibility in higher education. Her concluding argument shows Black women's history and philosophy are useful in exposing and eradicating oppressive practices still pervasive in Academe.

Keywords: African American Women, Higher Education in the U.S., Black Feminist Thought

A Brief History of African American Women in Higher Education

THERE WERE AT least 250 colleges established before the American Civil War; only a select few were open to Black or women students. The most notable were located Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky. A few New England colleges in Vermont, Maine, and Massachusetts graduated Black men in the 1820s, but the only college to graduate a significant number of Black women before the Civil War was Oberlin College in Ohio.¹

In 1850, Lucy Stanton, a freeborn Ohio native, was the first to complete the requirements for the

Literary Degree. Black women students were largely confined to the "ladies course," which was not as academically challenging as the "gentleman's course," or bachelor's degree, for males. Before African Americans' emancipation in 1865, only three Black women successfully challenged the curricular status quo and were awarded the B.A. degree by completing the "gentleman's course" at Oberlin.

Anna Julia Cooper, an Oberlin graduate, wrote *A Voice from the South* (1892), which exposed the limited academic opportunities for Black women, even after Reconstruction. Cooper found only 30 Black women college graduates in 1890.²

¹ Berea College General Education eds., *U.S. Traditions: A Reader* (Massachusetts, 2003), 91; John Pulliam and James Van Patten eds., *History of Education in America* (New Jersey, 1999), 134; Frederick Rudolf, *The American College and University*, (1962; Georgia, 1990), 47; Carter G. Woodson, *Education of the Negro prior to 1861* (1919; New Hampshire, 1991), 265.

² Cooper, "The Higher Education of Women," in *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, eds. Charles Lemert and Esme Bhan (Maryland, 1998), 84; Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York, 1987), 95-120.



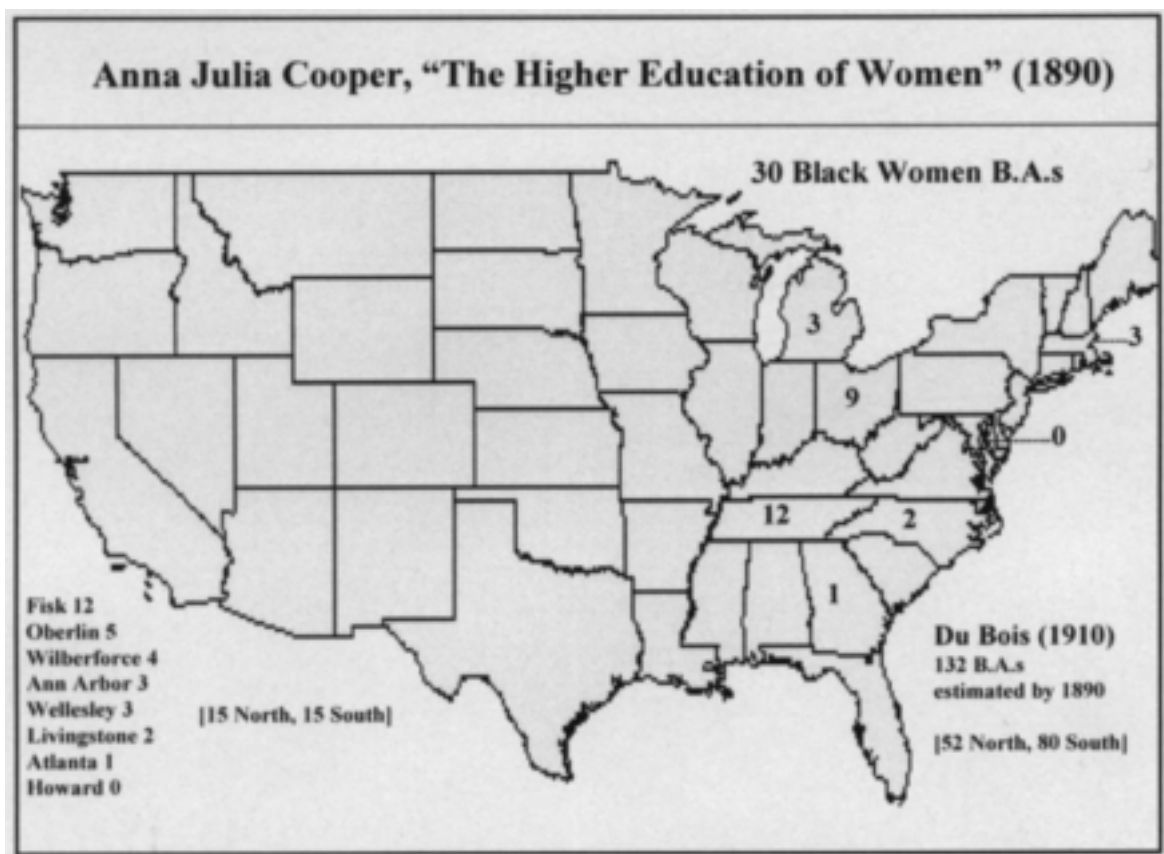


Figure 1: Cooper's Calculation of Black Women's Degree Attainment (1890). Map by Stephanie Y. Evans.

In 1900 and 1910, W.E.B. Du Bois and his Atlanta University research team conducted more comprehensive surveys.³ Du Bois reported approximately 132 Black women earned B.A.s by 1890—at least

100 more than Cooper's estimation. By 1910, Du Bois calculated that Black women college graduates numbered only 658.⁴

³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The College-Bred Negro* (Georgia, 1900), 56.

⁴ Du Bois and Dill, *The College Bred Negro American* (Georgia, 1910), 55-56.



Figure 2: Du Bois and Dill's Calculation for Black Women's Degree Attainment (1910). Map by Stephanie Y. Evans.

Unlike in the antebellum years, when northern schools had significant attendance by Black women, by the 1900s, the leading schools for Black collegiate women were in the segregated South. The "Seven Sisters" women's colleges were surprisingly slow to grant access to Black women, and there were only three historically Black women's colleges: Spelman in Georgia, Bennett in North Carolina, and Hartshorn Memorial in Virginia.⁵

Black collegiate women varied in economic and social status. For example, some Oberlin students like Lucy Stanton and Mary Terrell were born free, while others like Anna Cooper and Fanny Coppin were born enslaved. In addition to social class differences, Black collegiate women also revealed ideological variances. On one hand, Black women developed a legacy of activism demonstrated by Lucy Stanton's abolitionist graduation speech, "A Plea for

the Oppressed" (1850, Oberlin College). On the other hand, Black women also reflected the elitism of academia, as evidenced by Mary Anderson's graduation speech entitled "The Crown of Culture" (1899, Middlebury College). Anderson, born free in Vermont, was the first known Black woman inductee of the prestigious honor society Phi Beta Kappa.⁶

Nineteenth-century academic pundits claimed that too much education defeminized a woman, so there was nationwide resistance to women honors students, scientists, or researchers. Professors warned Black women away from "difficult" classes in order to "save" them the trouble of hard work. Black women themselves internalized this message, and some were careful not to advance too far lest they ruin their chances of finding a mate. Yet some pushed the envelope and dedicated themselves to study far beyond mainstream expectations.⁷

⁵ James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 114, 251, 256; Thomas Ward, *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South, 1880-1960* (Arkansas, 2003), 24. Du Bois and Dill, *The College-Bred Negro American*, (Georgia, 1910), 46; Linda Perkins, "The Racial Integration of the Seven Sister Colleges," in *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (Spring 1998), 104-108. Elsa Barkley Brown "Hartshorn Memorial College," in *Black Women in America*, 543-47; Beverly Guy-Sheftall "Bennett College" and "Spelman College" in *Black Women in America*, 109, 1091-95; Linda Perkins, "Education," in *Black Women in America*, (Indiana, 1994), 384.

⁶ Rudolf, *American College and University*, 322. Until recently, it was widely believed that Jessie Fauset was the first Black woman to earn the honor of Phi Beta Kappa. See Theodore Cross, "The Earliest Black Graduates of the Nation's Highest-Ranked Liberal Arts Colleges" in *Journal of Black Issues in Higher Education* (January 31, 2003), 105.

⁷ Cooper, "The Higher Education of Women," in *Voice*, 85-86; Elizabeth Ihle, *Black Women in Higher Education: An Anthology of Essays, Studies, and Documents* (New York, 1992), 23, 28-29, 81; Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (1940; rpt. New York, 1980), 42, 48.

Jeanne Noble published *The Negro Woman's College Education* (1956) and calculated that over 106,000 Black women had attended four or more years of college by 1950. This was an attendance rate of 2.1 percent for Black women, versus a 1.6 percent annual attendance rate for Black men, 4.4 percent for White women, and 6 percent for White men. Although attending college at higher rates than Black men, Black women were largely confined to elementary teacher education or home economic studies.

Although the beginning of the twentieth century saw increased social status for a select few, employment opportunities for the overwhelming majority of Black women were still limited to domestic or agricultural work. Mary McLeod Bethune, raised in South Carolina, recalled the pervasive racism in

which White children were carefully socialized to uphold supremacist ideals. One afternoon when Bethune was a child, a little White girl snatched a book out of her hand; it was at that point that Bethune realized the power of education and vowed to learn to read despite the powerful racist opposition entrenched in the American South.⁸

By the 1954 *Brown v. Board* Supreme Court decision, Black women had experienced very limited college access. Their attendance steadily grew, however, Black women were on average 30 years behind Black men and White women in earning the bachelor's degree, 13 years behind in earning the master's degree, 24 years behind in earning honors like Phi Beta Kappa, and 50 years behind in earning the Ph.D. Moreover, Black women were a solid century behind White men in educational access.⁹

	<u>White Man</u>	<u>Black Man</u>	<u>White Woman</u>	<u>Black Woman</u>
B.A.	1636 Harvard founded 1642 1st graduates	1823 Middlebury	1841 (3 B.A.s) Oberlin	1850 Literary Degree 1862 B.A. Oberlin
M.A.	1831 Harvard & Virginia	1872 Oberlin	1878 Oberlin	1888 Oberlin (2)
Honors	1776 Wm. & Mary	1877 Vermont	1875 Vermont	1899 Middlebury
Ph.D.	1861 Yale (3)	1876 Yale	1877 Boston	1921 (3) Radcliffe Penn, & Chicago
Ph.D. Abroad	1817 Göttingen	1865 Belgium	1904 Jena, Germany	1925 Sorbonne, Paris

Table 1: Educational Attainment in Black and White. Table by Stephanie Y. Evans.

⁸ Based on Johnson's survey of over 5,000 of these graduates, Marion Cuthbert estimated Black women respondents earned 1,495 degrees, 847 diplomas, 29 vocational diplomas, and 87 certificates. Marion Cuthbert *Education and Marginality: A Study of the Negro College Woman Graduate* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1942), 18, 138. Jeanne Noble, *The Negro Woman's College Education* (New York, 1956), 34, Table 3. Barbara Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America*, (Connecticut, 1985), 145; 242, n2.

⁹ Cross, "The Earliest Black Graduates," 104. Du Bois, *College-Bred Negro*, 55. Du Bois and Dill, *College-Bred Negro American*, 46; Johnson incorrectly lists John Russwurm as the first African American college graduate (Bowdoin, 1826) and estimates 28 bachelors earned by 1860 in Charles Johnson, *The Negro College Graduate*, (1938; New York, 1969), 7-8; Greene's study reflects more updated research and statistical reports in Harold Greene, *HOLDERS OF DOCTORATES AMONG AMERICAN NEGROES: AN EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL STUDY OF NEGROES WHO HAVE EARNED DOCTORAL DEGREES IN COURSE, 1876-1943*. (Boston, 1946). Solomon, *Company of Educated Women*, 134-37.

Black Women's Graduate Scholarship

Although there was no societal or economic motivation to continue their studies, Anna Cooper and Mary Terrell both earned their master of arts degrees in 1888, becoming the first known Black women to do so. As Black women gained access to graduate studies, they challenged traditional academic theories, methods, and practices.

Ida Jackson, a 1922 Berkeley graduate, testified to the difficulties Black women faced at the master's level. Jackson's research challenged the racist pseudoscience of the Alpha Army Intelligence Test, which claimed the Black race was not educable beyond the mental age of fifteen. Jackson refuted assertions of Black biological inferiority, which did not sit well with her committee members. Though her advisor offered her great support, the two psychologists appointed to her committee would not sign off on her thesis. Her work, titled "The Development of Negro Children in Relation to Education," undermined established scholarship that asserted Black inferiority because she cited environmental factors as barriers to African American students' learning. The Berkeley Graduate Council had to bypass the assigned committee and give approval in order for Jackson to graduate. While it was apparently difficult for Black women to get into graduate school, it often proved more difficult to get out.¹⁰

Confronted with institutionalized racist and sexist assumptions, Black women earned a negligible number of doctoral degrees. By 1943, of the 381 known Ph.D.s awarded to African Americans, only 48 were awarded to Black women.¹¹

In the early 1800s, the doctoral degree was established in Europe; by the early 1900s, American universities like Harvard and Michigan scrambled to rapidly increase the percentage of academic "doctors." The Ph.D. was the coin of the realm, and "research, teaching, and service" became the higher education mantra. Eventually, the measure of worth in Academe would devolve to the one-dimensional scope of, simply, "publish or perish."¹²

Teaching and service fell in line with the acceptable vocations for Black women and did not challenge established gender roles. Scholarly research, however, was considered out of the purview of Black women's reasonable aspirations or perceived capabilities. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf argued that women were denied financial

support, adequate space, and ample solitude. In *Gender and the Modern Research University* (2003), Patricia Mazon observed that the doctorate revolved around an idea of citizenship that was inherently male. In this view, women were daughters, sisters, mothers, wives, and keepers of communal responsibilities: a room of one's own for academic endeavors was considered a selfish indulgence. Despite these gendered limitations that were exacerbated by racial discrimination, Black women did conduct and produce doctoral research: with this work, they sought to simultaneously uplift the Black race, improve women's status, and add to the body of human knowledge.¹³

Of the approximately 50 Black women's doctorates earned by the 1940s, almost half (17) were in education. Others earned doctorates in a range of fields from language and home economics to social science and biology. Considering the popular focus on the field of education, it is interesting that none of the early scholars earned their degrees in that area.¹⁴

The first three Black women doctorates all earned their degree in 1921, but their dissertations varied greatly in length, content, and discipline. Eva Dykes, in English philology, traced Alexander Pope's impact and diminishing popularity in eighteenth-century America. Georgiana Simpson, in German Studies, explored Johann von Herder's interpretations of *das Volk* ("the people") as both a national and racial category. In economics, Sadie Mossell Alexander surveyed the home economic systems of 100 Black participants in the Great Migration to find the status of Black families in northern, urban Philadelphia. Interestingly, each offered theoretical innovations and, equally as intriguing, their findings contradicted each other by revealing vastly different interpretations of economic social class and by advocating different means for African American advancement.¹⁵

Black women scholars addressed issues facing Black women with varying degrees of explicitness. Particularly, their research addressed ideas of morality, power, and autonomy--all inherent in the struggle to gain educational access and preserve their culture. This tie of cultural identity to academic scholarship was especially apparent in Anna Cooper's 1925 dissertation for her Sorbonne University doctorate. Cooper, born enslaved, clearly fused her personal experience with her education: the first word of her dissertation was *esclavage*--slavery. For someone

¹⁰ Ihle, *Black Women in Higher Education*, 144.

¹¹ Greene, *Holders of Doctorates among Negroes*, 23, 219.

¹² William Clark, "On the Ironic Specimen of the Doctor of Philosophy" in *Science in Context* (March 1992), 97-137; Greene, *Holders of Doctorates among Negroes*, 22-23; Rudolf, *American College and University*, 335, 232, 237, 289, 442, 397.

¹³ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929; San Diego, 1981), 106; Patricia Mazon, *Gender and the Modern Research University: The Admission of Women to German Higher Education, 1865-1914* (California, 2003), 6.

¹⁴ Greene, *Holders of Doctorates among Negroes*, 78-84.

¹⁵ Expanded opportunities created by the onset of First World War explain the granting of three degrees in the same year.

born enslaved to write a dissertation on the dehumanising institution of slavery was a profound contribution indeed.¹⁶

Not only was Cooper's content controversial, but her philosophical framework directly challenged an influential French scholar on her dissertation committee whom she called "the dreaded Bouglé." This committee member claimed that Nordic scholars established the rights of man; Cooper argued that the rights of man were granted by God, not by any one human tradition. In a memoir, she recalled that though Célestine Bouglé took exception to her activist tone, which he called "partisan pleading," she passed her dissertation defence with his grudging approval and apparent respect.¹⁷

Cooper pursued advanced studies while raising five adopted children and while suffering professional devastation in the power struggles over education for African Americans between Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and White philanthropists. In 1906 Cooper was fired from her job as principal at Dunbar High School because she refused to change her focus on liberal arts and classical education. She had prepared students for entry into schools like Harvard, Yale, Cornell, Oberlin, and Amherst, but some Whites living in D.C. were opposed to this type of training for Blacks. Despite professional trials and personal responsibilities, Anna Cooper continued to pursue her own advanced studies. Though not much was made of her academic accomplishment in terms of pay increase or national recognition, she was supported by her sister circle, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated and by the local Black community in D.C. Interestingly, sororities were central in early twentieth century Black women's graduate school experiences: all four Black women who were first to earn Ph.D.s in the 1920s were members of Black sororities.¹⁸

In 1935, Zora Neale Hurston also pushed the boundaries of acceptable research practice. She employed methodological innovations such as "ethnographic subjectivity," which challenged the objective and positivist stances of traditional researchers. Hurston, a Harlem Renaissance writer, member of

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, attendee of Howard University, and graduate of Barnard College, challenged even the most progressive anthropologists during her graduate studies. Because she refused to have her work limited by repressive theories, paternalistic attitudes, or exploitative faculty practices, she left Columbia University in frustration, without the doctorate, and was recognized for her genius--in literature and in anthropology--only long after her passing.

These stories of denied scholarly recognition are accompanied by countless instances of denied access. For example, Ada Sipuel's legal suit against the Oklahoma State Law School (1948) and Authorine Lucy's suit against the University of Alabama Graduate School (1952) are examples of legal bureaucracy, institutionalised hatred, and White mob violence that prevented Black women from engaging in advanced studies. Additionally, Civil Rights Movement activists like Septima Clark and Mary Fair Burks who did earn advanced degrees were recognized for their political actions, but not their scholarly contributions.¹⁹

Collegiate Black women, though their numbers are statistically minute compared to those of non-degree earners, comprise an important demographic from which to understand the link between cultural identity, educational attainment, and knowledge production. Little is written about Black women scholars, even less about Black women's scholarship. Though historiography has grown since the mid-1980s, work about Black women's intellectual history is scarce.²⁰

Anna Julia Cooper's and Mary McLeod Bethune's Articulations of Research, Teaching, and Service

Anna Cooper and Mary Bethune embodied the oft-cited values of "scholarship, leadership, and service" upon which U.S. institutions of higher education were built. Yet their scholarly pursuits, educational practices, and numerous articles were quite different from one another and reflected multilayered theoret-

¹⁶ Cooper, "The Third Step," in *Voice*, 320-30. Anna Julia Cooper, *L'Attitude de la France a L'Egard de L'Esclavage: Pedant La Revolution* (Ph.D. diss., University of Paris, 1925), 7.

¹⁷ Cooper, "The Third Step," in *Voice*, 328-29.

¹⁸ The Xi Omega chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority sponsored a ceremony on December 29, 1925 at Howard's Rankin Chapel, where her degree was presented by D.C. Commissioner Tindale on behalf of Emile Daeschner, the French Ambassador to the U. S. *The Aframerican Women's Journal* (Summer 1940), 32.

¹⁹ Gwendolyn Mikell, "Zora Neale Hurston" in Ira Harrison and Faye Harrison eds., *African American Pioneers in Anthropology*, (Illinois, 1999), 61-65; James Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* (New York, 2001), 241 n37, 105; Grace Jordon McFadden, "Septima Clark and the Struggle for Human Rights" in Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline. A. Rouse, and Barbara Woods eds., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, (Indiana, 1993).

²⁰ Before the 1954 *Brown* case, Black women earned the doctorate in dental surgery, education, psychology, nutrition, history, library science, zoology, anatomy, government and international relations, geology, theater, chemistry, mathematics, and musicology, see *Black Women in America*, 1320-25. A January 2005 U.S. Library of Congress keyword search shows the comparative dearth of scholarship on Black women educators: references to Booker T. Washington (434 references); W.E.B. Du Bois (752), John Dewey (495); Paulo Freire (386); Jane Addams (241); Mary McLeod Bethune (95); Anna Julia Cooper (12 references).

ical approaches. Their journeys as teachers and learners were impacted by their experiences as Black women, but differences show that Black women's cultural identity was neither static nor uniform.

Anna Julia Haywood Cooper was born in Raleigh, North Carolina, in approximately 1858; she lived to be 105 years old. The youngest of three, born to an enslaved Black mother (Hannah), and an unnamed white father, she began school in 1865. Her Oberlin B.A. and M.A. concentration was mathematics, but she instructed language, history, performing arts, and physical education in a teaching career that spanned over 70 years. Though mainly teaching in Washington, D.C., she chaired the department of Romance Languages at Lincoln University in Missouri for four years. Cooper was a skilled lecturer who spoke at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and at the first Pan African Congress in London in 1900. Her publishing career lasted over 60 years, from the 1890s to the 1950s.²¹

Mary Jane McLeod was born in 1875 in Mayesville, South Carolina; she died in 1955 and was buried on the campus of Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona, Florida. Bethune was the fifteenth of seventeen children and the first in the McLeod family to be born free from enslavement. Like most children, she labored to help keep the family afloat, picking cotton or harvesting corn. But her family wanted a better life than agricultural work for Mary, so she began school at seven years old. She studied at Scotia Seminary in North Carolina and Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, and supported many organizations in the Black Women's Club Movement, including the National Council of Negro Women and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

Though Bethune initially wanted to work as a missionary in Africa, she embarked on a teaching career in South Carolina and Georgia before landing in Daytona Beach in 1904. There, she made history by founding what would become Bethune-Cookman College. Bethune was central to the Black Women's Club Movement, worked closely with three U.S. presidents, and engaged in international peace and antipoverity activist work.

Cooper, Bethune, and their contemporaries articulated educational philosophies that had four central themes: (1) demand for applied learning; (2) recognition of the importance of cultural identity; (3) epistemology that critically engaged dominant ideas; and (4) moral existentialism grounded in a sense of communal responsibility. Though both women taught at elementary and secondary levels, these themes were especially relevant to postsecondary education.

As African Americans, these women forged careers that reflected the commonly held notion in Black communities that all educational attainment should advance efforts for racial justice. As women, they internalized the ideology that females were better suited for the compassionate work of public service, and both espoused theories that assumed women's advanced sense of morality. Thus, as Black women, both expressed a vision of education heavily influenced by their complex social location and cultural identities. However, Cooper published with an emphasis on Greek metaphors, linguistic analysis, and Romantic prose--revealing her classical liberal arts training. In contrast, Bethune's writing focused on political argumentation, concrete plans for students in her school, and strategies for organizational development--revealing a more pragmatic educational background.

Cooper and Bethune's thoughts on research, teaching, and service support Patricia Hill Collins's argument for a "Black feminist epistemology." In the influential book *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), Collins identified four dimensions of Black feminist epistemology: (1) lived experience as criterion of meaning; (2) use of dialogue; (3) ethic of personal accountability; and (4) ethic of caring.²²

Bethune's and Cooper's scholarly work reflected all four aspect of Collins's framework. First, they insisted that learning be applied and that in evaluating the validity of truth claims, experience should count heavily. Learning was often a means to resist oppression, and the applied nature of their knowledge claims asserted their right to speak based on their own lived experience. For them, demonstrated efficacy in social settings was the measure of theory's value. They observed that too often political ideologues like Thomas Jefferson espoused ideals of democracy and equality but did not put the ideals into practice. Thus, these women insisted that the meaning-making process of academic scholarship be tied to real-world situations and that lofty ideals be consistent with policy implementation.

Second, Black women educators used dialogue, rather than monologue, as part of the learning process. To test truth claims, they conversed with their communities and brought cultural identity to bear on the discussion. Instead of placing a premium on "objectivity," they placed subjective knowledge at the center of understanding. Though they recognized the existence of some universal human principles, these principles had to be tested in different arenas to prove valid. Further, Black women did not assume their standpoint represented that of all races or ethni-

²¹ These works included *A Voice from the South*, 1892; *Le Pèlerinage de Charlemagne* (1925); and *Personal Reflections of the Grimké Family*, 1951.

²² Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*. (New York, 1991), 14, 210-16.

cities, and they resisted being objectified by White scholars who claimed to speak for everyone.

Third, they held themselves, and others, accountable for knowledge claims. It was not enough to say something was true; truth had to be demonstrated. Gaining pedigree was not enough to earn respect as a scholar--scholarship was recognized by deeds. They valued a critical approach to learning, and their work forcefully contested that of White and Black male scholars who misrepresented Black women's interests or perspectives. They unflinchingly pointed out American hypocrisy and demanded application of basic principles others took for granted. They produced qualitative and quantitative analysis to disprove unsubstantiated claims by those they considered to be academic charlatans.

Last, Black women academics voiced and demonstrated an ethic of care. Their ideas were based on an assumption of moral existentialism: social justice and civic responsibility were at the heart of all education. Where others questioned or ignored social responsibility of the educated class, for Black women, someone who was not serving the cause of justice for all simply did not qualify as truly educated. As Collins points out, the term "intellectual" was not reserved for those formally educated in the Academy, and Black women considered activism as important as scholastic training. Black women's educational philosophies made significant contributions toward understanding how cultural identity can impact educational access, administration, pedagogy, and curriculum.

Limitations of Black Women's Thought

Despite these strengths, Black women's intellectual history must be interrogated: there are important areas of contention for contemporary educators to consider. First, race issues are not simple binaries of Black and White. Race has historical significance with very real contemporary ramifications; however, it is a social construct and must be treated as such. African American women educators were race women, but race is not the only significant factor in education.

Second, extreme selflessness in advocacy can be harmful. Black Women's sense of self developed in the "we" of community--they became whole through collective action. But through their endless struggle, many Black women educators suffered mental and physical exhaustion. Stress was made normative and perpetuated the myth of the "strong Black woman," which robbed them of humanity, balance, health, and wellness. In "uplifting," Black women often displayed a martyrdom complex in the name of freeing

"their people." They sought sainthood in their suffering and insisting on dying for the Black race instead of living life with measured, balanced enjoyment.

Third, Black women argued that religion was essential to education. Their arguments were convincing because their results were impressive: through faith, they did specialize in what educator Nannie Helen Burroughs called the "wholly impossible." Yet, institutionalizing religion in higher education--just as in government--brings inevitable problems. Black women's ardent faith in Christian education, though in line with the origins of colleges and universities in the United States, reintroduces age-old debates on the imperative separation of church and state.²³

Last, challenges to socioeconomic status must be addressed in terms of defying "middle-class" values that marginalize citizens without property or pedigree. Elite Black women's "uplift" too often implied hierarchy and ignored the efficacy of poor people's activism on their own behalf. Furthermore, Black women's glorification of academic exceptionalism reified class and caste separations furthered by "talented tenth" arguments. Like appeals to nationalism, middle-class values and neo-liberal approaches proved too narrow a platform from which to address human rights.²⁴

These limitations notwithstanding, contemporary scholars would do well to engage the philosophies of historic Black women scholars. Power, resources, and values construct education, social training, and cultural transmission. Because of African American women's complex social position and awareness of their social standpoint, their pedagogy is certainly useful for eradicating oppressive trends in education. Historically, Cooper critiqued academic paternalism, and Bethune exposed the farce of Jim Crow "democracy" in the United States. These contributions were largely based on their social standpoint as Black women, a standpoint essential in "speaking truth to power."

Implications: The Link between Cultural Identity, Theory, and Moral Responsibility in Higher Education

Philosophers on Education: New Research Perspectives (1998), edited by Amélie Rorty, raises important questions on the relation between philosophy, history, education, and public policy. These questions include: What are the aims of education? Who should formulate educational policy? Who should be educated? What interests should guide curricular choice? How should the intellectual, spiritual, civic, artistic,

²³ Evelyn Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptists Church, 1880-1920*. (Cambridge, 1993).

²⁴ Joy James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth*. (New York, 1996).

and technical dimensions of education be connected?²⁵

Unfortunately, the philosophers chosen to answer these questions were all men in the European philosophical tradition, a choice that I contend does not provide a sufficient body of knowledge from which to assess educational meaning or policy. *Philosophers on Education*, a rather large text, presents a very narrow view. Scholars of color are marginalized, and women are ignored.

Bethune and Cooper belong to a group of human beings who were enslaved during much of the time that these "classic" philosophers--Hume, Locke, Jefferson and others--were espousing their ideals. Moreover, some of these philosophers were ruthless aristocrats or slaveholders themselves. Black women's ideas can weigh and measure the worth of "great men" who write "great books." Without this additional analysis, "classics" ring hollow.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire argued for the central role of identity in education. He wrote that a "banking method" of education (the rote memorization and automated input/output of information between the teacher and student) was detrimental, especially to subjugated populations. Fanny Jackson Coppin, who graduated from Oberlin College in 1865, also advocated for students' active role in the educational process. In 1913, she wrote:

we want to lift education out of the slough of the passive voice. Little Mary goes to school to be educated, and her brother John goes to the high school for the same purpose. It is too often the case that the passive voice has the right of way, whereas in the very beginning we should call into active service all the faculties of mind and body.²⁶

She too focused on the specific impact of cultural identity on educational opportunity and intellectual development. Coppin, born enslaved, served as principal of the Institute for Colored Youth (ICY) in Philadelphia from 1869 to 1902 and developed an academic infrastructure for the school so impressive as to attract John Dewey and Booker T. Washington to the ICY board of directors. But, unlike Dewey and Washington, she operated in relative obscurity because few recognized the genius of Black women intellectuals. Most contemporary educational theorists have heard of Freire, yet few know of Coppin, who wrote her treatise in 1913--almost 60 years before Freire's.

Application: The Importance of Black Women Scholar-Activists

In 1994, Johnetta Cole, Angela Davis, and Lani Guanier gave keynote addresses at a conference, with a theme of "In Defense of Our Names," that drew 2,000 Black women academics to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Each speaker addressed the need to fully incorporate Black women in the Academy; each also called for a close inspection of Black foremothers in order not to duplicate their shortcomings. They argued for the incorporation of Black women's history into the fabric of higher education as a corrective measure to unprofessional and abusive practices justified by racist and sexist academics.

Black women's scholarship can challenge pseudoscientific "research" that adds to the already devastating exclusion of America's disenfranchised. As an example of questionable research practices, the "mid-1990s Kennedy Krieger study that encouraged landlords to rent lead-contaminated homes to...107 poor, [predominantly Black] Baltimore families with young children" was housed at John's Hopkins University. When the story broke and excited public outrage, the researchers admitted no wrongdoing. Problems such as low birth rates, poor nutrition, dilapidated buildings, overpoliced but still-unsafe schools, racist curricula and teachers, limited books and study materials, overrepresentation in special education classes, tracking to vocational education, tracking away from liberal arts education, limited access to technology, and lack of academically challenging classes result in inequitable learning opportunities for African American and economically disadvantaged children. Through means such as unfair testing practices, discriminatory housing, and ridiculously disproportionate tax breaks for the nation's wealthiest citizens, the American elite who are educated at leading universities are largely responsible for perpetuating these conditions of social inequality.²⁷

Further, pre-World War I "psychometric" studies spawned a generation of more overtly racist publications during the 1960s and 1970s: Arthur Jensen's "Intelligence Quotient" studies were awarded legitimacy in the *Harvard Educational Review* (1969). Nobel Prize winning physicist William Shockley suggested coerced sterilizations for people with low IQs and advocated for "genius" sperm banks. Richard Herrnstein combined metaphysics, biology, and psychology to argue why and how White people--and some Asians--were cognitively superior to all other races (Atlantic Monthly 1971). Though the

²⁵ Amélie Rorty, *Philosophers on Education: New Historical Perspectives*, (London, 1998), 1-2.

²⁶ Fanny Jackson Coppin, *Reminiscences of School Life and Hints on Teaching*. (1913; New York, 1985), 39.

²⁷ Manuel Roig-Franzia, "My Kids Were Used as Guinea Pigs." *Washington Post*. Saturday, August 25, 2001.

questions, methodologies, and arguments differed greatly among these researchers, and though the causes of the deficit were variously identified, all arguments pointed to African inferiority (albeit with slight variation by nationality). That these writers differed so greatly in means, yet all came to the same end reveals the pervasiveness of racial discrimination in academic knowledge production. Research findings such as those produced by the *Bell Curve* authors (which charged that racial and ethnic minorities are inherently less intelligent and therefore less deserving of the country's resources) dehumanize people of color, thereby providing a seemingly rational basis for such inhumane practices as those advocated by the Krieger researchers.²⁸

But even the authors of the *Bell Curve* asserted that "g"--general intelligence--does not measure human excellence. So perhaps we should strive to construct a measure of higher education that more accurately reflects virtues that are commonly espoused in a would-be democratic or civilized nation. Cooper and Bethune offer good places to start this redefinition.²⁹

Even in the twenty-first century, Lawrence Summers, the former president of Harvard University openly disparaged African American and women's scholars. The devaluing of Black Studies as a field coupled with the assertion of women's biologically based intellectual inferiority--particularly in mathematics and science--provides rough academic ground. Based on archaic notions of "excellence" and "objectivity," many assume that African Americans and women scholars have little to offer the Academy; consequently, the "eminence" of a university is seemingly still measured in inverse proportion to the number of Black women scholars on campus. Despite the presence of more Black women than Black men in American colleges (due to systematic railroading of Black men into United States prisons), and irrespective of the ascendance of a few Black women academics to national status, equal access to higher education and institutional resources still remains an unrealized goal.

As outlined in the PBS documentary *Shattering the Silences*, Black women have yet to reach demographic parity in the Ivory Tower. By 1998, there were only about 5,000 Black women of a total

560,000 tenured full-time faculty in the United States. By 1999, a mere 1,706 Black women were tenured as full professors (out of 161,309 total). Numerically, these 1,700 Black women still lagged far behind the White women (29,548) or Black men (3,078) tenured as full professors. The problem of the twenty-first century is still a problem of the color line--and that line is made more distinct by gender discrimination. By the year 2000, the "community" of over 176,000 faculty tenured as full professors at public and private research universities in the United States consisted of 91 percent Whites, 75 percent men, 72 percent White men, 17 percent White women, 8 percent men of color (Black, Hispanic, and Native American combined), and 2 percent women of color.³⁰

Higher education is in need of massive reform to include the "heads, hands, and hearts" of the disenfranchised in order to make real the claims of a democracy heretofore unfulfilled. The works of thinkers like Cooper and Bethune provide essential tools by which to measure the progress of higher education. Black women's theoretical frameworks will enrich discussions of intelligence, capacity, and liberty. Beyond the need for their greater statistical representation, Black women's analyses must be incorporated into disciplinary epistemology and scholarly praxis.

Despite vast improvements in overall quality of life, African American women's access to education, economic stability, and professional employment has not drastically changed, relative to the population, since the late 1800s. This sustained disparity appears especially heinous when factoring in the exponential loss of life, health, and wealth during enslavement and Jim Crow segregation. That such racist and sexist practices are worldwide is scandalous.³¹

In a speech given at her doctorate graduation ceremony, Anna Cooper asserted that all beings have a "right to grow"; equitable participation in higher education is an essential part of this birthright. There once was a time when some scholars believed that the world was flat, that the Sun revolved around the Earth, and that Black women did not belong in the Academy. The first two myths have been dispelled; let this historical record lay to rest the third.³²

²⁸ Herrnstein and Murray, *Bell Curve*, 21.

²⁹ Herrnstein and Murray, *Bell Curve*, 442.

³⁰ Michael Nettles and Laura Perna, *The African-American Education Data Book: Preschool Through High School Education*. (Virginia, 1997), 27, 434; Cathy Trower and Richard Chait, "Faculty Diversity: Too Little for Too Long," in *Harvard Magazine*, (March-April, 2002), 33-37, 98.

³¹ Hine et. al, *Black Women in America*, 1313-42.

³² Cooper, "The Third Step," in *Voice*, 320-30.

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