

FORGOTTEN TRAILBLAZERS: AFRICAN  
AMERICAN WOMEN'S STUDY ABROAD IN  
EUROPE, 1859-1935

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the study abroad experiences of forgotten trailblazing African American women who studied in Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Today, their achievements at elite European institutions are overlooked, leaving a gap in the historical literature which this thesis fills. Facing barriers of slavery, Anti-Literacy Laws, race, gender, and doctrines of scientific intellectual inferiority, these women dared to challenge the prevailing attitudes of their time and place which restricted women's access to higher education. The thesis focuses on three women: abolitionist and physician Sarah Parker Remond (1826- 1894), international civil rights activist and clubwoman Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954), and diplomatic historian and disarmament expert Merze Tate (1905-1996).

A qualitative historical methodology is employed which examines and analyzes archives and primary sources including diaries, journals, correspondence, oral histories, autobiographies, and historic newspapers in addition to secondary sources. The theoretical frameworks of Black Feminist Thought and intersectionality are used to conceptualize the women's experiences. The core questions investigate how they navigated race, gender, and class intersections and how their study abroad affected their identity, careers, and transnational activities.

This thesis makes several original contributions to knowledge. It brings together for the first time the study abroad histories of three influential African American women who studied in Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It innovatively uses Black feminist epistemologies which offer other ways of knowing that go beyond the boundaries of default Eurocentric masculinist frameworks to demarginalize Black women's study abroad history. By examining the women's achievements through the gendered lens of Black Feminist Thought and intersectionality, I have created an original diachronic narrative which values the women's subjective voices as particular rather than general.

The findings show they succeeded by using their ancestors' reverence for education, their Black female agency characterized by initiative, determination, and resilience to navigate issues of race and gender. In addition, as educated women, Europeans granted them a higher-class status which gave them social mobility that aided their success. They resisted their racialized and gendered roles assigned at birth and dispelled the myth of Black female intellectual inferiority with their educational and professional achievements. They experienced few if any racial barriers in Europe compared to America, and they were intellectuals and feminists who were ahead of their time. They shattered every race, gender, and class ceiling they encountered and left an impressive legacy for today's underrepresented Black women studying abroad in Europe.

Key words: trailblazers, African American women, study abroad, Europe

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## Dedication

I dedicate my History PhD to my mother, Thomasina Bowman Anderson, M.Ed., an elementary school teacher for 32 years, and my grandmother, Alphonza Crum Bowman. They are the two people who always loved and supported me unconditionally. My only regret is that you are no longer here to share this achievement with me, but I have felt your encouragement, support, your faith in me, and your joyful spirit every step of the way on this journey. You are the wind beneath my wings. I have completed this thesis to honor you and your memories forever.

My grandfather Charlie Anderson (c. 1854-1934) was born a slave in the South Carolina Lowcountry, and I dedicate this thesis to honor his memory as well. He was a mulatto, and my grandmother Hassie (1889-1974) was his second wife. My father Jarodies (1924-2002), a World War II veteran and high school teacher, was ten years old when my grandfather died. I am living proof along with an unknown number of other biological grandchildren of slaves (and a few children) who are *still alive* today that America's nearly 250 years of chattel slavery is *not* ancient history. One of these children of a slave, my aunt, was Charlie's daughter and my father's sister. She was born in 1927 and died recently in 2020 at the age of 93. There are still other biological children of slaves alive in America today. Their stories, like the stories of the trailblazing study abroad of the women in my thesis, have been overlooked and forgotten in American history. This thesis recognizes these living children and grandchildren of slaves.

## Acknowledgements

There are few experts in the UK in my specialized research topic of African American women's history and even fewer with knowledge of their early and significant achievements during their study abroad in Europe. I did extensive research before I found that Cathy Bergin and Anita Rupprecht were the rare exceptions.

This was a team effort, and I would like to thank all my supervisors: Cathy Bergin who was my Lead Supervisor for two and a half years from April 2021 until October 2023; Anita Rupprecht who was originally my Second Supervisor and who graciously took on the role as my Lead Supervisor in November 2023 after Cathy's departure. I am also grateful that Jonathan Watson agreed to become my Second Supervisor and joined the team in January 2024. Since then, he has been a wonderful addition to the team with his special knowledge of broad aspects of African American history.

I had the pleasure of being guided by the team of Cathy and Anita for two and a half years, and they gave me invaluable guidance on both academic and personal levels. Their support through the Covid pandemic years was caring, kind, and understanding through all the ups and downs and unknowns of this unprecedented global pandemic. My overall well-being was of utmost importance to them, and often, they just listened. They made this project an enjoyable experience under these difficult circumstances. On an academic and professional level, I was fortunate to have their unique expertise and years of experience in my very specialized thesis topic. Their confidence in my research and writing abilities and the importance of my topic for the literature was steadfast. Overall, they have made me a better researcher, writer, and historian and prepared me for postdoctoral research and publication.

I am also grateful for the unwavering support of my best friend, Rose Mary Dreussi, PhD in Linguistics, who passed away in 2023. Finally, my appreciation goes out to the unheralded University of Brighton accommodation team at the central office and at Varley Park for all their kind help and support during my stay there.

## **Candidate's Declaration**

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed: S. Anderson

Dated: March 28, 2025

## Chapter One: Introduction

*Until the lions have their historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter.* ~ African Proverb. ~ Unknown.

### 1.0 Motivation/Aims/Objectives/ and Research Questions

In March 1925, Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964) was preparing to orally defend her PhD dissertation at the University of Paris, Sorbonne; however, the outcome hung precariously in the balance. Her entire life's work and experiences, her meticulous research, and her facility with the French language, none of these seemed to quell her anxiety. Her dissertation, 'L'Attitude de la France à l'égard de l'esclavage pendant la Révolution', was about French attitudes on human rights and slavery during the French and Haitian Revolutions from 1789-1804.<sup>1</sup> Cooper herself was born enslaved on a Raleigh, North Carolina plantation, and her father was said to be her mother's slave owner.

"Madame Cooper," as she was addressed by her committee members, had been working on her Sorbonne doctorate for several years. Now, as she neared its completion, her apprehension was fueled by ideological and philosophical differences with one of the jurors on her defense committee, renowned French historian and philosopher Célestin Bouglé. She wrote in *The Third Step* a memoir of her dissertation defense that: "I had but one short week to think it through," and she acknowledged her fear: "I was apprehensive there would be the inevitable clash with the great Judge himself."<sup>2</sup> She worked by candlelight because her rented Paris apartment lacked electricity, and she prepared for her defense by studying the supplementary discussion questions.

Finally, the day arrived and during the jurors' oral challenges to her dissertation, Cooper stayed true to the principles of her philosophical framework, and she intellectually refuted

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, *Slavery and the French and Haitian Revolutionists*, Edited and Translated by Frances Richardson Keller (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, 'The Third Step (Autobiographical)', (2017), 12. Manuscripts and Addresses. 24. accessed August 11, 2021. [http://dh.howard.edu/ajc\\_addresses/24](http://dh.howard.edu/ajc_addresses/24).

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what she believed were Bouglé's racist theories.<sup>3</sup> She argued that racial inequality had undermined the French Revolution's ideals and that slavery was "a supreme crime against humanity." After three hours of "grilling questions and grueling fear," Cooper was told by Monsieur Bouglé: "bien satisfaits" and . . . vous êtes docteur."<sup>4</sup> She successfully defended her dissertation on March 23, 1925. With this groundbreaking achievement, Anna Julia Cooper became the first African American woman to earn a PhD in History and the first to receive a doctoral degree from the Sorbonne.

To me, equally amazing is that she was 67 years old when she received her 'diplôme de Docteur ès lettres de la Faculté de Paris' on December 29, 1925, in a ceremony at Howard University, an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) in Washington, D.C. Cooper was only the fourth African American woman to receive a PhD degree. The first three women were Georgiana Simpson, Sadie Tanner Mossell, and Eva B. Dykes, and they all received their PhDs in 1921 in the United States.<sup>5</sup> For Cooper, her long journey from slavery to the Sorbonne had finally come to an end. At 67 years of age, Cooper was already a leading educator, author, feminist pioneer, an intellectual and a philosopher. She clearly articulated her feminist philosophy in her seminal book, *A Voice From the South*, which she published in 1892.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 27-36. On these pages of 'The Third Step', Anna Julia Cooper translated Bouglé's L'Egalite Thesis and her argument to his theories during her dissertation defense into English for her classes at Frelinghuysen University in August 1945. The section is titled: 'Les Idées Egalitaires et le Mouvement Democratique Question proposed by Monsieur C. Bouglé at Soutenance of Thesis: L'Attitude de la France a l' égard de l'Esclavage pendant la Révolution' by Anna J. Cooper, The Sorbonne University of Paris, March 23, 1925.

She politely states: "I trust my audacity may be pardoned in daring to take exception to certain conclusions of one of my judges, the learned Dr. Bouglé whose thesis Egalite has been assigned me for questioning." Cooper then proceeds to deliver a daring critique of his thesis. She argued that it was not a natural law that created inequality but the deliberate actions of humans.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>5</sup> Stephanie Y. Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954: An Intellectual History* (Gainesville, FL; University Press of Florida, 2007): 4.



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Cooper believed that “the status of black women is the only true measure of collective racial progress,” and she rejected their subordination to men, Black or White.<sup>6</sup> Now, a generation later, she was proving that her race, gender, and age were no barriers to earning her doctoral degree at the prestigious Sorbonne.

It was my discovery of Cooper’s study abroad achievements at the Sorbonne that inspired me to undertake this project. I first learned about Dr. Cooper while I was researching the history of the African American Diaspora in Great Britain, and her story stirred my imagination and piqued my curiosity. It was the catalyst that led me to research the forgotten histories of other pioneering African American women who had also studied in Europe. My position as an underrepresented African American woman studying abroad in Europe further fueled my interest in this topic.

I was keen to learn more about Cooper and other African Americans, especially women, who had studied abroad in Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Why had they decided to make the long transatlantic journey to Europe for their university and professional studies? What were their backgrounds in America, and what were their experiences in Europe, educationally, socially, and culturally? What were their career and life achievements? Most importantly, why had I not heard of their European study abroad before, and where could I learn more about them? This thesis originated from my quest to answer those questions.

After learning about Cooper’s Sorbonne PhD, I began my research to uncover other *histoires négligées*. I discovered that African Americans, some prominent and others lesser known, had studied abroad in Europe as early as the eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup> I learned that they included

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<sup>6</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988). (Originally published in 1892), xliii.

<sup>7</sup> Boston King was a former slave from Charleston, South Carolina who joined the British forces in the Revolutionary War as a Black Loyalist, and he studied for the ministry at the Methodist School in Kingswood near Bristol from 1794-1796. See Chapter Three: 3.2 in this thesis for more information.

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educators and intellectuals like Cooper, abolitionists, civil rights and women's rights activists, doctors, ministers, philosophers, scientists, engineers, musicians, writers, artists, opera singers, and sculptors. For many Black Americans, their reasons for studying in Europe could usually be summed up in two words 'American racism'. Frequently, their applications for admission to Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) were accepted and then summarily rejected when the institutions found out they were 'Negroes'.

Mary Church Terrell spoke about the racist rejection of Black applicants to White educational institutions in her speech to the United Women's Club on October 10, 1906, in Washington, D.C., and she implied that it was common. Terrell told her audience:

If I possess artistic talent, there is not a single art school of repute which will admit me. A few years ago a colored woman who possessed great talent submitted some drawings to the Corcoran Art School, of Washington, [D.C.] which were accepted by the committee of awards, who sent her a ticket entitling her to a course in this school. But when the committee discovered that the young woman was colored, they declined to admit her, and told her that if they had suspected that her drawings had been made by a colored woman, they would not have examined them at all. . . she then went to Paris to continue her studies, where she achieved signal success and was complimented by some of the greatest living artists in France.<sup>8</sup>

Earlier in the nineteenth century, sculptor Edmonia Lewis (1845-1911) had also left America for Paris after she suffered racism at Oberlin College. She was arrested after being falsely accused of poisoning and theft, was physically attacked by her White classmates, and she was not allowed to graduate. She sailed to Europe in 1865 and established her studio in Rome where she gained respect and prominence. She stayed in Europe for the rest of her life and returned only briefly to America.<sup>9</sup> It was stories like these that helped me to understand why from the earliest times African Americans have studied abroad in Europe. It also made me realize how much artistic talent and intellectual potential America lost over the centuries due to institutionalized racism.

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Church Terrell, 'What It Means to Be Colored in the Capital of the United States'. Originally published in *The Independent*, January 24, 1907. accessed October 2, 2021.

<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/marychurchterrellcolored.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower*, 104.

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Yet, as I continued with my research, the information I found was sparse and fragmentary.

Roberta M. Hall and Bernice R. Sandler have noted a general scarcity of literature about the history of African American women, and they claim that: “Insofar as research is concerned research interests that are not mainstream are sometimes devalued.”<sup>10</sup> I found their claim to be true regarding my research. It revealed that the history of African American women’s study abroad in Europe has been ignored by the mainstream literature in several fields including American Studies, educational history, and women’s and gender studies.

During my research, I found no books and only two journal articles that focused on the early study abroad history of African Americans in Europe. In 2002, Corey D. B. Walker researched African American elites who studied in European institutions at the beginning of the twentieth century to expand their intellectual knowledge. Due to the fragmented nature of the sources, it has been difficult to get accurate statistics of the scale and numbers of Black American students in Europe; however, Walker reported on the number of PhD students in the U.S. and abroad that:

During the last years of the nineteenth century and the opening decades of the twentieth century, the number of African Americans going beyond the first level college [university] degree slowly rose to, by the end of 1927, thirty-nine African Americans who received the Doctor of Philosophy degree. A substantial number of these individuals spent some part of their educational experience abroad . . . That number would rise to over one hundred forty by 1938, with African American women accounting for fourteen of those holding the doctorate.<sup>11</sup>

A few years later, Stephanie Y. Evans wrote a 2009 article about African American women scholars who had studied abroad, and she discussed Anna Julia Cooper’s PhD defense at the Sorbonne and the construction of her intellectual identity in an international context.<sup>12</sup> More information about these

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<sup>10</sup> Roberta M. Hall and Bernice R. Sandler, ‘Academic Mentoring for Women Students and Faculty: A New Look at an Old Way to Get Ahead’, in *Project on the Status and Education of Women*, (Washington, D.C: Assoc. of American Colleges, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> Corey D. B. Walker, “Of the Coming of John [and Jane]”: African American Intellectuals in Europe, 1888 -1938’, *European American Studies* vol. 47, no.1 (2002): 7-22.

<sup>12</sup> Stephanie Y. Evans, ‘African American Women Scholars and International Research: Anna Julia Cooper Legacy of Study Abroad’, *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* vol. 18, no. 1 (2009): 77.

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articles is presented in the introduction to Chapter Three.

William Hoffa and Sandra Singer have published works about the history of Americans studying abroad in Europe, but their books do not include specific information on Black American students, men or women. Study abroad has always exercised a degree of social exclusivity, benefitting upper-middle class White Americans. After women were finally allowed full entry into higher education in the late nineteenth century, between 1868 and 1915, upper-class White females represented the ‘typical’ American student who “pursued graduate and professional education” abroad in Europe.<sup>13</sup> The Black women in this thesis shattered this traditional White female ceiling, and in doing so, they opened the doors for future generations of African American women to enter. Remond and Terrell studied abroad independently like their White counterparts, and they were not enrolled in American university study abroad programs, because these were not established until 1923. Thus, their overseas study beginning in the mid-nineteenth century preceded these official American programs by more than 60 years.

Nevertheless, the history of African American women’s study abroad experiences and their significant achievements in Europe have been neglected and perhaps even devalued. I was eager to fill this literature gap, and I knew immediately I wanted to write about these forgotten trailblazers and their fascinating histories. This PhD project has given me the opportunity to research and share their significant but unheralded accomplishments abroad in Europe. My motivation to undertake this research project is best summed up in the words of Sylviane Diouf of Brown University who believes her contribution as a social historian “may be the uncovering

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<sup>13</sup> See William Hoffa, *A History of US Study Abroad: Beginnings to 1965* (Carlisle, PA: Forum on Education Abroad, 2007). Hoffa points out that it was not until 1923 that American universities formally established study abroad programs, and the University of Delaware was the first; and Sandra L. Singer *Adventures Abroad: North American Women at German-Speaking Universities, 1868-1915* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003), xvi. Singer’s study focused on North American women who pursued graduate and professional education in Europe. She found that they were White women aged 21 to 45, who came from the upper and middle classes. Their fathers were primarily businessmen, landowners, industrialists, bankers, ministers, physicians, lawyers, and professors.

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of essential stories and topics that were overlooked or negated, but which actually offer new insight into the experiences within the African Diaspora.”<sup>14</sup> Like Diouf, I am driven to retrieve the forgotten stories and achievements of these trailblazers, because knowledge of their educational histories in Europe is essential to remediate an incomplete scholarship which has excluded and silenced their voices. This thesis provides me with an excellent opportunity to highlight their accomplishments and to advocate for their inclusivity in American Studies scholarship.

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to explore the academic, social, and cultural experiences of selected African American women who studied in Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to understand how they were able to achieve their trailblazing firsts while navigating intersectional oppressions. It examines the period from 1859-1935 when little was expected academically and intellectually of African American women, because of their prescribed location at the bottom of the White male-dominated hierarchy. Given these obstacles, they were certainly never expected to attend university or to obtain higher education degrees in America or Europe. My specific objectives are to offer insight into how they were able to succeed while navigating race, gender, and class issues at home and abroad, and how their study abroad experiences affected their identities, careers, and transnational activism. I argue that this is a critical area of research to help us understand why so many influential and notable African American women have completed their higher education abroad in Europe since the mid-1800s.

This thesis features historical case studies on abolitionist and physician Sarah Parker Remond (1826-1894), international civil rights activist and clubwoman Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954), and diplomatic historian and disarmament expert Merze Tate (1905-1996). I argue that they were multidimensional and multilayered individuals who were ahead of their time and that they

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<sup>14</sup>Howard Dodson, 'An Interview with Sylviane A. Diouf' *Callaloo*, vol 39, no 4 (Fall 2016): 882.

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negotiated intersections of race, gender, and class by using their Black female agency which is characterized by initiative, perseverance, resistance, and empowerment. The key intellectual takeaways are the use of Black feminist methodologies which provide understanding and insight into the value that Remond, Terrell, and Tate placed upon education, which along with Black history was transmitted by their parents and slave ancestors. When accounts of their lives are compared, it becomes clear that they all emphatically rejected the restrictive race, gender, and class roles that American society had prescribed for them at birth. The patterns that emerge from these methodologies show that they chose higher education as a key location of their empowerment and pursued study abroad in non-traditional fields for Black women: medicine, foreign languages, and international relations.

The core research questions are: what were the educational, cultural, and social experiences of these women in Europe, and how did they navigate issues of race, gender, and class at home and abroad? How did their experiences inform their lives, identities, and careers? The sub-questions are: what were their contributions as suffragists, clubwomen, and transnational activists, and what were the historical contexts of the times in which they lived? Uncovering the answers to these questions will fulfill the thesis aims and objectives and provide a much-needed historical narrative to close the current literature gap. In addition, an investigation of these questions can inform higher education professors, students, and study abroad practitioners about the forgotten histories of the earliest African American women to study in Europe.

### 1.1 Explanation of Racial Terminology

*I see slavery is in retreat, but the prejudice from which it arose is immovable . . . When they have abolished slavery, the moderns still have to eradicate a much more intangible and tenacious prejudice---the prejudice of race. ~ Alexis de Tocqueville, 1835.*<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: Volumes I & II*, 1835, Translated by Henry Reeve (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2014).

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Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham claims that: “As a fluid set of overlapping discourses, race is perceived as arbitrary and illusionary, on the one hand, while natural and fixed on the other.”<sup>16</sup>

W.E.B. Du Bois also critiqued “the arbitrariness of race” and pointed out the ever-changing race distinctions “without explanation, without apology.”<sup>17</sup> Unlike European Americans, African Americans’ names, ethnic identities, languages, cultures, and religious beliefs were systematically expunged upon their arrival on the slave auction blocks. Tom W. Smith notes that:

Racial labels have been of special importance to Black Americans. Wrenched from their native lands, Blacks lost their core personal identities. Tribal affiliation, kinship ties, language, and many other cultural attributes were destroyed when Blacks were enslaved by an alien culture in a foreign Land. While the preferred term has changed several times, the common goal for Blacks has been to find a group label that instilled group pride and self-esteem.<sup>18</sup>

Consequently, in the United States, the collective labels for descendants of these kidnapped African slaves have undergone various alterations in racial classifications from “colored” to “Negro” to “Black American” and “African American” to the euphemistic “a person of color.”

As miscegenation increased between slave owners and their slave women, so did the number of ‘mulattoes’, called mixed-race persons today. As a result, these socially constructed racial terms became legally linked to the biological one-drop rule where one drop of Black blood makes a person Black in America regardless of the amount of White blood; however, this classification does not work in reverse. If it were to operate equally for both groups, nearly every African American would have a legitimate genetic DNA claim to be

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<sup>16</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, ‘African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race’, *Signs* vol. 283, issue 21, (1992): 255.

<sup>17</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1984), 99. (First published in 1940).

<sup>18</sup> Tom W. Smith, ‘Changing Racial Labels: From “Colored” to “Negro” to “Black” to “African American”’, *The Public Opinion Quarterly* vol. 56, no. 4 (1992): 496-497. See also Ben L. Martin, ‘From Negro to Black to African American: The Power of Names and Naming’, *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 106, no. 1 (1991): 83-107; and Freedmen and Southern Society Project, Testimony of a South Carolina Freedman before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission. Beaufort, S.C. June 1863. accessed June 15, 2021. <https://freedmen.umd.edu/mcmilln.htm>. Former slave Henry McMillan testified about his harsh life and physical abuse during slavery and how slaves referred to themselves. He was asked: “In speaking of each other do you say “negro”?” He replied: “We call each other colored people, black people, but not negro because we used that word in secesh [U.S. secessionists] times.” Now free, he no longer wanted to use that term.

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classified as White.<sup>19</sup>

The fluctuating and arbitrary nature of these labels for Americans of African descent can be seen in the re-naming of the former *Journal of Negro History*, which is now known as the *Journal of African American History*. On the other hand, the NAACP has not changed its name from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. summarized the ever-changing labels and declared in the ‘Personal Statement’ for his Yale University admission: “My grandfather was colored, my father was a negro, and I am black.”<sup>20</sup> Gates explained, however, that the term ‘black’ was not used in polite company in the 1950s when he grew up. The women in this study like Gates and other Black Americans were certainly aware of these fluctuating socially constructed racial identities. Hence, in this thesis, the various terms used to label Black people in America are used interchangeably to alleviate the discordance that arises from their endless alterations by those in power.<sup>21</sup>

Lastly, the terms ‘racism’ and ‘racist’ occur throughout this thesis, and my definition is any person, group, organization, educational institution, business, or other entity that uses an individual’s skin color and/or ethnicity to violate and deprive them of their legal rights and equality under the law. Of greater importance to me are their illegal actions rather than any derogatory or pejorative language they may use. Like many other African Americans who

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<sup>19</sup> The U.S. Supreme Court decision in the Plessy v Ferguson case in 1896 which legalized Jim Crow segregation with its ‘separate but equal’ ruling was based in part on the one drop rule. The plaintiff Homer Plessy, a New Orleans Creole was removed from a Whites only train carriage. Plessy, who was genetically seven-eighths White and one-eighth Black and could have passed for White, was classified as Black because of the ‘one-drop rule’. This decision ushered in Jim Crow segregation which was to last almost 100 years until Brown v Board of Education in 1954 when the Supreme Court declared ‘separate but equal’ laws in public places were unconstitutional.

<sup>20</sup> Alex Benichmol and Willy Maley, eds, *Spheres of Influence: Intellectual and Cultural Publics from Shakespeare to Habermas* (Bern, CH: Peter Lang, 2007), 311.

<sup>21</sup> See F. James Davis, *Who is Black?: One Nation’s Definition* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2020). The author discusses the history of proscribed miscegenation and its role in the one-drop rule. He explains how the U.S. census classification of racial and ethnic groups has changed over time since 1790 and that the one-drop rule does not exist in any other country. I contend that despite their unambiguous one-drop rule, these shifting and arbitrary definitions of who is Black in America exist to serve the polarizing economic and political agendas of those in power.



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visited, lived or studied in Europe, Remond, Terrell, and Tate wrote about American racism in sharp contrast to the relative lack of racism they experienced in Europe. In this thesis, I critically analyze their archives and primary sources which provide first-hand evidence of their European experiences with racism, because they raise questions of interpretation given the historical record of Europe and its imperial racist ideologies during their studies abroad. By highlighting Europe as a place where they were able to live their lives relatively free of America's oppressive racism, they drew attention to the ways in which the meanings of 'race' and 'racism' are not fixed but historically and geographically contingent. As a result, despite the usual archival marginalization in African American women's history, their voices in their archives and primary sources explain how and why they viewed Europeans as less racist than Americans.

### 1.2 Significance and Original Contribution of the Thesis

This research is significant for several reasons. First, it brings scholarly attention to an important but overlooked chapter in the early history of African American women's study abroad in Europe. It examines the crucial question of how they were able to succeed despite oppressive intersections of race, gender, and class. There are 22 million African American women in the world today, and if they were a country, they would rank 61st out of the world's 234 countries.<sup>22</sup> These numbers mean their history and accomplishments cannot be ignored, because African American women's history is American history, and it must be inclusive.

This thesis makes several original contributions to knowledge. For the first time, it brings together the collective histories of three prominent and influential African American women who studied in several European countries including England, Italy, France, Switzerland, and

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<sup>22</sup> 'Countries in the World by Population (2024)', Worldometer. accessed December 22, 2024. <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/> This is "Data based on the latest *United Nations Population Division* estimates." Numbering 22 million, the African American women's population is larger than the individual country populations of Ireland, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, Sweden, Hungary, Portugal, Austria, Switzerland, Singapore, Denmark, and Norway among others.

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Germany during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This research breaks new ground on this topic by applying Black feminist epistemologies and theoretical frameworks that provide other ways of knowing which dare to go beyond the boundaries of default Eurocentric masculinist frameworks. This methodological approach allows the women's marginalized voices to be heard from their standpoints and lived experiences.

Although Remond's, Terrell's, and Tate's educational achievements at home and abroad are not in dispute, this thesis makes an original contribution to the literature, because it focuses on their European experiences from critical theory perspectives which the current literature has not addressed. I conceptualize their experiences using the theoretical and analytical frameworks of Black Feminist Thought and intersectionality to examine and gain insight into *how* they were able to achieve their trailblazing firsts while navigating intersectional oppressions. This thesis interrogates their achievements by using the gendered lens of these Black feminist theories to intervene in default Western research paradigms and help combat the effects of White privilege in scholarship. It avoids the standard objectivity of these paradigms which may represent study abroad in specific and limited ways which do not consider the subjective voices of these trailblazers. This thesis applies a more holistic approach to their study abroad experiences and is grounded in the Black feminist activist tradition to show that Remond's, Terrell's, and Tate's study abroad incorporated a range of experiences both inside and beyond the classroom lectures. It emphasizes that the value of their experiences was not only knowledge acquired through study but also through a broader 'informal education' in cultural interactions, political campaigning and interracial transnational collaborations which impacted their lives.

Biographies about these three women have only been published within the last ten years. Sirpa Salenius wrote *An Abolitionist Abroad: Sarah Parker Remond in Cosmopolitan Europe* in 2016, Alison M. Parker published her biography *Unceasing Militant: The Life of Mary Church*

## Chapter One: Introduction

*Terrell* in 2020, and Barbara D. Savage's biography *Merze Tate: The Global Odyssey of a Black Woman Scholar* became available worldwide in February 2024.<sup>23</sup> While these biographies are welcome and timely, none focus specifically on the women's study abroad experiences from the critical theoretical and analytical frameworks that I apply. These recent biographies are structured by different research interests and methodological approaches. As her title suggests, Salenius uses a mixed political and social history framework to concentrate on Remond's abolitionism and her transatlantic cosmopolitan life in Europe. One point we do agree on is Salenius's analysis that through transnational sisterhood, Black women "assumed agency" and along with White women they "became involved in counter-hegemonic acts of resistance to oppression."<sup>24</sup> For Alison M. Parker, Terrell's militant "dignified agitation" in America is her foremost concern, and she presents an in-depth examination of her role as a clubwoman and her activism against lynching and for women's and civil rights. Savage's intellectual biography of Tate focuses on her global travel and on critiquing her prolific and interdisciplinary scholarship on topics such as international relations, disarmament, and diplomatic history. These biographies are further discussed in the introductions to each case study chapter.

While I include some of these aspects of their lives, my original theoretical contribution to the literature is missing from all three biographies. Although the authors discuss race and gender issues in the women's lives; they do not apply Black Feminist Thought or intersectionality to theorize the impact of these issues on their experiences in America or abroad. Very importantly, I research and include *all* three women in my thesis as historical case studies, which these

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<sup>23</sup> See Sirpa Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad: Sarah Parker Remond in Cosmopolitan Europe*, (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016); Alison M. Parker, *Unceasing Militant: The Life of Mary Church Terrell* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2020); and Barbara D. Savage, *Merze Tate: The Global Odyssey of a Black Woman Scholar* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023).

<sup>24</sup> Sirpa Salenius. 'Transatlantic Interracial Sisterhoods: Sarah Remond, Ellen Craft, and Harriet Jacobs in England', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* vol. 38, no. 1 (2017): 167.

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biographies do not. This collective research pushes the individual boundaries of the biographical approach and instead uses a critical theory approach based on Black feminist epistemologies to conceptualize and compare their intergenerational experiences abroad.

As far back as 1982, Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith called attention to the dearth of studies about African American women in a forward-thinking Black feminist anthology.<sup>25</sup> They proposed that this was due to “the politics of a white male society” which denied and refused to recognize the “importance of African-American women’s lives and contributions through racial, sexual, and class oppression.” However, by the beginning of the twenty-first century, published work in books, book chapters, and journal articles about African American women had rapidly expanded.<sup>26</sup> This includes literature about race and gender issues in higher education. Nevertheless, these studies have been confined to the United States.<sup>27</sup> The authors’ common theme in this domestic literature is that contemporary Black American women in academia continue to face racial issues both as professors and students. This theme links to my research, because it provides evidence of the longevity of racial issues in American higher education which existed during the lifetimes of the women under study. Stephanie Y. Evans has described the racial discrimination and hostility Black students faced at Predominantly White Institutions which included denial of on-campus housing, cafeteria access, and club

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<sup>25</sup> Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, Barbara Smith, and Brittney Cooper, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1982). Their purpose was to change the focus of Feminist Studies on White women and the Black Studies emphasis on Black men to more studies about the lives of Black women.

<sup>26</sup> Veronica G. Thomas, Kisha Braithwaite and Paula Mitchell, *African American Women: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>27</sup> See Elizabeth L. Ihle, ed., *Black Women in Higher Education: An Anthology of Essays, Studies, and Documents* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1992); Lois Benjamin, *Black Women in the Academy: Promises and Perils* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1997); Stephanie Y. Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954; An Intellectual History* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida 2007); and Deborah Gray White, ed, *Telling Histories: Black Women Historians in the Ivory Tower* (Chapel; Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

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memberships if they managed to get admitted. In other words, unlike White students, Black students were denied the equal opportunity to participate in university life.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, Merze Tate took part in a range of academic, social, and cultural clubs and activities at Oxford without any racial prejudice.<sup>29</sup> I propose that Tate's overseas location was the crucial difference in her treatment, and this underscores the significance of this research project and its aim to explore the lived experiences of Black women who managed to escape America's race prejudice in higher education and study abroad in Europe.

This thesis also reflects the transnational turn in American Studies scholarship. This trend situates the study of America, its history and diverse peoples beyond its borders in a non-geopolitical international context. David Thelen explains that beginning in the 1960s, historians reduced their focus on the nation-state after borders had been breached by the spread of globalization. As a result of the cross-border movement of people, ideas, and cultures, a new transnational scholarship emerged which replaced the focus on American exceptionalism and the nation-state as the frame of reference with its role as a global participant.<sup>30</sup> Despite Thelen's observations about the origins of contemporary transnational scholarship, this research has uncovered the little-known nineteenth and early twentieth century educational interactions and transnational networks between African Americans and Europeans. It has revealed that the current focus on transnationalism was already part of the ideologies and agendas of African American women, including former slaves, over 150 years ago. These histories are significant because they show an earlier praxis of this relatively new trend in transnational scholarship.

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<sup>28</sup> Evans, 'African American Women Scholars', 79-80. Evans reported that: ". . . integrated school experiences [at Predominantly White Institutions] in the United States revealed an undercurrent of race antagonism as well as cases of overt hostility." (Ibid).

<sup>29</sup> Merze Tate, 'Three Years in England', *Ivy Leaf*, vol. 14, no. 1 (March 1936): 18. Tate wrote that: "I joined societies and clubs . . . I made friendships and contacts," and "I felt myself, a part of Oxford life and society."

<sup>30</sup> David Thelen, 'The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History', *Journal of American History*, vol. 86, no. 3 (Dec 1999): 967.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Lastly, this research can inform current dialogues about the underrepresentation of Black women in university study abroad programs. Stephanie Y. Evans argues that: “This history of Black women’s study abroad can assist in removing barriers to educational opportunities that still exist for many Black and women students.” She found that fears of racial discrimination while studying overseas are obstructions for African American students.<sup>31</sup> While Remond, Terrell, and Tate faced racism in America, they rarely experienced it in Europe. Their success and their legacies can offer relevant lessons from the past for these twenty-first century students.

### **1.3 Limitations of the Study and Archival Marginalization**

This historical research examines the European study abroad experiences of selected women, and it is limited to their specific experiences and involvement with transnationalism during and after their studies. This thesis is representative, and, therefore, it does not include all the African American women who studied in Europe between 1859 and 1935 nor does it investigate the history of Black women’s transnational activism. Unfortunately, due to their archival marginalization, the historical memory and narratives of many African American women who were students in Europe during this time period cannot be retrieved and are forever lost to the dustbins of history. This scarcity of literature, archives, and primary sources has been an ongoing challenge for this study. Yet, unless researchers dare to investigate and tell the untold histories of African American women, the literature gaps will remain.

One woman I wanted to include in this thesis was Georgiana Simpson (1866-1944) who was the first African American woman to be awarded a PhD degree in June 1921 from the University of Chicago, but the lack of archives and literature prevented her inclusion. She survived the Chicago Race Riot of 1919 during the Red Summer of White supremacist terrorism in more than 36 U.S. cities; however, she did not survive when the University of Chicago’s President

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<sup>31</sup> Evans, ‘African American Women Scholars’, 94, 96.

## Chapter One: Introduction

Harry Pratt personally barred Simpson in 1920 from staying in the university's on-campus accommodation because of her skin color.<sup>32</sup> Like the women in the case studies, she used her Black female agency to persevere, and she received her PhD in German Philology from the University of Chicago in 1921 at the age of 55. Earlier in 1896, Simpson had studied German language and literature in Rostock, Germany for a year and a half. Yet, there are no archives or literature about her study in Germany which prepared her for PhD success.<sup>33</sup> As a result of this archival marginalization, the sample selection was limited to those Black women with extant archival and primary sources and sufficient secondary publications. The question that then arises is why are these archives missing or nonexistent?

One reason is that before and after four million slaves were freed in 1865, most of the archives in American repositories were created by Whites to disseminate Western histories based on Eurocentric research paradigms. An authentic inclusive American history to highlight Black achievements would not have been the goal, and paradoxically, due to the legacy of Anti-Literacy Laws during slavery, 95 percent of Black Americans were illiterate at the end of the Civil War in 1865, and 70 percent were still illiterate by 1880.<sup>34</sup> As a result, few archival documents exist in mainstream repositories about nineteenth century African American achievements and contributions, and even fewer exist for Black women. Elizabeth McHenry explains that only fragments exist of the literature that Black Americans did manage to write, because they

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<sup>32</sup> Sarah Bartlett, 'Georgiana Simpson (1866-1944)'. BlackPast.org. (October 8, 2010). accessed March 14, 2024. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/simpson-georgiana-1866-1944/>.

<sup>33</sup> See 'Georgiana R. Simpson', *The Journal of Negro History* vol. 29, no. 2 (April 1944): 245. This article was her obituary. The only other related primary sources I located were (1) An 1896 article in a historic Black newspaper's society column. It described her as a well-known public school teacher who "sailed for Europe today, from Baltimore, on the *Crefeld*, to spend her vacation with friends in Rostock, Germany." See 'Georgiana Simpson' *The Evening Star*, Washington, D.C., Wednesday, May 27, 1896; and (2) An original copy of her PhD Thesis titled 'Herder's Conception of "Das Volk"' at the Library of Congress website. See Georgiana Rose Simpson, PhD (Thesis). University of Chicago, 1921. accessed March 14, 2024. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcsd.0033770878A>

<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 4.

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were not valued or preserved in the official records of archives, libraries, museums, and other institutional repositories. She points out that “Although African Americans did realize the importance of and assumed responsibility for recording and preserving their own cultural artifacts, precious few of these have managed to survive.”<sup>35</sup>

In addition, the few educated Black scholars and academics who were literate were usually barred from publishing in White controlled American academic journals and from presenting their research at mainstream White conferences.<sup>36</sup> According to Barbara Savage, “Black and female scholars were routinely denied the opportunity to publish in most academic journals in their fields.”<sup>37</sup> They overcame this exclusion by publishing their work in Black periodicals like the *Journal of Negro Education*, the *Journal of Negro History*, *The Crisis*, the NAACP’s official magazine, and in the Black press. However, the availability and circulation of their research was limited to a small number of educated Black Americans, and their knowledge production remained outside the reach of the larger pool of mainstream White American academics.

Pero Dagbovie acknowledges African American women’s archival marginalization and their exclusion from mainstream American academic journals due to racist, sexist, and class oppression. He points out that they also struggled to enter the Black male academic and research community because of their gender.<sup>38</sup> These circumstances created the phenomenon of self-taught and self-proclaimed African American women who were “historians without portfolio.”<sup>39</sup> Dagbovie posits that these were Black women who lacked professional or academic

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>36</sup> See Ibid, 245. This racist exclusion was the impetus for the establishment of the male-only American Negro Academy in 1897, which published works on the Negro situation in America and promoted classical scholarship, and the liberal arts in higher education. Its prominent members included W.E.B. Du Bois and Alexander Crummell.

<sup>37</sup> Savage, *Merze Tate*, ix.

<sup>38</sup> Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, ‘Black Women Historians from the Late 19th Century to the Dawning of the Civil Rights Movement’, *The Journal of African American History*, vol. 89, no. 3 (Summer, 2004): 241; See also Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, ‘Black Women, Carter G. Woodson, and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1915-1950’. *The Journal of African American History* vol. 88, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 21-41.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 243.



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qualifications due to race and gender discrimination; however, they refused to remain silent, and they challenged the conventional definition of ‘historian’. Although it was a struggle, they persevered and published books independently and articles in the Black press and Black academic journals without waiting for the approval of White mainstream academia.<sup>40</sup>

According to Dagbovie “. . . less than ten black women earned doctorates in history before the mid-1950s thereby gaining access in some form of academic sanctioning.”<sup>41</sup> Those who did earn PhDs were usually the ‘first’ to receive them at their Predominantly White Institutions. After Anna Julia Cooper received her PhD in History from the Sorbonne in 1925, it was not until 1940 that the second African American woman, Marion Thompson Wright received her doctorate in history from Teachers College, Columbia University.<sup>42</sup> Merze Tate received her PhD in Government and International Relations from Harvard University’s Radcliffe College in 1941. Tate was one of the few Black women with a doctorate prior to the 1950s who left extant archival materials and other primary sources which challenged her ‘outsider within’ status.

Despite Tate’s archives, Gerda Lerner discovered that many primary sources about African American women’s history have been obscured in other collections or were never collected and are now lost to history.<sup>43</sup> She also found that the mainstream literature which does exist about African American women’s history often misrepresents, misinterprets, or omits their accomplishments.<sup>44</sup> For all these reasons, this thesis was challenged by archival marginalization.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Dagbovie names about a dozen African American women “historians without portfolio” from the 1890s to the mid-1950s. Ibid, 251. Drusilla Dunjee Houston (1876-1941) was one of the better-known historians who was not formally trained. She was self-taught and was the first Black woman to study and write about ancient African history. See her seminal 1926 book, Drusilla Dunjee Houston, *Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushite Empire* (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1985). Dagbovie calls this book: “a precursor to the Afrocentric tradition.” (Ibid). Houston aimed to correct the denials and miseducation about Black History, which she believed fueled oppression and racial hatred toward African Americans.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 242.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 241. Marion Thompson Wright was the first African American woman to earn a PhD in History in the United States.

<sup>43</sup> Gerda Lerner, ‘Black Women in the United States: A Problem in Historiography and Interpretation’, in Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1981), 64.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

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Lerner confirms my assertion that archival materials from African American women's history are frequently missing, partial, or fragmented, and even when they exist, as she points out, they are sometimes misinterpreted or misrepresented. As a result, researchers must often use 'clues' and not facts which require interpretation beyond the evidence. This means that we must interpret the experiences, perceptions, and statements from Remond, Terrell and Tate within the context of their archival marginalization. The methodological process I use to address this situation reflects the historian's need to interpret meaning based on their knowledge and understanding of the historical context. It is important to note that I not only had to deal with the limitations of the archival marginalization but also the marginalized subjective perspectives of these three women, which were conditioned by intersecting contexts of race, class, and gender. This thesis aims to bring the women from the margins to the center and this centering at times raises questions of interpretation when their viewpoints appear to contradict the historical record of the times. For example, their viewpoints about the lack of racism they experienced in Europe shows the tension between their marginalized voices and the historical record which tends to prioritize and privilege White male perspectives.

I acknowledge this tension throughout the thesis by exploring and interpreting other Black American voices and perspectives like those of W.E.B. Du Bois in Chapter Three. I include his various viewpoints on the nuances of European racism which sometimes agree and at other times disagree with the women's perspectives and the historical record at different points in his life. When readers interpret the three women's interpretations of Europe as a place without racism, they should note that Europeans perceived African Americans differently from their Black colonial subjects during the period addressed here. Furthermore, it is notable that for Remond, Terrell, and Tate, their class status fundamentally shaped their gendered and racialized experiences and opinions.

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### **1.4 Structure of the Thesis: Chapter Summaries**

This thesis is organized into seven chapters including this introduction. Chapter Two presents the methodology and explains the rationale and development of the research design, the steps in the process, and it discusses the Black feminist theoretical frameworks. Chapter Three sets the scene for the three case study chapters that follow. It provides essential historical contexts that situate the case studies within the key themes of the high value that slaves placed on literacy, and significant people, places, and events in African American study abroad from the eighteenth century to the early twentieth century in Great Britain, Germany, and France where Remond, Terrell, and Tate lived and studied.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six form the main body of the thesis, and they present the historical case studies of Remond, Terrell, and Tate, respectively. Each case study investigates the core questions of how they navigated race, gender, and class issues at home and abroad and how their study abroad experiences affected their identity, careers, and their transnational activities. The theoretical frameworks of Black Feminist Thought and intersectionality guide the research in all of the historical case study chapters, and the analytical content of these chapters reflects this feminist methodology. Each case study explores the women's early childhood and education in America, examines their motivations for studying abroad in Europe, and analyzes their academic, social, and cultural experiences as students. Their study abroad histories begin in 1859 when Remond began her studies at the Bedford College for Women in London and end in 1935 when Tate received her B.Litt. degree from Oxford University.

However, in addition to their formal study abroad, this thesis includes discussions of their experiences and activities beyond their classroom studies. This holistic approach enables us to understand how other informal aspects shaped and complemented their formal learning. These experiences include the women's cultural explorations and travel in Europe and their interracial

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

networking and transnational activities. Specifically, this thesis encompasses Remond's abolitionist campaign, her collaboration with British women abolitionists and suffragists, her political connections with Italian nationalists, and her cosmopolitan lifestyle in Italy; Terrell's language learning through immersion while living with various host families and her passionate interest in European history and cultural artifacts; and Tate's extensive travel throughout Europe during her term vacations from Oxford. These activities which are conceptually linked to Black feminist intersectional methodologies represent a more expansive definition of the idea of 'study abroad' – one that transcends and extends beyond the women's formal education to help us better understand their lives as Black women in a White world.

Chapter Seven summarizes the research's original contributions to knowledge, the effects of the archival challenges, the findings, my conclusion, and suggestions for further research. A major finding is that the women's study abroad helped them to create interracial networks which aided their cultural adjustments, broadened their international outlook and fostered their transnational activist collaborations. Another key finding is that Remond, Terrell, and Tate did not report racial discrimination in Europe and that as educated women, they were given higher class status; however, Remond and Terrell did report incidents of exported racism from White Americans. Chapter Two, Methodology now follows with the research design, and it includes an in-depth analysis of Black feminist epistemologies as decolonized alternatives to default Western research paradigms underpinned by Eurocentric masculinist frameworks.

## Chapter Two: Methodology: Research Design, Theoretical Frameworks

*Subordinated groups know that epistemology has never been neutral, and that epistemic power is part of how domination operates.* ~ Patricia Hill Collins.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses my research design and methodology, which are based on a qualitative historical approach. I examined and analyzed archives and primary sources including diaries, journals, correspondence, oral history interviews, official documents, autobiographies, and historic newspapers in addition to secondary sources. The research design was organized into my research philosophy, the data collection and analysis methods, the inquiry methods, and my theoretical frameworks. Due to the status of African American women as racialized and gendered subjects, the challenging task was to find suitable methods and theoretical approaches that addressed their multidimensional standpoints. Therefore, I needed to develop approaches that would enable me to analyze “the experiences of groups that occupy multiple angles and social locations” as well as frameworks that focus inductively on the intersectional complexity of Black women’s experiences.<sup>2</sup>

The first step in my research design process was to decide on a research philosophy, and I selected Black feminism because it best expresses my beliefs about African American women’s activist versus passive roles in history. Activism is a defining characteristic of the trailblazers in this study. Black feminism is defined as:

. . . an intellectual, artistic, and philosophical tradition and activist tradition and practice grounded in African American women's lived experiences. Along with gender inequality, Black Feminism engages with the aspects of racial, class, ability/disability inequalities, individual opportunities and the life trajectory with an intersectional lens.<sup>3</sup>

That is precisely the aim of this thesis. It is grounded in exploring the lived experiences of

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 122.

<sup>2</sup> Bonnie Thompson Dill and Ruth Enid Zambrana, ‘Critical Thinking about Inequality: An Emerging Lens’, in Bonnie Thompson Dill and Ruth Enid Zambrana, eds, *Emerging Intersections: Race, Class, and Gender in Theory, Policy, and Practice* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Introduction to Black Feminism’, accessed August 8, 2023. <https://libguides.rutgers.edu/blackfemin>. Whereas feminism can be viewed as an oppositional term to misogyny, Black feminism can be expanded to oppose misogyny by Black men as well. See also ‘The Combahee River Collective, ‘A Black Feminist Statement’. *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 2014): 271–280.

## Chapter Two: Methodology: Research Design, Theoretical Frameworks

the three women during their study abroad and transnational activities, and it seeks to historically contextualize them through an intersectional lens. Contemporary Black feminism developed in the 1970s in response to Black women's needs to address their concerns and define race and gender issues that were different from those of White feminists in the women's movement.<sup>4</sup> Patricia Hill Collins lists four core themes of Black feminism: the legacy of struggle, the search for voice, the interdependence of thought and action, and the significance of empowerment in everyday life.<sup>5</sup> My analysis of the lived experiences of these three women focuses on these themes which are central to Black feminist praxis.

Vivian May reminds us of the "historical dimensions of African American feminist theory and action" and how this theory was shaped and informed by Anna Julia Cooper's "theoretical-political precepts" although it may have varied due to time, place and circumstance.<sup>6</sup> While the term 'feminist' did not appear in her speeches and writing, Cooper's intellectual versatility and range meant that her insightful and critical analysis of the intersections of race, gender, and class set the foundation for contemporary theories about Black feminism.<sup>7</sup> A key principle of Anna Julia Cooper's feminist philosophy is "that race is gendered and gender is raced, and that both are shot through with the politics of class, sexuality, and nation."<sup>8</sup> Cooper's prescient articulation of Black feminism supports my argument about the racialized and gendered status of African American women, and it provides the essential framework that guides my research design.

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<sup>4</sup> See Patricia Hill Collins, 'Feminism in the Twentieth Century' in Darlene Clark Hine, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, and Elsa Barkley Brown, eds, *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia Vol. I* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 418-425. Collins includes a bibliography with the knowledge production of dozens of Black women feminists beginning in the 1970s. She points out that: "The foundation laid by early Black feminists has supported and nurtured the complex and growing movement today. (Ibid, 424). This 1,530-page encyclopedia is a seminal publication which includes the profiles of 641 African American women.

<sup>5</sup> Collins, 'Feminism in the Twentieth Century', 422.

<sup>6</sup> Vivian M. May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist: A Critical Introduction* (London, UK: Routledge, 2007), 181-182.

<sup>7</sup> Mark S. Giles, 'Special Focus: Dr. Anna Julia Cooper, 1858-1964: Teacher, Scholar, and Timeless Womanist', *The Journal of Negro Education*, vol. 75, no. 4 (2006): 629.

<sup>8</sup> May, *Anna Julia Cooper*, 182.

## Chapter Two: Methodology: Research Design, Theoretical Frameworks

In line with my research philosophy, I chose what I term an interpretive narrative approach along with historical case study as the most suitable methods to collect the data and then to organize the inquiry within the thesis. After the data was collected and the inquiry was organized into historical case studies, I explored, conceptualized, and critically examined Remond's, Terrell's, and Tate's lived experiences through the theoretical and analytical frameworks of Black Feminist Thought and intersectionality. These methods and frameworks complemented my research philosophy, and they completed the development of my qualitative research design.

### 2.1 Interpretive Narrative Method

*The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.* ~ Audre Lorde.<sup>9</sup>

I soon realized that applying Western research paradigms of pure objectivity which are presented as neutral posed a threat to my data collection and its assessment. These Eurocentric research methods were not created with enslaved and colonized Black people in mind and least of all African American women. Lois Benjamin posits that:

In critiquing the Eurocentric patriarchy, its pedagogies, paradigms, methods, and canons, we can balance the conceptual foundation of the Western scientific mind, which postulates that knowledge can be derived through procedures that are free of race, gender, ethnicity, class, age, or other context.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, the data collection and interpretation methods required a different approach away from these hegemonic Western paradigms, because of the women's racialized and gendered positions at the bottom of the socially constructed dominant hierarchy.

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<sup>9</sup> Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', in Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* Fourth Edition (Albany, NY: State University of New York (SUNY) Press, 2015), 95. Lorde claims that a key tactical tool that oppressors use is to keep the oppressed occupied with oppressors' concerns. She explains that: "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow a temporary respite . . . but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change." See also Audre Lorde, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* (London, UK: Penguin UK, 1984).

<sup>10</sup> Lois Benjamin, ed., *Black Women in the Academy: Promises and Perils* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1997), 49.

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To address this methodological challenge, I searched for approaches that would highlight the women's unique positionality of being Black and women in America. This is an ongoing struggle and has been since August 20, 1619, over 400 years ago, when the first African women arrived on British colonial soil in Jamestown, Virginia. Their lived experiences have always been fundamentally different from those of other groups, because African American women's oppressive intersections of race and gender do not occur in the lives of White men, White women, or Black men. Anna Julia Cooper asserted that White men could not speak to the experiences of Black men and Black men could not speak to Black women's experiences.<sup>11</sup> Because of their experiences in America, the methodological challenge was to find approaches that accurately reflected Black women's positionality.

After consideration of all these factors, I applied an interpretive narrative method to the data collection process to avoid the scientific abstraction embedded in methods of pure reason which would have further marginalized these women's stories and their inherent worth and value as intellectuals. I view the interpretive narrative method as a necessary paradigm shift, because it recognizes these Black women as authoritative participants in society. It does so by allowing primary data from their archives, diaries, oral histories, and autobiographies to be collected which values their subjective voices, and it connects these voices to their Black feminist and intersectional identities.

Anna Julia Cooper's research approach informed my selection of this method, because she conducted her research "from a situated standpoint, not an objectivist position."<sup>12</sup> She decried the limits embedded in a method of "pure reason" and criticized "scientific" abstraction

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<sup>11</sup> 'Anna Julia Cooper', *Standard Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (March 31, 2015). accessed October 28, 2023. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/anna-julia-cooper/>.

<sup>12</sup> May, *Anna Julia Cooper*, 128-129.



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in social and historical analysis as almost “ludicrous”.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, this thesis aims to make visible the shadows of Remond’s, Terrell’s, and Tate’s particulars in the margins of their subjectivity and outside generalizations that ignore differences. This interpretive narrative method was crucially needed because it foregrounded the androcentric and hierarchical power relationships between the women and the dominant White male hegemony rather than objectively minimizing them.

Another reason I used the interpretive narrative method was to bring the women in this study from the margins to the center. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to avoid a detached narrative, because of its inherent limitations as an a-priori method cloaked in the pure reason of the dominant hegemony. This disembodied detachment based on scientific abstraction and objectivity would have undermined my historical analyses and further trivialized the women’s race and gender embedded in their lived experiences. Instead, the interpretive narrative method allows their voices in autobiographies, memoirs, and oral history interviews to take center stage.

Cooper’s methodological approach employs elements that are part of “a critical interdisciplinary method that crosses boundaries of knowledge, history, identity, and nation to reveal how these constructed divisions marginalize those whose lives and way of knowing straddle borders.”<sup>14</sup> In her analysis of Cooper’s eleven key principles of Black feminist theory, Vivian May asserts that she challenged “hierarchical, top-down forms of knowing, leading, learning, organizing, and “helping” in favor of participatory, embodied, reflexive models.”<sup>15</sup> Similarly, this interpretive narrative method allowed me to collect data from the perspectives of these marginalized women rather than from a top-down Eurocentric macrohistory approach.

In summary, this interpretive narrative method builds upon Cooper’s call for “discursive

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 184.

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analytic techniques that are flexible, kinetic, comparative, multivocal, and plurisagant.”<sup>16</sup> This method of data collection challenges hegemonic epistemologies, and it shows how scholars can design research that transcends more than one standardized way of thinking and knowing. While this narrative method allows for subjectivity in interpreting human details, my hypotheses and arguments are grounded in historical evidence.

### 2.2 Historical Case Study and Purposive Sampling

I selected a descriptive intrinsic historical case study as the most suitable research inquiry for organizing the thesis into these three instances of a bounded phenomenon. Each case study is bounded by the elements of time, place, race, gender, and class allowing for a holistic and in-depth exploration of the women’s epochal lives particularly their formative experiences abroad. The time span for their European study abroad extends from 1859 to 1935.

John W. Creswell has proposed that there are five research traditions of inquiry, which can be applied to qualitative research: grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography, biography, and case study.<sup>17</sup> Developing a set of case studies is appropriate for this thesis, because my main purpose is to explore the women’s experiences of studying abroad bounded by specific criteria. Thus, my research focuses on presenting an in-depth description of a unique phenomenon, and it “studies the particulars and complexities of a case . . .”<sup>18</sup> Marilyn Lichtman asserts that “A lack of previous research or exploration on a topic might warrant qualitative research, particularly a case study approach,” and case studies may consist of documents and archival review.<sup>19</sup> In addition, Robert Bogdan and Sari K. Biklen fully approve of historical topics for case studies.

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<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Ogebe, ‘Anna Julia Cooper’, University of Chicago, Woman is a Rational Animal (December 8, 2020). accessed August 10, 2023. <https://womanisrational.uchicago.edu/2020/12/08/anna-julia-cooper/>.

<sup>17</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Marilyn Lichtman, *Understanding and Evaluating Qualitative Education Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, 2010), 111.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

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A historical case study method of inquiry was selected for all these reasons.

The historical case study method is also helpful as a diachronic tool, because it allows for a comparison of the similarities and differences of race, gender, and class issues in the lives of the three women in intergenerational contexts; therefore, the case studies are presented chronologically. C. Behan McCullagh posits that “An absolutely minimal requirement of historical narratives which have a central subject is that they recount events in the history of their subject in roughly chronological order, making them both credible and intelligible.”<sup>21</sup> This chronological arrangement allowed for the historical mapping and diachronic development of the overarching thread of this thesis, which is the women’s study abroad and their transnationalism. The mapping included the data collection, locations, and events that were analyzed to better understand how the women’s education was affected by social, cultural, and political changes over time.

Purposive sampling was used to select a sample most relevant for answering the research questions. This type of sampling method is valuable for researchers investigating a specific, small population who want to gain in-depth knowledge about a bounded phenomenon in a qualitative study. The criteria and rationale for inclusion in the sample must be clear for the sample to have validity.<sup>22</sup> Remond, Terrell, and Tate were selected from a larger pool as the most relevant subjects, because it was possible to retrieve archival and other primary sources about their experiences since they, more than others, wrote publicly and privately about the bounded phenomena in the case. The final step in my research design process was the selection of my theoretical and analytical frameworks, which are discussed next.

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<sup>20</sup> Robert C. Bogdan and Sari K. Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> C. Behan McCullagh, ‘The Truth of Historical Narratives’, *History and Theory*, vol. 26, no. 4 (1987): 32.

<sup>22</sup> Shona McCombes, ‘Sampling Methods, Types, Techniques & Examples’, (June 22, 2023). accessed November 10, 2023. <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/sampling-methods/>

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### 2.3 Theoretical/Analytical Frameworks: Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality

*Scholars of international thought must recognize a core predicament which has long faced Black women knowers more broadly: the interpretive catch-22 of being wholly ignored no matter how much one protests or raises one's ideas, or, alternatively, being engaged with in ways that violate and, in the end, still fundamentally silence what one has to say. ~ Vivian May.<sup>23</sup>*

Black feminist researchers have questioned the proprietary right to knowledge production and ownership in hegemonic Western research paradigms which are standard in the academy.<sup>24</sup> I had the same question, and as I developed my research design, I searched for other ways of knowing which would highlight the intellectualism, transnationalism, and overlooked study abroad achievements of the women in this study. I wanted to learn more about what Rebecca J. Fraser terms “the genealogy of Black women’s knowledge production” and the ideologies behind their thoughts.<sup>25</sup> Fraser’s genealogy of nineteenth century Black female intellectuals includes Frances E. W. Harper, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth, and I would add Maria W. Stewart, Anna Julia Cooper, and Ida B. Wells.<sup>26</sup> I contend that Black feminism is rooted in the knowledge production and activism of these women who challenged race, gender, and class oppression and left legacies and produced other ways of knowing based on their lived experiences. I argue that international thought is crucial for women’s intellectual knowledge production, and that is why this thesis examines each of the women’s transnational networks, including their interracial connections. These Black women thinkers and intellectuals laid the groundwork for today’s Black feminism, and I interrogate their theorizing from the perspective of their transnational activism from slavery through the interwar years of the twentieth century.

In this sense I am inspired by Brittney Cooper who urges us to “approach Black women’s

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<sup>23</sup> Vivian M. May, ‘Anna Julia Cooper on Slavery’s Afterlife: Can International Thought “Hear” Her “Muffled” Voice and Ideas?’ in Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler eds, *Women's International Thought: A New History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 33.

<sup>24</sup> See Bernice McNair Barnett, Rose M. Brewer, and M. Bahati Kuumba. ‘New Directions in Race, Gender & Class Studies: African American Experiences’, *Race, Gender & Class*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1999): 8-9.

<sup>25</sup> Rebecca J. Fraser, *Black Female Intellectuals in Nineteenth Century America: Born to Bloom Unseen?* (New York, NY: Routledge. 2023), 20.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

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long history of knowledge production with the same kind of trust” and “attention we give to the established canon of white thinkers like Michel Foucault or Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari or Louis Althusser. . .”<sup>27</sup> She poses the provocative question:

What might it mean for Black feminist scholars to say they are theorists in the tradition of Anna Julia Cooper or Fannie Barrier Williams, or Ida B. Wells or Patricia Hill Collins or Joy James, in the same way that scholars are allowed to claim that they are Marxist, or Freudian, or Foucauldian, or Kantian, or Spinozan? What might it look like to be Cooperian or Wellsian in our approach to the study of Black women’s lives and Black intellectual thought.<sup>28</sup>

She asserts that the intellectual work of these Black women should be taken “as theoretically seriously as we take the work of French white males . . . who most academics have been trained to trust” as being capable of “deep thoughts.”<sup>29</sup> Until now, these African American women intellectuals, theorists, and producers of knowledge from the nineteenth century to the present have not been added to this established cannon of White male thinkers. I propose that students, researchers, and academics of all backgrounds would welcome the literary canonization of Anna Julia Cooper’s prolific theoretical body of work and her unparalleled knowledge production. Her seminal 1892 book, *A Voice From the South* would be a worthy and deserving starting point.<sup>30</sup> It would offer a decolonized approach to the established canons underpinned by hegemonic Western research paradigms.

Elizabeth Kinsella argues that “It is vital for qualitative researchers, particularly those working with populations oppressed by colonial legacies, to critically examine and apply decolonizing methodological practices to their research.”<sup>31</sup> Kinsella’s argument is relevant to this

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<sup>27</sup> Brittney C. Cooper, *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 13.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Cooper, *A Voice from the South*.

<sup>31</sup> Vivetha Thambinathan and Elizabeth Anne Kinsella, ‘Decolonizing Methodologies in Qualitative Research: Creating Spaces for Transformative Praxis.’ *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20 (2001): 6. accessed November 10, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211014766>

See also Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London, UK: Zed Books Ltd, 2021). The author is a Maori decolonization theorist who analyzes intersections of imperialism and

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research, because the legacies of slavery and racial oppression, which originated in the Thirteen American Colonies, are links that binds Remond, Terrell, and Tate together as descendants of slaves. Therefore, for this research to make an original contribution, it was necessary to decolonize and reclaim knowledge production from hegemonic research paradigms and their established canons. Kinsella further believes that anti-colonial work is a “professional responsibility within the academy,” and that non-Eurocentric research paradigms could transform the academy and make it more inclusive as it recognizes and validates other ways of knowing.<sup>32</sup>

To implement Kinsella’s transformative research strategy, this thesis employs a Black feminist epistemological approach and applies Black Feminist Thought and especially the theory of intersectionality as the most appropriate critical frameworks to explore and interpret the women’s experiences. Black Feminist Thought, which Patricia Hill Collins articulated in 1990, considers the effects that intersecting oppressions have on Black women in all aspects of their lives. According to Collins:

. . . the overarching purpose of U.S. Black feminist thought is . . . to resist oppression, both its practices and the ideas that justify it. If intersecting oppressions did not exist, Black feminist thought and similar oppositional knowledges would be unnecessary. As a critical social theory, Black feminist thought aims to empower African American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions.<sup>33</sup>

Collins goes on to explain that unless these intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class among others are eliminated, Black women “cannot be fully empowered.”<sup>34</sup> She points out that while its theoretical significance is important, its praxis “can stimulate a new consciousness that

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research and argues that imperialism is embedded in Western knowledge traditions. She provides examples of how decolonial and indigenous methodologies written by indigenous people have been applied to research projects.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York, NY and London, UK: Routledge, 2000), 25-26.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 25.

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utilizes Black women's everyday taken for granted knowledge." They can then use this rearticulated consciousness to empower themselves and resist these intersecting oppressions.<sup>35</sup> Thus, Collins believes that Black Feminist Thought is accessible to all Black women regardless of class, educational, or economic status.

I contend that among these three statuses, education is the key to navigating these oppressions and to unlocking Black women's knowledge production. However, unlike Remond, Terrell, and Tate, few Black women who lived during their times were able to engage in higher education and even fewer were able to study or conduct research abroad. During the early twentieth century, Zora Neale Hurston and Flemma Kittrell were the few exceptions who were able to do both.<sup>36</sup> Hurston conducted anthropological field work in Jamaica and Haiti from 1937-1938 while doing postgraduate work under Franz Boas at Columbia University. Kittrell, who was the first African American woman to receive a PhD from Cornell University in 1936 and the first to earn a PhD in Nutrition, conducted her research in Hawaii, Africa, and Asia.<sup>37</sup>

Patricia Hill Collins argues that before 1950, the small number of Black women who earned advanced degrees had no choice but to comply with Eurocentric masculinist frameworks and work in "the confines of pervasive race and gender oppression."<sup>38</sup> She further notes that:

Black women scholars were in a position to see the exclusion of Black women from scholarly discourse, and the thematic content of their work often reflected their interest in examining a Black women's standpoint. However, their tenuous status in academic institutions led them to adhere to Eurocentric masculinist epistemologies so that their work would be accepted as scholarly. As a result, while they produced Black feminist thought, those Black women most likely to gain academic

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>36</sup> See Stephanie Y. Evans, 'African American Women Scholars and International Research: Anna Julia Cooper's Legacy of Study Abroad', *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* vol 18, no 1 (9 August 2009): 80; and Valerie Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2003). Acclaimed novelist Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960) was like Merze Tate at Oxford, the first and sole African American female student at Barnard College in New York, which was, a Seven Sisters College. She received her B.A. in Anthropology in 1928.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, 'The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought', *Signs, Common Grounds and Crossroads: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in Women's Lives*, vol. 14, no. 4, (Summer, 1989): 771.

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credentials were often least likely to produce Black feminist thought that used an Afrocentric feminist epistemology.<sup>39</sup>

To counter these Eurocentric masculinist epistemologies, which ignore the plurality of experiences and the social realities of Black women's lives, Collins encourages Black women to value their own subjective knowledge base.<sup>40</sup> She criticizes the U.S. "hegemonic domain of power" which has resulted in scholarship and publications that do not always recognize the knowledge production or intellectual achievements of African American women. Black Feminist Thought opposes these research practices and treats "Western intellectual traditions of exclusivity and chauvinism" with skepticism and suspicion.<sup>41</sup> These are legitimate concerns, because these practices were advanced in Western institutions with legacies of slavery.

If the walls within the Ivory Towers of Harvard, Columbia, Princeton, Rutgers, Yale, Oxford and Cambridge Universities (to name a few) could talk, they would tell tragic tales of slave trading and slave owning pasts.<sup>42</sup> According to Nicholas Draper: "For British universities, the circle of benefactors will be much larger than that of founders. Every [British] university extant in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century is likely to have received gifts derived from slavery."<sup>43</sup> The evidence is irrefutable: the most elite, prestigious, and respected universities in the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. Collins notes that: "As more Black women earn advanced degrees, the range of Black feminist scholarship is expanding. Increasing numbers of African-American women scholars are explicitly choosing to ground their work in Black women's experiences, and, by doing so, many implicitly adhere to an Afrocentric feminist epistemology." Zora Neale Hurston was one of the earliest of these Black women whose work was grounded in the African American experience.

<sup>40</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, 'Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination' in Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 221.

<sup>41</sup> Treva Lindsey and Alexis Pauline Gumbs, "Be a Mystery": (The Infinity of) Black Feminist Thought'. *Feminist Studies*, vol. 47, no. 1 (2021): 7.

<sup>42</sup> "Princeton recently disclosed that its first nine university presidents owned slaves, as did many Princeton faculty members. Half of Columbia University's early presidents owned slaves as well." See Ben Crump, 'How Elite Colleges Can Atone for Their History with Slavery'. accessed July 17, 2023.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/11/18/how-can-elite-colleges-atone-their-history-with-slavery-invest-historically-black-schools/>.

<sup>43</sup> Nicholas Draper, 'British Universities and Caribbean Slavery', *Social and Economic Studies*, vol. 68, no. 3/4, Special Issue on Reparations (2019): 134.



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United States and Great Britain prospered financially because they amassed their wealth from the slave trade on the backs of enslaved Africans. This includes their presidents, faculty, staff, administrators, students, and wealthy slave owning donors as well. Oxford University's 'Cabinet' platform states that:

The links between the University of Oxford (and Cambridge) and the Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave plantations run over many centuries and permeate numerous buildings and individuals, demonstrating how slave-derived wealth was structural in shaping British early-modern and modern society. In Oxford . . . It was common practice in [the 1600s and 1700s] for wealthy planters to send their sons back to Oxford for their education . . . Many legacies of these practices can be found in the streets, buildings, and collections of Oxford colleges.<sup>44</sup>

Frederick A. P. Barnard, who is the namesake of Barnard College and Columbia University's 10th president, owned several slaves; yet there is no mention of his slave ownership on Barnard College's 'Barnard History' webpage.<sup>45</sup> This omission is more glaring because Zora Neale Hurston, a descendant of slaves, graduated from Barnard College. It is unknown whether she knew that her alma mater was named after a slave owner.

The fact is the free labor of countless African slaves built and serviced these and many other Western colleges and universities over the centuries, and this matters to this thesis, because African American women researchers, as Collins explained, are expected to adhere to their default Eurocentric and androcentric research paradigms. Jacob Hardenbergh, who was the first president of Rutgers University in New Jersey was a slaveowner, and Deborah Gray White

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<sup>44</sup> 'Atlantic Slave Trade', Cabinet. accessed January 14, 2024. <https://www.cabinet.ox.ac.uk/atlantic-slave-trade>. At Oxford, students from South Carolina were the largest group of international students from 1761 to 1776 until America declared its independence from Great Britain, and they made up 50 percent of the students from the Thirteen Colonies. See also Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America*. Oxford (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Eric Eustace Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

<sup>45</sup> Born in Massachusetts, Frederick A. P. Barnard (1809-1889), who was the 10th president of Columbia College (1864-1889), has been praised for his advocacy of women's equality in higher education, and the eponymous Barnard College was established in 1889. Yet, he owned several slaves when he worked in the South as a professor and administrator at the Universities of Alabama and Mississippi from 1838 -1856.

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discovered that Sojourner Truth and her family were owned by his relatives.<sup>46</sup> Given this historical background, it is unlikely the hegemonic theorists in these White male-dominated institutions would have voluntarily acknowledged or praised the intellectual achievements and knowledge production of African American women like Remond, Terrell, and Tate in their research agendas. As a result of this mainstream institutional omission and neglect, much of African American women's history, their educational achievements abroad, and their transnational contributions is still untold or marginalized.

If African American women's scholarship continues to depend on the default theoretical paradigms of White men as the dominant lens for its academic research, then the histories of Black women will continue to be misrepresented and misinterpreted in the literature. Lois Benjamin goes even further, and she claims that Black women "need to deconstruct and change the contaminated knowledge base and distorted mirror image that support racist/capitalist patriarchy."<sup>47</sup> She points out, however, that Black feminism is neither anti-male nor anti-white, rather it "opposes all of the false assumptions undergirding the hegemonic paradigm." To overcome this controlling paradigm, Benjamin contends: "it is necessary to situate an analysis of Black women in the academy within the Africana feminist paradigm." She suggests that "Black women in the academy must question the placement of the mirrors in the dominant paradigm" and deconstruct and replace them with an Afrocentric

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<sup>46</sup> Deborah Gray White, 'The Reality of Being a Black Woman in America'. accessed September 6, 2023. <https://www.rutgers.edu/news/reality-being-black-woman-america>. Deborah Gray White is a history professor at Rutgers University in New Jersey, and she has researched the university's ties with slavery. She found that "Henry Rutgers, after whom the university was renamed, was a slaveholder. Both the college's first president, Jacob Hardenbergh, and its first tutor, Frederick Frelinghuysen, were slaveholders. Like most early American colleges, White pointed out . . . Rutgers depended on slaves to build its campuses and serve its students and faculty and it depended on the sale of black people to fund its existence." White also noted that "Sojourner Truth's family was owned by relatives of Jacob Hardenbergh." See also Marisa J. Fuentes and Deborah Gray White, eds, *Scarlet and Black, Volume I: Slavery and Dispossession in Rutgers History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016) for more information on this topic.

<sup>47</sup> Benjamin, ed, *Black Women in the Academy*, 48-49.

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perspective.<sup>48</sup>

Collins believes that this deconstruction can involve theoretical challenges while bell hooks maintains that the unfulfilled challenge for Black women intellectuals is how to interpret Black Feminist Thought and articulate it into a language that makes it more accessible.<sup>49</sup> This task is complicated by the need to first extrapolate Black Feminist Thought from being referenced to concrete Eurocentric masculinist frameworks and position it as a stand-alone theory. This thesis takes on this epistemological challenge by positioning Black Feminist Thought as a theory that can stand on its own merits independent of Eurocentric masculinist frameworks. Novelist Toni Morrison was concerned about the adverse effects of these frameworks as she formulated a theoretical approach to her fiction. She wrote in an essay from her personal archive that “I determined to diminish, exclude, even freeze any (overt) debt to western literary history.” She declared that she used the framework of “my own literary heritage of slave narrative” rather than relying on White male authors such as Joseph Conrad, Mark Twain, Herman Melville, Flannery O’Conner, Walt Whitman, Henry James, or Ernest Hemingway.” According to Morrison, “It would be reckless to rely on these men . . . for insights into my own culture.”<sup>50</sup>

Just as Morrison uses “her own literary heritage of slave narrative” to combat the adverse effects of White scholarship, I draw upon Black feminist theory as a source for insight into Remond’s, Terrell’s, and Tate’s lived experiences rather than relying on the standard hegemonic accounts of American history. The value of my theoretical framework is that it allows these women to be understood from their perspectives and voices instead of default

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>49</sup> Collins, ‘Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination’, 236.

<sup>50</sup> Toni Morrison, ‘I wanted to carve out a world both culture specific and race-free’: an essay by Toni Morrison’, August 8, 2019. accessed June 10, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/aug/08/toni-morrison-rememory-essay> Morrison claimed that it’s taken for granted that “Others are “raced” – Whites are not”. . . but in truth we all are “raced.”

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Eurocentric masculinist frameworks.

The last part of my research design is the analytical framework of intersectionality, which is used to examine how the convergence of race, gender, class and other intersections like marital status affected these three women's experiences. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality' in 1989, and she argues that race, gender, class and other socially constructed categories converge to create interdependent systems of discrimination both legal and illegal.<sup>51</sup> Crenshaw believes these systems are "perpetuated by a single-axis framework that is dominant in antidiscrimination law and that is also reflected in feminist theory."<sup>52</sup> In this thesis, taken together with Black Feminist Thought, intersectionality serves as a multi-axis framework to analyze the convergence of intersectional oppressions in the experiences and careers of the three women under study.

Intersectionality has gained increasing popularity and theoretical application in higher education, race, gender, and Black and women's studies research since Crenshaw's 1989 publication. Black feminist scholars have challenged and transformed the academy with their scholarship and teaching of intersectionality and by questioning the standard hegemonic frameworks. The long list includes Paula Giddings, Barbara Smith, Darlene Clark Hine, Patricia Hill Collins, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, bell hooks, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, and Audre Lorde.<sup>53</sup> These scholars agree with Crenshaw that race and gender cannot be independent variables, because they are not mutually exclusive in the lives of Black women. They posit that intersectionality is interwoven into Black women's lives and that theories which exclude this simultaneity are

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<sup>51</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Issue 1, Article 8 (1989): 139.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 12-13.

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illogical and only perpetuate marginalization by limiting their intellectual, social, and economic power.<sup>54</sup>

While intersectionality appears to be a recent theory, several scholars among them Vivian May and Beverly Guy-Sheftall point to intersectionality's much earlier origins in Anna Julia Cooper's 1892 book *A Voice From the South* although the term itself was not mentioned.<sup>55</sup> According to May, "By speaking from spaces of exclusion, Cooper fully articulates the promise of intersectional approaches to liberation."<sup>56</sup> Cooper applied the concept of intersectionality based on her personal experiences of both racism and sexism in a patriarchal society rather than from abstract ideas and theories. She knew first-hand that the overlapping and interdependent intersections of race and gender were unique to African American women.

Cooper also believed that it mattered little whether the gender discrimination was perpetrated by White or Black men, and she considered them to be equal in their misogyny and patriarchal treatment of women. Nonetheless, she appeared to hold Black men to a higher standard. Cooper delivered a special message to Black men concerning the primacy of Black women's intersectionality when she stated: "Only the black woman can say when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole . . . race enters with me"<sup>57</sup> Here, Cooper declares that Black men alone cannot represent the race; yet five years later, when the American Negro Academy

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (New York: Oxford, University Press, 1988). (Originally published in 1892).

<sup>56</sup> Vivian M. May, 'Thinking from the Margins, Acting at the Intersections: Anna Julia Cooper's *A Voice from the South*', *Hypatia*, Vol. 19, Issue 2 (Spring, 2004), 74. See also: Vivian M. May, 'Historicizing Intersectionality as Theory and Method: Returning to the Work of Anna Julia Cooper', in Carol Faulkner and Alison M. Parker, eds. *Interconnections: Gender and Race in American History* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, University of Rochester Press, 2012), 17-48.

<sup>57</sup> Cooper, *A Voice from the South*, 31. See also Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Sex and Race in America* (New York, NY: William Morrow, 1984). This book, which uses part of Cooper's quote in its title, is viewed as the first contemporary feminist history of African American women.

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was founded in 1897, it excluded Black women intellectuals like Cooper, because it only admitted “men of African descent,” and Cooper’s message went unheeded.<sup>58</sup> This moment is a reminder of the gender discrimination that Black women faced from Black men who refused to recognize their intellect or understand their essential role in race uplift and advancement.

Black women’s awareness of the intersectionality of multiple oppressions, although unnamed, can also be seen in the rhetoric of nineteenth century women’s rights activist Sojourner Truth.

Her 1851 speech, ‘Ain’t I a Woman?’ which she presented at the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, is regarded as one of the earliest articulations of intersectional feminism.<sup>59</sup> Even though she was an illiterate former slave, Sojourner Truth had the critical thinking and logic to understand the formidable power that women’s intellect and knowledge could wield if their race and gender were not used to deprive them of their equal rights with men.

For Black women like Sojourner Truth, Remond, Terrell, and Tate, intersectionality was not an abstract theory. It was interwoven into the tapestry of their lives. Although intersectionality might have been the name coined by Crenshaw, these examples show that this theory developed much earlier in African American women’s historical experiences. The women in the case studies were all central in articulating those early experiences as they were mediated by their transnational activism and their quest for higher education at home and abroad. While I am applying intersectionality as an analytical approach, Remond, Terrell, and Tate were living it even though they did not name it. When we move outside Eurocentric masculinist

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<sup>58</sup> Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 245. McHenry points out that Black male intellectuals designed the Academy to categorically exclude Black women and their “literary and intellectual contributions” which they devalued as not the proper area for women’s work. Alexander Crummell was a founding member and other prominent members included W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Alain Locke.

<sup>59</sup> See bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 159-160. Sojourner Truth’s first language was Dutch, and she gave her speech in English as a second language. Her ‘Ain’t I a Woman?’ speech was not recorded, and a variety of versions exist including the popular one in an alleged slave dialect.

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epistemologies as research methodology for African American women's history and use their experiences as the point of departure, we can bring their important stories from the margins to the center infused with an enlightened Afrocentric perspective.

### **2.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have discussed the development of my research design, its components, and my rationale for selecting them. I have explained how Crenshaw and earlier nineteenth century Black feminists advanced the critical theory of intersectionality which informs and shapes my exploration of Remond's, Terrell's, and Tate's experiences of studying abroad. Along with Black Feminist Thought, intersectionality is a fruitful lens to centralize and highlight the ways in which race, gender, and class affected their experiences. I draw on these theories as alternative approaches to challenge the efficacy of default hegemonic research paradigms for Black women's history. These standard research approaches tend to ignore the existence of race, gender, and class biases as intersectional oppressions in the lives of Black women. My research design is shaped by the pressing need to decolonize these default epistemologies by addressing questions of knowledge production and ownership.

**Chapter Three:**  
**From Anti-Literacy Laws to the Sorbonne: Historical Contexts**

*It is unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read. It could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy, and it would forever unfit him to be a slave.* ~ Hugh Auld, (1799-1861) slave master of Frederick Douglass.<sup>1</sup>

### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter supplies historical contexts that connect the case studies of Sarah Parker Remond, Mary Church Terrell, and Merze Tate with a diachronic frame of reference for their experiences. These contexts set the scene by describing the historical, sociocultural, and educational events that underpin the development of African American study abroad in Europe. It situates the case studies within the context of key historical themes from the struggle for slave literacy to Great Britain, Germany and Germanophilia, France, the New Orleans Creoles, and the Harlem Renaissance. Within these historical themes, this chapter profiles some of the influential African Americans, including former slaves, who made the transatlantic journey to study abroad at some of Europe's most prestigious institutions. Since the antebellum era (1790-1860), African American students in Europe have graduated from elite universities and institutions across the continent in medicine, engineering, science, education, the humanities, history, literature, theology, politics, the arts, and they have trained as artists, sculptors, and musicians under the tutelage of Europe's greatest maestros. They studied in a variety of other languages besides English including French, Italian, German, Spanish, classical Latin and Greek.<sup>2</sup>

Speaking in the mid-1800s, former fugitive slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass commented that: “Black travellers crossed the ocean . . . to combat American prejudice against the darker colored races.”<sup>3</sup> African American travelers and students like Remond, Terrell, and Tate who crossed the Atlantic from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth

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<sup>1</sup> David Greene, *Unfit to Be a Slave* (Rotterdam, NL: Sense Publishers, 2015), 7.

<sup>2</sup> See Harry Washington Greene, *Holders of Doctorates among American Negroes: An Educational and Social Study of Negroes Who Have Earned Doctoral Degrees in Course, 1876–1943* (Boston, MA: Meador, 1946). Greene lists the names and provides data on hundreds of the earliest African Americans who earned PhDs both in the U.S. and abroad, primarily in Europe, from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.

<sup>3</sup> Sirpa Salenius, ‘Troubling the White Supremacy-Black Inferiority Paradigm: Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown in Europe’, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* (2016): 152.



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centuries found Europe to be more welcoming and hospitable than their native country. The overwhelming majority declared that for the first time in their lives, they did not experience the systemic racism they had endured in America. In their letters, speeches, slave narratives, memoirs, autobiographies, oral histories, travel diaries, and interviews they commented on the lack of racist treatment they experienced in Europe.

Sirpa Salenius points out that not all was perfection, however, and that some Black Americans overseas may have ignored microaggressions that “failed to fit their creation of a utopian space based on social equality.”<sup>4</sup> They did not declare Europe a utopia, but they reveled in what they perceived as freedom and relative equality in Europe despite any minor slights. The majority returned to America after their studies, but some like Sarah Parker Remond became expatriates and made Europe their permanent home. Their new cosmopolitan identities based on class and their higher education gave them the opportunity to live in environments that transcended race.

However, as was discussed in Chapter One, there is a serious dearth of literature on the history of African American study abroad in Europe, which this thesis seeks to remedy. Corey D. B. Walker is among the few scholars who have researched this topic, and he explores the reasons African Americans pursued PhD degrees in European institutions at the beginning of the twentieth century. In what he describes as an under-researched area, he focuses on the intellectual motivations behind their study abroad. Walker explains that:

African American intellectuals . . . found themselves traveling across the Atlantic to Europe in order to fulfill their intellectual ambitions. These individuals crossed the greens of Cambridge and Oxford and filled their minds with their new visions of their emerging worlds. As the sun slowly paced itself across the German sky, African American intellectuals at Heidelberg and Berlin found themselves enraptured with the possibilities of the dawning of a new day. On the banks of the Seine and along the boulevards of Vienna, these intellectuals questioned their previous systems of knowledge and sought to re-encode them within expanded horizons.<sup>5</sup>

His purpose was to investigate the “intellectual milieu” of these Black American intellectuals

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>5</sup> Corey D. B. Walker, “Of the Coming of John [and Jane]”: African American Intellectuals in Europe, 1888-1938’, *European American Studies*, vol. 47, no.1 (2002): 8.

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who studied both short term and for PhDs at European universities and institutions.<sup>6</sup> Walker found that some among this “new Black intellectual class” sought to go beyond the limitations of Black liberal arts colleges and expand their horizons at European institutions. They wanted to learn more about the new research-oriented approaches in Europe, and Germany was a leader in this new teaching method. They could then return to America and apply these approaches in their institutions and school systems to re-encode their earlier systems of knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

Walker includes W.E.B. Du Bois, Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, and Merze Tate as examples of these intellectuals.<sup>8</sup> His findings are important for this research, because they show that like Remond, Terrell, and Tate, other African Americans were willing to go beyond America’s borders for an international experience that would expand their intellectual ambitions. My research confirmed Walker’s conclusion that their study abroad: “left a lasting mark on the lives of many of these individuals as they crossed between two worlds in their effort to achieve their intellectual dreams.”<sup>9</sup> According to Walker, the most popular countries were Great Britain, Germany, and France, and he discovered that London, Berlin, and Paris were the destinations of choice for these Black students.<sup>10</sup> This historical background chapter focuses on early African American study abroad experiences in these three countries.

A few years after Walker’s 2002 article, Stephanie Y. Evans also investigated the intellectual tradition of African American study abroad in Europe. She focused on Anna Julia Cooper and showed how Cooper’s “research agenda and institutional choice reflected a popular trend of Black academics to construct their [intellectual] identities with an

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 11-12.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 17. While Walker notes that Terrell did not receive a PhD, he states that she: “spent two years studying in Paris.” According to Terrell’s autobiography and her ‘French and Swiss Diaries’, she only spent a month studying French in Paris. The details are discussed in Chapter Five, Terrell’s case study chapter.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 9-10

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international foundation.”<sup>11</sup> Cooper’s PhD dissertation, written and defended orally in French, exemplified this scholarly trend for Black academics. Evans argues, as I do, that the intersections of race and gender “are critical areas of inquiry from which to study higher education.”<sup>12</sup> She also points out that African Americans have a long legacy of traveling abroad which can be clearly seen in the “international, political, economic, and cultural lineage inherent in creating the African Diaspora.”<sup>13</sup> According to Evans, this travel began in the eighteenth century and has been sustained over the centuries since then.<sup>14</sup>

However, except for her discussion of Anna Julia Cooper’s defense of her PhD dissertation at the Sorbonne, Evans does not fully engage with the study abroad experiences of any of the women in the case studies. She concentrates on Cooper’s research and intellectual production, and she uses Cooper’s doctoral dissertation as her focal point. This approach supports her purpose as stated in her title of investigating the international research of African American women scholars. This chapter builds upon Walker’s and Evans’ research by presenting a much broader framework of historical themes from slave literacy to the Harlem Renaissance to contextualize the development of early African American study abroad in Europe and situate the case study narratives.

While this thesis focuses on the history of trailblazing African American women in European study abroad, in addition to Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller and Jessie Fauset, this chapter includes profiles of three of the earliest African American men who studied in Europe: Boston King, Dr. James McCune Smith, and W.E.B. Du Bois along with information about Free Blacks known as New Orleans Creoles. Anton Wilhelm Amo, a former African slave is also discussed, because in the eighteenth century he became the first known African to receive a PhD from a European university. Women were prohibited from undertaking higher education during the eighteenth

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<sup>11</sup> Stephanie Y. Evans, ‘African American Women Scholars and International Research: Anna Julia Cooper’s Legacy of Study Abroad’, *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad* (2009): 77.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 77-78.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

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and most of the nineteenth centuries in America and Europe, so more Black men than Black women were among the first study abroad students in Europe.

Boston King is included because he is the first documented African American to study in Europe, and he was a student at the Methodist Kingswood School near Bristol, England from 1794-1796. McCune Smith was the first African American to receive a medical degree in 1837 from the University of Glasgow, and Du Bois, one of the first Black American sociologists, was a pioneering student at the University of Berlin from 1892-1894. Jessie Fauset's profile combines the themes of France, Paris, and the Harlem Renaissance, the African American cultural, literary, and intellectual revival, during the interwar years. Before those profiles are presented, this next section explores the struggle for literacy by slaves and Free Blacks, a foundational theme for this historical context.

#### **3.1 Struggle and Importance of Literacy for Slaves and Free Blacks**

*1619-1865: Almost all Africans brought to the Americas and their direct descendants were enslaved and forced to work in unfathomable, inhuman conditions to build imperial power for European and later USA colonialist, capitalist rulers. The exploitation of their labor in sugar, tobacco, rice, and cotton fields created surplus capital for those claiming to own them. Investments of this new wealth became the basis for the massive fortunes of many white planters, merchants, bankers, and industrial capitalists.<sup>15</sup>*

The history of early African American study abroad in Europe would be incomplete without recognizing the critical importance and high value that slaves and Free Blacks placed on literacy during slavery, the Civil War, and the post-antebellum era. I argue that knowledge of this tradition of struggle for education is vital for historical context to ensure that Remond's, Terrell's, and Tate's case studies are not viewed in a vacuum. Their ancestors fought and struggled throughout slavery and after their emancipation to gain literacy and an education. There is a need for understanding and insight into the legal and illegal obstacles, and the entrenched racial barriers that former slave and Free Black students had to overcome, including those who went to Europe to study abroad, which privileged White Americans

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<sup>15</sup> Project South & Hunger Coalition Present: Southern Movement Assembly Educational History, Juneteenth. accessed May 26, 2024. <https://projectsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PS-MovementHistory5.pdf>.

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never had to consider. This chapter would also be incomplete without discussing the nefarious methods that White Americans used to oppose Black Americans' efforts to obtain literacy during slavery, and the freedmen and women's struggle for education against White resistance after slavery ended in 1865.

Slaves were legally banned from obtaining basic literacy because literate slaves were viewed as dangerous slaves, and "literacy could be the first step on the path to freedom."<sup>16</sup> Slave owners, some who were likely illiterate themselves, feared slaves who could read and write, and their fears were justified. Literate slaves could and did teach other slaves, and they carried news within the slave communication network alongside spirituals that carried coded messages. 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot' was said to be a favorite song of abolitionist and Underground Railroad conductor Harriet Tubman.

Literate slaves were held in high esteem by other slaves, but they were a threat to slave owners because of their ability to forge passes to aid escapes and to instigate revolts. The leaders of some well-known albeit unsuccessful slave rebellions, Gabriel Prosser, 1800, Denmark Vesey, 1822, and Nat Turner, 1831, were all literate. One ingenious literate slave, Henry "Box" Brown, successfully mailed himself as dry goods from slavery in Richmond, Virginia to freedom in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1849. He later fled to England after passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law where he joined the abolitionist lecture circuit in the British Isles and relived his ingenious and daring escape for astonished audiences.<sup>17</sup>

Slaves also desired literacy for other more personal reasons: for self-identity, to reclaim their humanity and control over their lives, as non-violent resistance to the mental and psychological conditions of slavery, to read the Bible, and optimistically to prepare for life after slavery.<sup>18</sup> Annette Gordon-Reed argues that: "The profanity of slavery does not define

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<sup>16</sup> Jack Lynch, 'Everyman Able to Read: Literacy in Early America', *Colonial Williamsburg Journal*, vol. 33, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 28.

<sup>17</sup> Henry "Box" Brown, *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown Written By Himself* (Manchester, UK: Lee and Glynn, 1851).

<sup>18</sup> Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 1.

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the entirety of the lives of enslaved people so that everything any one of them ever did, felt, or thought . . . was degraded.”<sup>19</sup> This is a crucial point, because it shows that literacy and education were integral components of how slaves defined their humanity and freedom. In effect, they used literacy to subvert their masters’ authority and take control over their lives.<sup>20</sup>

Beginning in 1740, several of the Thirteen American Colonies passed Anti-Literacy and Compulsory Ignorance Laws to prevent slaves from learning to read and write. Penalties ranged from finger amputations to imprisonment to death. South Carolina passed its first Anti-Literacy Law, the Negro Law, in 1740 as a response to the Stono Slave Rebellion of 1739. Later, after Nat Turner’s Rebellion in Virginia in 1831, the South Carolina legislature passed another law on April 1, 1835, which prohibited both slaves and Free Blacks from being taught to read and write. Penalties of fines and imprisonment applied to both Blacks and Whites who violated this law; however, unlike Whites, slaves and Free Blacks could be whipped up to fifty lashes at the discretion of the court.<sup>21</sup>

Elizabeth McHenry describes slaves and Free Blacks as being “legislated into illiteracy,” because prior to the Civil War, like South Carolina, most states had laws forbidding slaves from learning to read and/or write.<sup>22</sup> These laws were examples of how Whites used the legal system to rationalize, justify, maintain, and secure their institution of chattel slavery, and according to Alfred and Ruth Blumrosen, to ignore the obvious contradictions between slavery and freedom in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.<sup>23</sup> In defiance of

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<sup>19</sup> Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 324.

<sup>20</sup> Williams, *Self-Taught*, 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13; and Daniel Alexander Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years* (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1969), 27-28. Originally published in 1888.

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 6.

<sup>23</sup> Alfred W. Blumrosen and Ruth G. Blumrosen, *Slave Nation: How Slavery United the Colonies and Sparked the American Revolution* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks Inc, 2006), xii. The Blumrosens argue that slavery was indispensable to the South’s agricultural economy and that “the North not only tolerated southern slavery, but early agreed to its permanence in the new nation.” (*Ibid.*, xiii-xiv). I propose that this pro-slavery compromise, which was engraved in the U.S. Constitution, led to America’s birth as a slave nation with the majority slave holding Founding Fathers like Washington, Jefferson, and Madison serving as its midwives.

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these Anti-Literacy Laws, some slaves risked going to clandestine night schools, others learned from fellow literate slaves while a few learned inadvertently and sometimes purposefully from their slave master's children and other Whites.

In addition to these clandestine methods, during the antebellum era, Free Blacks and former slaves, especially women, and Black and White Christian abolitionists bravely and defiantly established schools for slave and Free Black children in both the North and South. However, they were often met with fierce resistance from Whites, and they were short-lived. They used physical assaults, arson, poisoning, sabotage, false charges, arrests, legislation, and court cases against the schools and teachers. In Norfolk, Virginia, Margaret Douglass, a former slave owner, was arrested and jailed in 1853 for teaching Free Black children in a school in her home. In Connecticut, Quaker Prudence Crandall founded Miss Crandall's School for Young Ladies and Little Misses of Color in 1833 for Free Black students. Even though the New England colonies did not have anti-literacy laws, the school was strongly opposed by local Whites, and Connecticut passed the Black Law of 1833 to close Crandall's school. She was arrested and the school was burned to the ground by a White mob.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the destruction of Crandall's school, in the absence of anti-literacy laws, some northern slave masters in New York and New England, especially those associated with Anglican and Congregational churches, allowed their slaves to learn to read, so they could read the Bible.<sup>25</sup> One northern slave who gained literacy was Jupiter Hammon (1711- c. 1806), who was born enslaved in Lloyd Harbor, New York on Long Island. He was the first African American to have a poem published in the United States. His poem,

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<sup>24</sup> Williams, *Self-Taught*, 17. Several schools lasted longer, and many were run by Black women, slave and free. In the 1820s, Catholic nun and Saint-Domingue native Sister Mary Elizabeth Lange opened a school in her home in Baltimore, Maryland for poor Free Black children. This led to the founding of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first religious order for Black American Catholic nuns in 1829. (I received my elementary education at a segregated Catholic school in the South run by the Oblate Sisters of Providence.) In Natchez, Mississippi, a literate slave woman, Milla Granderson dared the authorities to run her underground Milla's midnight school, and she succeeded in teaching literacy to hundreds of slaves.

<sup>25</sup> Sarah Kautz, 'The Life and Works of Jupiter Hammon (1711-before 1806)', *Preservation Long Island* (October 2018). accessed March 2022. <https://preservationlongisland.org/the-life-and-works-of-jupiter-hammon-1711-before-1806/>.

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‘An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries’ was published in 1761.<sup>26</sup>

It is not known how Hammon learned to read and write; however, his slave owners, the Lloyd family, were known to belong to Anglican and Congregational churches.<sup>27</sup> While the history of his education is still unclear, the facts about Hammon’s history-making publication are now well-known and celebrated.

However, during this research, I came to better understand the complexity of the man and his life and times when I read his memoirs and Faith Berry’s harrowing description of Hammon, the faithful slave who was never freed and died still enslaved.<sup>28</sup> It was then I understood the magnitude of his literary achievements and his humanity. Berry explains that:

Hammon lived and died the property of a family he obediently served for three generations: the Lloyds of Long Island, New York, and Hartford, Connecticut. An atypical slave who willingly conformed to slavery, in turn he had unconventional owners who permitted him a rudimentary education and encouraged publication of his writings. On Christmas Day 1760, he penned his earliest known poem, “An Evening Thought. Salvation by Christ, with Penitential Cries.” Its printing early the next year made him the first black male poet published in North America. He was forty-nine.<sup>29</sup>

Berry goes on to say that: “He died in quiet ignominy, his work buried and forgotten until the early twentieth century.”<sup>30</sup> Now, no longer forgotten, he is an example not only of the slaves’ reverence for literacy but of their ability to gain more than a rudimentary knowledge of the English language through learning to read the Bible. Sarah Kautz asserts that the Bible was a prominent theme in Hammon’s writing, and he “recommended a pious approach to literacy for both free and enslaved African Americans.”<sup>31</sup> Sarah Parker Remond was also very pious, and she emphasized the importance of Christian morals in her anti-slavery rhetoric.

Phillis Wheatley’s background and literacy attainment share some similarities but also some differences from Hammon’s. While Hammon was born in colonial America, Wheatley (1753-1784) was kidnapped by slave traders in the West African region of Senegal and

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Hammon used Christian themes in his poetry.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Faith Berry, *From Bondage to Liberation: Writings by and About Afro-Americans From 1700- 1918* (New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2001), 50-51.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>31</sup> Kautz, ‘The Life and Works of Jupiter Hammon’.



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Gambia when she was eight years old. Separated from her family forever, she survived the harsh Middle Passage and arrived in colonial America where the Wheatley family from Boston, Massachusetts purchased her. Fortunately, she did not have to struggle to learn to read and write, because her owners taught her, and after she learned English as a second language, she excelled as a student beyond all their expectations. Wheatley went on to become the first African American woman to publish a book of poetry, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* in September 1773.<sup>32</sup> Despite this historic accomplishment, while still enslaved, she had to travel to London with her slave owner's son to get her book published after its rejection by colonial publishers.<sup>33</sup>

The colonists, including Thomas Jefferson, immediately questioned Wheatley's authorship, because they were convinced that Black people could not learn because of innate inferior intelligence. Their refusal to accept that Wheatley was the author forced publishers to include an attestation of her authorship in the book's preface. This practice was also common for published slave narratives. Despite these attempts to devalue Wheatley's creativity and talent as a poet, her legacy remains intact today. Part of that legacy, however, is that of the long-serving, dutiful and faithful slave, which she shares with Hammon. Nevertheless, I view Wheatley as a determined, confident, and extremely religious young woman who, although she was not immediately freed after her book's publication, used her literacy to resist the mental and psychological conditions of slavery. Through her poetry, she found an

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<sup>32</sup> Berry, *From Bondage to Liberation*, 50, points out that historically, "The first Afro-American female poet was Lucy Terry, whose "Bars Flight" was composed as an oral ballad in 1746." However, unlike Wheatley, Terry had utilized the African oral tradition to recite her poetry, and her ballad was not published until 1855. Terry (1733-1821) was kidnapped as an infant from Africa and enslaved in Rhode Island. Her poem is recognized by many scholars like Berry as the earliest known literature by an African American author.

<sup>33</sup> It is possible that Wheatley's gender, along with her race, was the reason for the refusal. Both she and Jupiter Hammon wrote poems about the same topic, Christianity; yet, he was able to get his poems published in America. Women authors were uncommon in colonial America, and White women also had more difficulty than men in getting recognized and published as well. Women writers were seen as radicals if they entered public discourse, and it was daring and unacceptable for them to become writers just as it was for them to speak in public. So, unlike Hammon, Wheatley had race and gender intersections to contend with. However, they both shared Thomas Jefferson's contempt and his belief that Blacks were mentally inferior to Whites.

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impenetrable space to reclaim her womanhood, which gendered slavery negated, her humanity, and control over the mental aspects of her life.

Most slaves lived in the South and unlike Hammon and Wheatley, they faced monumental struggles to gain literacy, because of the Anti-Literacy Laws. One of these slaves was Frederick Douglass (c. 1817-1895). He was born on a Maryland plantation to an African slave mother and her White slave owner, and in 1826, he was gifted to the Auld family in Baltimore. Sophia Auld, Hugh Auld's wife, began teaching Douglass in 1829 when he was twelve years old, and when her husband disapproved, Douglass continued to teach himself secretly using a variety of clever methods.<sup>34</sup> Even as a child Douglass's intelligence was much more advanced than those around him, even his slave masters like Hugh Auld. Douglass used his literacy to become the most prominent African American intellectual of the nineteenth century.

He displayed outstanding rhetorical skills in both his speeches and publications, which fortunately are available and not archivally marginalized. He is remembered today for his brilliant mind, superior intellect, and as one of America's greatest orators. His achievements as the foremost African American male intellectual of the nineteenth century symbolize Hugh Auld's warning that if you teach a slave to read, "it would forever unfit him to be a slave."<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, besides Hammon, Wheatley, and Douglass, few slaves managed to gain literacy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was the rare slave who could read and write fluently before 1865, because despite their best efforts, most early attempts by slaves to gain literacy either informally or in schools were crushed.

Free Blacks also struggled to get an education even in northern states.<sup>36</sup> Some, like Sarah

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<sup>34</sup> McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 1. Frederick Douglass heard his slave master Hugh Auld tell his wife "If you teach that nigger . . . how to read, there will be no keeping him," and that "it would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master." Upon hearing these words, Douglass said he understood then that "the white man's power to enslave the black man". . . was located in his ability to maintain the black man's ignorance and his illiteracy. "Douglass found ingenious ways to "steal" literacy and continue learning to read and write including from poor, hungry White boys in exchange for bread. (Ibid, 1-2).

<sup>35</sup> Greene, *Unfit to Be a Slave*, 7.

<sup>36</sup> McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 3.

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Parker Remond, who suffered from racial discrimination in all areas of life, were denied equal access to education and were forced to attend segregated schools.<sup>37</sup> In spite of this discrimination and laws which denied them their civil rights, Free Blacks, especially the wealthy Black Elite, were traditionally a literate and educated group. A substantial percentage of Free Blacks were mulattoes, who were the progeny of White slave owners and their slave women. Some White fathers acknowledged their children and freed them either during their lifetimes or in their wills, and a few inherited their wealth in this manner.

Free Blacks founded mutual aid societies, created social networks, and established their own schools and literary societies in the northern cities of Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Washington D.C. and in the southern cities of Charleston and New Orleans in the antebellum era. They “recognized that reading was a potentially transformative activity,” and it was urgently needed to counter the systemic resistance of Whites to their efforts to gain literacy.<sup>38</sup> Free Blacks understood the value of education, and like the slaves, they held it in high esteem.

During the Civil War (1861-1865), America’s four million slaves finally saw their quest for literacy change dramatically. Tens of thousands escaped from their southern plantations in the chaos of the fighting or when slave owners abandoned their plantations as the Union troops conquered town after town during their march through the Confederate States. These slave refugees were called ‘contraband of war’, so they were not yet legally free. When they walked into Union Army camps ragged, barefoot and carrying their meager belongings, their first demands were for literacy. Black teachers Mary S. Peake went to Fort Monroe in Virginia and Charlotte Forten (Grimke) traveled to South Carolina to teach them. In describing her students’ enormous thirst for an education at the contraband school for 2,000

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<sup>37</sup> Sarah P. Remond, ‘Sarah P. Remond’, in Matthew Davenport Hill, ed., *Our Exemplars, Poor and Rich; Biographical Sketches of Men and Women Who Have, by an Extraordinary Use of Their Opportunities, Benefited Their Fellow-Creatures* (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1861), 281.

<sup>38</sup> McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 3, 6.

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escaped slave children on Saint Helena Island in South Carolina, Forten wrote in her diary in 1862 “. . . and for the Future the eyes of these freed children see no clouds in it. It is full of sunlight, they think, and they trust in it, perfectly.”<sup>39</sup>

The slaves’ quest for literacy only increased after their emancipation. They knew that illiteracy stood in the way of their progress, and they immediately demanded access to universal public education from elementary school to university. The number of HBCUs increased dramatically after the Civil War aided by northern White philanthropists and supported by Christian missionaries.<sup>40</sup> White southerners were adamantly opposed to this Black education movement, which they viewed as a threat to everything they held sacred under their doctrine of White Supremacy. Racism, based on southern Whites’ fears of the political power which the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments granted Black Americans, was at the core of their resistance.

This resistance from Whites only made Black Americans more aware of the importance of literacy for their future survival and success. Israel Jefferson, (c. 1800-1879), was a former slave of President Thomas Jefferson at Monticello, and he never freed him. When Jefferson died in 1826, Israel Jefferson was sold “from the auction block” in 1829 to Thomas Walker Gilmer, who later became a Congressional representative and Governor of Virginia.<sup>41</sup> Israel Jefferson eventually purchased his freedom from Gilmer for \$500 and moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. He wrote in his 1873 memoir: “Since I have been in Ohio I have learned to read and write, but my duties as a laborer would not permit me to acquire much of an education. But such as I possess I am truly thankful for, and consider what education I

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<sup>39</sup> Charlotte L. Forten, ‘Life on the Sea Islands (Part II)’, *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 13 (June 1864): 666.

<sup>40</sup> Leroy Hopkins, ‘Black Prussians’: Germany and African American Education from James W.C. Pennington to Angela Davis,’ in David McBride, Leroy Hopkins and C. Aisha Blackshire -Belay, eds. *Crosscurrents: African Americans, Africa, and Germany in the Modern World*, (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1998), 70. Hopkins describes how a series of higher education institutions for Black Americans, HBCUs “spread mushroom-like throughout the border and southern states in the two decades after the war.” (Ibid).

<sup>41</sup> Israel Gillette Jefferson, ‘Life Among the Lowly, No. 3’, *Pike County Republican*, December 25, 1873.

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have as a legitimate fruit of freedom.”<sup>42</sup> To Thomas Jefferson, he was a piece of property who was three-fifths of a human being to be owned forever; however, after outliving Jefferson, Israel succeeded in gaining his ‘fruit of freedom’ through his hard work and his determination to learn to read and write.

Like Israel Jefferson, other freedmen and women placed a high value on education during Reconstruction.<sup>43</sup> Undaunted, they took the initiative, and without waiting for outside aid from the government or northern White philanthropists, they built schools from the ground up in their communities. The *Black Loyal Georgian* newspaper reported in February 1866 that “In Savannah, [Georgia] for instance, there were 28 schools in 1866, and 16 of them . . . were under the control of an Educational Board of Colored Men, taught by colored teachers, and sustained by the freed people.”<sup>44</sup> This self-sufficiency before support from northern Whites included church sponsored Sabbath Schools which met in the evenings and on the weekends to provide basic literacy. In 1867, Camden, South Carolina Blacks established 22 schools for 4,000 children.<sup>45</sup>

Many White northern missionaries were amazed to learn that these ex-slaves had taken the initiative and established their own schools staffed by Black teachers without seeking “Yankee” help.<sup>46</sup> They understood that education was crucial for their liberty and their lives in freedom, and they passed this reverence for education down through the generations. By 1910, due to their impressive gains in education, literacy rates had improved dramatically, and 70 percent of African Americans were literate.<sup>47</sup> This next section focuses on two of the earliest African Americans who took their quest for an education overseas to Great Britain.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> See Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1961). 1988); and John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction After the Civil War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

<sup>44</sup> James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 11.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 8, 12.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>47</sup> McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 31.

<sup>48</sup> Jamaican Francis Williams (1692-1762) is alleged to be the first person of African descent to study in Great Britain at Cambridge, but sufficient documentation has yet to be found to support this claim. However, his admission in 1721 to Lincoln’s Inn, a professional association for barristers, has been confirmed.

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**3.2 Great Britain and Early African American Students**

Like Anna Julia Cooper, Boston King (c. 1760-1802) was born a slave, and he too studied abroad in Europe. Although he did not earn a PhD, he is the earliest documented African American to study in Great Britain. He was born in Charleston, South Carolina, and during the Revolutionary war, he escaped and joined the British lines as a Black Loyalist when they came through Charleston. King was among the Black Loyalist slaves who were evacuated to Nova Scotia by the defeated British forces on ships that sailed from New York in 1783.

After the British reneged on their promises and denied land grants to the Black Loyalists, King and his wife immigrated to Sierra Leone in 1792, where he became the first Black Methodist minister in Africa. He next moved to England to further his religious education, and from 1794 to 1796, he studied at the Methodist School in Kingswood near Bristol. The school was founded in 1748 by John Wesley, a leader of the Methodist movement of Church of England dissenters, and it is the oldest Methodist school in the world. It was originally established for the children of coal miners, but it soon opened its doors to children of itinerant Methodist ministers and became a boarding school. King was part of the British Methodist Abolition Network that recruited Black ministers to be trained for missionary work in Sierra Leone.<sup>49</sup>

King wrote about his experiences at Kingswood in his memoir, and he also shared the hardships of his enslavement and his escape to the British lines. He begins by praising his parents, especially his father who was “stolen away from Africa when he was young.”<sup>50</sup> When he writes about Kingswood, he does not share any details of the courses he studied, but he is extremely appreciative of the educational opportunity he has been given by the

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<sup>49</sup> Kingswood School. accessed May 20, 2024. <https://www.kingswood.bath.sch.uk/>. In 1851, the Kingswood School relocated to Bath, Somerset from its original site near Bristol, and a Reformatory School was established on the old site. Today Kingswood School is a private co-ed boarding and day school based on Christian principles, still located in Bath.

<sup>50</sup> Boston King, 'Memoirs of Boston King', Canada's Digital Collections. accessed April 10, 2024. <https://blackloyalist.com/cdc/documents/diaries/king-memoirs.htm>.

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the Methodists, and he expresses his gratitude. As the following passage shows, King is humbled and feels blessed to be in England:

In the month of August 1794, I went to Bristol; and from thence Dr. Coke took me with him to Kingswood-School, where I continued to the present time, and have endeavored to acquire all the knowledge I possible [sic] could, in order to be useful in that sphere which the blessed hand of Providence may conduct me into, if my life is spared. I have great cause to be thankful that I came to England, for I am now fully convinced, that many of the White People, instead of being enemies and oppressors of us poor Blacks, are our friends, and deliverers from slavery, as far as their ability and circumstances will admit. I have met with the most affectionate treatment from the Methodists of London, Bristol, and other places which I have had an opportunity of visiting. And I must confess, that I did not believe there were upon the face of the earth a people so friendly and humane as I have proved them to be.<sup>51</sup>

He feels indebted to his sponsor Dr. Coke and is eager to learn all he can for his upcoming ministry work. For the first time, he finds friends among White people, especially his fellow Methodists, and this makes King realize that not all White people want to oppress Blacks. This comes as quite a shock to him, because of his treatment by Whites during his enslavement. He reports the same lack of racism as other Black Americans who later traveled to England in the nineteenth century.

King states he began his studies at Kingswood in August 1794, which was about 20 years after Phillis Wheatley published her first book of poetry in London in September 1773. It is noticeable that they both traveled to England after the 1772 Somerset Case ruling which stated that once on British soil, all slaves became free persons.<sup>52</sup> Although neither King nor Wheatley remained in England, they both managed to become literate and set foot on British soil. There, they took advantage of British publishing and educational opportunities outside of America's entrenched chattel slavery system. If we interpret what this means for the slaves' struggle for literacy, it shows the positive results of Wheatley's and King's sustained determination to educate themselves despite formidable odds. It also emphasizes the early role Great Britain

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> See Blumrosen and Blumrosen, *Slave Nation*, 11-12. This decision caused jubilation for slaves in England and for those in the American colonies, but it caused the fear of revolts for slave owners especially those in Virginia, which held 250,000 slaves in bondage, the highest number in the Thirteen American Colonies.

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played in welcoming the earliest African American trailblazers who traveled to Europe for educational and publishing opportunities unavailable to them in America.

King signed and dated his memoir: Kingswood-School, June 4th, 1796. An afterword to his memoir notes that:

About the latter end of September, 1796, Boston King embarked for Sierra Leone; where he arrived safe, and returned the employment of a schoolmaster in the Colony; the number of scholars under his care are about forty; and we hope to hear that they will not only learn the English Language, but also attain some knowledge of the way of salvation thro' faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

King combined two groundbreaking firsts when he returned to Sierra Leone. He was the first known African American to study abroad in Europe, and he was among the first African American missionaries to serve in Africa.<sup>54</sup> Despite his pioneering educational achievement in eighteenth century England, White male American students had an almost 200-year head start in higher education over African Americans in the United States. Robert Bruce Slater points out that:

For nearly two centuries after the first institution of higher learning in the New World was established in 1636 [Harvard], no Black student received a degree in any shape or form from an American college or university. Prior to, and for many years following, the Revolutionary War, blacks were thought of as intellectually inferior and undeserving of a higher education.<sup>55</sup>

Slater's assertion is correct, because the first African American to receive a degree from an American college or university was Alexander Twilight (1795-1857). He received his bachelor's degree from Middlebury College in Vermont in 1823, 170 years after Harvard was founded.<sup>56</sup>

James McCune Smith (1813-1865) added his name to this list of 'firsts' when he became

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<sup>53</sup> King, 'Memoirs of Boston King'. See also Ruth Holmes Whitehead and Carmelita Robertson, eds, *The Life of Boston King, Black Loyalist, Minister, and Master Carpenter*, (Halifax, NS: Nimbus Publishing Ltd. and the Nova Scotia Museum, 2003).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Bruce Slater, 'The Blacks Who First Entered the World of White Higher Education', *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*. no. 4 (1994): 47.

<sup>56</sup> At the time, Middlebury College only admitted White men, but Twilight was only 7/8 White, so he had at least one drop of Black blood; however, the college was unaware of this and that he was therefore Black. See Joan Potter, *African American Firsts: Famous, Little-Known and Unsung Triumphs of Blacks in America* (New York, NY: Kensington Publishing Corp., 2013), 24-26, 130.



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the first African American university-trained physician in 1837. However, he did not graduate from an American university; instead, he earned his M.D. degree from the University of Glasgow in Scotland after racism forced him to study abroad. James McCune Smith was born enslaved in Manhattan, New York on April 18, 1813. His mother, Lavinia was born into slavery in South Carolina and his father, Samuel Smith was his mother's White slave owner. As was the law then in New York, because she was born before 1799, McCune Smith inherited his mother's slave status, and he spent the first 14 years of his life as a slave. Despite this, he was able to get an education, and he studied at the African Free School in New York City.

McCune Smith was not emancipated until the passage of New York's Emancipation Act of 1827.<sup>57</sup> As Craig A. Landy points out: "Contrary to the popular narrative, the southern states were not alone in their adamant refusal to end slavery."<sup>58</sup> According to Landy:

In 1799, New York gradually freed future generations who would otherwise have been born into slavery, but left enslaved thousands born before 1799. It was not until March 31, 1817 that the New York legislature ended two centuries of slavery within its borders, setting July 4, 1827 as the date of final emancipation and making New York the first state to pass a law for the total abolition of legal slavery. When Emancipation Day finally arrived, the number of enslaved men and women freed was roughly 4,600 or 11% of the black population living in New York and the black community and its supporters held joyous celebrations and parades throughout the state.<sup>59</sup>

Fourteen-year-old James McCune Smith was one of those joyous people. His story is essential to this historical background, because it shows the critical role that European universities played in offering higher education to African Americans, including former slaves, during the antebellum era when racism prevented them from studying in the United States. Several American medical schools including Geneva Medical College in New York, Columbia College, now University, and the New York Academy of Medicine refused to admit McCune Smith because he was Black.<sup>60</sup> If he had not been allowed to study abroad in

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<sup>57</sup> Craig A. Landy, 'When Did Slavery End in New York?' *Historical Society of the New York Courts*. accessed October 27, 2023. <https://history.nycourts.gov/when-did-slavery-end-in-new-york/>. Many people would be surprised to learn that New York, a northern state, only completely abolished slavery in 1827.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> John Stauffer, ed. *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), xxi.

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Scotland, he might never have been able to fulfill his potential and make his outstanding contributions to the medical field.

McCune Smith arrived in Glasgow in 1832, but unfortunately, there is no documentation of his educational experiences in Scotland; however, some aspects of his stay are known. He embraced his educational opportunity in Scotland, and his time there was relatively free of racism. According to John Stauffer: “McCune Smith experienced a virtual absence of racism in Glasgow, a degree of freedom that was totally foreign to American Blacks.”<sup>61</sup> It is also known that in 1834, he joined the Glasgow Emancipation Society, which helped with his funding, as a charter member.<sup>62</sup> Coincidentally, race riots and racial violence erupted in New York that same year in July 1834. McCune Smith was awarded his B.A. in 1835, his M.A. in 1836, and his M.D. in 1837, and he served his internship in Paris before leaving the continent to return to America.

Onboard the steamer home, an incident occurred which involved exported American racism, which knew no national boundaries. The incident happened at the beginning of McCune Smith’s voyage home:

The American ship captain refused to grant him cabin passage because of his race, a refusal that not only infuriated him but “also insulted those with whom I have had the delight of associating, during the last five years.” No native of Scotland “would deny the social board to any man on account of the color of his skin.” His white friends and colleagues in the Glasgow Emancipation Society confronted the captain and persuaded him to allow McCune Smith to sail home as a cabin rather than a steerage passenger.<sup>63</sup>

McCune Smith experienced the same exported American racism that Terrell encountered during her time overseas. It is noteworthy that his Scottish friends supported him and that he fought for his equal rights to unhindered mobility. This historical context is key to understanding the importance of interracial transnational networks, which Remond, Terrell, and Tate all established during their time abroad.

McCune Smith’s friends, colleagues, and leaders in the Free Black community warmly

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, xxii.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, xxi-xxii.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, xxii.

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welcomed him home, and he began to put this medical education to immediate use. His contributions to medical research and scholarship are too numerous to mention here. He took a stance against racism when he opened his integrated medical practice and pharmacy in New York City. He was also the chief physician at the New York City Colored Orphan Asylum from 1843 until 1863.<sup>64</sup>

McCune Smith was fluent in many languages, and he wrote more than 100 articles on ethnology, geography, and medicine.<sup>65</sup> Heidi Lujan and Stephen E. DiCarlo assert that McCune Smith was a physician and statistician, who “pioneered the use of medically based statistics to refute notions of African-American inferiority, and he exposed scientific flaws in the racially biased U.S. Census of 1840.” Lujan and Di Carlo noted that he:

became a giving physician to orphans, an accomplished statistician, medical author, and social activist who worked to end slavery. His pioneering work debunked doubts about the ability of African-Americans to transition into free society. Specifically, he used his training in medicine and statistics to refute the arguments of slave owners and prominent thought leaders that African-Americans were inferior and that slaves were better off than free African-Americans or white urban laborers. Frederick Douglass, narrator of the Anti-Slavery Movement, cited Dr. James McCune Smith as the single most important influence on his life.<sup>66</sup>

A historical breakthrough occurred in 1844 when he became the first African American physician to publish a scientific paper in the prestigious mainstream journal, the *New York Journal of Medicine*.<sup>67</sup> These history-making accomplishments by a former slave who succeeded against formidable racial obstacles in America are truly outstanding. Yet, McCune Smith has been generally overlooked in American medical and historical literature. Despite his many medical and scientific firsts, his groundbreaking study abroad, and his distinguished medical career, scholars tend to remember McCune Smith for his abolitionism, as is the case with physician Sarah Parker Remond, if he is remembered at all.

However, McCune Smith’s alma mater did not forget him and his trailblazing medical

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid xiv.

<sup>65</sup> Neil Krishan Aggarwal, ‘The Legacy of James McCune Smith, MD—The First US Black Physician’, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 326, no 22 (2021): 2247; and Stauffer, ed. *The Works of James McCune Smith*, xiii.

<sup>66</sup> Heidi Lujan and Stephen E. DiCarlo, ‘First African-American to Hold a Medical Degree: Brief History of James McCune Smith, Abolitionist, Educator, and Physician’, *Advances in Physiology Education*, vol. 43, no. 1 (June 2019): 134.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid; and Stauffer, ed., *The Works of James McCune Smith*, xiv.

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achievements. In April 2021, the University of Glasgow opened the £90.6 million James McCune Smith Learning Hub, a state-of-the-art learning and teaching facility, to honor him.<sup>68</sup> This commemoration will keep his name, his study abroad achievements, and his medical accomplishments alive for generations to come.

### **3.3 Germany and Germanophilia**

African Americans have studied in Germany since the nineteenth century and many have earned PhD's in scientific fields. However, the earliest Black students who studied in Germany came from Africa and not America. The most notable was former slave Anton Wilhelm Amo (c. 1703 - c. 1759) who was born on the Gold Coast. The Dutch East India Company brought him to Amsterdam, where he was enslaved, but they also provided him with an extensive education. He received his Law degree in 1729 and his Master of Arts in Philosophy in 1730 from the University of Halle in Germany. He next studied at the University of Wittenberg, which was a center of German Enlightenment, and he received his PhD in Philosophy from Wittenberg in 1734. He was the first Black African to receive a doctoral degree from a European university, and he became a professor of philosophy and a leading intellectual during the Enlightenment.<sup>69</sup> Amo's historic achievements illustrate that even though Germany was likely not race-free, the country accepted this former slave into its most prestigious universities in the eighteenth century. This was a time when slaves and Free Blacks in colonial America faced Anti-Literacy Laws which authorized cruel punishment for learning to read and write. As a result, no former slaves or Free Blacks studied at any universities in the Thirteen American Colonies during the 1700s while Amo and other former Black African slaves were allowed to study in Germany.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> James McCune Smith Learning Hub. accessed June 5, 2022. <https://www.gla.ac.uk/explore/future/jmslh/>.

<sup>69</sup> Reginald Bess, 'A. W. Amo: First Great Black Man of Letters', *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 19, no. 4 (1989): 387–393.

<sup>70</sup> See Slater, 'The Blacks Who First Entered', 47.

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This historical context is important for this thesis, because both Mary Church Terrell and Merze Tate studied German in Berlin and were fluent in the language. They are prominent examples of the African American interest in Germany, which began during slavery and continued into the twentieth century.<sup>71</sup> According to Leroy Hopkins, three generations of African Americans have studied in Germany, because they believed that the German system of academic training would equip them with the tools they needed to bring about social change back home.<sup>72</sup> Fugitive slaves and abolitionists Rev. James W.C. Pennington (1807-1870) and Frederick Douglass shared a mutual interest in 1848 revolutionary Germany, and at the 1852 Colored Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, they expressed praise for the revolutionaries and recommended the teaching of German at African American schools. Douglass even decided to have his autobiography translated into German to gain German anti-slavery support.<sup>73</sup> Earlier in 1849, Pennington, a minister, had made an anti-slavery campaign trip to Britain. While he was in Europe, the University of Heidelberg awarded him an honorary doctorate in Theology in December 1849, which was a first for an African American and a former slave.<sup>74</sup> This award is a sign of the strong reciprocal bond that some Germans in academia had with Black Americans during slavery. For historical context, according to Hopkins: Pennington “had completed a course of study at Yale’s School of Divinity even though the administration had refused him permission to register as a student or to borrow books from the library.”<sup>75</sup> Hopkins concedes that we may never know the origins

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<sup>71</sup> Hopkins, ‘Black Prussians’, 67. Political activist, feminist, professor, author, and prison reformer Angela Davis received her PhD in Philosophy from Humboldt University in East Berlin, Germany in 1969. Hopkins views Davis’s studies as the centuries-long continuation of African American students seeking out Germany to escape systemic racism in America. (Ibid, 78).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 81. Several African American men received their PhDs from German universities and from other German-speaking countries in the early part of the twentieth century. They include: Gilbert Haven Jones, PhD in Philosophy, University of Jena, 1909; Milton S. J. Wright, PhD in Economics, University of Heidelberg, 1932; Lewis McMillan, PhD in History, Philosophy, and German, University of Bonn, 1933; and Percy Lavon Julian, PhD in Organic Chemistry, University of Vienna, 1931. See Greene,  *HOLDERS OF DOCTORATES AMONG AMERICAN NEGROES*.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>74</sup> R.J.M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement 1830 – 1860* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 214.

<sup>75</sup> Hopkins, ‘Black Prussians’, 68-69.

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of Pennington's interest in Germany, but I suggest that educational apartheid in America was likely one reason.<sup>76</sup>

African American 'Germanophilia' was still strong at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. HBCUs were among those American universities that increasingly offered German language courses. Fisk University, W.E.B. Du Bois's undergraduate alma mater, was an HBCU where German had been taught since 1869.<sup>77</sup> This continuing African American interest in Germany was now part of a national trend, and the teaching of German at schools and universities across America remained high until just before World War I when it temporarily ceased. Forty percent of American high schools taught German as Americans were impressed with Germany's culture and its Humboldtian model for higher education.<sup>78</sup>

This research model influenced Harvard's professors and curricula, and in the 1890s, Harvard College was a leading center for Germanophiles, and one of those Germanophiles was doctoral student W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963). A pioneering sociologist, Du Bois was the most well-known Black scholar and activist of the twentieth century. Even so, the history of his study abroad is not as well known, and I argue that it can shed light on the Germanophilia that gripped not only mainstream America, but also Black America and its HBCUs from the late nineteenth century through the interwar years of the twentieth century. Du Bois interrupted his PhD studies at Harvard and spent two years studying at the University of Berlin from 1892-1894.

Du Bois recorded his experiences in Germany and shared his insights about what life was like for a Black American man at the end of the nineteenth century. He said that both his

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 67-69.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 65-66, 71.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 66. Hopkins found evidence that as far back as 1818, Thomas Jefferson had proposed a plan for a curriculum at the University of Virginia based on the Humboldtian model of the research-based university, which was developed by Prussian philosopher and linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt.

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sociocultural and educational experiences in Germany contributed to his racial and scientific research awakening. Du Bois wrote:

Of greatest importance was the opportunity which my Wanderjahre in Europe gave of looking at the world as a man and not simply from a narrow racial and provincial outlook . . . And above all I began to understand the real meaning of scientific research and the dim outline of methods of employing its technique and its results in the new social sciences for the settlement of the Negro problems in America.<sup>79</sup>

His study abroad experiences deeply affected his educational philosophies throughout his long and illustrious career. He used this new research paradigm to demonstrate that it was not biological determinism but systemic racism which was responsible for the racial hierarchy that resulted in the educational and economic disparities between Black and White Americans.<sup>80</sup> For the rest of his life, Du Bois applied these empirical social research methods he learned at the University of Berlin. Intellectually awakened by his experiences in Germany, he returned to the U.S. and became the first African American to receive a PhD from Harvard in 1895.

Du Bois described his time in Berlin as two of his most “liberating years.”<sup>81</sup> I propose this was due to his non-racist treatment by his professors and his extracurricular activities, which included his travel throughout Europe. He took full advantage of his time off from his studies to explore Europe and its cultural capitals, artistic treasures, and physical landmarks. He confirmed the common belief among Black Americans that Europe was color-blind when he stated that: “I first met white folk who treated me as a human being.”<sup>82</sup> In Berlin, Du Bois was pleasantly surprised that the Germans viewed him as “just a man,” just another human being, an identity he readily accepts as his own. Kwame Appiah claims in his biography of Du Bois that his education in Germany helped to shape his ideas about race and social

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<sup>79</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of its First Century* (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1968), 159-160.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Kenneth Barkin, ‘W. E. B. Du Bois’ Love Affair with Imperial Germany’, *German Studies Review*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2005): 285.

<sup>82</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Lines of Descent: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Emergence of Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 28.

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identity illustrating how identity and study abroad can intersect.<sup>83</sup> I would add that it was the absence of American racism that allowed Du Bois the time and freedom to reflect on his identity in an enlightened and liberal academic environment.

Prior to his arrival at Harvard to study for his PhD, Du Bois had studied German at Fisk University where he received his B.A. in 1888. He gave his valedictorian speech on Otto von Bismark. However, despite Harvard's reputation as a leading center for German thought and culture, Du Bois felt his intellectual ambitions were unfulfilled. After only two years at Harvard, Du Bois accepted a fellowship from the John F. Slater Fund for the Education of Freedmen and sailed to Germany in 1892 to continue his PhD studies at the University of Berlin.

Du Bois never described Germany as a race-free utopia, and he wrote a sociological analysis of the nuances and complexity of race relations in Germany after he visited the country for six months in 1935 and 1936. He admitted that:

When, therefore, I say I have not suffered from race prejudice in Germany, this calls for explanation. There is race prejudice in Germany, and a regular, planned propaganda to increase it and make it characteristic of the Third Reich. But it is not instinctive prejudice, except in the case of the Jews . . . When an American Negro says, "I have met no discrimination in account of race," it is well for those of us who know to apply considerable doses of salt.<sup>84</sup>

He tried to explain the difference between race prejudice based on skin color and the prejudice against the Jews which he believed was instinctive and taught over centuries. He explained that unlike in the United States, "in Berlin or elsewhere in Germany," he could stay in any hotel, dine wherever he pleased, go to any theater, join a sightseeing tour and enjoy "complete civic freedom and public courtesy."<sup>85</sup> He further explained that: "On the other hand, in social lines, there are limits . . . no German woman of good standing would think of marrying a Negro under ordinary circumstances; nor could she do so legally."<sup>86</sup> This reminds me of the age-old

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, 'A Forum of Fact and Opinion', *Pittsburgh Courier* (December 19, 1936): A1.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.



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rhetorical question, in response to a White American saying some of my best friends are Negroes, ‘Yes, but would you want your daughter to marry one?’ There appears to have been gender differences in the German marriage norms that Du Bois described, because Mary Church Terrell reported that she received several marriage proposals from German men, but that was in the 1880s.

Back in the 1890s when he was in Berlin, Du Bois would have also noticed that changes in gender norms were affecting German higher education. Germany was taking the lead in offering graduate and professional training to women and that included Black women.<sup>87</sup> Georgiana Simpson studied in Germany during the 1890s. Corey D. B. Walker suggests that her contacts with the German-American community around Washington, D.C. may have sparked her interest in German language and culture.<sup>88</sup> Simpson, who was the first African American female PhD recipient in 1921, studied German language and literature in Rostock, Germany from 1896-1897 as was discussed in Chapter One.

Almost a decade earlier, Mary Church Terrell had studied German in Berlin during her Grand Tour from 1888-1890.<sup>89</sup> Both Terrell’s study of German and Simpson’s choice of German for her doctorate reflect the continuing African American interest in Germany and its language, culture, and literature during the late nineteenth century. During the interwar years from 1918 to 1939, Germany continued to attract African American students without barriers to their race or gender. Along with Germany, African American students, scholars, travelers, and intellectuals have also had a long attraction to France which Stephanie Y. Evans

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<sup>87</sup> See Sandra Singer, *Adventures Abroad: North American Women at German-Speaking Universities, 1868-1915* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003). Singer’s seminal book documents the stories of North American women who were among the first students when German universities and German-speaking universities in Switzerland began to accept women as degree students. Singer does not mention any North American Black women such as Georgiana Simpson who studied in Rostock, Germany from 1896 to 1897 within the years of her study.

<sup>88</sup> Walker, ‘Of the Coming of John’, 15.

<sup>89</sup> See Jennifer M. Wilks, ‘The French and Swiss Diaries of Mary Church Terrell, 1888–89: Introduction and Annotated Translation.’ *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International*, vol. 3 no. 1 (2014): 9.

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attributes to its “promise of liberté, égalité, fraternité,” and their infatuation with Paris’s offerings in particular.<sup>90</sup> The following section examines this attraction and analyzes the reasons behind it and its implications for the Black feminist epistemologies which guide this thesis.

#### **3.4 France, the New Orleans Creoles, and the Harlem Renaissance**

Dozens of New Orleans Creoles, who were Free Blacks, studied in France in the 1800s, and they were among the first African Americans to study abroad in Europe. From the 1830s to the 1870s, they studied engineering, medicine, art, literature, music, and sculpture in Paris and earned university degrees and diplomas.<sup>91</sup> They include Julien Hudson (1811-1844), a painter, who studied in Paris in 1827; Louis Charles Roudanez (1823-1890) who studied medicine at the Faculté de Médecine de Paris and received his M.D. in 1853; and Norbert Rillieux (1805-1894) who was an engineering student in Paris. Rillieux was not only an accomplished engineer, but he was also the patented inventor of sugar refining equipment and was considered ahead of his time. He was a student and teacher in Paris at the renowned École Centrale engineering school in the 1820s-1830s, decades before Frenchmen Gustave Eiffel, André Michelin, and Armand Peugeot studied there.<sup>92</sup>

These New Orleans Creoles, also known as ‘gens de couleur libres’ represent a distinct sociocultural group in American society, and they have an intriguing history rooted in miscegenation. Therefore, they do not fit neatly into America’s binary Black and White racial classification system.<sup>93</sup> They existed due to what Michel Fabre describes as “the peculiarities of race relations in French Louisiana.”<sup>94</sup> They were mixed-race with mainly French paternal and African slave and free maternal ancestry although a few had British, Spanish, and other

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<sup>90</sup> See Evans, ‘African American Women Scholars’, 85

<sup>91</sup> Michel Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris: Black American Writers in France, 1840-1980* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 9, 11.

<sup>92</sup> Karla Alston, ‘Blacks in Engineering History’, *Umoja Sasa*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1982): 26.

<sup>93</sup> Amy R. Sumpter, ‘Segregation of the Free People of Color and the Construction of Race in Antebellum New Orleans’, *Southeastern Geographer*, vol, 48, no. 1 (2008): 19 -20.

<sup>94</sup> Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris*, 10-11.

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European paternity. As a result, the New Orleans Creoles were typically well-to do, speakers of colonial French and French Creole, Roman Catholic, educated, and oriented to French culture. They owned businesses, land, property, and some even owned slaves.<sup>95</sup>

By the late 1700s, miscegenation, although illegal, was a common practice in French Louisiana and French planters who fathered children by their slave women often sent their sons to study abroad in Paris. They would customarily free the slave mothers and their children and leave them an inheritance in their wills.<sup>96</sup> Later generations of these now wealthy New Orleans Creoles continued this tradition and sent their sons to study in France throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>97</sup> However, custom dictated that their daughters were tutored at home and did not go abroad to study.

No other Free Blacks in the South were as prosperous as the New Orleans Creoles in the antebellum era.<sup>98</sup> Unlike Free Blacks in other parts of the South whose freedom and mobility were restricted, they enjoyed many of the same rights as White southerners. They were among the few people of any color who had the financial resources and French language abilities to travel and study in France. As a result, the African American Diaspora in France can trace its roots to these educated and affluent New Orleans Creoles. In the post-antebellum era and Reconstruction, this Diaspora expanded to include several influential African Americans who traveled to France as tourists, performers, former abolitionists, intellectuals,

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid; and Shirley E. Thompson, *Exiles at Home: The Struggle to Become American in Creole New Orleans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 275.

<sup>96</sup> This was often done in an arrangement known as the *plaçage* system. The women were called *placées*. *Plaçage* originated in Saint-Domingue (Haiti) before the Haitian Revolution (1797-1804), and it became the practical solution to the shortage of White women since interracial marriage was illegal under France's King Louis XIV's Code Noir. Even after they later married their White wives, the men continued their relationships with their *placées*. They maintained their plantations but also kept a townhouse in New Orleans for their Black family. See Vernon Valentine Palmer, 'The Origins and Authors of the Code Noir', *Louisiana Law Review*, vol. 56, no. 2 (1996). This code was introduced in French Louisiana in 1724. See also Loren Schweningen, 'Antebellum Free Persons of Color in Postbellum Louisiana', *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, vol. 30, no. 4 (Autumn 1989): 346-347.

<sup>97</sup> Tyler Edward Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 17.

<sup>98</sup> Schweningen, 'Antebellum Free Persons of Color', 347.

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and activists during the late nineteenth century. According to Tyler Stovall:

The distinguished actor Ira Aldridge toured the country in 1866 and 1867, receiving favorable reviews in the French press for his starring role in *Othello*. Frederick Douglass traveled to Paris as a tourist in 1886, as did Booker T. Washington in 1899. Other black American visitors of note to France during these years included Mary Church Terrell . . . and W.E.B. Du Bois.<sup>99</sup>

Although New Orleans Creole women did not normally travel to France as students during the antebellum era, towards the end of the nineteenth century Mary Church Terrell sailed to France and studied French in Paris during her 1888-1890 Grand Tour. Sculptor Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller (1877-1968) followed her and studied in Paris at the Académie Colarossi and the École des Beaux-Arts from 1899 to 1902. She was met with exported American racism immediately upon her arrival in Paris when the American Women's Club refused to give her a room because she was Black. The director blamed it on: "some girls here from the South". . . who would be certain to object to Meta's color."<sup>100</sup> She did not let this racism deter her, and with the help of Henry Ossawa Tanner, an expatriate Black artist who had fled America's racism, she found lodging in a non-racist Parisian owned accommodation.<sup>101</sup> She audaciously asserted her independence by producing bold Afrocentric sculptures, and she was able to work without the prejudice of race within a fairly gender-neutral environment in a profession dominated by White men. In Paris, she was a protégée of Auguste Rodin and their first meeting took place at his studio in Meudon.

During her last year in Paris, Meta was given a letter of introduction to Auguste Rodin, and she went to visit the master at his studio in Meudon. She recalled it as possibly the most exciting moment of her life. She took with her some small pieces of sculpture for him to criticize. Rodin's attention was drawn to a plaster sketch of her work entitled "Man Eating His Heart", sometimes called "Secret Sorrow", a piece no more than eight inches high. He studied the piece for a few minutes and then said to her, "my child, you are a sculptor; you have the sense of form in your fingers". He showed her some of his work and pieces of anatomical study with which he worked, and they discussed sculpture for a time. At the end of the interview he offered to criticize her work whenever she wanted, and added that he would come to Paris to do so if the work was too large for her to take to him.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Stovall, *Paris Noir*, 22.

<sup>100</sup> Velma J. Hoover, 'Meta Warrick Fuller: Her Life and Art', *Negro History Bulletin*, vol. 40, no. 2 (March/April 1977): 678.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

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Rodin became a mentor and part of her interracial network, and this praise from the maestro himself was helpful in her one-woman exhibitions and group shows, and her sculptures brought acclaim from the French. Despite Rodin's praise for her work, she faced racism from the art world in her hometown of Philadelphia upon her return to America.<sup>103</sup>

Not surprisingly, by the dawn of the twentieth century, when they compared it to America, Black artists like Warrick Fuller and Ossawa Tanner, writers, performers, and intellectuals increasingly viewed France as the most color-blind European country devoid of race prejudice. Corey D. B. Walker found that during the early twentieth century, a steady stream of African American intellectuals was "choosing the intellectual migration route to France."<sup>104</sup> This flow included Carter G. Woodson, renowned as the founder of Black History Month, W. Mercer Cook, and Anna Julia Cooper who all studied at the Sorbonne. Woodson studied European history in 1907, Cook received his French Diploma in 1926, and Cooper was awarded her PhD a year earlier in 1925.<sup>105</sup> Rayford W. Logan, a World War I veteran, remained in France for several years in the 1920s as a student.<sup>106</sup> He later became Merze Tate's history department chair at Howard University. Walker claims that: "It was at this time that a virtual "Harlem on the Seine" was becoming a reality as more and more artists, writers, and intellectuals flocked to the City of Light."<sup>107</sup> African American students, intellectuals, writers and artists spent so much time in France that 'Black Paris' heritage tours are still in popular demand today.

Stephanie Y. Evans notes that during the interwar years from 1918 to 1939, Black Americans believed that their positive experiences were indisputable proof of France's egalitarianism. They spoke of the liberating and emotional experience of being judged by

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 679. Velma J. Hoover suggests that despite this continuing racism and rejection of her work in America, Warrick Fuller did not return to Paris because her work and art were rooted in the African American experience, and she needed to be close to her cultural roots. Mary Church Terrell and Jessie Fauset expressed similar reasons for their return to America.

<sup>104</sup> Walker, 'Of the Coming of John', 17.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 17-18. Shirley Graham Du Bois, another influential African American, (although not mentioned by Walker) studied music composition at the Sorbonne from 1926 to 1927.

<sup>106</sup> Stovall, *Paris Noir*, 35. Logan was one of the 13 Black Americans who were permitted to stay on as students in an arrangement between the American and French governments for ex-World War I soldiers.

<sup>107</sup> Walker, 'Of the Coming of John', 17-18.

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their talents and abilities rather than the color of their skin.<sup>108</sup> As a result, they increasingly traveled to France for work, study, and tourism. Biologist and researcher Ernest Everett Just spent a week in Paris on his first trip to Europe in January 1929. He was enroute to a post-doctoral research post in Naples, Italy at the Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn to conduct experiments, and he was the first Black scientist to work at the Stazione. Paris captivated Just as he toured the major sites throughout the city. He felt no race prejudice and he was struck by the liveliness of the city and the French people.<sup>109</sup> For Just, the absence of racism he had experienced in America was overwhelming.

While Paris may have appealed to the aesthetic sensibilities of Black Americans like Just, paradoxically, the French did not always extend their racial liberalism to African immigrants from their colonies. Thus, French ideas about race in a transnational historical context were complicated and situational. ‘Negrophilia’ is a term that has been used to explain why African Americans were in vogue in early twentieth century France especially during the 1920s and 1930s. Negrophilia, which comes from the French word ‘nérophilie’, love of the Negro, had been used since the early nineteenth century to express a fetishization of Black culture.<sup>110</sup> African American soldiers who brought jazz to Europe during World War I, and performers like Josephine Baker and Ada “Bricktop” Smith fueled the growth of French Negrophilia for African Americans.<sup>111</sup> Conversely, people of African descent from French colonies were often not treated as well, and they suffered from the racism and discrimination that African Americans had experienced back home.

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<sup>108</sup> Evans, ‘African American Women Scholars’, 85. See also Heike Raphael-Hernandez ed. *Blackening Europe: The African American Experience* (London, UK: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>109</sup> Kenneth R. Manning, *Black Apollo of Science: The Life of Ernest Everett Just* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983), 168-169.

<sup>110</sup> See Petrine Archer Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (High Holborn: Thames & Hudson, 2000).

<sup>111</sup> Imaobong D. Umoren, ‘Black and Feminist Internationalism in Interwar Europe, 1920-1935’, in Imaobong D. Umoren, *Race Women Internationalists: Activist-Intellectuals and Global Freedom Struggles* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 12. See also T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Bricktop’s Paris: African American Women in Paris Between the Two World Wars* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015), 145-147. The French were influenced by and adopted Black Americans’ style in art, dance, and clothing and became enamored of their music, especially jazz.

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Lydia Lindsey and Carlton E. Wilson point out that: “. . .as African Americans were taking satisfaction in the belief that there were “green pastures” for Black people in Europe, indigenous European Blacks and colonials who served in the French and British armies continued to experience racial prejudice”<sup>112</sup> Writing in the mid-twentieth century, journalist Roy Ottley also disputed the concept of a color-blind France. He claimed that African American artists, writers, performers, and students enjoyed less racism and more freedom in France precisely because they were usually only temporary visitors.

According to Ottley, Black Americans were “not. . . a social or economic threat to the Frenchman in Paris or elsewhere within metropolitan France, so the average Frenchman can afford racial liberalism.”<sup>113</sup> Ottley lived and traveled throughout Europe in the 1920s, and he concluded that a non-racist France was an enduring myth.<sup>114</sup> Michel Fabre agrees with Ottley’s premise of the non-racist myth, but he offered a different explanation. Fabre concluded that the French accepted and appreciated Black Americans because of their distaste for egotistical White Americans and their dislike of Black Africans due to their “bitter colonial history.”<sup>115</sup>

Nonetheless, African American travelers and students in twentieth century France, and especially in Paris, consistently reported experiencing less race, gender, and class discrimination than in their native America. They were aware of being treated better than the Africans from France’s colonies, and when the French asked, “Isn’t it horrible how they treat you in the United States?” they often replied: “Like you treat the Algerians?”<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, this racist treatment of France’s colonial subjects did not deter African Americans from traveling to France, and this included large numbers of Harlem Renaissance members who

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<sup>112</sup> Lydia Lindsey and Carlton E. Wilson, ‘Spurring a Dialogue to Place the African European Experience Within the Context of an Afrocentric Philosophy’, *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 25, no. 1 (1994): 44. accessed June 10, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784413>.

<sup>113</sup> Roi Ottley, *The Negro in Europe Today: No Green Pastures* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1951), 74; and Roi Ottley, *No Green Pastures* (London, UK: Murray, 1951), 109-110.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Fabre, *From Harlem to Paris*, 169-171. In fact, whether deserved or not, the ‘ugly American’ persona is a well-known cliché in international travel, and it has fueled anti-White American sentiment abroad.

<sup>116</sup> William Gardner Smith, *Return to Black America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 14.

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went to France and called Paris their home during the 1920s and 1930s.

It became fashionable for these artists, writers, playwrights, poets, and performers to travel to Paris, La Ville Lumière, the City of Light.<sup>117</sup> France's democratic principles of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* attracted them, and Paris afforded the perceived luxury of a color-blind society in which they could live and creatively practice their crafts free from the pervasive racism, discrimination, and prejudice they endured in their homeland.<sup>118</sup>

Harlem Renaissance members had a distinct advantage over French colonial immigrants; they were usually educated middle to upper-class African Americans and Jessie Fauset (1882-1961) was a representative Black woman. She was a novelist, journalist, and foreign correspondent who lived, worked, and studied in France during the 1920s. Fauset was born in New Jersey, but she spent her formative years in Philadelphia in a family that prioritized education. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Cornell University in 1909 with a major in classical languages, and she was among the university's first Black women graduates. In 1929, she earned her M.A. in French from the University of Pennsylvania, which was another milestone for an African American woman.

Fauset made several trips to Europe during the 1920s in her job as a foreign correspondent for *The Crisis*, the NAACP's official magazine. From 1919 to 1926, she also served as the literary editor for *The Crisis* under W.E.B. Du Bois. In her trailblazing position as a rare Black female foreign correspondent, she kept *The Crisis* readers informed of news about Black American expatriates in France and Pan-African colonial issues of concern in the African Diaspora. A multi-tasker, she was best known as a Harlem Renaissance novelist.

Black feminism features prominently in her novels where she explores its intersectional meaning for Black women.<sup>119</sup> She projects her personal values in her writing, and the main characters in her novels are middle-class Black women professionals. Her themes include

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<sup>117</sup> Walker, 'Of the Coming of John', 14.

<sup>118</sup> Evans, 'African American Women Scholars', 93.

<sup>119</sup> See Jessie Redmon Fauset, *There is Confusion* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2020); *Plum Bun: A Novel*



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‘passing’, racial discrimination, women’s struggle for equality, and the constraints of the respectability paradigm, which she explores in her novel *Plum Bun* (1929).<sup>120</sup> The European settings of her novels mirror her life, standpoints, and transnationalism, which position her work within the theoretical frameworks of this thesis.

It is unknown whether Fauset ever crossed paths with Cooper at the Sorbonne or if she was there when Cooper defended her PhD dissertation in March 1925. Although they may never have met in France, they are examples of the Black American writers, scholars, academics, and intellectuals who traveled to France during the Harlem Renaissance in the interwar years. Fauset studied French at the Sorbonne, and she revealed her historical and cultural impressions in an article published in *The Crisis* in March 1925, which was the same month that Anna Julia Cooper defended her dissertation at the Sorbonne. As the title suggests, ‘The Enigma of the Sorbonne’, she addresses various aspects which she found puzzling and different from American universities.

First, Fauset sets the background with a lengthy description of the Sorbonne’s theological origins, its expansion and development over the centuries, and the confusion and vagueness of its related names, “Université de Paris” and “Collège de France.”<sup>121</sup> After this educational history, she notes some cultural differences in campus life and the curriculum. She expresses her astonishment at the lack of “college life” which is typical in American universities. She opines that: “It is impossible to speak of its “college life”, because no “life” as such exists here. The shape and form, the definite aspect of university living, features so marked in our own advanced institutions are to be remarked here only for their absence.”<sup>122</sup>

She astutely observes that the different colored countenances of the passersby troubled no one and finds the Sorbonne to be “a veritable Tower of Babel,” and a multicultural

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*Without a Moral* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1999); and *The Chinaberry Tree: A Novel of American Life* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Reprint Edition, 2013).

<sup>120</sup> See Fauset, *Plum Bun*.

<sup>121</sup> Jessie Fauset, ‘The Enigma of the Sorbonne’, *The Crisis*, vol. 29, (March 1925): 216.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 219.

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“microcosm of the world.”<sup>123</sup> Her personal reflections suggest that the range of ethnicities and languages gave her a sense of identity with the multicultural atmosphere of the Sorbonne, and she does not mention any racial concerns in her observations. She provides an introspective and rare glimpse of the Sorbonne with the nuanced eye of a journalist balanced with that of an African American student for *The Crisis* readers. This is not simply a travel narrative but an attempt to present the Sorbonne as a welcoming place for Black students to experience.

Earlier, in a 1924 interview for the *Paris Tribune*, Pierre Loving asked Fauset why she was living in Paris, and she replied:

I like Paris because I find something here, something of integrity, which I seem to have strangely lost in my own country. It is the simplest of all to say that I like to live among people and surroundings where I am not always of “thou shalt not.” I am colored and wish to be known as colored, but sometimes I have felt that my growth as a writer has been hampered in my own country. And so--but only temporarily-- I have fled from it. I adore my own people and I like to be among them of them, despite the race issue in America.<sup>124</sup>

Fauset explained that in Paris she could forget about the race-based criticism of her work that came with the omnipresent burden of being colored in America. She told the interviewer: “There is no more crushing criticism for a colored writer or painter than the words: “Well, it’s not half bad considering she’s colored’ . . . I will be forgiven, I am sure, for wanting to forget the color question.”<sup>125</sup> Fauset wanted to be judged by the quality of her work and not by the color of her skin. Overseas, Fauset embraced this new identity that was possible in France, not to escape her blackness, but to avoid being identified as a “colored writer or painter” with the assumption that she could never be as good as a White person. The identity she found in Paris came without the stigma and burden she felt of being a Black woman in America. Almost 70 years earlier, Sarah Parker Remond had expressed similar feelings about the burden of the stigma she carried as a Black woman in America.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Hugh D. Ford, ed, *The Left Bank Revisited: Selections from the Paris Tribune 1917-1934*. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972), 47-48.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> C. Peter Ripley, ed, ‘Speech by Sarah P. Remond Delivered at the Red Lion Hotel, Warrington, England 2 February 1859’ in *The Black Abolitionist Papers, Vol. 1*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 445.

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Although France allowed her to acquire a new identity in which she could grow as a writer without restrictions, Fauset emphasized that her stay was temporary and that she would not abandon her people in America. Mary Church Terrell had expressed almost identical sentiments over 30 years earlier when she decided that her calling was to return to America, the land that her “African ancestors suffered and died for,” and “helped to build and enrich.” She felt a duty to uplift the Negro race, which she did through her work as a clubwoman, civil rights and transnational activist.<sup>127</sup> Terrell declared that she did not want to live as an expatriate in an alien land no matter how free it was of racism.<sup>128</sup> This intergenerational consensus is notable for two reasons: first, it speaks to Terrell’s and Fauset’s determination to use their experiences abroad to assist the Black community in their fight for racial equality, and second, it shows that America had still not lived up to its 1868 Fourteenth Amendment which promised equal protection under the law.

#### **3.5 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter has considered a range of overlapping historical contexts within which to situate the following case studies. It has examined experiences across race, gender, and class intersections in intergenerational settings in Great Britain, Germany, and France. The findings show that there has been a continuous presence of African American students in Europe since the eighteenth century. Overwhelmingly, these students, including former slave James McCune Smith, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Jessie Fauset, found that in contrast to their experiences in America, Europeans welcomed and treated them humanely with respect, dignity, and equality. For some, like Du Bois, this was the first time in their lives they had experienced such treatment. Their class was an advantage, and it helped to overcome race intersections.

These African American students were able to successfully navigate the long road from slavery, segregation, discrimination, and racial violence in their homeland to the hallowed

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<sup>127</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005), 133.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

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halls of the Sorbonne and other prestigious European institutions. Yet, they did not overtly criticize or repudiate their own country when they were overseas. Freed from the shackles of American slavery and endemic racism, pioneering African Americans achieved educational milestones as they developed their full academic and intellectual potential from the eighteenth century through the antebellum era to the Harlem Renaissance.

Their study abroad achievements did not take place in a historical vacuum, however. They were rooted in their slave ancestors' reverence for education as a 'fruit of freedom' and their determination and perseverance to learn to read and write despite Anti-Literacy Laws. This chapter has investigated historical, sociocultural, and educational contexts that situate the time and place in which Remond, Terrell, and Tate studied abroad in Europe, and I now turn to their case studies. Remond's historical case study is next, and all the components of my research design are used to explore her study abroad experiences in England and Italy.

## Chapter Four: Sarah Parker Remond

*There is no such thing as race. None, there is just a human race – scientifically, anthropologically, Racism is a construct, a social construct. . . it has a social function, racism.* ~ Toni Morrison.<sup>1</sup>

### 4.0 Introduction

This first case study explores the trailblazing European experiences, study abroad, and transnational activism of Sarah Parker Remond from 1859 to 1894. During those years, she lived, studied, and worked in England and Italy as a rare Black American female expatriate. While existing works focus on Remond’s impact as an abolitionist, this chapter includes the lesser researched area of her higher education achievements in Europe. Her main goals when she left on her transatlantic journey were threefold: “to serve the antislavery cause, enjoy freedom, and improve her education.”<sup>2</sup> In order to answer the core research questions, this chapter examines her encounters with race, gender, and class both at home and abroad. Specifically, it seeks to understand how these issues impacted not only her abolitionism but also her education in America, her study abroad, identity, career, and her sociocultural interactions in Europe. How did Remond defy intersectional oppressions of race, gender, and class to create her model of empowered Black womanhood? Her accomplishments are even more significant because they occurred during the Victorian era when European White women were still struggling to gain access to higher education against a powerful patriarchal hegemony.

A historical case study approach is used to provide an in-depth and concrete analysis of Remond’s life. Its chronological format shows her development from a segregated life as a Free Black during the antebellum era to her intellectual journey as an abolitionist and a physician in Italy. Her biographer Sirpa Salenius asserts that “By including Remond in national and transnational narratives, as well as other prominent Black women, we contribute to the process of recognizing the range and complexity of the Black experience in slavery and

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<sup>1</sup> Jessica Dickerson, ‘Toni Morrison Breaks Down The Reality of Race on The Colbert Report’. accessed January 14, 2023. [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com). November 21, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Sirpa Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad: Sarah Parker Remond in Cosmopolitan Europe* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 75.

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freedom’.”<sup>3</sup> Karen Cook Bell recognizes and praises these women’s efforts, and she argues that “Black women have been at the forefront of movements to address iniquity, social oppression, and freedom for the Black community for centuries.”<sup>4</sup> Bogin and Lowenberg have noted the “courageous struggle of countless Black women [who] found creative ways to transcend and to transform the often harrowing circumstances that constricted their lives.”<sup>5</sup> Remond’s life personified all these characteristics, and she left an enduring legacy as a pioneer in transnational abolitionism, women’s rights, and higher education in Europe.

As I discussed in Chapter One, interrogation of the early study abroad history of African American women in Europe is extremely challenging because most of their narratives are missing from the archives and the historiography. As a result, their voices have been essentially marginalized and their memories relegated to the abyss of the historical past. Therefore, this study takes full advantage of the extant primary sources on Remond’s abolitionism to gain insight into how she became the first African American woman to study at university in England and Italy. Remond tirelessly gave dozens of anti-slavery lectures throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland between 1859 and 1865, and during that time she also studied at the Bedford College for Women and the All Saints Hospital Nursing School at University College London. Thus, her academic coursework likely benefited from her highly praised rhetorical skills. Newspapers in the British Isles and America wrote articles which included her speeches, and they lauded her powerful and effective oratory, which drew crowds to her lectures.

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<sup>3</sup> Sirpa Salenius, ‘Sarah Parker Remond’s Black American Grand Tour: Responses in Art and History’ in Deborah Willis, Elyn Toscano, and Kalia Brooks Nelson, eds, *Women and Migration: Responses in Art and History* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2019), 265.

<sup>4</sup> Karen Cook Bell, ‘Enslaved Revolutionary Women: An Author Interview with Karen Cook-Bell’, *Black Perspectives*, November 9, 2021, accessed February 10, 2022. <https://www.aaihs.org/enslaved-revolutionary-women-an-author-interview-with-karen-cook-bell/>. Bell describes how enslaved Black women fiercely resisted slavery not only by escaping but also by initiating lawsuits to gain their freedom. She highlights the story of Ona “Oney” Judge (c. 1773–1848), the fugitive slave of George Washington who escaped from the President’s House in Philadelphia in 1796 while he served as the first U.S. President. He relentlessly pursued Ona Judge for several years, which made her life one of fearful terror, but she was never recaptured by Washington and returned to slavery.

<sup>5</sup> Ruth Bogin and Bert J. Lowenberg, eds. *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life: Their Words, Their Thoughts, Their Feelings* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1976), x.

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Despite her exceptional accomplishments for a nineteenth century African American woman, there were minimal scholarly publications about Remond prior to this century. When Sybil Ventress Brownlee wrote her 1997 PhD dissertation about Remond, it was the first holistic narrative of her life, because previous publications had only offered partial documentation of her historical presence.<sup>6</sup> Brownlee noted that Remond's invisibility was due to the lack of a published biography. This was not rectified until almost twenty years later in 2016 when Sirpa Salenius wrote *An Abolitionist Abroad: Sarah Parker Remond in Cosmopolitan Europe*.<sup>7</sup> Salenius did not shed much light on Remond's lived experiences at Bedford College for Women in her biography; nevertheless, our work is linked through our examination of Remond's abolitionist and transnational activism, and her interracial networking with White British women abolitionists, suffragists, and reformers.

During the years between 1997 and 2016 and the publication of Salenius's biography, the literature on Remond was limited to articles and book chapters which were part of broader historical treatises.<sup>8</sup> From 2016 until the present, however, researchers have shown increased interest in Remond. Salenius has been the most prolific researcher, and she stands alone as the expert source on Remond, and she is her premier biographer. She has also written several articles about Remond, which have informed my research questions. Two of these articles are about her transnational activism and interracial networks and sisterhoods, one is about her Black American Grand Tour, and the other focuses on "the importance of archival research in

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<sup>6</sup> Sybil Ventress Brownlee, 'Out of the Abundance of the Heart: Sarah Ann Parker Remond's Quest for Freedom', PhD Dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> See Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*.

<sup>8</sup> A chronological list of literature published between 1997 and 2016 which includes references to Remond includes: Carla Peterson, *"Doers of the Word": African American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995); Angelita Reyes, 'Elusive Autobiographical Performativity: Vacey Skipwith's Home Place and Sarah Parker Remond's Italian Retreat', in John Cullen Gruesser and Hanna Wallinger, eds. *Loopholes and Retreats: African American Writers and the Nineteenth Century* (Vienna, AT: LIT Verlag, 2009), 141-168; Clare Taylor, *British and American Abolitionists: An Episode in Transatlantic Understanding* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1974); Jean Fagin Yellin and John C. Van Horne eds, *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); Teresa Zackodnik, *African American Feminisms, 1828-1923* (New York: Routledge, 2007); and Teresa Zackodnik, *Press, Platform, Pulpit: Black Feminist Publics in the Era of Reform* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2011).

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recovering historical accounts that have been erased.” Salenius uses Remond as her case study in this last article on archival research.<sup>9</sup> Kabria Baumgartner, Christine Kinealy, and Hannah-Rose Murray have all recently written books that include Remond, but they focus on her abolitionism and not on her study abroad experiences.<sup>10</sup>

In order to bring these experiences to the forefront, it was necessary to subvert patriarchal research paradigms which do not relate to the reality of marginalized Black women’s lives. Therefore, Remond’s narrative is guided by the theoretical and analytical frameworks of Black Feminist Thought and intersectionality to explore her experiences. The key intellectual takeaways from these Black feminist methodologies are insight into the ways Remond used resistance and empowerment strategies to negotiate her encounters with race, gender, and class issues and the value she placed upon education which she shares with Terrell and Tate.

Her Black female agency, which underpins conceptualization of these experiences from her standpoint as an African American woman, is also examined. The term Black female agency refers to how Remond took the initiative and employed direct action to confront racial obstacles embedded in her structural oppression. I argue that Black female agency was a key factor which fueled her educational pursuit and transnational activism. She applied it when she filed lawsuits to seek justice for the discrimination she faced even though she was born a Free Black in supposedly liberal Massachusetts. Remond applied Black female agency throughout her life to combat multiple intersectional oppressions which affect the

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<sup>9</sup> These four articles are: Sirpa Salenius, ‘Transatlantic Interracial Sisterhoods: Sarah Remond, Ellen Craft, and Harriet Jacobs in England’, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 38, no. 1 (2017): 166–196; Sirpa Salenius, ‘Sarah Parker Remond’s Black American Grand Tour: Responses in Art and History’, in Deborah Willis, Ellyn Toscano, and Kalia Brooks Nelson eds, *Women and Migration: Responses in Art and History* (Open Book Publishers, 2019), 265-272; Sirpa Salenius, ‘Interracial Networks of Transatlantic Activism: Sarah Parker Remond Reassessing Black Womanhood’, in *Connecting Women: National and International Networks During the Long Nineteenth Century*, Barton C. Hacker, et al, eds. (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2021), 47 -62; and Sirpa Salenius, ‘On Archival Research: Recovering and Rewriting History. The Case of Sarah Parker Remond’, *Transatlantica*, vol 1, Issue 1 (2021). accessed September 10, 2022. <https://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/16939>.

<sup>10</sup> Kabria Baumgartner, *In Pursuit of Knowledge: Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2019); Christine Kinealy, *Black Abolitionists in Ireland* (London, UK: Routledge, 2020); and Hannah-Rose Murray, *Advocates of Freedom: African American Transatlantic Abolitionism in the British Isles* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020).



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positionality from which Black women speak.<sup>11</sup>

Since Remond is among the African American women who are archivally marginalized, it was very challenging to reconstruct her study abroad through the fragments in Western archives which were not established with Black women in mind. With the exceptions of archives at HBCUs like Howard University and Spelman College, research centers such as the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City, and the National Archives for Black Women's History in Washington, D.C., archives on African American women are missing from mainstream Western repositories. This situation required resourcefulness, especially in finding primary sources about Remond's educational experiences in England and Italy. Keshia N. Abraham found that: "To see my ancestors, I had to learn to read history for clues, not for the facts, "because they only tell part of the story."<sup>12</sup> I have had to apply a related strategy in my research for primary sources on Remond.

Through my strategic search for clues versus facts, I have discovered primary sources about Remond off the beaten track in hidden places. For example, I discovered an extremely valuable article about the circumstances of Remond's death written by Sirpa Salenius which was obscured in an issue of a cemetery newsletter.<sup>13</sup> I researched U.S. and UK online digital archive collections and other primary sources and located Remond's autobiographical essay, which is a rare first-person account of her life in America prior to her leaving for England in 1858.<sup>14</sup> *The Black Abolitionist Papers, Vol. 1: The British Isles, 1830–1865* (1985) has a considerable number of newspaper articles about Remond's

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<sup>11</sup> Vivian M. May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist: A Critical Introduction* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 43.

<sup>12</sup> Keshia N. Abraham, John Woolf, *Black Victorians: Hidden in History* (London, UK: Duckworth Books, 2022), 8.

<sup>13</sup> See Sirpa Salenius, 'Who They Were: Sarah Parker Remond and Her Family in Rome', *Friends of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome*, no. 38 (Spring 2017): 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> Sarah P. Remond, 'Sarah P. Remond', in Matthew Davenport Hill, ed., *Our Exemplars, Poor and Rich; Biographical Sketches of Men and Women Who Have, by an Extraordinary Use of Their Opportunities, Benefited Their Fellow-Creatures* (London, UK: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1861), 276–286.

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abolitionist lectures and speeches, her correspondence with abolitionist colleagues and abolitionist organizations both in America and the British Isles.<sup>15</sup> These invaluable primary sources provide first-hand descriptions of her life and times in her own voice. I augment these documents by discussing the leading role that Bedford College for Women and its founder Elizabeth Jesser Reid played in the development of higher education for women in Great Britain during the nineteenth century.

### 4.1 Childhood and Life in America, 1826-1858.

Sarah Parker Remond was born on June 6, 1826, in Salem, Massachusetts into a Free Black middle-class family of well-known abolitionists and entrepreneurs, John and Nancy Lenox Remond. Her parents owned several successful catering and hairdressing businesses and several of her siblings followed in their footsteps.<sup>16</sup> However, with her older brother Charles Lenox Remond as an example, Remond's path diverged from this family tradition, and she joined him as a full-time lecturer for the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1856.<sup>17</sup> This decision eventually led to her transatlantic journey to Europe two years later. The only extant primary source I found about her early life in America was Remond's 1861 autobiographical essay in which she describes her upbringing in Salem, Massachusetts and Newport, Rhode Island.<sup>18</sup> She unpacks the themes of race, gender, class, family unity, abolitionism, self-directed learning and how they affected her life and her beliefs. While Remond records a relatively pleasant existence in Massachusetts with her prominent abolitionist parents, she

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<sup>15</sup> C. Peter Ripley, ed, *The Black Abolitionist Papers. Vol. 1: The British Isles, 1830-1865*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985). See pages 435, 445, 447, 457, 462, 465, 469, and 568.

<sup>16</sup> Dorothy Burnett Porter, 'The Remonds of Salem, Massachusetts: A Nineteenth-Century Family Revisited', *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings*, vol. 95, pt. 2 (1985): 265-267, 272.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 287. Remond had first lectured against slavery with her brother Charles in Groton, Connecticut in 1842 when she was just 16 years old.

<sup>18</sup> Remond, 'Sarah P. Remond', 276–286. In the preface to Remond's autobiographical essay, the editor presents his views about what makes her an exemplar to be included among luminaries: "Miss Remond, who has kindly favoured us with the following autobiography, is a coloured lady of great talent and energy. She is gifted with natural eloquence, and is thus qualified for the profession she has adopted — that of a lecturer on the anti-slavery question. During her stay in England she has made a tour through some of our principal towns, where her spontaneous appeals were listened to with respect, and even with admiration."

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was aware of the racial restrictions that plagued people of her ‘complexion’ a term she used frequently.

Remond begins her autobiographical essay by stating: “I was born at [sic] Salem, Massachusetts, the youngest but one of ten children of John and Nancy Remond.”<sup>19</sup> She notes that her mother was born in nearby Newton, but she does not mention that her father was born in 1788 in Curaçao, then a Dutch colony in the West Indies, and that he had immigrated to America alone in 1798 when he was just ten years old.<sup>20</sup> He left home with the full approval of his mother, and he stated that his purpose was “for schooling.”<sup>21</sup> John Remond’s quest for an education foreshadowed his daughter Sarah’s journey to Europe to pursue her schooling 60 years later. It demonstrates a family pattern of embracing the power of education and a family history of study abroad.

The denial of human and civil rights to Free Blacks in America was a recurring theme in Remond’s autobiographical essay and in her anti-slavery speeches, and it appears to have affected her deeply. She wrote that “my father was a tax-payer for years before I was born, and it will need no extra clear vision to perceive that American prejudice against free-born men and women is as deep-rooted as it is hateful and cruel.”<sup>22</sup> According to Remond, Free Blacks were forced to endure the cruel treatment of separate schools and churches, segregated seating in theaters, on steamships, and exclusion from public hotels and omnibuses as a result of color prejudice harbored by Whites.<sup>23</sup> As an example, Remond describes her own forceful removal from the White section of the Howard Athenaeum theater in Boston in 1853, and she states that her crime was having a ‘complexion’ that identified her as a proscribed race.<sup>24</sup> During her forceful ejection, she suffered injuries to her arm when she was being pushed down the stairs.

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 277.

<sup>20</sup> Porter, ‘The Remonds of Salem, Massachusetts’, 263.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 281.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 282.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 281.

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Remond immediately filed and won a lawsuit against the theater and was awarded \$500, which was a sizeable sum at that time.<sup>25</sup> The successful outcome of her court case was important enough to be published in the 1853 Annual Report of the *American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society* which recorded that:

Justice Russell delivered an opinion sustaining the equal rights of colored citizens. The defendants were fined a small sum, and the agent adjudged to pay the costs. An action was brought before the Court of Common Pleas for damages, but it was later withdrawn by Miss Remond, on her expenses being paid by the other party, and a stipulation that she should occupy hereafter any seat at the Howard that she may choose to pay for.<sup>26</sup>

This was not only a personal victory for Remond but a political act on behalf of her Free Black community. This successful outcome was due to Remond's steadfast refusal to be denied her constitutional and civil rights. Although the odds were not in her favor because of her race and gender, she resisted her mistreatment, adhered to her principles and summoned her courage to overcome, and, very importantly, to change the Howard Athenaeum's racist policies.

It was the continuing denial of her right to attend the public schools in Salem which hurt and saddened Remond the most, however. Her voice is clear in her autobiographical essay about how detrimental segregated schools were to her advancement and to all people of color.

Separate . . . schools for coloured persons are an immense disadvantage to the descendants of the African race, and a great drawback to their elevation. They are based completely on prejudice against colour, the legitimate offspring of American slavery, and it is to be regretted that many well-wishers to the coloured race assist in sustaining them.<sup>27</sup>

Remond explains that some White people who were against slavery revealed their hidden race prejudice when they approved of segregated schools. She declared that "My strongest desire through life has been to be educated," and she echoed the wishes of her slave

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. See also Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*, 45; and Porter, 'The Remonds of Salem, Massachusetts': 283.

<sup>26</sup> *American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society*. Thirteenth Annual Report. New York, The Society, (1853): 154. accessed June 22, 2023. <https://archive.org/details/thirteenthannual00amer>.

<sup>27</sup> Remond, 'Sarah P. Remond', 281.

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ancestors.<sup>28</sup> She refused to allow the injustice of segregated schools to derail her learning. Instead, she independently took the initiative and read as much as possible. She explained that although she and her siblings had been taught to read a little, they received no regular instruction and, in her words, she “found the most exquisite pleasure in reading, and, as we had no library, I read every book which came in my way, and, like *Oliver Twist*, I longed for more.”<sup>29</sup> This seems to indicate that she was largely self-educated and well-versed in English literature and that she was quite adept at securing books despite her lack of library access.

Remond described how her mother “strengthened her children . . . not only for the trials and duties of life [within the home] but also to enable them to meet [the] terrible pressure which prejudice against colour would force upon them.”<sup>30</sup> She credits her mother for instilling in her the courage she would need to face, in her words, the “scorn and contempt” . . . [of those] who hated all who were identified with an enslaved race.”<sup>31</sup> While she was taught the domestic duties of “the genuine New England woman,” like other free middle-class Black women, she also worked to support ‘race uplift’ from which her White peers were exempt.<sup>32</sup> In Salem, her parents did their best to ensure that Remond and her siblings received the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. Young Sarah was raised to expect that she should be treated no differently from the White children in Salem in all aspects of her life; however, in her lived experiences, Remond found that:

As a community, the most refined and the most vulgar [White person] treated every coloured person, so far as their personal rights were concerned, worse than criminals. In such an atmosphere, so well calculated to crush out all the finer feelings, and almost to make one despair, I grew to womanhood.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 278.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 278-279.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 276.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 277.

<sup>32</sup> Linda M. Perkins, ‘The Role of Education in the Development of Black Feminist Thought, 1860-1920’, *History of Education*, vol. 22, no. 3 (1993): 266, 275. Perkins posits that “Black women were nurtured in an environment moulded by slavery and by systematic discrimination and legal segregation. They grew up with a mission to ‘help their race’. Because the race needed every able person, gender was not a divisive issue.” (Ibid, 275).

<sup>33</sup> Remond, ‘Sarah P. Remond’, 277-278.

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Remond explained that as she reached womanhood, racism continued to be a reality in her life. As she gathered strength to fight this injustice, she refused to allow it to prevent her from obtaining an education. When the Remond children were denied admission to Salem's public schools because of their race, she said she felt "the most bitter and indignant feeling" against those "who deprived me of the opportunity for knowledge."<sup>34</sup> Remond had passed the examination for entry into Salem's East School for Girls in 1834, but she was still refused admission.<sup>35</sup> This had such a lasting effect on Remond that the memory of her expulsion remained with her, and she never forgot it. Remond wrote in her autobiographical essay that:

Years have elapsed since this occurred, but the memory of it is as fresh as ever in my mind, and like the scarlet letter of Hester, is engraven on my heart. We had been expelled from the school on the sole ground of our complexion.<sup>36</sup>

When they were prevented from attending the public school in Salem, the Remonds were forced to move to Newport, Rhode Island in 1835 where the children were enrolled in a private school for colored people. They returned to their Salem home in 1841 after the children had completed their schooling.<sup>37</sup>

Due to the disruptions and discontinuity in her education, an unsatisfied Remond said that she continued to read daily, not only books, but daily and weekly newspapers, which were available in public and private libraries of friends. She devoured "the best English and American literature" and proclaimed that no prejudiced person could rob her of the joy she obtained from reading books or listening to music.<sup>38</sup> Her progressive-minded parents also provided a variety of educational materials at home and in their businesses, which informed the children of slavery and related political issues of the day. They included books, and newspapers such as "the *Liberator*, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, and newspapers

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 279.

<sup>35</sup> Baumgartner, *In Pursuit of Knowledge*, 107.

<sup>36</sup> Remond, 'Sarah P. Remond', 280.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 279, 281.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 282.

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published by Free Blacks such as *Freedom's Journal*, *Rights of All*, the *Weekly Advocate*, the *Colored American*, the *Mirror of Liberty*, and the *North Star*.<sup>39</sup> The Remond family home was a meeting place which hosted several notable Black and White abolitionists among them William Lloyd Garrison, and Remond joined them in denouncing the “evil system of American chattel slavery.”<sup>40</sup>

As she grew into adulthood, Remond held the firm belief that anti-slavery activism was the most effective way to end slavery. She agreed to put her life on the line and become an anti-slavery lecturer despite the danger.<sup>41</sup> She joined a growing group of African American women abolitionists and public speakers that included Maria W. Stewart, Sojourner Truth, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. Undaunted, and risking her personal safety, Remond accompanied her brother Charles and Massachusetts native Abby Kelley and began her anti-slavery lecture tours as a member of the Massachusetts and the American Anti-Slavery Societies. Garrison “praised her calm dignified manner her winning personal appearance and her earnest appeals to the conscience and heart.”<sup>42</sup> These were the same personal characteristics which would define her and sway audiences to her side during her lectures in the British Isles.

In her autobiographical essay, Remond does not dwell on the dangers or racial issues she and her brother encountered on the anti-slavery circuit like the discrimination they faced securing accommodation while traveling. Unlike their White counterparts, they were often denied accommodation in hotels and boarding houses. During her 1858 speaking tour in New York state, they were refused accommodation on several occasions. As a result, they were forced to

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<sup>39</sup> Porter, ‘The Remonds of Salem, Massachusetts’, 272-273.

<sup>40</sup> Remond, ‘Sarah P. Remond’, 286.

<sup>41</sup> Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*, 47, 58. “Violent mobs attacked anti-slavery women . . . in Boston in the 1830s, when abolitionists Maria Weston Chapman and Angelina Grimké violated the norms of customary female behavior.” (Ibid, 58).

<sup>42</sup> Dorothy Sterling, ed, *We are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, NY: Norton, 1997), 176.

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plan ahead and rely on home stays with “sympathetic friends.”<sup>43</sup>

Remond’s autobiographical essay is a brief memoir, but it is the only known primary source written in her own voice about her early family life and education. It is a clear voice that provides critical insight into how she lived and survived in America as a Free Black stripped of her civil rights. Most relevant for this thesis, she sheds light on how her upbringing in a progressive and unconventional Free Black family prepared her for the historic and extraordinary events that would unfold when she left America for the British Isles.

### 4.2 The British Isles: Anti-Slavery Campaign

*From the 1820s to the Civil War, African Americans assumed prominent roles in the transatlantic struggle to abolish slavery. In contrast to the popular belief that the abolitionist crusade was driven by wealthy whites, some 300 black abolitionists were regularly involved in the antislavery movement, heightening its credibility and broadening its agenda.*<sup>44</sup>

“I had an intense desire to visit England that I might for a time enjoy freedom, and I hoped to serve the anti-slavery cause at the same time.”<sup>45</sup> With these words, Sarah Parker Remond ended her autobiographical essay. She fulfilled her wish when she set sail for England from Boston harbor on December 16, 1858. Remond was among the growing influx of African American abolitionists who traveled to England, Scotland, and Ireland to plead their cases for slave emancipation. She campaigned by lecturing at public meetings, and she pursued the same goals as her brother and other African American anti-slavery advocates. They hoped that if they informed the British and Irish public of the horrid details of slavery, they would use their leverage to persuade the Americans to free the slaves.<sup>46</sup> Her lecture campaign was designed to gain financial and moral support from British and Irish abolitionists and their various organizations to urge them to pressure the Americans to eradicate the entrenched ‘peculiar

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<sup>43</sup> Ruth Bogin, ‘Sarah Parker Remond: Black Abolitionist from Salem’, *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, vol. 110, no. 2 (Apr. 1974): 129-130.

<sup>44</sup> Black Abolitionist Archives, University of Detroit, Mercy. accessed August 2, 2022. <https://libraries.udmercy.edu/archives/special-collections/index.php?collectionSet=all&collectionCode=baa>.

<sup>45</sup> Remond, ‘Sarah P. Remond’, 287.

<sup>46</sup> R.J.M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement 1830–1860* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), ix.



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institution' of slavery.<sup>47</sup> Christine Kinealy claims that "It has been estimated that at the height of transatlantic anti-slavery activities . . . between 1830 and 1860, over 80 black abolitionists visited Britain."<sup>48</sup> Remond was the only prominent woman abolitionist among them.

When Remond arrived at the port of Liverpool aboard the Cunard steamer, the *Arabia* on January 12, 1859, she was following in the abolitionist footsteps of her brother Charles who made his first transatlantic journey to the British Isles in 1840. British newspapers took note of her planned trip even before she had departed. On November 1, 1858, London's *Anti-Slavery Advocate* published a notice in anticipation of her arrival.

Miss Sarah P. Remond a colored lady, zealous and able anti-slavery lecturer, and sister to Mr. Charles L. Remond, who was well known in England in 1840 and 1841, an eloquent pleader on behalf of his oppressed race.<sup>49</sup>

This newspaper article indicates that her abolitionist activities in America had not gone unnoticed in England and that her renown had preceded her. It is also noticeable that she is identified as Charles Remond's sister and that he was still warmly remembered in England eighteen years after his first anti-slavery lecture tour.

Remond was greeted at the pier by an old acquaintance, William Robson, a prominent English abolitionist from Warrington near Liverpool. Remond was aware of the ties and collaborations since the late eighteenth century between American and British abolitionists and their crisscrossing of the Atlantic for meetings and conventions that solidified their transatlantic networks.<sup>50</sup> She carried with her letters of introduction from American abolitionist Maria Weston Chapman addressed to British abolitionists her brother had met on his earlier visits. Chapman had lived in Paris from 1848-1855, and she "had consolidated a network of

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<sup>47</sup> The United States Census statistics testified to slavery's growth and entrenchment in America. "In 1800, the U.S. Census showed 893,602 enslaved people. In 1860, there were 4.4 million black people, just 448,000 of them classified as "freemen." Cited from Margaret Kimberley, *Prejudential: Black America and the Presidents* (Lebanon, NH: Steerforth Press, 2020), 5, 27.

<sup>48</sup> Kinealy, *Black Abolitionists in Ireland*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Anti-Slavery Advocate*, London, England, November 1, 1858.

<sup>50</sup> Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*, 74.

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friends and fellow activists.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, she was well positioned to guide Remond in establishing contacts within the extensive transatlantic abolitionist network. When Remond arrived in England, she was warmly welcomed by William Robson and his wife Anna, and she was received positively by audiences everywhere.<sup>52</sup>

Her public speaking may have subverted Victorian social norms, but British and American newspapers reported on her lectures, and some even published them along with their analyses and commentaries.<sup>53</sup> This enabled Remond’s anti-slavery appeals to be heard by a wider public both in America and the British Isles. While she was still in Warrington, Remond was welcomed into a White sisterhood that was beyond her expectations. As she addressed a noon meeting of women at the Red Lion Hotel in Warrington on February 2, 1859, she emotionally declared: “I have been received here as a sister by white women for the first time in my life. I have been removed from the degradation which overhangs all persons of my complexion.”<sup>54</sup> These heartfelt comments were in response to a gift from local women who presented her with a watch inscribed: “Presented to S. P. Remond by Englishwomen, her sisters, in Warrington, February 2nd, 1859.”<sup>55</sup>

In England with the stigma and burden of being a Black woman removed; she was now able to embrace a new identity as a totally free woman. Remond was overwhelmed and very touched by this gift, and she told the women that in America she had never been able to identify with or form a sisterhood with White women. She was not abandoning her identity

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 79-80. Mary Estlin was among Chapman’s British abolitionist friends, and Remond would later meet Estlin and stay at her home when she visited Bristol.

<sup>52</sup> Porter, ‘Sarah Parker Remond’, 290.

<sup>53</sup> These newspapers and periodicals in America include *The Liberator* in Boston, and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* in New York, and in the British Isles, the *Anti-Slavery Advocate*, London, the *Western Daily Press*, Bristol, the *Warrington Times*, and the *Leeds Mercury*; in Scotland, *The Scotsman*, and in Ireland, the *Irish Times*.

<sup>54</sup> The *Warrington Times*, February 5, 1859. Reprinted in *The Liberator*, March 11, 1859. See also Ripley, ed, *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, Vol. 1, 445, ‘Speech by Sarah P. Remond Delivered at the Red Lion Hotel, Warrington, England 2 February 1859’. This was Remond’s third lecture in Warrington, and she spoke at a noon meeting of women in the assembly room of the hotel. “Remond’s efforts in Warrington encouraged 3,525 local residents to sign an address condemning American slavery and to donate \$100 to the American Anti-Slavery Society.” (Ibid, 445).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

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as a Black woman; instead, Remond emotionally expressed her appreciation that these women recognized and affirmed her status as a Black female abolitionist who was on an equal footing as a peer.<sup>56</sup>

*The Liberator* reported on her speech to a Liverpool audience on February 18, 1859, about two weeks after her lecture in Warrington. Remond called upon her powers of moral persuasion when she said:

I appeal on behalf of four million men, women and children who are chattels in the Southern States of America ... not because they are identical with my race and colour, though I am proud of that identity, but because they are men and women.<sup>57</sup>

A few months later in a speech at the Manchester Athenaeum on September 14, 1859, titled 'Why Slavery is Still Rampant in the Land', Remond cleverly injected the abolitionists' consensus that British influence could end slavery. She told the audience that:

Now, I ask for your sympathy and your influence . . . Give us the power of your public opinion – It has great weight in America. Words spoken and read there are as no words written in America are read . . . I ask you to raise the moral public opinion until its voice reaches the American shores.<sup>58</sup>

The passion and eloquence of Remond's rhetoric can be seen in the poetic way she chose to end her speech. She used a simile to urge the audience to join the cause and: "Aid us thus until the shackles of the American slave melt like dew before the morning sun."<sup>59</sup> Remond's emphatic words demonstrate her firm conviction that British moral public opinion could be used as leverage to pressure and shame America into freeing the slaves. As a Christian, she believed that fellow Christians would use their moral compass and readily support her appeals for immediate slave emancipation by using their influential voices to convince the Americans.

Before continuing with the discussion of Remond's British experiences, it would be beneficial to review the context and circumstances in which Black people lived, especially in

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<sup>56</sup> See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 245-246.

<sup>57</sup> 'Miss Sarah P. Remond in Liverpool', *The Liberator*, 18 February 1859.

<sup>58</sup> Sarah Parker Remond, 'Why Slavery is Still Rampant in the Land', September 14, 1859. *The Anti-Slavery Advocate*, vol. 34, no. 2 (October 1859): 274-275.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

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London where Remond spent most of her time. How were race and class socially constructed when Remond lived in England? Kathryn Castle discovered a superiority complex in the relationship between British Victorians and people of the 'darker races'. She concluded that:

The rendering of Africa as the binary opposite of Britain . . . was less a rationale for state intervention than a reminder of the quality of British middle-class values, to which all lower orders should aspire. The mirror held up to Africa reflected the accomplishments of Britain's own civilization.<sup>60</sup>

Castle theorized that British opinions of Africans were directly connected to their justification for colonialism. They viewed themselves as a superior people with a higher-order civilization to which less-civilized Africans should aspire. When Remond arrived in January 1859, Black people in London were living in bleak circumstances compared to the lifestyle that Remond enjoyed with her well-to-do upper-class hosts.

Peter Fryer described life for Black Londoners during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as primarily one of unemployment, misery, squalor, and beggary where the Black Poor dominated. They were discriminated against in jobs and housing, and when they were able to find employment, most Black Londoners worked as manservants, agricultural laborers, craftsmen, seamen, street performers, groomsmen, and the small number of women worked as house servants, seamstresses, laundry maids, and children's nurses.<sup>61</sup> The majority of the estimated 10,000-20,000 Black people in Great Britain during the eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries lived in London.<sup>62</sup> They included about 1,000 Black Loyalists who had escaped from their Patriot slave owners and joined the British lines during the Revolutionary War (1775-1783) for the promise of 'British freedom'.

The defeated British evacuated thousands of these Black Loyalists to Nova Scotia, but many soon left for England when the British failed to fulfill their promises of land and pension

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<sup>60</sup> Kathryn Castle, 'The Representation of Africa in Mid-Victorian Children's Magazines,' in Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, ed, *Black Victorians: Black Victoriana* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 156.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London, UK: Pluto Press, 1984), 73-74, 78.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 70.

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payments, and they joined London's Black Poor.<sup>63</sup> There were only a few well-off and successful Black people, primarily men, who lived in Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Men like Ignatius Sancho, Ottobah Cugoano, Olaudah Equiano, and George Bridgetower are frequently mentioned in the literature.<sup>64</sup>

Remond arrived in England during the Victorian era, and as Caroline Bressey has noted: "The Victorians hotly debated race and the place of black people in the world, and the nineteenth century was the time when racism established its popular association with colour prejudice."<sup>65</sup> Bressey further explained that by "the late 1850s and 1860s, there was a growing hostility towards black people in Britain, supported by derogatory theories of race based on scientific racism, which were particularly popular with James Hunt and his supporters."<sup>66</sup> Remond did not reveal in her correspondence nor her speeches if she was aware of these facts about the hardening of racial prejudice in Britain upon her arrival.

Remond's interactions and social contacts were with British and Irish abolitionists and the touring, professional Black American male abolitionists. She was based and lived in London during her time in Britain, however, there is no information in the literature about her relationship and interactions with the city's Black community and its majority Black Poor.

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<sup>63</sup> Gretchen H. Gerzina, *Britain's Black Past* (Liverpool UK: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 315.

<sup>64</sup> See Patrick Vernon and Angelina Osborne, *100 Great Black Britons* (London, UK: Hachette, 2020). This book includes biographies of Ignatius Sancho (c. 1729–1780), Ottobah Cugoano (c. 1757–c. 1791), and Olaudah Equiano (c. 1745–1797) who were all abolitionists and writers of slave narratives. Other prominent Black men were George Bridgetower, and Francis Barber (1745–1801) who was writer Samuel Johnson's manservant. The mixed-race Bridgetower (1778–1860) was a classical violinist who was elected to the Royal Society of Musicians in 1807. Earlier in 1791, he had gained the patronage of the Prince of Wales (later King George IV). He was also one of the first Black Cambridge students, and he graduated from Trinity Hall in 1811 with a Bachelor of Music degree. See also Lawrence Goldman, ed, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography 2005–2008* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013). Among the few non-working class prominent Black women of the Victorian era were Sarah Forbes Bonetta (1843–1880) and her daughter Victoria Davies who were Queen Victoria's goddaughters and wards; and see Caroline Bressey, 'Forgotten Geographies: Historical Geographies of Black Women in Victorian and Edwardian London', PhD Thesis, University College London (2002): 2, 153–190.

<sup>65</sup> Bressey, 'Forgotten Geographies', 21, 76.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 76. James Hunt (1833–1869) was a British speech therapist and anthropologist who published *The Negro's Place in Nature*, a paper he read before the London Anthropological Society in 1864. Hunt was president of the Society, and he claimed that people of African descent were inferior and that, among other things, they were unintelligent because they had thick skulls. Hunt also believed that slavery was the normal condition of the Negro.

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Black Londoners had been settled and living in the East End of London since the mid-seventeenth century, but I did not find any documentation that they were a part of Remond's abolitionist, feminist, or social circles. Remond lived with prominent and well-to-do White women hosts in the luxurious surroundings of Bloomsbury's West End, and with her celebrated stature as an esteemed orator, she was given upper-class status as well. Sirpa Salenius notes that: "Remond had been accepted in British upper-class society, which fiercely supported her and acted on her behalf."<sup>67</sup> Although the British working-class supported the abolitionists and attended their lectures, Remond's experiences were largely shaped by her associations and interactions with the upper-social class.<sup>68</sup>

Black abolitionists, among them, Frederick Douglass, William G. Allen, and William Wells Brown believed that class-based prejudice outweighed racial prejudice in Europe.

Douglass and Brown temporarily relocated from a world of discrimination into upper-class internationalism in such cosmopolitan centres as Paris and London, where their identities were mediated and shaped by different expectations and opportunities . . . In Europe, Douglass and Brown challenged dominant stereotypes created of black inferiority by underscoring their cultural expertise and equality with European intellectual elite, thus promoting black empowerment.<sup>69</sup>

Douglass was pragmatic in his analysis of racism in Europe, and he reported in his 1881 article, 'The Color Line', that Black travelers had experienced racial prejudice in Europe, but this came from White Americans who traveled or lived there.<sup>70</sup> While there may have been exceptions to Douglass's critique of White Americans, Remond described her own experience with exported racism in an incident at the U.S. Foreign Ministry in London when an official refused to grant her a visa to travel to France in December 1859.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*, 77

<sup>68</sup> Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall*, 199. Blackett notes that Black abolitionists were aware of "the issue of working-class poverty and oppression in Britain," and this would have included Remond.

<sup>69</sup> Sirpa Salenius. 'Troubling the White Supremacy-Black Inferiority Paradigm: Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown in Europe', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* (2016): 153.

<sup>70</sup> Frederick Douglass, 'The Color Line', *North American Review*, vol. 132, no. 295 (June 1881): 571.

<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Pryor, *Colored Travelers: Mobility and the Fight for Citizenship before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 106-107. Pryor notes that Remond "had an official U.S. passport signed by Secretary of State Lewis Cass," and this incident caused negative British press which resulted in "a public shaming of the United States." (Ibid). Remond was apparently one of the few Black Americans to be granted a passport during the antebellum era. Since the issuance of passports was based on citizenship and no Black people

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At the time, she was a student at the Bedford College for Women. Remond took direct action and publicized the incident, which then became a cause célèbre. She wrote letters to the editors of the Edinburgh *Scottish Press*, the *London Morning Star*, the *London Inquirer*, and a fourth letter to George Mifflin Dallas, the United States Minister to the United Kingdom (1856-1861) and a former U.S. Vice President. She informed Dallas that:

Upon my asking to have my passport vised at the American Embassy, the person in the office refused to affix the vise, on the ground that I am a person of color. Being a citizen of the United States, I respectfully demand, as my right, that my passport be vised by the Minister of my country.<sup>72</sup>

Her use of the word ‘demand’, however respectfully applied, shows a lack of fear or intimidation. This incident made her aware of “the extent to which American racism reached beyond American shores.”<sup>73</sup> Mary Church Terrell would later express a similar awareness when she too experienced exported American racism in Berlin in 1889. The Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society took note of Remond’s passport incident and included it in their Annual Report for the year ending May 1, 1860. They reported that:

The Edinburgh *Scottish Press* thus comments upon this refusal. “Every day brings fresh evidence how indelible and foul is the stain of American Slavery. The antipathy to color is so deep-seated that even in free England it denies the ordinary courtesies of civilized life to ladies whom Henry Brougham was proud to recognize, and who are deemed no unworthy associates of the elite of our female nobility.” Miss Remond subsequently obtained a passport from the British Foreign Secretary, who had not learned that a shade on the complexion is a forfeiture of human rights.<sup>74</sup>

Remond’s passport incident, which exposed exported American racism, was abhorred by many throughout the British Isles, and it aroused their empathy and support, and the British Foreign Secretary was among them. Thus, Remond’s attachment to U.S. affairs had wide-ranging international consequences from highly ranked British politicians to U.S. activists in the American Anti-Slavery Society. Ironically, some White Americans objected to the passport system, because it “cut to the heart of what it meant to be free and white.”<sup>75</sup>

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in America were citizens at that time, Remond’s passport was a rarity. The official who rejected it claimed that it had been issued due to a clerical error. (Ibid, 107).

<sup>72</sup> See ‘Sarah P. Remond to Editor’, *Scottish Press*, December 4, 1859; and ‘Sarah P. Remond to George Mifflin Dallas, 12 December 1859’, in Ripley, ed, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 469-471.

<sup>73</sup> Ripley, ed, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, 469.

<sup>74</sup> *American Anti-Slavery Society*. Annual Report by the Executive Committee for the Year Ending May the First, 1860, New York, American Anti-Slavery Society (1861): 222. accessed June 24, 2023.

<https://archive.org/details/ASPC0023600100>. This archive is part of the Anti-Slavery Collection at Oberlin College.

<sup>75</sup> Pryor, *Colored Travelers*, 109.

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Remond also recounted the racial prejudice she experienced from Americans in Italy to the American Quaker abolitionist and women's rights activist Elizabeth Buffum Chace when she visited Remond in Florence in 1873. Buffam Chace reported that:

We had a fine visit. Sarah Remond is a remarkable woman and by indomitable energy and perseverance is winning a fine position in Florence as a physician, and also socially; although she says Americans have used their influence to prevent her, by bringing their hateful prejudices over here.<sup>76</sup>

In both cases in England and Italy, the Americans appeared unaffected and undeterred by

Remond's elevated class status in London or her occupation as a physician in Florence.

Unlike the class-conscious Europeans Frederick Douglass described, these White Americans paid little attention to Remond's class status and judged her solely on the subordinate racial classification of a Negro they had assigned to her in America.

Remond reported no similar racial incidents with locals in the British Isles, but her gender was a novelty in the public arenas she entered. She had arrived at a time in Victorian England when women of any color did not venture far from the domestic realm to become public speakers before large gatherings which included men. By 1859 when Remond began her lectures on the anti-slavery circuit, she was the only Black woman abolitionist who gave public speeches in the British Isles. Contemporary newspaper accounts portrayed her as an influential and powerful speaker who moved audiences with her electrifying rhetoric. She possessed an exceptional command of the English language, and she used this ability to artfully adapt the rhetoric of her lectures to connect to different audiences.

Although Remond was not a slave, she wanted to show her sisterhood with the abused slave women she represented, and for whom she hoped to earn respect and freedom.<sup>77</sup> Some British women were already attuned to the idea of the 'sister slave'. The Negro's Friend Society of Birmingham, a female anti-slavery society, used the emblem of 'slave

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<sup>76</sup> Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman and Arthur Crawford Wyman, *Elizabeth Buffum Chace, 1806-1899: Her Life and Its Environment*, Vol. 1 (Boston, MA: W. B. Clarke Co., 1914), 42-43.

<sup>77</sup> Audrey A. Fisch, *American Slaves in Victorian England: Abolitionist Politics in Popular Literature and Culture* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9-10.



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woman as sister', also known as the female slave emblem, on the cover of their 1826 *First Report*.<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps further emboldened by her positive reception in the British Isles especially from women, Remond did not shy away from potentially distasteful subjects like the sexual abuse of slave women. She gave disturbing details of the sexual exploitation of enslaved women, which may have shocked her audience. In one of her earliest speeches in Warrington on January 24, 1859, Remond told the standing-room only audience that:

Above all sufferers in America, American women who were slaves lived in the most pitiable condition. They could not protect themselves from the licentiousness which met them on every hand—they could not protect their honour from the tyrant. There were slaveholders everywhere in that country. There were no morals there; no genuine regard for womanhood or Manhood . . . The more Anglo-Saxon blood that mingles with the blood of the slave, the more gold is poured out when the auctioneer has a woman for sale, because they are sold to be concubines for white Americans.<sup>79</sup>

Here, Remond exposed the commercial and financial purpose of miscegenation for some slaveowners. She explained that forced rapes were perpetrated against defenseless slave women to produce female mulattoes who could fetch a higher price and then be sold as concubines for White men. She understood that slavery was a gendered institution which could be more profitable for slave owners who benefited financially from this type of exploitation.

When she lectured in Manchester on September 14, 1859, she specifically addressed her appeal to women when she said: "I ask especial help from the women of England. Women are the worst victims of the slave power."<sup>80</sup> She used vivid imagery to show the audience the gendered violence Black slave women suffered. Her shocking and uncompromising rhetoric on the taboo subject of sexual abuse and exploitation of female slaves raised awareness of

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<sup>78</sup> Zackodnik, *Press, Platform, Pulpit*, 54.

<sup>79</sup> Speech by Sarah P. Remond, Delivered at the Music Hall, Warrington, England, 24 January 1859', Ripley, ed, *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, 437-438. Reported in *Warrington Times*, January 29, 1859.

<sup>80</sup> Remond, 'Why Slavery is Still Rampant in the Land', 274-275.

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gender issues that were central for the respect and value of Black womanhood whether enslaved or free. She used her personal standpoint as a Black woman to amplify her message, which made her arguments even stronger. This was a strategy that was unavailable to the Black male abolitionists.

These men included such stalwarts as fugitive slaves Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Henry “Box” Brown, Samuel Ringgold Ward, Moses Roper, and Henry Bibb. Some had fled from America to Britain after the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, because despite their successful escapes to northern states, bounty hunters could now legally recapture and re-enslave them. Anna and Ellen Richardson, two British Quaker abolitionists purchased Douglass’s freedom from Auld in 1846 for £150.<sup>81</sup> But Douglass and even Remond or any other Free Black could be captured and sold into slavery because of this law. She vividly described the devastating effect of both the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law and the 1857 Dred Scott decision in which the Supreme Court ruled that African Americans were not citizens. In her autobiographical essay she wrote:

The Fugitive Slave Law, and the Dred Scott decision, are most keenly felt by all the coloured race; Fugitive Slave Law, which returns into bondage every slave who seeks an asylum in a free State from the slave hunters and their bloodhounds, who in many instances have kidnapped free persons of colour; the Dred Scott decision, which declares that ‘black men and women have no rights which white men are bound to respect,’ completely annihilating the citizenship of every coloured American.<sup>82</sup>

Because of the Fugitive Slave Law, the 1850s were extremely dangerous and precarious times for Black people in America whether they were runaway slaves who had found sanctuary in the North or Free Blacks who believed their northern homes were secure havens from bondage.

While ending slavery was the most urgent item on Remond’s speaking agenda, she also lectured her audiences about the racism, denial of citizenship and equal rights that she

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<sup>81</sup> ‘The Richardson Family Help Free Frederick Douglass’. accessed September 4, 2022. <https://radicaltyneside.org/events/richardson-family-help-free-frederick-douglass/>.

<sup>82</sup> Remond, ‘Sarah P. Remond’, 284-285.

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and other Free Blacks were forced to endure.<sup>83</sup> Remond understood that if Free Blacks did not have equal rights, what could the slaves look forward to when they were freed. She called upon America to live up to its democratic ideals expounded in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution and grant Free Blacks like herself full citizenship and equal treatment with White Americans. She claimed that the Declaration of Independence and all political developments of “the so-called democratic republic” had been a fresh compromise with slavery.”<sup>84</sup> Remond viewed the Constitution as a pro-slavery document, and she believed that the Constitution’s three fifths compromise was a concession to the slaveholders which reinforced, consolidated, and rewarded their slave ownership.<sup>85</sup>

It is worth putting into perspective the formidable task Remond faced as she appealed to America’s spirit of democracy. First, the United States entered the world as a slave nation, the opposite of a democracy, when it declared its independence from King George III and Britain in 1776, ironically, on principles of freedom from tyranny. Slavery was legal in all the Thirteen Colonies on July 4, 1776. By the time Remond began her anti-slavery lecturing in 1856, America had a long list of Founding Fathers and Presidents who were slave owners. They owned hundreds to thousands of slaves, and they grew wealthy on the backs of their free slave labor which was used to develop and build America’s economic prosperity.

These men included George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison, the first, third, and fourth United States Presidents, and they all continued to hold slaves while they served as President. A total of eight of the first twelve American presidents were slave owners.<sup>86</sup> This situation created an extremely difficult task for Remond and her fellow

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<sup>83</sup> Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*, 3.

<sup>84</sup> Brownlee, ‘Out of the Abundance of the Heart’, 139.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Margaret Kimberley, *Prejudential: Black America and the Presidents* (Lebanon, NH: Steerforth Press, 2020). George Washington owned 300 slaves during his lifetime and freed none. As America’s first President (1789-1797), known as ‘the father of the country’, Washington brought eight of his slaves to work for him and his wife Martha at the President’s House in Philadelphia in 1790. The White House was not constructed until 1801

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abolitionists in their anti-slavery campaigns, because those at the highest levels of America's government were at the same time slave owners. Despite this formidable political obstacle, Remond persevered on the lecture circuit even after she began to fulfill her educational goals.

During her time in London, Remond lived in Elizabeth Jesser Reid's boarding house from late 1859 until 1861 while she was a student. In addition to Reid, the founder of Bedford College for Women, Remond established transnational connections by aligning herself with a number of prominent British female activists. Through her lecturing, studies, and her organizational memberships, she became acquainted with Clementia Taylor, Frances Power Cobbe, Mary Estlin, and Harriet Martineau. Remond established herself within a network of upper-class British feminists who were not only abolitionists but also suffragists, social reformers, and advocates of higher education for women. She was politically aware and astute, and she realized the need for transnational collaboration not only in the fight for slave emancipation, but for women's rights and suffrage as well.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, she aligned herself with women who were considered radicals and whose activism violated the Victorian norms of the day. The anti-slavery movement was the catalyst for the women's rights movement, and Remond was one of the African American women along with Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, and Frances E. W. Harper who ushered in Black feminism in the nineteenth century.<sup>88</sup> Teresa Zackodnik points out how vitally important Remond's work was "not simply because it was rare but because it alters a received

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in Washington, D.C. Every six months Washington would send these eight slaves back to Virginia to circumvent Pennsylvania's gradual abolition law which required enslaved people to be freed after six months residency. See also Alfred W. and Ruth G. Blumrosen, *Slave Nation: How Slavery United the Colonies an American Revolution* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2006). The Blumrosens argue that America was born as a slave nation and came into the world with the protection of slavery embedded in its 'democratic' constitution. Acceptance of their argument could lead to the conclusion that this birth was responsible for the racism that has permeated the country from 1776 until the present day.

<sup>87</sup> Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*, 103.

<sup>88</sup> See Leila J. Rupp, 'Transnational Women's Movements', *European History Online (EGO)*, Institute of European History (IEG), Mainz (June 16, 2011). accessed May 14, 2022. <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/ruppl-2011-en>. "The first wave of a transnational women's movement emerged in the late 19th century out of a variety of connections [abolitionism, socialism, peace, temperance, and moral reform] forged across national borders." (Ibid).

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understanding of early black feminism as more local than is actually the case.”<sup>89</sup> In fact, with her move to Europe, Remond raised the transnational profile of Black feminism. Her mobility and visibility in Europe contributed to her unique status as a feminist prototype for African American women.

Remond succeeded in using her powerful voice beyond the borders of the United States in an international arena. She was interested in the same question about Black women’s rights that Maria Stewart had asked decades earlier: “How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?”<sup>90</sup> Her association with British women activists and her Bedford classmates provided her with a transnational platform to promote a positive image of Black women and their rights to an education. Her study abroad was proof that Black women no longer had to bury their minds and intellectual abilities “beneath a load of iron pots and kettles.”<sup>91</sup>

### 4.3 Bedford College for Women, 1859-1861

Remond decided in October 1859 that the time had come to continue her formal education following a rigorous anti-slavery speaking tour for most of the year. She had maintained correspondence with her American abolitionist friend Maria Weston Chapman, and on October 6, 1859, she wrote her from Warrington, England to inform her that:

On the 12th of this month I go to London, to attend the lectures at the Ladies College. I shall on every occasion that I can still continue to lecture and do all I can for our cause. I have lectured very frequently, in fact had more invitations recently than I could fill . . . I am now with my friends Mr. & Mrs. Robson, for a little rest.<sup>92</sup>

Despite being exhausted from her lecture circuit touring, Remond enrolled at London’s Bedford College for Women in October 1859, and she began to fulfill the educational purpose of her trip. She wanted to gain the higher education she was unable to in America.

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<sup>89</sup> Zackodnik, *Press, Platform, Pulpit*, 58.

<sup>90</sup> Marilyn Richardson, ed, *Maria W. Stewart, America’s First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 38.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Ripley, ed, *The Black Abolitionist Papers*. 462. Although Remond does not mention it in this letter to Chapman, while she was staying with the Robsons, she aided them in founding the Warrington Anti-Slavery Society.

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Elizabeth Jesser Reid, an abolitionist, feminist, women's rights advocate, and philanthropist founded Bedford College in 1849. She used the private income she had inherited from her physician husband, Dr. John Reid, to finance the college. Reid leased a building at 47 Bedford Square in the Bloomsbury section of London and opened her modest yet ambitious Ladies College which was focused on the liberal arts. It was the first higher education institution in Britain where women could study subjects which prepared them for positions other than governesses, who were rarely salaried and were often spinsters.<sup>93</sup>

Remond was noticeably a spinster; however, with her previous education and experience sharpening her rhetorical skills as an anti-slavery lecturer, she was likely far more qualified academically than the typical British governesses of the era. By choosing to pursue her higher education at Bedford College, Remond made history and became the first known African American woman to study abroad at a university.<sup>94</sup>

As a mature 33-year-old student, she completed two academic years from 1859 to 1861. Her college records indicate that during the first year she studied ancient history, geography, mathematics, French, Latin, vocal music, and elocution, and she studied English and French literature, and modern history during her second year.<sup>95</sup> "She studied subjects that interested her rather than those for a particular degree . . . Her subject choices were not unusual as students at the College were allowed to choose courses they preferred or, instead, study towards examination."<sup>96</sup> In the afterword to her autobiographical essay, the editor noted that:

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<sup>93</sup> Liza Picard, 'Education in Victorian Britain'. accessed September 15, 2022, [Education in Victorian Britain | The British Library](#). According to Picard, "In the upper classes, it was assumed that a girl would marry. . . and that therefore she had no need of a formal education, as long as "she could look beautiful, entertain her husband's guests, and produce a reasonable number of children . . . If she could not find a husband, she faced a grim future as a 'maiden aunt' whose help could always be called on to look after her aged parents or her siblings' children. She might be forced to take on employment as a governess. This became increasingly unattractive to intelligent women." (Ibid.)

<sup>94</sup> Sirpa A. Salenius, 'negra d'America: Remond and Her Journeys', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 14.5 (2012). accessed May 15, 2022.

<https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2156&context=clcweb>.

<sup>95</sup> Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*, 112.

<sup>96</sup> Salenius, 'negra d'America', 6.

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“Miss Remond is now (September, 1860) a student at the Ladies' College in Bedford-square, London, availing herself with ardour of her long-sought opportunity for reaping the advantages of a liberal education.”<sup>97</sup> Two important messages can be understood from this brief notation. The first is the recognition that Remond had “long-sought” to continue her education, and second one is that she was receiving the liberal education which Mrs. Reid had envisioned as the College’s mission.

The fact that Bedford College existed at all was indeed radical and a monumental shift in firmly held ideas about the role of women in society during the Victoria era. As Margaret J. Tuke pointed out:

The German ideal of the *Hausfrau* – that of Prince Albert – was adopted by Queen Victoria and spread through society. It reinforced the natural manly attitude to women as persons incapable of intellectual occupation or reasoned thought - . . . whose attempts to acquire knowledge were recognized butts of ridicule.<sup>98</sup>

Such gendered beliefs made it impossible for women to breach the formidable ivory-covered walls of Oxford and Cambridge. Liza Picard explains that:

For centuries, the ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge had imposed three barriers to entrance. An applicant had to be 1: male; 2: unmarried; and 3: a member of the Church of England. While 2 and 3 could be evaded with a little cunning, 1 could not.<sup>99</sup>

Reid was, therefore, a bold social reformer who wanted to establish a higher education college where women could study the liberal arts in a non-sectarian environment and without regard to class or financial circumstances. She believed that this education would enable them to prepare better lives for themselves and their families.<sup>100</sup> This was quite a novel, even a radical idea in Victorian England, where education was reserved for wealthy men.

Although Reid has been labeled a radical feminist, the educational goals she established for her college appear to be more pragmatic than ideological. Megan Catherine Brown asserts that Reid “did not see herself or her ideas as particularly radical or subversive.”<sup>101</sup> However,

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<sup>97</sup> Remond, ‘Sarah P. Remond’, 287.

<sup>98</sup> Margaret J. Tuke, *A History of Bedford College for Women 1849-1937* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1939), 19.

<sup>99</sup> Picard, ‘Education in Victorian Britain’.

<sup>100</sup> Megan Katherine Brown, “A College for Women, or Something Like It”: Bedford College and the Women's Higher Education Movement, 1849-1900. Master's Thesis, Portland State University, 2011, 1.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

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Brown argues that the founding of Bedford College was “a bellwether of the women's higher education movement” and that it was crucial for the later development of other women’s colleges in Britain such as Girton College and Newnham College in 1869 at Cambridge.<sup>102</sup> Bedford College provided a needed impetus for the women’s education movement which had a much lower profile than either the abolitionist or the suffragist movements.<sup>103</sup>

After a protracted campaign and struggle, the situation finally changed, and British higher education colleges relented and admitted women to degree level studies after Emily Davies and Barbara Bodichon founded Girton College. However, even when the women sat and passed the same examinations as the men, they were denied their graduation certificates. In 1871, for the first time, nine women received the equivalent university degrees from Girton College that Cambridge men received.<sup>104</sup> Megan Katherine Brown asserts that the founding of Bedford College firmly placed the idea of female university students in the minds of the Victorian public, and it served as a prototype for Girton, Newnham, and later British women’s colleges.<sup>105</sup>

Bedford College was non-sectarian although Reid was a member of the Unitarian Church. Nevertheless, it was not meant to be godless, so Biblical instruction was included from the beginning and placed under the management of clergymen connected to the college.<sup>106</sup> While the Church of England supported education as a means for learning to read the Bible, it was facing dissent from James Martineau and other unitarian pioneers who championed enlightenment thought, and social reformers like Reid who believed that women had a right to a university education.<sup>107</sup>

An 1850 entry in the *Hand-book of London* “mentioned [that] under *Bedford Square*: No. 47 is a “Ladies College,” a recent institution, much wanted and likely to succeed.”<sup>108</sup> Despite

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, i.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, i.

<sup>106</sup> Tuke, *A History of Bedford College*, 33.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 61; and Peter Cunningham, F.S.A., *Hand-book of London, Past and Present* (London, UK: John Murray,



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this anomalous and anonymous welcome and favorable prognosis, in the early years, especially during the first three years, Bedford College struggled and faced bankruptcy and imminent collapse due to low student enrollment and lack of financial support. In the beginning, the college was governed by a Ladies Committee of influential women, and a General Committee composed of the Ladies, three trustees, and the college's professors. Soon after, the organizational structure was changed, and the General Committee ran the college while the Ladies Committee supervised the Lady Visitors. Chaperoning the students and overseeing their welfare and discipline was the responsibility of the Lady Visitors.<sup>109</sup>

It is important to note that when Bedford College was established, it was not a University College; that was Reid's eventual goal. When it opened, the college admitted girls as young as twelve, and these girls naturally lacked the preparation to undertake advanced liberal arts courses. This lack of qualifications did not go unnoticed by the professors who lodged their complaints, and this led Reid to establish a Junior College nearby in 1853.<sup>110</sup> Those students who required lodging were housed in Reid's boarding establishment. The best words to describe the residence, which was called "The Home" are spartan and austere. The students had a rigid and fixed timetable for dining and the food was very simple and very British. Because the Matron in charge of The Home received room and board but no salary, a non-salaried position was not attractive to qualified women, and Reid was called in occasionally to supervise the young ladies.<sup>111</sup> Later, there was a separate residence for university college students like Remond.

When Mrs. Reid died in 1866, she left three female trustees in charge of running of the college. With this commitment to female leadership in the college's functioning, she was

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2nd edit., in one vol., 1850), 44.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 46-49.

<sup>110</sup> Bedford College Papers, Archives Hub. accessed October 10, 2022.

<https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/ea72edbf-ccfd-3a04-8a64-021e9779134f>.

<sup>111</sup> Tuke, *A History of Bedford College*, 145-148.

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ensuring that Bedford College would not be dominated by a patriarchal administration. However, of necessity, the professors were mostly male in the nineteenth century since women had historically been denied access to higher education. Because of the lack of qualified female professors, all of Remond's professors were men. Her English Literature professor was George MacDonald (1824-1905) who taught at Bedford from 1859-1867. He held an M.A., Hon and LL.D from the University of Aberdeen. He was a poet and novelist with a wide circle of friends that included Robert Browning and Lady Byron.<sup>112</sup> In 1859, Remond's Latin teacher was Rev. E.P. Eddrup. Edward Spencer Beesly (1831-1915) became her Latin teacher in 1860 following Eddrup's departure. According to his biographical notes, Beesly was a leader of the English Positivists, and he had an important role in the Trades Union Movement. He graduated from Wadham College, Oxford, B.A. 1854 and M.A. 1857, and he was Professor of Latin at Bedford College from 1860-1889.

Richard Holt Hutton (1826-1897) was Professor of Mathematics from 1858-1865, and Remond studied Mathematics at Bedford in 1859. He was a man of letters who was also a theologian and journalist. Holt was educated at University College School, University College London, and at Heidelberg, and Berlin.<sup>113</sup> Lastly, Remond's Ancient History professor was James Heath who taught at Bedford from 1856-1861. Professor Heath graduated from Kings College London, where he earned his B.A. and his M.A. in Classics.<sup>114</sup> These profiles of Remond's professors reveal that she was taught in an enlightened environment by highly qualified professors and that she would have received a superior higher education at one of the only institutions for women. The male professors who taught at Bedford College distinguished themselves as men who did not fear and were not threatened by educated women nor the women's movements for co-ed education.

Remond was very likely one of the few international students at Bedford College. Since

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 299-315.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

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this chapter explores Remond's study abroad experiences and her transnational activities, it is worth examining her education from a transnational perspective. Gabriela Ossenbach and Maria del Mar del Pozo argue that a transnational history "conceptualizes categories and identities, discovers networks united by bonds stronger than social class or ideology, and links narratives and experiences that transcend time and location."<sup>115</sup> As discussed in this chapter, Remond's transnational mobility allowed her to bond with "activists and intellectuals of all races and nationalities" in the absence of racial prejudice.<sup>116</sup> Remond's education in Europe placed her in an international academic environment and exposed her to new ideas, theories, and philosophies which she could adapt to meet her needs as an abolitionist, student, women's rights activist, and as a physician. Thus, she was affected by the transnational history of movements and connections between people and networks that transcended time and location.

Her decision to study at Bedford College alongside other pioneering women complicated the Victorian era beliefs that a woman's place was in the home, and that her sole life-long duties were to care for her husband and nurture her children. Moral women had no business in public venues that were territories proscribed for men only, and those spheres included the ballot box and higher educational institutions. It is historically significant that Remond completed her studies at Bedford College in 1861, just one year before Mary Jane Patterson became the first African American woman to earn a university degree in 1862.<sup>117</sup> Both Remond and Patterson studied mathematics and Latin, and Patterson also studied Greek. These were regarded as difficult subjects, which were suitable for men only, because they would be too mentally taxing for the fragile female brain.<sup>118</sup> Patterson demanded to study the four-year "gentlemen's course" instead of the women's two-year course, and she earned her

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<sup>115</sup> Gabriela Ossenbach and Maria del Mar del Pozo, 'Postcolonial Models, Cultural Transfers and Transnational Perspectives in Latin America: A Research Agenda', *Pedagogica Historica*, vol. 47, no. 5 (2011): 581.

<sup>116</sup> Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*, 19.

<sup>117</sup> Stephanie Y. Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954: An Intellectual History* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008), 24, 32.

<sup>118</sup> Tuke, *A History of Bedford College*, 5.

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A.B. degree from Oberlin College in Ohio, which was also the alma mater of Mary Church Terrell and Anna Julia Cooper.

It was most advantageous that Remond studied at Bedford College, where according to Salenius: “Many of the early students campaigned for women's suffrage, educational rights, and women’s property rights.”<sup>119</sup> She was well within her element there and would have had the opportunity to discover networks, link narratives and experiences, and meet women from different social classes as envisioned by Reid. Remond did not leave a memoir of her time at Bedford College; however, her student enrollment archives are part of the Bedford College Papers, which are repositied in the Royal Holloway University Archives inside the Emily Wilding Davison Building.<sup>120</sup>

Since both Remond and Davison fought for women’s suffrage, this location for her Bedford College Archives appears to be providential. I researched the Bedford College Papers at the Royal Holloway Archives, and I held in my hands Remond’s original transcript which showed her full academic record and the courses she studied over two years as a student enrolled in a formal program of study at the Bedford College for Women from 1859-1861. The archive included the names of the courses she studied, the dates she attended, and her marks. Remond’s liberal arts education would have supported her transnational activism positively and reinforced her identity as an independent African American woman who could compete at the highest levels at university and in public forums.

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<sup>119</sup> Salenius, ‘negra d’America’, 6.

<sup>120</sup> See Elizabeth Crawford, ‘Emily Wilding Davison: Centennial Celebrations’, *Women's History Review* vol. 23, no. 6 (2014): 1000-1007. Emily Wilding Davison (1872-1913) studied at Royal Holloway College, which was founded as an all-women's institution in 1879 in Egham. She was a well-known English suffragette who was tragically killed by King George V’s horse during the 1913 Derby when she walked onto the racetrack. A member of the radical Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), she was considered a militant and was arrested and jailed often during public protests. She was known for her hunger strike tactics, which led to her numerous force-feedings. In 1985, Bedford College merged with Royal Holloway College and is now known as Royal Holloway, University of London.

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### 4.4 The Years in England from 1861-1865

Towards the end of her studies at Bedford College in 1861, Remond left Reid's boarding house and moved into Aubrey House, the home of Clementia Taylor and her husband Peter Taylor. She lived with Taylor who was an abolitionist, suffragist, and women's rights advocate from 1861-1864. She also visited and stayed with suffragist Mary Estlin in Bristol. Remond continued to lecture on the anti-slavery circuit, but she also found time to join the Ladies' London Emancipation Society, which was founded at Aubrey House by Mrs. Taylor on March 20, 1863, while Remond was living there.<sup>121</sup> The Society's goals were "to circulate documents exposing the evils of slavery," and to promote the Union cause in the Civil War. Remond became an executive committee member and a pamphleteer.<sup>122</sup>

She also became acquainted with the Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini in 1861 while she was living with the Taylors, and she contributed to his Italian unification movement. She was like other African Americans in Britain who met and associated with European political exiles who had fled their countries during the revolutions of 1848.<sup>123</sup> Remond "had drawn parallels between abolitionists working for the liberation of American slaves and Italian revolutionaries even before she met Mazzini."<sup>124</sup> In a speech in Birmingham, England on Thursday, January 24, 1861, Remond stressed to her audiences that slaves in America had as much right to fight for their freedom as revolutionaries like Garibaldi had to fight for his country's freedom. She emphasized the similarities between ongoing European revolutionary movements and the abolition campaigns.<sup>125</sup> Based on this viewpoint, Remond expanded her activist agenda beyond slavery to advocate for the universal rights to freedom for all humanity. She and her fellow female activists helped to

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<sup>121</sup> Sally Mitchell, *Frances Power Cobbe: Victorian Feminist, Journalist, Reformer* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 132. According to Mitchell, Taylor founded the society after the London Anti-Slavery Society refused to admit her because of her gender. (Ibid).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall*, 199.

<sup>124</sup> Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*, 132-133.

<sup>125</sup> 'Lectures on Slavery by Miss Remond', *Birmingham Daily Post*, January 25, 1861.

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organize a fund-raising bazaar for Mazzini in London in April 1863.<sup>126</sup> Mazzini thanked Remond for her support in letters to the Taylors, and their friendship, based on mutual respect and admiration, would later prove beneficial to Remond when she moved to Italy.<sup>127</sup>

Remond was living with the Taylors at Aubrey House when the American Civil War began in 1861. Britain wanted to remain neutral, but Remond actively solicited British moral support for the Union forces, and she urged the British not to support the Confederate Army. While she continued her activism during the Civil War, she did not neglect her education. After she completed her two years of study at Bedford College, she continued to take advantage of the non-discriminatory and integrated educational opportunities which were available to her in England. She enrolled for midwifery courses at the All Saints Hospital Nursing School, which was housed at University College London, and she trained as a nurse.<sup>128</sup> The school, which was run by the Anglican Sisterhood from 1862 until 1899, used the facilities of the University College Hospital. The nursing staff were required to be members of the Church of England. While there are few archival traces of her experiences at All Saints, this academic and practical training prepared her for acceptance into the Oespedale Nuova de Santa Maria in Florence, Italy where she would later train as an obstetrician.

During this busy period in her life, Remond still found time to become involved with the campaign for women's suffrage. She was the only Black woman among the 1,521 people who signed the 1866 petition for women's voting rights. Three Kensington Society leaders, Barbara Bodichon, Emily Davies, and Elizabeth Garrett drafted the petition in 1865 and persuaded MP and Liberal John Stuart Mill to present it to Parliament. Although it was unsuccessful, Remond, a Black woman from America, participated in this historic event which marked the beginning of the British campaign for women's suffrage.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*, 135-136.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 136-137.

<sup>128</sup> Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*, 166.

<sup>129</sup> Votes for Women: the 1866 Suffrage Petition, accessed February 20, 2022.

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/326/petitions-committee/news/99135/votes-for-women-the->

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When she completed her nursing course in 1865, the American Civil War had ended, and the Thirteenth Amendment had finally freed the slaves throughout the entire United States. However, Remond did not rest. She now used her influential voice to support civil rights for the Black freedmen and women. She switched her lecture topic and appealed for funds to support the four million newly freed slaves, who were 95 percent illiterate, landless, homeless, and impoverished, because the alleged promise of ‘forty acres and a mule’ was never fulfilled.<sup>130</sup> Yet, she did not return to America and her family and life in Salem.

Remond had originally planned to stay in the British Isles for only a one-year abolitionist lecture tour.<sup>131</sup> There has been much speculation as to why Remond decided to remain in Europe permanently. Some historians have suggested that in Europe, she was free from “the dominant norms [which] were socially constructed to sustain assumptions of white supremacy and to empower white men.”<sup>132</sup> This was something she had never experienced nor enjoyed as a supposedly ‘Free Black’ in an America which denied her citizenship and equal rights. Sybil Brownlee asserts that since Remond had “carved out a life for herself in Europe, . . . Her return to the states was highly unlikely.”<sup>133</sup> The post-Civil War intensification of racism in America provided a further incentive for Remond to remain in Europe.<sup>134</sup>

In England and later in Italy, Remond obtained a new identity as a cultured Black cosmopolitan, which was based on class, so her access to the upper-classes transcended her socially constructed racial identity.<sup>135</sup> I am not suggesting that Remond was class conscious;

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1866-suffrage-petition/; and Elizabeth Crawford, 'The Black and Asian Women Who Fought for a Vote', accessed July 16, 2022. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/in-pictures-42837451>.

<sup>130</sup> See Sarah Parker Remond, 'The Negro Race in America', *London Daily News*. September 22, 1866; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 2014), 83; and James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1985* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina, 1988), 31.

<sup>131</sup> Fisch, *American Slaves in Victorian England*, 83.

<sup>132</sup> Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*, 19.

<sup>133</sup> Brownlee, 'Out of the Abundance of the Heart', 196.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 120.

<sup>135</sup> Salenius, 'Troubling the White Supremacy', 152.

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however, her transnational abolitionist network was mainly upper-class and interracial. Remond observed that the legal limitations and sociocultural restrictions placed on her interracial interactions in America were absent in her European experiences. The opportunity to continue to live as a free person in Europe without the customary restrictions America placed on her race would certainly have appealed to someone with Remond's intellect, integrity, and activist background. It is not surprising then that she also embraced this propitious opportunity to reach her full educational potential which the school system in Massachusetts had prevented her from achieving.

Remaining in Europe also proved to Remond that she was in control of her geographical space and mobility, and it must have been exhilarating and empowering after the limitations on her mobility in America, which she and all Free Blacks were forced to endure.<sup>136</sup> Salenius concurs with this analysis. She posits that "Geographical mobility was therefore a necessary requisite for Remond's social and cultural ascent," because it "triggered a change in her self-definition that was fundamental for the progress of Remond personally, and Black women collectively."<sup>137</sup> I argue that more than access to social and cultural ascent, Remond used her mobility and freedom in Europe to advance her education and self-expression beyond the limitations of American racism, discrimination, and segregation.

### 4.5 The Italian Years: 1866-1894

In 1866, Remond used her unrestricted mobility in Europe to relocate to Italy. One reason she alluded to for leaving England was her awareness of increasing racism there in the late 1860s, which was fueled in part by scientifically based anti-Black sentiment. In a letter she wrote to the *London Daily News* on September 22, 1866, Remond stated that she had detected "in the minds of many Englishmen a 'share of the same feeling of hatred towards the coloured race' that disgraced the planters of the Southern States."<sup>138</sup> Remond's awareness of

<sup>136</sup> Pryor, *Colored Travelers*, 1-9, 106-107.

<sup>137</sup> Salenius, 'Sarah Parker Remond's Black American Grand Tour', 266.

<sup>138</sup> Sarah Parker Remond. 'The Negro Race in America'.



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increasing British racism came two years after Hunt had read his paper before the London Anthropological Society in 1864. This realization of the changing racial climate in Britain also came at a time when she was thinking about furthering her education outside England.

Remond also realized that racism in America had intensified after the Civil War. Her association with Italian nationalist Mazzini turned her attention to educational and professional opportunities in Italy. She had already qualified as a nurse midwife, but for Remond that was not enough, and she now turned her attention to the highest position in the medical field, a physician. Her nursing qualification in London was excellent preparation, and once again she was determined not to allow any racial or gender barriers to stand in her way of becoming a doctor. She had made the decision that her future was in Europe and not in an America which she suspected would continue to deny her human rights despite the Union victory and slave emancipation.

In August 1866, armed with Mazzini's letter of introduction, she traveled by train to Italy via Lucerne, Switzerland.<sup>139</sup> She wrote a letter to the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* and described her southward journey across the Alps into Italy and enthused glowingly that "all that one ever dreamed or imagined of the sunny, cloudless skies of Italy burst upon my vision." She contrasted this image with the situation in her homeland and asked "Is this the result of your war – that neither black or white men have rights which tyrants are bound to respect?"<sup>140</sup> In making this comparison, Remond justified her right to take advantage of her transnational mobility in Europe to live in a location which she believed was more suitable and compatible with her social and political ideologies, personal wellbeing, and career aspirations. She had spent her entire life as an anti-slavery and social justice activist, and she would spend her remaining years in what Angelita Reyes described as "the urban

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<sup>139</sup> Salenius, 'negra d'America', 8; and Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*, 11.

<sup>140</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, November 3, 1866. This newspaper and *The Liberator*, which was published by William Lloyd Garrison, were the official weekly newspapers of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

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environment of an expatriate retreat created in Italy.” Reyes further concluded that: “Against the backdrop of slavery, abolition, the Civil War and post-emancipation transitions that included social and political upheaval,” Remond “defined and asserted black female agency and the sense of place.”<sup>141</sup>

Remond arrived in Florence on August 14, 1866. She wrote another letter to the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* and stated that: “After a long day’s journey in the full moonlight of a summer night, I arrive at ‘Firenze La Bella’.” However, she was quick to stress that: “I am not here [in Firenze] for pleasure, but for study,” and she restated one of her original goals for traveling to Europe.<sup>142</sup> She stayed at the highly recommended Pension Casa Iandelli, a boarding house centrally located near the Ponte alla Carraja, and she began to adjust to her new independent cosmopolitan lifestyle, to the Italian language, and to medical school.

Despite beginning her medical studies in 1866 at the relatively advanced age of 40, just as with race and gender, Remond did not allow her age to prevent her from obtaining further education in Italy. She expressed no hesitation at beginning a new and challenging course of study during what would have been considered her middle age. Salenius located her medical school records at the University of Florence archives. She was able to piece together from the information in these various documents, written in Italian, a picture of Remond’s student days at the Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova.<sup>143</sup> According to Salenius, B. B. Appleton, M.D., a member of the Massachusetts Medical Society, was one of the referees who provided letters of recommendation for her medical school application. Sister Rosmonda from the All Saints University College and Dr. M. Berkeley Hill, who was the Head Surgeon when Remond studied there, also provided her with letters of recommendation.<sup>144</sup> During the

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<sup>141</sup> Reyes, ‘Elusive Autobiographical Performativity’, 162.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>143</sup> See Sirpa Salenius, ‘On Archival Research: Recovering and Rewriting History. The Case of Sarah Parker Remond, *Transatlantica*, vol 1, Issue 1 (2021): 1-13. accessed September 10, 2022.

<https://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/16939>. Salenius discovered and personally researched Remond’s Ospedale school records at the University of Florence archives, and she translated them from Italian, so they could be shared with other researchers. Her purpose was to recover “the voices of those who have been silenced” in order to rewrite “their inspirational stories back into the history that erased them.”

<sup>144</sup> Salenius, ‘On Archival Research’, 5-6.

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academic year 1866-1867, Remond requested and was admitted to study classes as an auditor in the obstetrics clinic. She then requested full admission to the medical school at the Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova for the year 1867-1868, and she included her letters of recommendation.

She had left a formidable impression on all her referees who described her as extremely capable, well-qualified and dedicated, and she passed the entrance exam justifying her referees' assessments. She was fully admitted to medical school in November 1867, and Salenius found information about her practical training:

The school register shows that Remond, whose first name now was Italianized to Sara, participated in practical training/clinical service with the others. The women, in groups of four, took turns in 24-hour shifts to assist pregnant women, those expected to give birth, and those who had just delivered babies. The students had to write reports of the patients recovered at the department where they practiced under the supervision of one of the medical assistants.<sup>145</sup>

Regarding gender parity in staffing at the Oespedale, according to Angelita Reyes, "Santa Maria Nuova included women in the medical staff," who had been trained through apprenticeship and experience as surgeons."<sup>146</sup> So, providing training for women physicians like Remond did not appear to be a rarity at the Oespedale. When her course ended, Remond took and passed the practical and the final habilitation exams on August 4th and 11th, 1868, respectively.<sup>147</sup> Now with her professional medical license in hand, Sarah Parker Remond became the first female African American physician in Europe.<sup>148</sup>

She continued to live in Florence after her studies, and she spent the next 20 years working as an obstetrician in her private practice. Remond married Lazzaro Pintor (1833-1913) an office worker from Sardinia in 1877, and several of her family members also joined her in Florence. Her sisters Maritcha and Caroline Remond Putnam and her son Edmund

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<sup>145</sup> Salenius, 'negra d'America', 8.

<sup>146</sup> Reyes, 'Elusive Autobiographical Performativity', 160.

<sup>147</sup> Salenius, 'On Archival Research', 7.

<sup>148</sup> Remond was the second African American woman to become a physician after Rebecca Lee Crumpler who earned her M.D. in 1864 in America. Crumpler (1831-1895), known as Rebecca Lee then, graduated in 1864 from the New England Female Medical College in Boston as its first and sole Black female student. Similar to Remond, she worked as a nurse prior to studying medicine. This was the first female medical school in the U.S. and the world. See Rebecca Lee Crumpler, M.D., *A Book of Medical Diseases: In Two Parts* (Boston, MA: Cashman, Keating Printers, 1883), 2.

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Quincey Putnam and his wife Gertie all left America to live in Italy as expatriates and follow in Remond's footsteps.<sup>149</sup> Salenius found that when citizenship and passports made transatlantic travel more available to African Americans after the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, those who had the means headed for Europe. Some, like the Remonds, chose to live there permanently "in such cultural capitals as Paris, London, Florence, and Rome" and "they joined the fashionable social circles of their less prejudiced adoptive homes."<sup>150</sup>

This was true for Remond and her family. In addition to her professional career, Remond was very active socially in the community of American and European expatriates who made cosmopolitan Florence their home in the late nineteenth century.<sup>151</sup> In this Renaissance city, Remond, like other educated and cultured individuals from various nationalities, participated in intellectual exchanges in aristocratic salons, and she attended operas and concerts and sat wherever she desired, unlike in Boston.<sup>152</sup> Salenius described her life abroad in Europe as follows:

In Europe, Remond and her family, in particular her sisters, participated in social activities that in the United States were either exclusively reserved for whites or were racially segregated. In London, Florence, and Rome, they mingled with foreign nobility and organized musical soirées where some of the most famous musicians of the time performed to racially mixed audiences . . . For African American travelers it became a means to underscore their inclusion in transatlantic cosmopolitan society.<sup>153</sup>

This was almost a complete reversal of their racist and discriminatory treatment in America, and, understandably, some of these Black Americans had no desire to return to their native homeland.

Remond also indulged in her love of literature which she had developed as a child, and her name is on the reading room register of subscribers at the venerable Gabinetto Vieusseux Library, founded in Florence in 1819. Her name is included alongside those of Italian

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<sup>149</sup> Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*, 18.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Salenius, 'negra d'America', 8-9, 19.

<sup>152</sup> Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*, 19.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

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aristocrats, Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky, American sculptor Hiram Powers, American authors Henry James, Mark Twain, and James Fenimore Cooper, and British authors D.H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, and William Makepeace Thackeray.<sup>154</sup> American novelist Constance Fenimore Woolson (1840-1894), the grandniece of James Fenimore Cooper, was one of the few female names on the register, so gender issues may have been involved at this foremost library in the most cosmopolitan of Italian cities. Whether Remond crossed paths with Woolson is unknown, but, coincidentally, Woolson died in Italy in the same year as Remond and they are both buried in the same cemetery.<sup>155</sup>

Remond and her family were not the only African Americans in Italy during the nineteenth century who enjoyed the cosmopolitan lifestyle of Florence and Rome. Reyes names artist Robert Scott Duncanson, and sculptors Edmonia Lewis and Eugene Warburg, a New Orleans Creole, as some of the other Black Americans who lived among the Anglo-American artists and intellectuals in those cities.<sup>156</sup> Remond and Lewis may have met in Rome where Lewis had a studio. I concur with Salenius that they represent what African American women could achieve when their academic abilities and creative skills were allowed to develop freely, and I would add when they were treated and respected as human beings.<sup>157</sup>

Information about Remond's final years in Italy after 1887 until her death in 1894 have completely disappeared from the historical record. For years, the date of Remond's death and her burial location were unknown and disputed. Some researchers believed she died in London, but Sirpa Salenius found a hospital document with her grave register which confirmed that she died "in Rome on 13 December 1894 at 6:00 am at the Hospital of

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<sup>154</sup> Sirpa Salenius, 'Cultivating Cosmopolitanism: Nineteenth-Century Americans in Florence', *Open Inquiry Archive*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2014): 5.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 5, 11. Salenius notes that Woolson wrote "Italian short stories . . . that centered around women and addressed many contemporary issues such as gender roles, the "marriage question," and definitions of home." (*Ibid*). If she and Remond had met, they would have had some things in common to discuss.

<sup>156</sup> Reyes, 'Elusive Autobiographical Performativity', 160.

<sup>157</sup> Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad*, 14.

## Chapter Four: Sarah Parker Remond

Sant’Antonio.”<sup>158</sup> I located this invaluable information about Remond’s death in an article written by Salenius which was obscured in an issue of the *Friends of the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome Newsletter*. The grave register was hidden in a primary source until its discovery by Salenius, and then it was further hidden away in the newsletter. This is an example of some of the ways in which African American women’s history has been archivally marginalized. Her grave in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome is now known and has a permanent marker, and her legacy lives on.

### 4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Sarah Parker Remond was a trailblazing and influential African American woman who achieved several groundbreaking accomplishments in Europe during the nineteenth century from 1859 to 1894. The findings show that in addition to her study abroad, she was a rare Black female transnational abolitionist and anti-racist activist who addressed mixed-gender audiences throughout the British Isles. She became well-known for the impact of her electrifying anti-slavery lectures and her fundraising efforts for American abolitionist organizations.

Remond was the first African American woman to study at universities in England and Italy, and the first to become a physician outside the United States. She was a dedicated women’s rights activist and a suffragist who established interracial networks with leading British women abolitionists and reformers. However, despite all these accomplishments, she still had to navigate race and gender in confrontations with White Americans in Europe who had exported their racism across the Atlantic. Because she asserted her right to mobility beyond America’s borders, Remond’s study abroad and transnational activism in Europe profoundly affected and changed the trajectory of her life and sealed her legacy in African American women’s history.

Throughout her life, Remond was guided by the principles of universal human rights and

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<sup>158</sup> Salenius, ‘Who They Were’, 2.

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equality, which her parents instilled in her at an early age. She actively challenged and refused to accept the proscribed racial and gender roles for African American women, which limited her personal freedom, and her educational and career opportunities. Her defiance was driven by her belief that the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness enshrined in America's Declaration of Independence applied equally to women of her complexion.

In summary, her study abroad combined with her transnational networks shaped her activist and professional priorities. By leaving America and living in Europe, Remond not only relocated physically, but she also engaged intellectually and bonded over shared causes and viewpoints with British women and men like the Italian Mazzini. This networking would have been impossible in America where she was a non-citizen with *no rights* a White man was bound to respect. She redefined her purpose in life by going abroad to Europe, which led to her groundbreaking career as a physician, and she left a model for Black womanhood of integrity, resistance, and empowerment which still resonates today.

## Chapter Five: Mary Church Terrell

*The distance from Sojourner Truth to Mary Church Terrell is really more than the forty or fifty years of fight for political recognition for women. It is an infinitely greater distance, almost limitless space, between the centuries of debasement and degradation of a sex, and the meteor's flight of education, purity, a plumb, rare scholarly training and literary culture. ~ Mary Church Terrell, 1898.*<sup>1</sup>

### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the historical case study of Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954), and it moves the thesis forward into the post-Reconstruction era and beyond Sarah Parker Remond's abolitionism and her study abroad during slavery. A thread that binds this thesis together is the forgotten but significant achievements that trailblazing African American women made during their European study abroad and how it shaped their transnational activism, which they all engaged in. Another interwoven thread is how their study abroad affected their identities and careers. Therefore, I was especially interested in comparing how Terrell identified herself as a Black woman before and after her study abroad. Identity for African American descendants of slaves can be a complex process especially if they are troubled by the post-traumatic slave syndrome.<sup>2</sup> I discuss both Terrell's early struggles with her identity as a descendant of slaves and her later reflections after her study abroad.

Terrell studied French, German, and Italian in France, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy independently during her 1888-1890 European Grand Tour, an undertaking which was unprecedented for an African American woman. Her status as a member of one of the leading

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *The Progress of Colored Women*. (Washington, D.C: (Smith Brothers, Printers, 1898). accessed July 9, 2023. <https://www.loc.gov/item/90898298>. Terrell delivered this address before the National American Women's Suffrage Association at the Columbia Theater, Washington, D. C., February 18, 1898, on the occasion of its Fiftieth Anniversary. Terrell, who was president of the National Association of Colored Women (1896-1900), discussed the achievements of African American women since Emancipation, especially in education, and the efforts to reach out to poor Black women of the rural South. She gave details about their intellectual and cultural advancement, how far they had come, and how much further they had to go in achieving suffrage and equal education.

<sup>2</sup> The post-traumatic slave syndrome is a theory which asserts that memory of the trauma of slavery, even among descendants of slaves who never experienced it, has played a role in shaping the identity of African Americans through an intergenerational memory transfer. See Joy DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome; America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Milwaukie, OR: Uptone Press, 2005).



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Black Elite families in America and her wealthy father made this trip possible. She used her Grand Tour to gain first-hand knowledge of European culture, society, and history which complemented her language study. She recorded her lived experiences and adventures in diaries written in the French and German languages she was studying, because she was determined to avoid any use of English which she feared would hinder her progress. Terrell succeeded in her educational goals, and after only two years, she had become fluent in three European languages. She would soon learn that her foreign language skills were formidable assets when she served as a delegate and spoke at transnational conferences across Europe.

Her collection of Personal Papers and Manuscripts at the Library of Congress attests to her indefatigability as she expanded her activism into multiple social justice and civil rights causes.<sup>3</sup> They hold a wide range of documents about her international travel and attendance at European conferences, and they include transcripts of her speeches and her notes. Fortunately, Terrell's digitized archives are a rare exception to the many Black women from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who are archivally marginalized, and they were of vital importance for this research about her study abroad.

However, despite her trailblazing Grand Tour and study abroad, Mary Church Terrell is primarily remembered and praised for her civil rights activism in America and for her presidency of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) from 1896-1900.<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth McHenry notes that "Terrell is most often mentioned purely in connection with her social and political

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Church Terrell Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. accessed June 2, 2023. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/collmss.ms000076>. These archives "were given to the Library of Congress by her daughter, Phyllis Terrell Langston, [from] 1955-1975." (Ibid).

<sup>4</sup> See Alison M. Parker, *Unceasing Militant: The Life of Mary Church Terrell* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020); Beverly W. Jones, 'Mary Church Terrell and the National Association of Colored Women: 1896-1901', *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 67, no. 1 (Spring, 1982): 20-33; Brittney C. Cooper, "Proper, Dignified Agitation": The Evolution of Mary Church Terrell,' in Brittney C. Cooper, *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017); and Fatma Ramdani, 'Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954): A Black Woman Pioneer Historian: From the Margin to the Center Stage', *IdeAs. Idées d'Amérique* 16 (2020). accessed June 25, 2023. <https://journals.openedition.org/ideas/9327>

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activity” in the United States.<sup>5</sup> As a result, researchers and scholars have paid less attention to her European study abroad and travel experiences and their critical role in shaping her identity, career, and transnational activism.

An example is Beverly W. Jones’ article, which examines Terrell’s leadership of the NACW.<sup>6</sup> Jones analyzes her success in meeting the organization’s expressed goal of race uplift of the Black masses, young women in particular. According to Jones, Terrell’s tenure was “characterized by innovative and progressive programs,” which included kindergartens, nursery schools, homes for girls, and other social welfare reforms. However, Jones does not venture beyond Terrell’s domestic NACW activities, which she concludes were significant, because they embodied Terrell’s strategy of race uplift. Her purpose is to explore Black women’s club movements of the late nineteenth century by examining Terrell’s strategy and leadership as the NACW’s first president. Jones only devotes a few pages to Terrell’s European study abroad; however, she makes the salient point as I discuss in this chapter that: “After spending two years of travel and study in Europe, she [Terrell] decided not only to remain in the United States but to strive to elevate her race,” which she does through her pioneering work with the NACW.<sup>7</sup>

Alison M. Parker wrote the first full-length biography about Terrell titled *Unceasing Militant: The Life of Mary Church Terrell* in 2020.<sup>8</sup> However, Parker’s 449-page book is concerned with Terrell’s domestic civil rights activities, and it provides no information about Terrell’s experiences during her Grand Tour in Europe. The only details included are about Terrell’s letters from Europe to her future husband, Robert Terrell. This lack of information about her

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth McHenry, ‘Toward a History of Access: The Case of Mary Church Terrell’, *American Literary History*, vol. 19, no. 2 (July 2007): 383.

<sup>6</sup> Beverly W. Jones, ‘Mary Church Terrell and the National Association of Colored Women: 1896-1901’, *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 67, no. 1 (Spring, 1982): 20-33.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 20-21, 30.

<sup>8</sup> Parker, *Unceasing Militant*, 35-39. These are the only pages that discuss Terrell’s two-year Grand Tour and her foreign language study in Europe. However, Parker discusses Terrell’s study abroad only in the context of the letters between her and Robert Terrell to focus on their budding romance.

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study abroad is the book's greatest deficiency for my research. Parker does include information about Terrell's membership in international organizations and her attendance at transnational conferences in Europe. There is also a relevant chapter about Terrell's "Black Feminism," and Parker posits that Terrell "created a distinctive black feminist voice that centered the protection of African American women, [and] offered them hope." She notes that Terrell "built onto a framework of black feminist thought that stretched from Phillis Wheatley's early abolitionist poetry to Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality."<sup>9</sup> Parker's analysis correlates with my discussion in Chapter Two about Crenshaw and the nineteenth century Black women whose lived experiences personified this theory without naming it.

This chapter builds upon this secondary literature and extends it by critically analyzing Terrell's experiences in the international context of her study abroad and transnationalism. I argue that those Terrell scholars who have focused on her domestic activism may have missed what hides in plain sight about the genesis of that activism, her study abroad. As in Remond's chapter, I apply the lens of Black feminist thought and intersectionality to gain insight into how she succeeded while having to navigate race, gender, and class throughout her life. These methodologies are key to understanding Terrell's reverence for education passed down by her parents, who unlike Remond's parents were born enslaved.

In addition to her Library of Congress Papers, the most useful primary sources for my purposes are Terrell's autobiography and her French and Swiss Diaries, which have been translated and digitized.<sup>10</sup> Terrell wrote her autobiography in 1940 long after her study abroad but while she was still active in her many domestic and international causes. Her autobiography and diaries are exceptional primary sources to learn about her life through her subjective voice

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>10</sup> See Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2005); and Jennifer M. Wilks, 'The French and Swiss Diaries of Mary Church Terrell, 1888–89: Introduction and Annotated Translation', *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International*, vol. 3 no.1 (2014): 8-32.

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as particular rather than general and to gain insight into how she chooses to represent her experiences. Terrell's diaries offer an extremely detailed and intimate narrative about her educational, sociocultural, and travel experiences during her two years abroad. They describe the development and the literary, feminist, and activist aspirations of a young, educated Black woman at the dawn of the twentieth century in Europe.

### 5.1 Terrell's Early Life in America and Her Education in Antioch and Oberlin, Ohio

*Aristocrats of color who could afford to do so sent their children to private academies and boarding schools in the North.*<sup>11</sup>

Mary "Mollie" Eliza Church was born a slave in the middle of the American Civil War (1861-1865) on September 23, 1863, in Memphis, Tennessee to Robert Reed Church (1839-1912) and Louisa Ayres Church (1844-1911).<sup>12</sup> Her parents were enslaved 'mulattoes,' who "were the children of their White slave holders and enslaved Black women, and they were not freed until the end of the Civil War" when the Thirteenth Amendment was passed in 1865.<sup>13</sup> President Abraham Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, in the year Terrell was born, but it did not change her status as a chattel slave. The Proclamation that Lincoln signed was an Executive Order which did not require Congressional approval. It stated in part that: "all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free." However, neither Lincoln nor the Union army forces had any means of enforcing his Proclamation in the rebellious Confederate States where the overwhelming majority of the four million slaves lived.

Therefore, Mary Church along with her parents remained enslaved in Tennessee until the

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<sup>11</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1990), 257.

<sup>12</sup> Terrell had three siblings, all younger: a brother Thomas Ayres Church (1867-1937), a half-brother, Robert Reed Church Jr., (1885-1952) and a half-sister Annette Elaine Church (1887-1975) from her father's second marriage to Anna Susan Wright (1856-1928) after her parents' divorce.

<sup>13</sup> Parker, *Unceasing Militant*, 5.

## Chapter Five: Mary Church Terrell

war ended with a Union victory, and the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified on December 6, 1865.<sup>14</sup> Section 1 of the Thirteenth Amendment states that “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” This unfortunate wording led to racial injustices such as the Convict Lease System which Terrell vigorously protested.<sup>15</sup>

Terrell devotes the first seven chapters of her autobiography to her parents, her early childhood, her primary and secondary schooling in the North, and her experiences at Oberlin College. She discusses and reflects upon her early encounters with the concept of race and her search for her racial identity. In the very first sentence of the introduction to her autobiography, Terrell declares that:

This is the story of a colored woman living in a white world. It cannot possibly be like a story written by a white woman. A white woman has only one handicap to overcome – that of sex. I have two – both sex and race. I belong to the only group in this country which has two such huge obstacles to surmount. Colored men have only one – that of race.<sup>16</sup>

This statement is powerful and significant, because Terrell acknowledges her standpoint and identity as a Black woman in America’s racialized and gendered social structure. She then explains that her motivation for writing her autobiography was to record: “what I have been able to accomplish in spite of the obstacles which I have had to surmount.”<sup>17</sup> She emphasizes that:

I have done this, not because I want to tell the world how smart I am, but because both a sense of justice and a regard for truth prompt me to show what a colored woman can achieve in spite of the difficulties by which race prejudice blocks her path . . . [if she] works with all her might and main to do it and is given a chance.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Constitution Annotated: Analysis and Interpretation of the U.S. Constitution’, The Thirteenth Amendment. accessed July 8, 2023. <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-13/>.

<sup>15</sup> Surprisingly, based on the Thirteenth Amendment, slavery is *still* legal in America due to the “exception” of convicted criminals who can *still* be enslaved. Terrell believed that African Americans, more than any other group, were unfairly singled out and imprisoned under the racially motivated Convict Lease System. She campaigned and protested against it and demanded that the exploited prisoners be released. See Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 200.

<sup>16</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*.

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She states that despite this race prejudice, her determination fueled her success, and as I have argued, it is a key factor of Black female agency.

Terrell then stresses almost apologetically that she has “been obliged to refer to incidents which have wounded my feelings, crushed my pride, and saddened my heart.”<sup>19</sup> However, she does not want to be accused of “whining” or “arousing the sympathy of her readers . . . by tearing passion to tatters, so as to show how wretched I have been.”<sup>20</sup> Terrell does not deny her emotional suffering, but she does not want to be seen as a victim; she simply wants “to tell the truth” which includes the hardships along the way as well as her victories. Brittney C. Cooper interpreted this statement as Terrell’s refusal “to use unnecessarily incendiary and divisive speech,” and instead, she applies “her own notion of dignified agitation.”<sup>21</sup> Cooper argues that: “Terrell’s autobiography should be understood within the context of her broader political framework of “proper, dignified agitation.”<sup>22</sup> While this analysis has merit, I propose that her “dignified agitation” approach to racism can also be interpreted as an attempt to avoid being seen solely as a victim, and she invokes a strategy of “dignified” offense versus a defensive approach.

I agree with Cooper that Terrell’s narration of her personal and “her more public experiences of intellectual and political development” in her autobiography demonstrates how her standpoint as a Black woman “uniquely shaped each of these experiences.”<sup>23</sup> Terrell grew up in a household with an unconventional mother who filled her with ideas about gender relationships that were nonconformist. Her mother Louisa was a businesswoman who owned a fashionable hair salon, which was located in “the most elite section of downtown Memphis.”<sup>24</sup> She defied both gender norms and the social norms

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> B. Cooper, ‘Proper, Dignified Agitation’, 65.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Parker, *Unceasing Militant*, 15. What is perhaps not well known is that Louisa’s father, her former slave owner, helped her to set up this store. Louisa “sold human hair extensions to upper-class white women.” (Ibid.) The fact that a “Negro”

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of respectability when she divorced her husband when Terrell was still young.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Terrell received her first lessons about womanhood from a mother who had made her own way in the world unhindered by the constraints of male dictated social norms.

Growing up with her mother's non-traditional lifestyle gave Terrell permission to challenge restrictions on her gender, and she would go on to live a non-conformist life as well.<sup>26</sup> Her mother did not receive an extensive higher education, but Terrell highly praised her business acumen just as she did her father's entrepreneurial skills. She reported that "He had business ability of high order and gave proof of that over and over again."<sup>27</sup> His industriousness and real estate investments paid off when he became one of the South's first Black millionaires. Robert Church was well-respected in Memphis as a political leader and a philanthropist.<sup>28</sup> Alison M. Parker describes him as "an important Republican powerbroker" and during Reconstruction, he succeeded in abolishing the separate streetcar system in Memphis among other civil rights achievements. Terrell was aware of her father's activism, and she shared his Republican party loyalties.<sup>29</sup>

Terrell's parents were among those 'aristocrats of color' whom I refer to as the Black Elite, and they sent Terrell up North for her education. Her mother believed the Memphis schools for Black children were unable to offer her the best education. When she was only six years old, her parents sent her to study at the Model School on the campus of Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. Horace Mann, an educational reformer and abolitionist, was Antioch's first president. The co-ed

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businesswoman in the postbellum Deep South owned a store financed by her White father and former slave owner, which served an all-White clientele, speaks volumes about the complicated race relations in the former Confederate states. It was a complex system that was not simply Black or White as some may assume.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 21. Terrell's mother: "dared to flout social convention among middle-class blacks and whites by formally filing for divorce in 1874." (Ibid).

<sup>26</sup> B. Cooper, 'Proper, Dignified Agitation', 67.

<sup>27</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 36.

<sup>28</sup> Parker, *Unceasing Militant*, 20–21; and Jessie Carney Smith, ed., 'Robert Reed Church Sr.' in *Notable Black American Men*, 1 (Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1999), 202.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 21.

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college was founded in 1852 and like Oberlin College, it also admitted Black students. Terrell boarded with the Hunster family, one of the handful of colored families in the small village of Yellow Springs. Ida Gibbs Hunt was one of the few colored students, and she and Terrell began a lifelong friendship. Terrell attended the Model School for two years and a public school for two more years before she attended Oberlin High School. She lived in the age of growing Germanophilia among Black Americans, and her mother suggested she study German, and she hired a private tutor for her daughter.

Except for a traumatic racial identity crisis at the public school in Yellow Springs, Terrell has fond recollections of the school and her stay with the Hunster family. During a history lesson about the Emancipation Proclamation, Terrell, despite being the daughter of former enslaved parents, said “I learned a fact that I had never known before.”<sup>30</sup> She said she was “stunned” to learn that she was descended from slaves. She recalled that “I was covered with confusion and shame at the thought, and my humiliation was painful indeed.” When she recovered her composure, she resolved that she would show those White students that she was just as equal, and she held her head high.<sup>31</sup> In this way, she was able to reconcile “a social discourse of Black inferiority” with her “inner dialogue about her racial positionality and its stigma . . .”<sup>32</sup> This reckoning, according to Brittney Cooper, allowed Terrell to use her personal ties to slavery “to signify her racial identity” and to “embrace a social disposition as a “free woman” whose social interactions are characterized by confidence or holding one’s head high – being in a word: dignified.”<sup>33</sup> Yet, Terrell’s initial feelings of shame and her ability to suppress her memory that her parents were born enslaved should not be dismissed.

Terrell's “confusion and shame” during this incident can be attributed to a theory about the

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<sup>30</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 51,

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 51-52.

<sup>32</sup> B. Cooper, ‘Proper, Dignified Agitation’, 72-73.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 73.



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generational memory of slavery. This theory proposes that memory of the trauma of slavery has played a role in shaping the identity of African Americans, which has resulted in a post-traumatic slave syndrome. Even though Terrell was only enslaved until she was two years old, she may have suffered from this syndrome because of her parents' enslavement, which she had suppressed. Proponents of this theory such as Joy DeGruy claim that intergenerational transfer of trauma from historical memories of centuries of slavery along with systemic racial oppression can occur in Black Americans long after the context should have lost its dehumanizing effectiveness.<sup>34</sup> Thus, according to this theory, Terrell's reaction of shame upon discovering her slave ancestry demonstrated a relationship between trauma and identity that stemmed directly from historical memories of slave ancestry that she may have suppressed but was abruptly forced to acknowledge.

Terrell does not mention whether she discussed this incident with her parents, but it was to have a lingering effect, and she would revisit it again during her study abroad. Fortunately, the incident did not affect her studies, and after completing her public school courses, she left Yellow Springs to study at Oberlin High School. She entered this college preparatory school with plans to study at Oberlin College, which shared the same campus. Oberlin College is a PWI (Predominantly White Institution) that was among the first American universities to welcome both African American students and women after it was established in 1833. As a private coeducational institution, Oberlin was a pioneer in race and gender equality, and it offered a liberal arts curriculum that was pedagogically structured around Latin and Greek language study and literature. George B. Vashon became Oberlin's first African American male graduate in 1844, and Mary Jane Patterson became the first African American woman to graduate from an

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<sup>34</sup> DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, 115. DeGruy's research found that "African Americans have continued to experience traumas similar to those of our slave past," which have never been addressed.

## Chapter Five: Mary Church Terrell

American university in 1862 when she received her A.B. degree from Oberlin. Remarkably, by 1900, one third of all black professionals in the U.S. had undergraduate degrees from Oberlin College. Stephanie Evans found that: “by 1910, there were 250 Black women college graduates and over 2,000 Black men graduates.”<sup>35</sup>

Terrell graduated with her A.B. from Oberlin in 1884, and Anna Julia Cooper and Ida Gibbs Hunt were in her graduating class. All three women, like Patterson, had demanded and enrolled in the Gentlemen's Classical Course, which included the study of mathematics, Greek, and Latin. These subjects were thought to be too difficult for the fragile female mind, and there was also the belief that: “To learn Latin was . . . unwomanly.”<sup>36</sup> Some men and women believed that studying these subjects could prevent a woman from finding a husband. Nevertheless, Terrell defied this gender discrimination in the curriculum and along with Cooper and Gibbs, she graduated on her own terms and completed the men's course. All three women found husbands.

While she was at Oberlin, Terrell decided that she wanted to help with the uplift of her fellow African Americans. In her autobiography, she stated that “All during my college course I had dreamed of the day when I could promote the welfare of my race.”<sup>37</sup> Against her Victorian-minded father's wishes, she took a job as a teacher at Wilberforce College, an HBCU in Ohio, because she knew he would object to her teaching in the North less than the South.<sup>38</sup> Robert Church believed that “real ladies did not work,” and “he wanted his daughter to be a lady.”<sup>39</sup>

Terrell taught at Wilberforce for two years from 1885-1887, and she then accepted an offer from the M Street High School in Washington, D.C. This renowned school was one of the first public high schools for African Americans. Ida Gibbs Hunt, Anna Julia Cooper, and Jessie

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<sup>35</sup> Oberlin College, (1833-) *The Black Past Remembered*, accessed November 10, 2022.

<http://www.blackpast.org/aah/oberlin-college-1833>; and Evans, ‘African American Women Scholars’, 79.

<sup>36</sup> Margaret Tuke, *A History of Bedford College for Women 1849-1937* (London, UK, New York. NY: Oxford University, 1939), 19.

<sup>37</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 83.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

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Fauset all taught there. Unbeknownst to Terrell, her decision to teach at M Street would change the course of her life. She became an unofficial assistant to Robert Terrell (1857-1925), her future husband, who was the head of the Latin Department. She was aware that he came from a distinguished Black Elite family in Washington, D.C. and that his educational background and character would impress her very protective father.<sup>40</sup> They would remain in touch, and they corresponded regularly during Terrell's European Grand Tour.

### 5.2 Study Abroad in Europe, 1888-1890: France, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy

*[Black Elite] Families who could afford the expense of a "grand tour" sent their children to Europe following graduation from preparatory school or from college.<sup>41</sup>*

#### 5.21 Prelude to the Grand Tour

Mary Church Terrell blazed an educational trail for Black women when she completed her Grand Tour in Europe from 1888-1890. Because of the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment on July 9, 1868, Terrell's citizenship was never questioned, and she was given her passport without incident. She did not have to endure the passport and travel visa rejections of earlier abolitionist travelers like Remond, her brother Charles, Frederick Douglass, and William Wells Brown, because the U.S. government did not recognize them as American citizens. Elizabeth Pryor notes that as national identification documents, passports serve as a "surveillance of mobility," required to navigate public space.<sup>42</sup> Malini Schueller points out that: "Even free blacks whose remote ancestors had been brought to the country as slaves were not and were never intended to be, included as "citizens" of the United States."<sup>43</sup> African American non-

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<sup>40</sup> Parker, *Unceasing Militant*, 32; Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color*, 42-43; and Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 301. Robert Terrell had graduated from Harvard *cum laude* in 1884, the same year Terrell graduated from Oberlin. He received his L.L.B degree from Howard University School of Law in 1889. A Republican like his wife, he was later appointed as a judge to the Municipal Court of D.C. in 1911 by Republican President William Howard Taft.

<sup>41</sup> Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color*, 256.

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Pryor, *Colored Travelers: Mobility and the Fight for Citizenship before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 105.

<sup>43</sup> David F. Dorr, Malini Johar Schueller, ed, 'Introduction', in *Colored Man Round the World* (Ann Arbor, MI, University of Michigan Press, 1999).

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citizens were cast as outsiders and their transatlantic mobility was severely restricted by their lack of citizenship and denial of passports. An American passport was a privilege only guaranteed to White American citizens before 1868.

Ironically, during the antebellum years, only slaves or Black servants traveling with their White masters, which included diplomats, were granted official travel documents to sail to Europe.<sup>44</sup> In 1845, former slave Harriet Jacobs went to Europe as a servant to a White family, and because she traveled in that capacity under the authority of White Americans, she was granted her travel documents forthwith.<sup>45</sup>

As a full-fledged American citizen in 1888, Terrell used the unfettered access to her passport to travel freely beyond America's borders. She joined scores of other newly-minted African American citizens who also took advantage of this freedom of mobility and traveled to Europe and beyond. The fugitive slave and abolitionist travelers of old were replaced by former slaves and the children of slaves among them Black performers, entertainers, tourists, and students.

During the summer season, Black Elite families often vacationed in Europe, and Robert Church was the head of one of these families who had sufficient means to afford a European tour. His daughter's decision to take a Grand Tour and study abroad is as unique as it is trailblazing, because in the nineteenth century, a Grand Tour of Europe's cultural capitals was a tradition reserved for young upper-class European men. Terrell's Grand Tour not only disrupted that tradition, but it also called attention to her social class and the Black Elite's striving for upward mobility.

Terrell's father sailed with her to Europe when she began her Grand Tour in July 1888, and they traveled together for two months before he returned to America. Miss Church, as she was

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 155. Jacobs was also allowed to ride in the first-class train cars in the United States when she traveled with her White employer's children, because the conductors "recognized her status as a servant." When she traveled independently on her own, she was unceremoniously "ousted from the first-class cars" and removed to the second-class Jim Crow cars. (Ibid, 63.)

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known then, continued her travel alone, a daring feat for any woman in the nineteenth century Victorian era. She carefully pre-arranged her stays in family pensions and private homes for immersive language study. During her stay at a pension in Lausanne, Switzerland, she also studied French at a private girl's gymnasium for a few months.<sup>46</sup> Throughout her Grand Tour, Terrell enjoyed the aesthetic pleasures of Europe's cultural capitals and sites, and she waxed lyrically about them in her diaries and her autobiography.<sup>47</sup> She had received a Western university education and earned a classics degree which included these sites, and she relished the opportunity to visit them in person. However, she also hoped to gain educational knowledge and intellectual enrichment, which she believed would support her race uplift goals.<sup>48</sup>

Race uplift meant duty and obligation to end Black oppression, and successful Blacks were expected to uplift those who were less advantaged. Education was viewed as the main vehicle to liberate the Black masses and refute Whites' beliefs of Black inferiority.<sup>49</sup> Like their slave ancestors, as I discussed in Chapter Three, African Americans viewed education as 'a fruit of freedom', which was essential for their survival, attainment of equal rights, and advancement in all spheres of life.

Since it appears to be counterintuitive, one might wonder how does a European classical education and Grand Tour help to 'uplift the race'? Terrell believed as did W.E.B. Du Bois that Blacks who wanted full citizenship and equal rights should prepare themselves with a liberal arts education just like those White Americans who occupied the top of the economic and social ladder. Du Bois

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<sup>46</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 103.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 101.

<sup>48</sup> See Corey D.B. Walker, "Of the Coming of John [and Jane]": African American Intellectuals in Europe, 1888 - 1938', *European American Studies*, vol. 47, no.1 (2002): 7. Terrell's study abroad during her Grand Tour predated those African American students who, according to Walker, as discussed in Chapter Three, went to Europe around the turn of the century in an intellectual migration.

<sup>49</sup> Linda M. Perkins, 'Black Women and the Philosophy of "Race Uplift" Prior to Emancipation'. Working Paper, Radcliffe College, ERIC Number: ED221444 (1980):1-2.

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argued that this would create an intellectual cadre of African American leaders who could then function on a par with Whites. This so-called ‘Talented Tenth’ would then be placed in Black schools and universities to uplift the race by leading the oppressed Black working class to their rightful and equal place in American society.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, Du Bois advocated a broad liberal arts curriculum at the university level as the best preparation for the Talented Tenth, and this was the education that Terrell had received when she graduated from Oberlin College in 1884.

This strategic approach was not a rejection of African American culture or knowledge production; it was a deliberate, pragmatic plan to uplift the race based on the reality of daily Jim Crow life for Blacks who lived in White America as segregated, discriminated, and disenfranchised citizens. Many educated Black Elites, like Terrell, entered the teaching profession with the intention of providing race uplift for the Black masses. She decided to enhance her university preparation by studying French, German, and Italian during an ambitious two-year Grand Tour of Europe.

### 5.22 The Grand Tour and Study Abroad

Mary Church Terrell, still known as Mollie Church, boarded the *SS City of Berlin* in New York on July 21, 1888, and she sailed to Europe with her father. She booked one of the Cook’s tours, and he accompanied her on their escorted expeditions to “principal cities in England, Belgium, Switzerland, and France,” before he returned to America two months later. Terrell “drank in everything of historic interest in great gulps,” and she was pleased to see, in her words, that her father’s “interest in historical places and the rare objects we saw was also unbounded.” She was especially impressed by the “priceless paintings in the Louvre [which] opened up an entirely new world” to her.<sup>51</sup> Despite her father’s pleas to return home with him, Terrell

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<sup>50</sup> See W.E.B. Du Bois, ‘The Talented Tenth’, in Booker T. Washington, ed, *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today*. (New York, NY: James Pott and Company. 1903), 31–75.

<sup>51</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 99.

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remained steadfast with her plans to study in Europe, which “she had set her heart on.”<sup>52</sup> She was grateful that he kept his promise and allowed her to remain on the continent to study on her own.

Terrell was single and 24 years old when she undertook her Grand Tour. She was eight years younger than Sarah Parker Remond was when she sailed to Liverpool, England in 1858, thirty years earlier. Another difference is that Terrell went to Europe *after* slavery had ended. During the antebellum, Remond and other Black male abolitionists reported they had received a warm reception from White abolitionists, the public, and the working classes. Now that slavery had ended, and Black abolitionists were no longer in vogue, how would Europeans react to an educated, upper-class, and multilingual Black woman like Terrell? What roles would her gender, race, and class play in her treatment and social life? How would she react if she encountered racial discrimination? I wondered if her autobiography and diaries would provide the answers.

Terrell’s French and Swiss Diaries signaled a new Black literary trend away from the genre of slave narratives to travel narratives. This new generation of nineteenth century and early twentieth century Black travelers like Terrell were motivated by the same educational, cultural, and social travel agendas as White Americans. With their passports in hand, their travel narratives showed the progress that had been made since the slave narratives of Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, William and Ellen Craft, and Booker T. Washington. These new travel writers generally wrote narratives that extolled the wondrous cultural sites, the museums, art galleries, and opera houses of Europe. These freedoms were still routinely denied to them in America even though they were freedmen and women. William E. Matthews wrote about his European travels in 1890 around the same time Terrell was on her Grand Tour.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> See William E. Matthews, ‘A Summer Vacation in Europe’, *Christian Recorder*, VI (January, 1890): 292-306.

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Zatella R. Turner wrote about her “wonderful year” in Europe studying at the University of London during the interwar years.<sup>54</sup>

Gary Totten analyzed and critiqued the post-Civil War travel writing of several African Americans who visited Europe among them Ida B. Wells, Jessie Fauset, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Claude McKay. He concluded that their travel writing strategies emphasized “issues of culture, power, identity, and mobility.”<sup>55</sup> This new writing genre signaled their empowerment and control over their lives. Their rhetorical strategies were in sharp contrast to the fugitive slave narratives whose main purpose was to recount the writers’ traumatic and harsh experiences while enslaved, their quests for freedom, and their escapes. Boston King’s narrative expressed all these themes.

Terrell exemplified this new travel writing in both her French and Swiss Diaries. She paints a powerful portrait of a carefree but determined young woman who embraces her privileged opportunity to study European languages and cultures. She presents herself as an observant student of people and places, one who is open to new experiences, and she regales her readers with sensory descriptions and metaphors. Later, in her autobiography, she also expressed herself lyrically when she described being left alone in Paris when her father departed:

I was the happiest girl on earth. I am sure I felt as Monte Cristo must have felt when he exclaimed, “The world is mine.” Here I was in Paris. I could study French, visit the wonderful galleries to my heart’s content, learn something about art, and attend the theaters. In short, here at last was the realization of those radiant dreams which had filled my head and heart for years.<sup>56</sup>

The reasons for Terrell’s unbounded happiness fit comfortably with Totten’s description of new Black travel writing strategies. Her empowerment and control over her life is clear in her feeling that: “The

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<sup>54</sup> Zatella R. Turner, *My Wonderful Year* (Boston, MA: The Christopher Publishing House, 1939). Turner received the Fourth Alpha Kappa Alpha Foreign Fellowship for 1935-1936. She spent a year at the University of London and writes about her impressions of England and several other countries she traveled to including Germany, France, Belgium, and Holland. Merze Tate received the Second AKA Foreign Fellowship for 1932-1933 which funded her first year of study at Oxford.

<sup>55</sup> Gary Totten, *African American Travel Narratives From Abroad: Mobility and Cultural Work in the Age of Jim Crow* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015).

<sup>56</sup> Terrell, *a Colored Woman*, 101.



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world is mine.” In Paris, she would finally fulfill her long-held dreams with the pleasures that awaited her in the city’s art galleries and theaters. Before she arrived, she was given an unexpected entrée into the City of Light during her transatlantic voyage.

Soon after her departure from New York in July 1888, Terrell met Mrs. Isabella Beecher Hooker onboard who befriended her. Mrs. Hooker was the half-sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe, and she gave Terrell letters of introduction. These letters were extremely valuable, and they were considered essential in the polite society of the day for foreign travelers as they confirmed their identity and facilitated their stay by providing connections to the proper social circles and professional groups. Terrell was delighted to receive this unsolicited help from a White American who showed no hint of racism. She explained that the letters of introduction were “to some of the most helpful and influential people in Paris” and that “These letters from Mrs. Hooker were an open sesame wherever and whenever I presented them.”<sup>57</sup> Terrell’s fortuitous meeting with Mrs. Hooker and her supportive letters opened doors for Terrell that would have otherwise been closed.

Terrell settled in and began her French and Swiss Diaries in Paris, and she wrote 48 entries in French between August 26, 1888, and February 3, 1889.<sup>58</sup> Her diaries offer specific details and reveal personal insights about her study abroad experiences in France and Switzerland, the people she met, and her touring of Europe’s most revered cultural sites. She wrote her candid impressions, and she even wrote down some of her conversations, all in French. The tone of her diaries is upbeat, and her entries are filled with the youthful exuberance of a carefree life balanced with language study. In her words, she had “not a care in the world, bubbling over with the enthusiasm of youth!”<sup>59</sup> Her stress-filled existence of being a raced

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>58</sup> Wilks, ‘The French and Swiss Diaries’, 9.

<sup>59</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 101.

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and gendered colored woman in a White world in America was left far behind. Jennifer M. Wilks translated Terrell's French and Swiss Diaries into English, and she suggests that they originated from Terrell's lifelong desire to become a writer. According to Wilks:

Church arrived in Europe committed to language study through nothing less than total immersion and thus resolved to record her thoughts in the languages of the countries in which she resided . . . It is through reading such lines as "Je veux écrire. Je dois écrire" (I want to write. I must write) that one begins to understand the urgency and longevity of Church's literary aspirations.<sup>60</sup>

Wilks believes that Terrell's diaries are of critical historical importance, and that "It is only by reading the unfiltered thoughts of her early diaries . . . that one can discover who Mary Eliza Church was before becoming an icon of African American and women's history."<sup>61</sup> Her diaries were naturally valuable sources for this thesis as I have mentioned. The following section includes her innermost thoughts from her diaries and her autobiography as she reveals how her language study abroad redefined her identity, her purpose in life and stirred her nascent patriotism.

Terrell boarded with a French family in Paris, and she totally immersed herself in the language by speaking only French. She also used translation as a study method, and she translated an article and an English book into French.<sup>62</sup> When she was not speaking French, she was reading French literature and visiting historic and cultural Parisian sights. When she needed a dentist in Paris, she engaged a British dentist, Dr. Chapman. After learning that he was a former editor of the *Westminster Review*, she sought his advice about her writing aspirations and asked his opinion. She wrote an entry in her French diary on September 12, 1888, about their conversation. Dr. Chapman advised her that:

If one has something to say, he will find the words to say it. One has to be full of a subject before trying to write. . . One must have a good design, a great desire to help people advance, to show them

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<sup>60</sup> Wilks, 'The French and Swiss Diaries', 9-10.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 10. Wilks also points out that even though Terrell's diaries have long been available to researchers and are housed at the Library of Congress, the volumes posed "linguistic and disciplinary challenges" because they were written in French and German.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 11, 20.

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their faults, or to try to improve the condition of the oppressed, the poor, and the ignorant. One must have, as the goal of writing, the advancement of society.<sup>63</sup>

He supported her desire to use her education to advance and uplift the race. She wrote that she respected him and described him as intelligent and benevolent, and she emphasized how grateful she was for his practical advice, suggestions, and encouragement.<sup>64</sup> Terrell does not mention whether they spoke in English or French, but of all the people she met in Paris, she spoke very highly and fondly of him. He, like Mrs. Isabella Beecher Hooker, became another friend in her growing interracial network that she continued to build in Europe.

Terrell thoroughly enjoyed her life in Paris; however, she quickly realized that the City of Light was too expensive for her budget, and she began researching other options. Her very first diary entry dated August 26, 1888, reads: “I came to Paris in order to learn the French language,” but she laments that “The pensions of Paris are expensive – too expensive for me and I have to leave Paris as soon as I can make arrangements to go. I would like to stay here but it bothers me to pay so dearly for the pension.”<sup>65</sup> Terrell showed both her frugality and character with this decision, because despite her family’s wealth, she apparently did not want to flaunt it. She reluctantly decided to leave Paris and move to Switzerland for further French study, because she believed she could find a less expensive pension there.<sup>66</sup>

Two days later on August 28, 1888, she wrote: “Today I read a book that is a guide to Swiss cities and I looked for addresses of pensions in Vevey, Lausanne, Ouchy, Leuva, and Villeneuve. I found several that are less expensive than those in Paris.”<sup>67</sup> She eventually decided that the city of Lausanne with its greenery would be a tranquil and suitable location to continue her French

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<sup>63</sup> Wilks, ‘The French and Swiss Diaries, 14.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

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studies. Before she left her beloved Paris, she spoke of visiting the panorama of the Bastille and Notre Dame, two places she did not want to miss.

So, after only one month in Paris, Terrell moved to Lausanne where she lived in a pension which she described as having “the most charming view of Lake Léman, not Geneva. It is absolutely forbidden to say Lake Geneva in Lausanne. How beautiful Lausanne is, and how happy I am with my pension.”<sup>68</sup> She boarded with a French-speaking family that consisted of a mother, father, and two daughters around her age. In addition to her immersive language learning with her host family, she also studied French composition and literature at a private girls’ gymnasium. She wrote in her autobiography:

In Lausanne I attended a private school for girls. Most of the pupils were younger than I, although I was by no means the oldest. I recited all my lessons in French and I was required to write compositions in French like the others. [I] learned much about the history and literature of Europe that I had not previously known and acquired many new points of view. I lived a long distance from the school and had to climb a steep incline – almost a young mountain - to reach it in the morning.<sup>69</sup>

Terrell spent a year in Lausanne studying French before she left to begin her German language studies.

She left Lausanne by train and headed to Berlin, Germany in the summer of 1889. Before she left, she bought a Baedeker’s guidebook to read and research the places she wanted to visit. She traveled across Switzerland’s “snow-capped alps” into Germany, but she stopped off in Munich and Dresden on the way. She hired a German tour guide in Munich to take her around the city, and she was glad to discover that her rusty German was sufficient for her to understand and be understood.<sup>70</sup> When she reached Dresden, she was surprised that it was “full of Americans,” and she was very glad that “I had decided to study in Berlin.” She acknowledged that she could likely face exported racism in Dresden when she “was trying to flee from the evils of race

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 20-21.

<sup>69</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 103.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 105.

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prejudice so depressing in my own country.”<sup>71</sup> Thus, she revealed another, until then, unspoken reason for her Grand Tour, a respite from American racism; however, this break would soon prove to be short lived.

She began writing her German Diary on September 22, 1889, after she arrived in Berlin.<sup>72</sup> The following is a translated version of the beginning of that entry:

Here I am in Berlin, where I have been neglecting my second journal for three weeks, but that's the way it is, and now I must try to make up for lost time. The last time I wrote here I was in Lausanne and was going to travel to Berlin on the following day. I went via Munich and Dresden.<sup>73</sup>

The translation sounds as though she was at a beginner's level in German. After finding a suitable pension, she wrote on September 27th that she had enrolled in Victoria Lyceum for German lessons. All was going smoothly until she experienced exported racism from two young American men who were staying at her pension owned by her landlady Fräulein von Finck. Two White American medical students, from Baltimore and Washington, D.C., complained to her landlady when they discovered she was living there. Terrell wrote in her autobiography: “I saw two young American men eyeing me as though they were anything but pleased to behold me in their midst.”<sup>74</sup>

They told her landlady that she was a Negro and demanded her removal, because in America, she would not be allowed to stay in “a first-class boarding house or hotel,” because of segregation. Until then, her landlady had not discerned that Terrell was a Negro; she had only seen the light-skinned Terrell as an American. She told the two White students, “But Fräulein Church is not a Negro . . . she is not black. She is no darker than Frau General von Wenckstern, a Spaniard.” The White men explained that her skin-color did not matter because of the one-drop rule that classified her as a Negro.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>72</sup> Wilks, 'The French and Swiss Diaries', 30.

<sup>73</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *Mary Church Terrell Papers: Diaries, -1951; -1889. - 1889, 1888*. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss425490001/>.

<sup>74</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 119.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 120.

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Terrell eventually left her pension, however, and she gave two reasons for her departure: her self-respect and consideration for her landlady's reputation. She explained that:

I felt that I could not retain my self-respect if I stayed another second in the same boarding house with two young men who were so full of prejudice against my race that they would drive from comfortable quarter a young colored girl who was alone in a foreign land three thousand miles from home . . . The incident proved to me that among some Americans race prejudice is such an obsession that they cannot lay it aside even in a foreign land, where there is no danger they will be pestered to any appreciable extent by the objectionable Negro. . . They did not hesitate to humiliate me and disturb my peace by attempting to persuade my landlady to put me out of the house.<sup>76</sup>

She tried to avoid being seen as intimidated and emphasized her sense of dignity and self-respect. She further revealed that "I told Fräulein von Finck I would not embarrass her by remaining under her roof another night."<sup>77</sup> Fraulein von Finck begged her to stay, but Terrell left a week later.

The incident shows that for some White Americans, an African American's level of education or class status did not matter, and they would always be viewed as 'Negroes' undeserving of respect or equality no matter how educated, refined, or intelligent they might be. The pervasive and pathological nature of White supremacy can only become authoritative in relation to the construction of a racialized other. The young White men confirmed the reported words of Chief Justice Roger B. Taney in the 1857 U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the Dred Scott case: "Black men and women have no rights which white men are bound to respect."<sup>78</sup>

Terrell approached and resolved the situation in Berlin by using the best solution from her standpoint as a Black woman in response to the imposition of the young men's social construction of race upon her life.<sup>79</sup> She maintained her self-respect, which they were unable to deny her through their exported racism. She felt humiliated, but she did not let them see it, and

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> See Jonathan W. White, 'Bound to Respect', *The American Scholar* (June 3, 2021). accessed May 2, 2023. <https://theamericanscholar.org/bound-to-respect/>.

<sup>79</sup> B. Cooper, 'Proper, Dignified Agitation', 58, 76. Terrell's response is related to what Brittney Cooper describes as the obscurantism characteristic of dissemblance which Black women used to combat racism and gender social constrictions and maintain their respectability.

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she applied the obscurantism characteristic of dissemblance. Terrell hid her true feelings and emotions from both the men and her landlady, and she left on her own terms with her self-respect intact. She outwitted the young men and resisted their attempts at stigmatizing her as a Negro, because her landlady refused to concede that she was a Negro even after she was told about the one-drop rule. She insisted that “Fräulein Church is not a Negro,” and the young men had failed to convert her to their racist beliefs.<sup>80</sup>

During her stay in Germany Terrell noticed that most Germans, like her landlady, did not share the racial prejudice the two men had brought with them from America, and she enjoyed the rest of her stay in Berlin. After the incident, she found a “delightful boarding place in the home of a widow of a court minister,” who had two daughters near her age. She proudly noted that “In Frau Oberprediger’s home I spoke German all the time and was never tempted to lapse into English.”<sup>81</sup>

Terrell also maintained an active social life to help her learn the language. After her first taste of German opera, she attended the opera in Berlin at least two to three times a week. The pragmatic Terrell believed that listening to good actors was the best way to educate the ear and acquire the correct pronunciation when studying a foreign language.<sup>82</sup> Finally, after several weeks of “steeping” herself in “German literature, music and drama, and going to the opera at night,” she left Berlin at the end of October 1889 and traveled to Italy, which was the last country on her Grand Tour.<sup>83</sup>

In Italy, Terrell settled in Florence, *La Belle* for about two months, the city where Sarah Parker Remond lived and worked as an obstetrician for 20 years. She stayed with an Italian widow and her young son and went with her to the Artists’ Ball, which she described as a

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<sup>80</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 120.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 122-123.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

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“unique affair” with participants wearing bizarre and risqué costumes.<sup>84</sup> It was in Florence that Terrell was able to visualize her ideas and philosophy about life, religion, and art.

The streets of Florence, my adopted home for a few months, have echoed with the footsteps of Dante, the divine singer, with Michel Angelo, the prince of sculptors and with Raphael who seems to have exhausted the resources of wit in the creation of his wonderful Madonna's and his no less wonderful saints.<sup>85</sup>

Here, Terrell shows her affinity for the classical traditions of European art and literature, and she places them in a universal cultural voice. She is claiming this voice in the context of the history of American racism, which denied African Americans their own cultural past or any claim to the cultural world of the United States. Since her purpose during her study abroad was cultural as well as educational, she wants to absorb as much European culture as possible, and in Florence, she can feel the echoes of these Renaissance luminaries even in its streets.

In the role of a critical theorist, she also used her Grand Tour as a site of resistance against the myriad racial and gendered limitations and humiliations America placed upon her as a Black woman. In doing so, she destroyed several prevailing myths. First and foremost, like all the women in the case studies, Terrell obliterated the pseudoscientific doctrine of the intellectual inferiority of Black people. She also deconstructed the myth that African Americans had the same rights and equal opportunities as White Americans. She found it necessary to correct her European friends' mistaken beliefs that Black Americans like herself were treated just as equally and had the same rights as their fellow White Americans. Many had never seen a Black person or a Black American before they met Terrell.

She wrote that they listened intensely and incredulously when she told them about legal and

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>85</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *Mary Church Terrell Papers: Speeches and Writings, 1953; 1891, "Another Glimpse of the Old World"*. 1891. Manuscript/Mixed Material, 33. accessed June 1, 2023. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss425490350>.



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de facto segregation, violation of their constitutional rights, and the illegal disenfranchisement African Americans suffered because of the color of their skin whether they were light skinned as she was or pitch black. They saw the fair-skinned Terrell and wondered why she called herself Black or a Negro. America's unique one-drop rule was difficult for them to understand.<sup>86</sup> One of her young German friends told Terrell that: "She could not believe that any human being could object to another solely on account of the color of his skin."<sup>87</sup> Terrell said she finally gave up trying to explain the concept to those who already saw her as another human being, one who was educated, intelligent, lively, and whose company they enjoyed.

Terrell did not set out to deconstruct these myths about life for Black people in America, because, like her German friends, she saw herself as no different from any other human being. In contrast to her experiences in America, she was satisfied that this was how the Europeans she met saw her as well, because she reported that:

Reams upon reams I might write if I tried to tell the innumerable acts of kindness shown me by the people through whose countries I have traveled or among whom I lived . . . Everywhere I went in Europe I received a cordial reception and made a host of friends.<sup>88</sup>

In this purposive stance, she critiques the U.S. by stressing the humane treatment and cordial welcome she enjoyed in Europe.

Terrell discovered that one key to the kindness she experienced was her upper-class standing along with her education, intellect, and language abilities which helped to eliminate any lingering racism Europeans might hold. She learned that her class mattered more to Europeans than it did to White Americans who did not distinguish African American class standings. She discovered that as an African American woman, wherever she went in Europe, her race and gender did not carry the stigma and burden they did in America.

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<sup>86</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 124.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* Her friend could not understand "why anybody would object to another human being because he happened to be a few shades darker than himself."

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

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She had received several marriage proposals from White Europeans during her stay including one from a young Jewish German lawyer, Barron Otto von Devoltz. However, in early February 1890, he made the mistake of writing to her father and asking for her hand in marriage without consulting her first, and she “upbraided” him. Other reasons for the end of their romance were her wariness of marrying a White man and the knowledge that her father “would never consent to his daughter’s marrying a foreigner and living abroad.”<sup>89</sup> Meanwhile, she had maintained her correspondence with Robert Terrell, and they became closer during the two years she was away. She was also aware that her father would more readily approve of Mr. Terrell as a suitable husband. As educated, independent, and career minded as she was, she still envisioned marriage and a family in her future; however, it remained her choice and her decision.

Meanwhile, Terrell’s Grand Tour had ended in Florence, and she had to decide whether to leave or stay in Europe. It was a difficult decision, but in the end, she discovered after two years abroad that her true calling was to uplift her fellow Black Americans rather than live life as an exile in a foreign land, however free from prejudice. If she stayed in Europe, she believed that she would be forsaking the suffering and sacrifices of her slave ancestors.

My African ancestors helped to build and enrich it [America] with their unrequited labor for nearly three hundred years, while they were shackled body and soul in the most cruel bondage the world has ever seen. My African ancestors suffered and died for it as slaves and they have fought, bled, and died for it as soldiers in every war which it has waged. It has been cruel to us in the past and it is often unjust to us now, but it is my country after all, I said aloud, “and with all its faults I love it still.”<sup>90</sup>

Ironically, Terrell had the opportunity to choose whether she wanted to live the life of an exile in

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<sup>89</sup> *ibid*, 126. Decades later, when Hitler had risen to power in Germany, Terrell reflected: “I wonder what my fate would have been if I had married my German friend. Where would I be today? Would I have been forced to leave Germany? If there had been any children, what would be their status now?” She thanked God that she was spared a painful ordeal. Although she was not against marrying a White European man, she did not want to live in the United States if she did, and yet, she “feared I would not be happy as an exile in a foreign land.” (*Ibid*).

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 133. Terrell’s description is like Anna Julia Cooper’s statement that “I speak for the colored women of the South, because it is there that the millions of blacks in this country have watered the soil with blood and tears, and it is there too that the colored woman of America has made her characteristic history, and there her destiny is evolving.” See: Anna Julia Cooper, ‘The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States Since the Emancipation Proclamation’ in May Wright Sewall, ed. *The World’s Congress of Representative Women* (New York, NY: Rand, McNally, 1894), 712. ‘The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States’ Cooper gave her speech at the May 1893 World’s

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a foreign land. In contrast, her slave ancestors, who were kidnapped from their homelands, were forced to live as exiles in a foreign land for the rest of their lives and without their consent.

Despite having a choice, Terrell did not reach her decision to return home easily, but in the end, she found that she identified more with America. Because of her African slave heritage and the brutal slavery her ancestors had endured, she felt an obligation to honor their memories by returning to her homeland. On the other hand, she said her heart ached at the thought of leaving, because:

Life had been so pleasant and profitable abroad, where I could take advantage of any opportunity I desired without wondering whether a colored girl would be allowed to enjoy it or not, and where I could secure accommodations in any hotel, boarding house, or private home in which I cared to live. I knew that when I returned home I would face again the humiliation, discrimination, and hardships to which colored people are subjected all over the United States.<sup>91</sup>

Terrell's description of the racism and hardships she expected to face as a "colored girl" upon her return to America is similar to W.E.B. Du Bois's expectations when he left Berlin to return to "Negro-hating" America in 1894 after two years as a student there.<sup>92</sup> The weariness in their feelings in anticipation of their return to their homeland is unmistakable and identical.

Terrell's study abroad experiences had caused her to reflect and think about her purpose in life and her writing aspirations, which she shared in her conversations with Dr. Chapman.<sup>93</sup> She also took time to rethink her identity as a colored woman in White America and her African slave heritage. By the end of her two years, she had gone from being shocked and ashamed of having slave ancestors during her youth in Yellow Springs to being proud of them. Her time abroad gave her the opportunity to consider an expatriate life in a land where people exhibited little racial prejudice versus returning home to a country where she would continue to face it.

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Exposition in Chicago to an international audience of The World's Congress of Representative Women. She was one of five African American women who spoke at this major event which included women from around the world.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>92</sup> See W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc, 1999), 9.

<sup>93</sup> Wilks, 'The French and Swiss Diaries', 14.

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However, America was also the country that her ancestors had built and enriched, fought, bled, and died for, despite being kept in cruel bondage. She was now able to fully embrace her identity as a “colored woman” who was descended from slave ancestors. Terrell was expressing as far back as 1890, the torn loyalties and identity crises that African Americans still struggle with in deciding whether to live abroad in Europe and elsewhere around the globe or to continue to live with systemic and institutionalized racism in America. As for Terrell, she expressed her happiness upon leaving, and she wrote in her autobiography, “I was glad when the steamer began to plough the sea to bring me home.”<sup>94</sup> Even the tempting prospect of a permanent release from the humiliations, degradation, and injustices of Jim Crow could not persuade her to stay.

### 5.3 Domestic Activism in America

*By theorizing humanity and researching themes central to justice, they sought to simultaneously uplift the black race, improve women’s status and add to human knowledge. ~ Stephanie Y. Evans.*<sup>95</sup>

An examination of Terrell’s domestic activities can serve as a bridge to her transnational work. From a holistic perspective her activities in America and Europe are not mutually exclusive, and they are both essential parts of her legacy. They overlap in several areas such as Black women’s rights, suffrage, education, human and civil rights, and lynching. Upon her return home, Terrell dedicated her life to eradicating lynching, segregation, the Convict Lease System, and racial and social injustices that African Americans endured in every part of the United States.

She was at the forefront of all these causes from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries in the United States and abroad. In America, she led and joined protest marches, boycotts, strikes, she gave speeches, wrote for the Black newspaper, *The Defender*, filed successful anti-discrimination lawsuits, published articles, met with local, national and

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<sup>94</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 133. See also Parker, *Unceasing Militant*, 39. “She returned to the United States to embrace an engagement, marriage, and partnership that would allow her to launch a career of social and political activism on behalf of her race.”

<sup>95</sup> Stephanie Y. Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954: An Intellectual History* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2008), 125.

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international officials and dignitaries, picketed the White House and testified before Congressional committees to support the passage of civil rights legislation.<sup>96</sup> She tirelessly campaigned against gender discrimination of Black women in education, employment, and health care, and what she viewed as their disproportionate racist and gendered incarceration well into her 80s. At the age of 85 in 1949, she won a lawsuit to integrate the AAUW (American Association of University Women), which I discuss in the next chapter on Merze Tate.

Terrell's multifaceted activism and her dedicated commitment to social justice was underpinned by her intersectional theorizing and her leadership in feminist empowerment. In keeping with her strategy of dignified agitation built upon a framework of respectability, she prioritized non-violent direct action and legal solutions for multiple intersections of oppression from race and gender to the criminal justice and health care systems.

With her study abroad fulfilled, she had gained valuable international experience, and she was well poised to begin her intersectional theorizing and dignified agitation. She returned to America in 1890, and she married Robert Terrell a year later in 1891. As a result, she was forced by law to resign from her teaching position at the M Street School in Washington, D.C., where she and her husband had settled, because married women were not allowed to teach.<sup>97</sup>

This gender discrimination was not unexpected, but it would still have been a great disappointment to Terrell. She explained that she had attended university to avail herself of opportunities and to prepare herself "for a life of usefulness." She knew that she would "not be happy leading a purposeless existence."<sup>98</sup> Her husband had no objection to her working, and he

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<sup>96</sup> For a comprehensive summary of her many domestic activities, campaigns, achievements and successes see the 'Introduction: From Emancipation to Brown,' in Parker, *Unceasing Militant*, 1-4. Parker discusses the timeline of her activities from the 1890s to 1954.

<sup>97</sup> B. Cooper, 'Proper Dignified Agitation', 61-63; Parker, *Unceasing Militant*, 40. Parker explains that: "Educated women with teaching careers lost their jobs once they married." This was not true for married men, and they could keep their jobs.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid*, 92.

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was the rare man who did not feel threatened by educated, intelligent Black women.<sup>99</sup> Terrell's Oberlin College classmate Anna Julia Cooper wrote a scathing commentary on this issue in her book, *A Voice From the South* (1892). She wrote in 'The Higher Education of Woman':

The old subjective, stagnant, indolent and wretched life for woman has gone. She has as many resources as men, as many activities beckon her on. As large possibilities swell and inspire her heart. . . . The question is not now with the woman "How shall I so cramp, stunt, simplify and nullify myself to make me eligible to the honor of being swallowed up into some little man?" but the problem I throw, now rests with the man as to how he can so develop his God-given powers as to reach the ideal of a generation of women who demand the noblest, grandest and best achievements of which he is capable.<sup>100</sup>

Terrell's forced resignation from teaching after her marriage is an example of Anna Julia Cooper's belief that society's treatment of women is calculated to make them more dependent on marriage for economic support if they chose not to remain single.<sup>101</sup>

Terrell worked diligently toward the empowerment of African American women through a multitude of club work activities. She was elected president of the Bethel Historical and Literary Society in Washington, D.C. in 1892.<sup>102</sup> Educated Black women like Terrell were actively engaged with race uplift, and beginning at the end of the eighteenth century, they established dozens of female literary societies across America after being barred from White women's organizations. These societies became pulpits for educational, literary, and political activism. Bethel was open to all and held weekly public meetings, readings, lectures, and discussions.<sup>103</sup> Terrell also co-founded the Colored Women's League in 1892 with Anna Julia Cooper and Mary Jane Patterson.<sup>104</sup> The League was the precursor to the National Association of Colored Women

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>100</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (New York, NY: Oxford, University Press, 1988), 70-71. (Originally published in 1892).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>102</sup> McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 185. Although most of these earlier literary societies such as Bethel no longer exist, their legacies and stories resonate today, and they have inspired a new generation of African American literary societies in the 21st century.

<sup>103</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *Mary Church Terrell Papers: Subject File, -1962; Bethel Literary and Historical Association, Washington, D.C., 1895 to 1896*. Manuscript/Mixed Material. accessed June 2, 2023. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss425490257/>.

<sup>104</sup> Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower*, 81.

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(NACW). Terrell was a founding member when it was created in 1896 in Washington, D.C., and she served as the first NACW president from 1896-1900. This is the position and organization for which Terrell is most remembered, and it was the most prominent Black women's club at that time. The NACW's motto was "lifting as we climb," and it was based on the idea that Black women's education was essential for the success of race uplift.

Anna Julia Cooper had warned in *A Voice From the South* as far back as 1892 that the advancement of the Black community would not occur without the advancement of Black women, especially their education.<sup>105</sup> Working with the NACW, the Bethel Literacy Society, and other clubwomen's organizations, Terrell was a tireless advocate for education as the way for race uplift, and she supported and taught literacy to Black women. Politically, she was involved with the National American Women's Suffrage Association, and she proudly marched with other African American suffragists in a March 1913 parade in Washington, D.C. and thwarted attempts by White suffragists to stop them from participating.<sup>106</sup>

Lynching was also high on her agenda, and she supported the 1918 Dyer Anti-Lynching Act which would have made lynching a federal crime, but it was never passed into law due to the strong opposition and delaying tactics of White Southern politicians. Terrell testified before several U.S. Congressional Committees to urge passage of this Act.<sup>107</sup> Despite the nearly 5,000 African Americans who had been lynched between 1882 and 1968, the United States government did not pass an anti-lynching bill until March 29, 2022, when President Joe Biden signed the Emmett Till Antilynching Act into law, which made lynching a federal hate crime.

### 5.4 Transnational Activities in Europe: 1904-1937

Terrell did not have a transnational agenda before she studied abroad. Her study and travel

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<sup>105</sup> Anna Julia Cooper, 'The Higher Education of Woman' in *A Voice from the South* (New York, NY: Oxford, University Press, 1988), 48-79. (Originally published in 1892).

<sup>106</sup> Parker, *Unceasing Militant*, 126.

<sup>107</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 143, 452.

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experiences in Europe shaped her subsequent activism and fueled her membership in international organizations. She felt a responsibility to educate Europeans about Black Americans' domestic problems of segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement. She also informed them about the unabated crime of lynching as her contemporary Ida B. Wells had done, and it was a cornerstone of her transnational activism.<sup>108</sup> She crisscrossed the Atlantic several times between 1904 and 1937 to attend conferences and congresses in Europe, usually as a delegate and speaker. Terrell promoted interracial solidarity and transnational alliances to engage with Europeans about the issues facing Black Americans. She reasoned that the minority of African American women "must continue their attempts at interracial dialogue with the majority group of white women, in order to achieve their goals."<sup>109</sup> She expanded this collaborative strategy transnationally to include European women.

Terrell traveled to Germany in 1904 to implement her agenda transnationally, and she was the only Black delegate and speaker at the International Congress of Women (ICW) in Berlin. She astounded the audience when she delivered her speech first in German to honor the hosts, then French, and finally in English. She began her speech by saying:

If it had not been for the War of the Rebellion, my friends, which resulted in a victory for the Union forces in 1865, instead of addressing you as a free woman tonight, in all human probability I should be on some plantation in one of the southern states of my country, manacled body and soul in the fetters of a slave.<sup>110</sup>

She wanted her audience to understand the historical significance of her appearance at the conference for African Americans. If slavery had not been abolished, she would still be enslaved in America and would never have been able to address the ICW in 1904. She did not want her

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<sup>108</sup> See Mary Church Terrell, 'Lynching from a Negro's Point of View', *North American Review*, vol. 178, no. 571 (June 1904): 853-868. She began this article by stating that: "Before 1904 was three months old, thirty-one negroes had been lynched." She added that "Hanging, shooting, and burning black men, women, and children in the United States have become so common that such occurrences created but little sensation and evoke but slight comment now." (Ibid 853).

<sup>109</sup> Parker, *Unceasing Militant*, 131-132.

<sup>110</sup> Mary Church Terrell, *Mary Church Terrell Papers: Speeches and Writings, -1953; 1904, June 13, Address to be Delivered at the International Congress of Women in Berlin, Germany also German translation*. 1904. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Accessed July 11, 2023. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss425490363/>.



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audience to regard American slavery as ancient history; she wanted them to understand her personal connection and how its eradication had saved her from its bondage and chains. For the rest of her speech, she focused on the situation of the millions of African American women in the United States and their accomplishments and challenges in a nation that still had not granted them their equal rights and which regarded them as mentally inferior and lacking in morality.

Despite these and other obstacles, she informed the audience of the many achievements of African American women in the short 40-year span since the end of slavery. She listed their accomplishments in America and abroad in Europe and Canada in academia, the professions, and business. She noted that:

In spite of the almost insurmountable obstacles which block their path, the progress made by Colored women along all lines is a veritable miracle of modern times. Mentally, morally and financially they are advancing at a rapid rate. From the most renowned universities as well as from the best colleges and high schools throughout the United States, Colored girls have graduated with honor and have thus forever settled the question of their capacity and worth . . . In the professions we have several lawyers, together with a goodly number of dentists and doctors whose practice is lucrative and large. In business Colored women have achieved signal success.<sup>111</sup>

Terrell did not mention her university degrees, and she only modestly mentioned that she was the former president of the National Association of Colored Women. She said she had one goal: “I wanted to place the colored women of the United States in the most favorable light possible.” She believed that she not only represented African American women, but as the only Black woman at the Congress, she represented “the whole continent of Africa as well.”<sup>112</sup> She felt her ovation was because she was a descendant of recently freed slaves who “spoke a foreign language well enough to deliver an address in it.”<sup>113</sup>

I argue that she achieved much more than recognition of her foreign language skills. In her

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 244.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

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emerging role as a transnational activist, Terrell succeeded in giving what she termed the ‘race problem’ in America an international platform. Because she dared to raise her voice against this systemic racism, she was bombarded with requests from European newspapers and magazines in Norway, France, Austria, Germany and other countries for articles about this pressing issue. In a dinner conversation with her hosts and other guests, she detected the same lack of knowledge and understanding about the status and treatment of Black people in America as she had encountered in Germany during her study abroad Grand Tour. She vowed after the 1904 Congress that: “for the rest of my natural life, I shall devote as much of my time and strength as I can to enlightening my friends across the sea upon the condition of the race problem in the United States, as it really is.”<sup>114</sup> Her commitment to transnational networking in an interracial context places her alongside Remond as one of the earliest Black women internationalists.

In her role as a transnational activist, Terrell continued to serve as a delegate to international peace and women’s rights conferences in Germany, England, France, and Switzerland for the remainder of her life. She never ceased to inform the Europeans about the situation in the U.S. for African Americans from systemic racism to lynching and legalized Jim Crow segregation, which the U.S. Supreme Court approved in its 1896 Plessy v Ferguson decision. Her main objective at international conferences was to give Europeans the “credible facts” about the situation of colored women in the United States.<sup>115</sup> Just as Remond had done decades earlier during slavery, Terrell sought transnational support from Europeans and urged them to take a moral stand against the oppressive conditions in which African Americans lived.

The next major conferences Terrell attended were in 1919. The first was the February 1919

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<sup>114</sup> Mary Church Terrell, ‘The International Congress of Women’, *Voice of the Negro* (October 1904): 460.

<sup>115</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 237-238.

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Pan-African Congress in Paris where she connected with people from Africa, the Caribbean, and the Black diaspora in Europe. Later in May 1919, she was a U.S. delegate at the Women's International Congress for Peace and Freedom (WICPF) in Zurich, Switzerland.<sup>116</sup> She also delivered a speech in German at St. Peter's Cathedral in Zurich, and she traveled and shared a hotel room with Jane Addams, the well-known suffragist and settlement activist who was president of the U.S. peace organization, the International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).<sup>117</sup>

Terrell noted that she was once again the only woman of African descent at the International Congress in Zurich, and she was obliged to represent all Black women worldwide. She wrote a bold resolution into the official proceedings which condemned racial discrimination.<sup>118</sup> Along with her colleagues, she also demanded an end to the economic imperialism of Western nations and for international disarmament, a critical issue which Merze Tate would later support. When the Zurich Congress ended, Terrell traveled to Etienne, France to visit her Oberlin classmate, Ida Gibbs Hunt and her husband, the Honorable William H. Hunt who was the U.S. Consul in that city. It must be noted that as U.S. Consul, Hunt was a rarity in 1919 when few African Americans were assigned to consulate posts in Europe, because most were sent to Africa or the Caribbean.

In 1922, Terrell was a co-founder of The International Council of Women of the Darker Races (ICWDR), which was formed after the 1922 meeting of the National Association of Colored Women in Richmond, Virginia.<sup>119</sup> The ICWDR helped to form a bond among women of color who called themselves 'women of the darker races'. It operated from 1922 to 1940, and it

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<sup>116</sup> Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower*, 81.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Parker, *Unceasing Militant*, 148.

<sup>119</sup> Michelle Rief, 'Thinking Locally, Acting Globally: The International Agenda of African American Clubwomen, 1880-1940', *The Journal of African American History*, vol. 89, no. 3 (Summer, 2004): 203-222.

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was the first autonomous international organization formed by African American women. This organization had a Pan-African and indigenous people's agenda, and Sheilena M. Downey asserts that it was the precursor to women of color feminism.<sup>120</sup> African American women recognized their common heritage with other Black and indigenous women worldwide, because of their connected and inseparable slavery, colonial, and imperialist histories. Michelle Rief investigated Black American women's activities in the international arena, and she uncovered the breadth of their political agenda after they "realized that local race problems were mirrored on a global level."<sup>121</sup> Rief notes that it was Terrell's experiences abroad that compelled her to "develop an international outlook" and join the ICWDR.<sup>122</sup>

In July 1937, the indefatigable 64-year-old Terrell was in London representing African Americans at the World Fellowship of Faiths. In her autobiography, she describes how she was invited to attend the conference by Charles F. Weller, a general secretary of the Fellowship. He urged her to come and share her voice and concerns as a Black American. The theme of the conference was 'Peace and Progress Through World Fellowship', and Terrell was one of 54 speakers who delivered addresses.<sup>123</sup>

Afterwards, she was the invited guest at a luncheon given by "Viscountess Snowden, widow of the late Chancellor of the Exchequer."<sup>124</sup> Lady Astor also invited her "to tea on the terrace of the House of Commons," and her long-time friends, Mr. and Mrs. H.G. Wells invited her to tea as well.<sup>125</sup> However, for Terrell, the highlight of her "latest sojourn in England" was her meeting with Emperor Haile Selassie. They spoke in French, and she expressed her support for

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<sup>120</sup> Sheilena M. Downey, 'Precursor to Women of Color Feminism: The International Council of Women of the Darker Races of the World and Their Internationalist Orientation' *Meridians* 1, vol. 19, no. 2 (October 2020): 271–277.

<sup>121</sup> Rief, 'Thinking Locally, Acting Globally', 203.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> Terrell, *A Colored Woman*, 445–446.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 446.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 446–447.

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Ethiopia's struggle against Italian imperialism, and she told him that: "right-minded and justice-loving people all over the world considered Italy a highway robber [and] sympathized deeply with Ethiopia and hoped that some day, somehow, justice would triumph in the end."<sup>126</sup>

The London Fellowship Conference and her meeting with Emperor Haile Selassie underscore the significance and impact of her post-Grand Tour work as a dedicated transnational activist. Over several decades, she promoted peace, justice, and interracial solidarity and formed lasting friendships with some of the most prominent White and Black leaders and activists of her time. Like Remond, she was part of an extensive interracial transnational network that led to collaborations and friendships with influential men and women over several decades. In addition to the people mentioned above, in her autobiography, she describes friendships with Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, Anna Julia Cooper, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, and the Countess of Warwick. She continued to promote interethnic solidarity with indigenous women and other women of color whose lands were subjected to European colonization and cultural, educational, and economic oppression. Mary Church Terrell was truly a citizen of the world, and the foreign language skills she gained during her study abroad in Europe proved to be formidable assets in her transnational activities.

### 5.5 Conclusion

*You may write me down in  
history With your bitter,  
twisted lies, You may trod  
me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise. ~ Maya Angelou, Still I Rise.<sup>127</sup>*

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 447-449.

<sup>127</sup> Maya Angelou, *And Still I Rise* (New York, NY: Random House, 1978).

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This chapter explored how Mary Church Terrell navigated race, gender, and class intersections at home and abroad, her educational, cultural and social experiences during her European Grand Tour, and the effects of her study abroad on her identity, career, and transnational activism. It examined and compared her identity before and after her study abroad from her unique standpoint as a Black woman to understand her personal and political development over time. The findings show that her domestic militancy and her transnational activism in Europe were both shaped by her study abroad and travel experiences during her Grand Tour, which not only broadened her foreign language knowledge but also clarified her career path and world view. On the one hand it helped her to realize that her calling was to return home and pursue race uplift for her fellow African Americans. On the other, it helped her to understand that the true racial situation of Black people in America was not well known by the Germans and other Europeans she met and that it could be better exposed through transnational activism and interracial networking.

The findings also show that during her youth, Terrell was troubled by the post-traumatic slave syndrome, and she struggled to accept that she was descended from slaves, a fact she may have suppressed because it shamed her. Although Terrell and her parents were born enslaved, this revelation stunned her, and she applied the obscurantism characteristic of dissemblance to hide her shame. Her experiences traveling and living among various European ethnicities and cultures gave her a new perspective about her own people, and she remembered the suffering and sacrifices of her slave ancestors when she was considering whether to remain in Europe after her studies. After reflecting on their history and contributions, she now looked upon her slave ancestors with pride. As she embraced her new identity, which was tinged with patriotism, Terrell decided that she could not abandon her people and live as an exile in a foreign land - even one without race prejudice.

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During her travels, Terrell astounded Europeans with her intellect and language abilities, and she helped to deconstruct denigrating and stereotypical images of Black people as inferior human beings. She developed friendships with many influential upper-class Europeans whom she enchanted by speaking in their languages. The only racism she experienced was from two White American men, and she applied the obscurantism of dissemblance and her Black female agency of resilience to find another pension.

The main conclusion from these findings is that Terrell's study abroad experiences played a key role in the acceptance of her identity as an African American and her decision to return to her country and work for race uplift. She became an agent for change upon her return, and she made long-lasting contributions to African American education, literacy, women's and civil rights and transnationally to Pan-Africanism and peace conferences in Europe, and she was still active in her 80s. In a historical case study, which is bounded by time, place, race, gender, and class, Terrell's trailblazing achievements in study abroad, transnationalism, and her domestic contributions to women's and civil rights merit her inclusion in this project, and they define her legacy.

## Chapter Six: Merze Tate

*Being a woman studying at Oxford in the 1930s was, in itself, an outstanding accomplishment. Yet, to do so as a 'coloured woman', as Tate described herself, was a truly remarkable and mind-blowing achievement. However, what is even more striking is that Tate's place in intellectual history has been massively overlooked. ~ Imaobong Umeron<sup>1</sup>*

### 6.0 Introduction

When Merze Tate (1905-1996) received her B.Litt. degree in International Relations from the University of Oxford in June 1935, she noted that “I was the only colored American in the entire university, man or woman, and the first to get a higher research degree.”<sup>2</sup> This study abroad milestone was just one of the many firsts she achieved throughout her long life. After Oxford, Tate earned her PhD in Government and International Relations from Harvard University's Radcliffe College in 1941, which was another first for an African American woman. Tate is one of those rare persons, male or female, who has degrees from both Oxford and Harvard. In 1942, she began her 35-year teaching career as one of two Black women in the history department at Howard University in Washington, D.C. and she specialized in international relations.<sup>3</sup>

Tate was an intellectual and a diplomatic historian who combined her Howard professorship with her transnational scholarship and global research activities. She traveled the world and blazed a trail as a prolific scholar, researcher, author, and lecturer on disarmament, diplomatic history, imperialism, and Hawaii and the Pacific region. She broke transnational barriers for all women, regardless of color as a Fulbright Scholar in India and as an advisor for the U.S. State Department. Her B.Litt. degree from Oxford in 1935 demonstrated her early intervention in the White male-dominated field of international relations. It meant that an African American woman had a seat and a voice at the androcentric table that transcended the intersections of race and gender.

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<sup>1</sup> Imaobong Umeron, 'Professor Barbara Savage, Professor Merze Tate, and Black Women's Intellectual History. accessed September 10, 2023. <https://torch.ox.ac.uk/article/professor-barbara-savage-professor-merze-tate-and-black-womens-intellectual-history>

<sup>2</sup> Merze Tate, 'Three Years in England', *Ivy Leaf* vol. 14, no. 1 (March 1936): 40. Tate liked to point out that Alain Locke, the first African American Rhodes Scholar, had studied at Oxford University from 1907-1910 as an undergraduate student while her B.Litt. was a postgraduate research degree.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara D. Savage, 'Beyond Illusions: Imperialism, Race, and Technology in Merze Tate's International Thought' in Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler, eds. *Women's International Thought: A New History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 266-267.



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I argue that her groundbreaking accomplishments were the result of her determination, resilience, perseverance, and initiative characteristic of Black female agency. Like Remond and Terrell, Tate's case study is viewed through the lens of Black Feminist Thought and intersectionality to conceptualize her complex standpoint as a Black woman. This complexity is due to her racialized and gendered positionality prescribed at birth, which placed her at the bottom of America's educational, social, and economic hierarchy. These methodologies extrapolate key takeaways about her respect and reverence for education and highlight her determined efforts to succeed at Oxford and be a credit to her race despite the intersectional oppressions. As a result of her race, Tate, like the other women in the case studies, faced discrimination in the United States even though she was born in the Midwest and not in the segregated Jim Crow South. However, at Oxford, this was not the case, and Tate's time there was not plagued by the systemic racism she experienced in America.

As far as Oxford was concerned, Tate's race was not problematic. According to Dr. David Smith, the former librarian and archivist at St. Anne's College, there is no evidence in Tate's archives that any of her tutors ever discussed her race among themselves or with her. Barbara Savage also emphasized that Tate: "made no mention of any hostilities or incidents directed at her."<sup>4</sup> St. Anne's College was known as the Society of Oxford Home-Students when Tate attended. She explained in her interview for the Black Women Oral History Project that she participated freely in a variety of clubs and societies at Oxford without any racial obstacles and that her best friend and roommate, Margaret Johnson, was from New Zealand.<sup>5</sup> Tate was fortunate that she did

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<sup>4</sup> David Smith, 'The Lives of Others', *The Ship*, St. Anne's College (2010-2011): 5-10. accessed August 10, 2023. <https://doczz.net/doc/4785436/the-ship-2010-2011---st-anne-s-college>. According to Smith, ". . . in the quite extensive file of correspondence I found about Merze Tate, none of her tutors so much as mentioned race, either to her or to each other; to the Misses Butler, Miss Hadow [the principals] and their contemporaries, to have done so would doubtless have been both bad manners and a distraction from that generation's rigorous and steely pursuit of learning."; and Barbara D. Savage, *Merze Tate: The Global Odyssey of a Black Woman Scholar* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023) 58.

<sup>5</sup> Merze Tate, Oral History Transcript, 'Black Women Oral History Project Interviews, 1976-1981'. Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, 60. accessed August 12, 2023. [https://guides.library.harvard.edu/schlesinger\\_bwohp](https://guides.library.harvard.edu/schlesinger_bwohp) (Unpublished partial transcript is available upon request.)

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not experience and suffer from the racist abuse that Alain Locke endured during his time at Oxford from 1907-1910 as the first African American Rhodes Scholar.<sup>6</sup>

The literature that does exist on Tate has not applied Black Feminist Thought and intersectionality to examine her academic experiences at Oxford or her earlier 1931 summer study in Geneva, Switzerland, and I argue that these experiences were critical in shaping her future PhD studies and her international relations career choice. The main concern of the extant literature has been her post-Oxford career, research, and scholarship. A recent example is Barbara D. Savage's intellectual biography, *Merze Tate: The Global Odyssey of a Black Woman Scholar*, which was available to world-wide audiences in February 2024.<sup>7</sup>

Savage's primary research interest, as her title suggests, is in Tate the intellectual, the development of her international thought, and analysis of her prolific body of work as an international relations expert and diplomatic historian in a global context. She notes that: "Tate was among that minority of African American scholars who did not focus their work on domestic racial matters," and that she "has all but disappeared from the narrative of American and African American diplomatic, political, and intellectual life in the twentieth century, or for that matter, Black women's history."<sup>8</sup> To rectify this, Savage's biography focuses on Tate's post-Oxford years and not on her study abroad experiences at Oxford. My research aims are different because I apply Black feminist epistemologies and intersections of race, gender, and class to examine her Oxford experiences and how they affected her post-Oxford career.

Savage's book is both timely and important, because Tate's international relations research and warnings about disarmament resonate today in ongoing global conflicts. Besides Savage, very few scholars have researched and published holistic academic literature on Tate. Linda

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<sup>6</sup> See Christopher Buck, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy* (Los Angeles, CA: Kalimat Press, 2005), 15-16.

<sup>7</sup> Savage, Merze Tate. It is important to note that when I began researching this thesis in April 2021, Savage's book had not yet been published. Like Tate, Savage has a connection with Oxford University; she was the Harmsworth Visiting Professor of American History at Oxford's Rothermere American Institute from 2018-2019.

<sup>8</sup> Savage, 'Beyond Illusions', 267.

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Perkins examined Tate's problematic experiences as one of the first women in Howard University's history department and her protests against gender discrimination in pay and promotions. Tate had a prolonged battle with Rayford Logan about gender bias in salary equity for women when he was the history department chair.<sup>9</sup> Being a Black woman at an all-Black university may have spared her from racial discrimination, but at Howard, she was snared by the gender trap. Tate's post-Oxford professional struggles at Howard illustrate the critical role that gender played as she worked to establish her career in America. Gender had been negligible during her university studies in America, her 1931 summer course in Geneva, and at Oxford except for its segregated women's colleges.

Lastly, Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler are the lead editors of an anthology with an Anglo-American focus about women's contributions to international thought, which includes chapters on Merze Tate, Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, and Lucie A. Zimmern among the nearly 100 women profiled.<sup>10</sup> It is encouraging to see that this anthology acknowledges and honors these African American women as early thinkers and activists in international relations. However, Owens and Rietzler point out that women were excluded from the history and development of international relations because of their gender.<sup>11</sup> They argue that the women in their anthology "defined and transformed the substance of international relations as it emerged as a separate intellectual field."<sup>12</sup> They aim to illuminate this gender disparity in contemporary historiography which ignores women's "centrality to international relations discourse" from the late nineteenth century to the long mid-twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> Tate is among these overlooked women who dared to enter the exclusive male domain of international relations and faced gender

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<sup>9</sup> Linda Perkins, 'Merze Tate and the Quest for Gender Equity at Howard University: 1942–1977', *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 4 (November 2014): 524.

<sup>10</sup> See 'Merze Tate', 'The War Aims of World War I and World War II and Their Relation to the Darker Peoples of the World' (1943), in Patricia Owens, Katharina Rietzler, Kimberly Hutchings, and Sarah C. Dunstan, *Women's International Thought: Towards a New Canon* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 323–333.

<sup>11</sup> Owens and Rietzler, et al, *Women's International Thought*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

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challenges in their careers.

Tate's chapter in this anthology is a reprint of her 1943 article 'The War Aims of World War I and World War II and Their Relation to the Darker Peoples of the World'.<sup>14</sup> She questioned whether people of color around the world could expect "a just and durable peace" after two world wars. She feared that World War II would result, in her words, in another "division of the spoils of the vanquished and a return to the status quo" of mandated lands, which the League of Nations had parceled out to the victors of World War I.<sup>15</sup> She believed that nations with imperialist mentalities would ignore their mandated subjects' demands for independence and curtail their progressive development. It was fortuitous and timely for the authors to include Tate's 1943 article in this 2022 anthology, because it is an example of her visionary geopolitical ideology which I contend has contemporary resonance for international relations in the Levant.

The primary sources about Tate which offer the best insight into her experiences at Oxford come from Tate herself. Fortunately, she left multiple archival artifacts, and these sources are the exception to the "archival absences and silences" which are common in Black women's history.<sup>16</sup> They include her student file at Oxford's St. Anne's College Archives, her 1978 oral history interview for the Black Women History Project, and her 1935 article, 'My Three Years in England', for her Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority known as the AKAs.<sup>17</sup> All these primary sources are

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<sup>14</sup> See Merze Tate, 'The War Aims of World War I and World War II and Their Relation to the Darker Peoples of the World' *The Journal of Negro Education*, vol. 12, (Summer 1943): 521–532. Tate posed and answered the question in this article: "What is meant when one refers to the darker peoples of the world?" She answered that in addition to Negroes in America, people from the Caribbean, Central, and South America, these "peoples of color" include inhabitants of Africa, Asia, the Mediterranean littoral, and Oceania - the islands of the Central and Western Pacific. She included virtually every place in the world except Europe. (Ibid, 521).

<sup>15</sup> Owens and Rietzler, et al, *Women's International Thought*, 323.

<sup>16</sup> Savage, *Merze Tate*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Tate also donated her papers including her Travel Diary to Howard University, and they are in the Moorland Spingarn Research Center at Howard University, Washington, D.C. They are not digitized, and these papers are only available by visiting the university in-person, and they were not accessible to this researcher. See Merze Vernie Tate Papers, Coll. 219. Moorland-Spingarn Research Center. accessed May 11, 2024.

<https://huaspace.wrlc.org/public/repositories/2/resources/443>

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filled with Tate's own voice, and they provide this study with valuable insight into how she was able to become the first African American woman to graduate from Oxford.

Tate's Oxford archives are vast, and they include her personal correspondence with the American Association of University Women (AAUW) who administered her Oxford application process, her letters of recommendation, her correspondence with the Society of Oxford Home-Students' principals, her tutors and professors, and financial documents including her loan applications, scholarships, and grants. These archives offer a first-hand account and provide an intimate look from Tate's perspective into the academic and funding struggles she faced during her time at Oxford.

The transcript of Tate's 1978 oral history interview and audio files for the Black Women Oral History Project are reposted in the Schlesinger Library at the Harvard Radcliffe Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts as part of the library's History of Women in America holdings.<sup>18</sup> Harvard alumna Letitia Woods Brown (1915-1976) developed the idea for the project. She was the first African American woman to receive a PhD in History from Harvard University in 1966. Brown noticed the inadequate documentation of African-American women's history, and she recommended that the Schlesinger Library collect the oral memoirs of older Black women. The project focused on prominent and lesser-known women in their 70s to 90s to preserve the significant contributions they made which improved the lives of African Americans.

Tate's oral history covers her life until 1978 when she gave the interview, which was more than 40 years after she graduated from Oxford. Despite the passage of time, Tate provides nuanced details about her education in America, her 1931 summer study abroad in Geneva, and her recollections about her stay at Oxford. She emphasizes her schooling, her outstanding academic record throughout her studies, and her worldwide travels during her professional career, but she shares few details about her relationships with her parents and siblings or about her religion. She

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<sup>18</sup> 'Black Women Oral History Project Interviews, 1976-1981', Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, 60. accessed August 12, 2023. [https://guides.library.harvard.edu/schlesinger\\_bwohp](https://guides.library.harvard.edu/schlesinger_bwohp)

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does not always present the information chronologically, but her engaging personality, sense of humor, wit, and astounding ability to remember many details from past decades are present throughout her interview.

Another valuable primary source is Tate's article 'Three Years in England', which she submitted to her Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority at the 18th AKA Boulé Conference in December 1935. She called it "a brief report of three crowded years of study abroad."<sup>19</sup> She describes her courses, the impact and influence of her professors, her academic and social experiences, and her extensive travel around Europe during her term vacations. Tate's account paints a portrait of an adventurous, but serious and studious, young woman who is determined to succeed and eager to explore cultural sites in interwar Europe at the height of the Great Depression. Most of Tate's worldwide travel and research occurred after her 1935 Oxford graduation, so I have included a brief section which highlights these transnational activities which are an essential part of her intellectual legacy.

### 6.1 Life in America: Family, Education, and Early Career

Tate began her oral history interview by describing her unique childhood and education where she was often the only Black student. Vernie Merze Tate was born on February 6, 1905, in Blanchard, Michigan, a small rural town in the center of the state's Lower Peninsula about 60 miles northeast of Grand Rapids. Her parents Charles and Myrtle Tate were farmers who inherited their land from their parents. Tate's grandparents were pioneering homesteaders in Michigan and not sharecroppers, and this distinction is important for African Americans. It means that unlike most of the freed but landless slaves in the South who were forced to resort to sharecropping, they were among a small number of African Americans who were able to own their land through the Homestead Act of 1862. Tate told her oral history interviewer that: ". . . my grandparents on both sides, maternal and paternal, migrated from Ohio into Michigan under the Homestead Act."<sup>20</sup> They

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<sup>19</sup> Tate, 'Three Years in England', 18.

<sup>20</sup> Tate, 'Oral History Transcript', 12.

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traveled as Free Blacks to predominantly White central Michigan and claimed land in Blanchard.

President Abraham Lincoln signed the first Homestead Act in 1862 which gave public domain land to private citizens. African Americans became eligible in 1866 after the Civil War ended; however, they faced racial discrimination in securing their homesteads. According to Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, “blacks had to face the extra burden of racial prejudice and discrimination along with the charging of illegal fees, expressly discriminatory court challenges and court decisions, and land speculators.” Nevertheless, they persevered and by 1900 one quarter of all Southern black farmers owned their own farms.”<sup>21</sup>

Most of the remaining 75 percent lived and worked as impoverished sharecroppers, especially in the Deep South, which had not yet recovered economically from the Civil War. While the Tates owned their land outright and kept any profits they made from farming, Black sharecroppers worked the land, but it was owned in some cases by their former slave masters, and they did not benefit financially from their labor. They worked and toiled during the year for a share of the profits from the farm; however, because they had to rent their housing, buy their goods and necessities from the owner’s stores, at the end of the year, they often ended up owing the landowner money. Due to this vicious economic cycle, they remained in perpetual debt with little hope for the future.<sup>22</sup> Tate’s family of homesteaders fared much better than these southern sharecroppers.

Tate was born on her family’s farm in the dead of winter in Michigan, which is known for its harsh winds, freezing temperatures, and frequent snowstorms. Tate tells the story in her oral history interview of how she was born in the middle of a blizzard that kept the doctor from getting to her home for two days after she was born.<sup>23</sup> Blanchard was and still is a predominantly White

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<sup>21</sup> Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth/white Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 14-15.

<sup>22</sup> David Brown, *Race in the American South: From Slavery to Civil Rights* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 181.

<sup>23</sup> Tate, Oral History Transcript’, 19.

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town with a little more than 1,000 residents. When Tate was born, in the community spirit of the times, it was a German-American neighbor, Mrs. Vernie Fisch, who delivered Tate, and she was named in her honor.<sup>24</sup> Tate's siblings include two older brothers, a sister, Thelma, and one younger brother.

As the only girls in the family, Tate shared a close bond with her sister, who provided critical financial help during her Oxford studies. As I have noted, Tate offers few details about her relationship with her family or about religion in her oral history interview. Tate answered open-ended questions, so she controlled the amount of private information she wanted to include or omit. Her biographer Barbara Savage does mention that Tate's mother Myrtle finished the sixth grade and "was known in the community for her gifts of elocution, dramatic readings, and recitations."<sup>25</sup> One could conclude that Tate was raised in a literate family who highly valued learning, a trait that Tate displayed throughout her life. Tate and her sister Thelma were university graduates and teachers, which in 1920s and 1930s would have made them stand out in their community as exceptional.

Tate grew up and attended schools where she was one of a handful of Black students in Blanchard, yet she reported no racism during her childhood, and she never knew segregation. Due to the small number of Black people in her rural area, she and her siblings attended school with White students without any problems, but she never had a Black teacher. She was raised in a multicultural community of German immigrants like Mrs. Fisch, and she was exposed to their language and culture from a young age.

Living in a rural area meant there were long distances to cover, and she walked to her high school in a round-trip of nine miles for the first two years.<sup>26</sup> Tate explained in her oral history interview that she used those long solitary walks to memorize poems including Gray's "Elegy in

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Savage, *Merze Tate*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Tate, 'Oral History Transcript', 25.



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a Country Church Yard” and Chaucer’s tales in the original Old English.<sup>27</sup> She wanted to emphasize that her dedication to learning continued outside the classroom and that she took full advantage of those walks for self-education. Tragedy struck when Blanchard High School burned down after her sophomore year, but despite this, Tate, the only Black student, was chosen as class valedictorian.<sup>28</sup> She completed her last two years of secondary school at Battle Creek High School in Battle Creek, Michigan where she was a straight-A student and again, the sole Black student in her class.<sup>29</sup>

An important turning point in her young life came when she won the Hynman Oratorical Contest at Battle Creek High School in 1923 during her senior year.<sup>30</sup> Despite her youth, she fearlessly expressed her anti-racist views and geopolitical insight and awareness in her winning speech. Tate demonstrated her broad intellect by telling the mainly White audience that a lasting result of slavery was racial inequality, which must cease. She demonstrated that her knowledge went beyond America’s borders when she explained that Black people in the Caribbean and Africa were fighting for their rights against colonialism. She then schooled the audience about the sacrifices made by Black American soldiers despite being denied their constitutional rights in America. She included the Black men in her own family who were veterans of the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and an older brother who had served in the navy during World War I.<sup>31</sup> Her speech and its transnational ideological message set the tone for the internationalist agenda which she would pursue later in her life.

In her oral history interview, Tate made no mention of being taught about African American history during her formal education in Blanchard and Battle Creek, so she appears to have gained

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid*, 26.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 27-28.

<sup>31</sup> Savage, *Merze Tate*, 1-2. See also St. Edmund Hall, ‘Professor Merze Tate: In Conversation with Professor Barbara D. Savage’. January 25, 2022. accessed May 10, 2023. [Professor Merze Tate: In conversation with Professor Barbara D. Savage - YouTube](#)

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her knowledge at this youthful age from her family and self-education, a trait reminiscent of Sarah Parker Remond. A logical explanation and experiential source for her global knowledge was growing up as a teenager during World War I. Reading the news about the war exposed her to the international world beyond rural Michigan, which could have shaped her international thought. In her interview, she shared a humorous but sobering anecdote about how her family became involved with the backlash against Germany during the war. The family's pet dog was named Fritz, a name likely influenced by her German-American neighbors. However, because of the war hysteria, her family was advised to change his name, but, Tate said, unfortunately, he would only answer to Fritz.<sup>32</sup>

Tate was extremely fortunate that she lived her childhood and young adulthood in a racially tolerant environment in a small midwestern town that represented what a multicultural America could look like. She was born at the height of the 'nadir' in African American history from 1877-1920, which was characterized by some of the worst terrorism against Black people in America's history apart from slavery. This period included the lynching of thousands of Black men, women, and children by Whites and dozens of race riots in cities across the country.<sup>33</sup> Millions of African Americans lived under Jim Crow segregation in the South, and the rest lived under de facto segregation in the North, Midwest, and West. Nevertheless, all these areas, including Michigan, suffered the same racial violence as the South including cross-burnings, lynching, and race riots at the hands of the Ku Klux Klan and other White supremacists, who operated with impunity.<sup>34</sup>

Tate would have been aware of these racially motivated events when she read the Black press or mainstream newspapers. However, by her own admission, she lived her early life in Michigan untouched by racism and segregation until her 1927 graduation from Western State Teachers College (now known as Western Michigan University) in Kalamazoo, which she had attended on a

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<sup>32</sup> Tate, Oral History Transcript, 33.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, *Race in the American South*, 180.

<sup>34</sup> Savage, *Merze Tate*, 28.

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scholarship. Until then, neither her race nor her gender had ever been a problem during her education. This was when she learned that because of the color of her skin, the education authorities in Michigan prohibited her from teaching at any high school in the state. She explained that even though: “I had the highest record ever made there . . . they couldn’t place me. . . in Michigan.” so, “I went out of the state.”<sup>35</sup> Tate recalled that: “At that time, there was no public school, or private school, probably in the state of Michigan, hiring colored people at the senior high school level.”<sup>36</sup> This was because the students at the high school level were predominantly White, and White people “could not conceive of a colored person teaching white students” according to Tate.<sup>37</sup> At that time, the total Black population in Michigan was only around 3 percent. With such a small population, Michigan had no official segregation laws, and that is why Tate was the only Black student in her classes throughout her elementary and high school years and all her teachers were White.

Tate was also the only Black student in her class at Western State Teachers College and the first African American to earn a bachelor’s degree. She not only completed her teacher training program in three years instead of the normal four, an outstanding accomplishment for any student, but as she stated, she graduated with the highest academic record in the college’s history.<sup>38</sup> None of this mattered at all to the Michigan school authorities. They either ignored or dismissed these facts about her exceptional qualifications, because the only criteria they were interested in was that Tate was not White, she was Black. This was the first time Tate was directly affected by racism, and she handled what must have been distressing news with her usual determination and confidence, and she made plans for her teaching career outside the state of Michigan.

Black women like Tate were restricted to teaching in elementary schools in Michigan, and her

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<sup>35</sup> Tate, ‘Oral History Transcript’, 19.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 30. Tate went on to proudly note to her interviewer that: “I understand that it [Tate’s academic record] has not been excelled since.”

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older sister Thelma agreed to teach at this level in Detroit. Tate did not join her, because she had set her sights on using her qualifications to teach at a more advanced level. After considering and attending interviews and completing examinations in several cities, she accepted a position at the newly built Crispus Attucks High School in Indianapolis, Indiana. It was for Black students only, and Tate taught history at this segregated high school from 1927 to 1932.

During her time at Crispus Attucks, Tate continued her education by taking extension courses at Indiana University including European history, French, and German. The ambitious Tate also studied part-time at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York during her summer vacations, and in 1930, she graduated with her M.A. Now that she had achieved this goal, she immediately set another one: to reward herself with a trip to Europe the following summer. She explained to her interviewer that:

I decided to take a trip to Europe and I registered at Sir Alfred Zimmern's International School in Geneva. Sir Alfred Zimmern was Professor of International Relations at Oxford, And in the summer, he had this School of International Relations in Geneva, Switzerland, which attracted scholars from all over the world since it was in Geneva. And that was my objective . . . But in the meantime, it was only six weeks and I had a matter of two or three months . . . And I was able to tour western Europe on the way out.<sup>39</sup>

Tate seems to imply that she planned her trip in advance with the objective of studying international relations in Geneva with scholars from around the world. However, her recollection in her oral history differs from Barbara Savage's account which is discussed in the next section.

### 6.2 International Relations Summer Study in Geneva, 1931

Tate left America for her first trip abroad in June 1931, and she sailed on the Canadian steamer the *SS Montrose* from Montreal to Cherbourg, France. According to Savage, she had a three-part plan: to study French history at the Sorbonne, visit the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition, and to travel to historic and cultural sites across Europe.<sup>40</sup> As I discussed in Chapter Three, Paris was a popular

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<sup>39</sup> Tate, 'Oral History Transcript', 34.

<sup>40</sup> Savage, *Merze Tate*, 38. Savage cited an article in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a leading Black newspaper, about Tate's European travel plans for summer 1931. According to Savage, the article included a photograph and stated that:

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destination for those African Americans who could afford to travel to Europe. Seeking France's *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, they found it to be colorblind and welcoming. As far back as the nineteenth century, Paris had attracted the New Orleans Creoles, Mary Church Terrell, sculptor Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller, and artist Henry Ossawa Tanner who all studied there.

Like these Black Americans, Tate planned to study in Paris as well. She traveled from Cherbourg to Paris by train, arranged her lodging near the Sorbonne, and then visited the Paris Colonial Exposition to view cultural displays of countries in the French colonial empire.<sup>41</sup> According to Savage, it was in the City of Light that Tate first learned about Alfred Zimmern's School of International Relations in Geneva from Grace Walker, a fellow African American. Tate did not disclose any of this information in her oral history interview. However, she apparently gave more details in her travel diary, and Savage claims it was Tate's chance meeting with Walker, an accomplished literary performer and singer, which prompted her decision to register for the course, and she immediately changed her itinerary and boarded a train to Geneva.<sup>42</sup> Despite the discrepancies with what Tate remembered in her oral history interview, unbeknownst to her, this decision to attend Zimmern's school would forever change the course of her life.

During her train ride to Geneva, she shared a compartment with a wealthy Dutchman, H.H. van Gessel who lived and worked in the city which was the headquarters for the League of Nations. After becoming acquainted during the journey, he helped Tate to swiftly arrange her accommodation close to Zimmern's school. He also invited her to his lakeside villa and took her on excursions with his family around Geneva.<sup>43</sup> Van Gessel would become the first of many

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"One of those touring Europe this summer is Miss Merze Tate, a teacher of history in the Crispus Attucks high school, Indianapolis. Miss Tate will study French history at the Sorbonne and make a special survey of the International colonial exposition now in Paris." (Ibid). There is no mention of her plans to register and study at Zimmern's School of International Relations in Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

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European friends in Tate's multicultural and interracial network during her time abroad. This encounter which led to their friendship is an example of how vital this type of networking was for Tate. It opened doors and provided necessary assistance as she navigated her way around Europe as a rare, single, independent, and educated Black woman.

Having secured her lodging, Tate went immediately to the School of International Relations and Alfred Zimmern and his wife Lucie allowed her to enroll despite the short notice. International relations was a new and emerging field in 1931, and Alfred Zimmern, who was considered one of its founders, had recently been appointed as the first Montague Burton Professor of International Relations at Oxford.<sup>44</sup> Although the institute was widely known as British-born Alfred Zimmern's School of International Relations, his French-born wife Lucie was the co-founder and co-director. Despite this, Lucie Zimmern's contributions to international relations are missing from the historiography according to Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler.

As I discussed in this chapter's introduction, they have criticized both race and gender bias in international relations, and they noted the effects of Lucie Zimmern's omission. They postulate that:

While we are hesitant to proliferate the already excessive numbers of schools of international theory, the erasure of the Lucie Zimmern School of International Studies helped to organise the post-World War II academic discipline of IR around male eponymous approaches and an all-male, all-white canon.<sup>45</sup>

Owens points out that until the 1970s, "To a great extent, especially in Britain, early international relations was a branch of History, focused on the study of diplomats and high politics."<sup>46</sup> These international relations diplomats and politicians were usually White males. Owens discovered through her research that women have been almost completely erased from the historiography on international relations, because "Across 60 histories of international thought there are fewer than 3% of references to historical women, those working before the late 20th century, including only

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Patricia Owens and Katharina Rietzler, 'Polyphonic Internationalism: The Lucie Zimmern School of International Studies', *The International History Review*, vol. 45 no. 4 (2023): 636.

<sup>46</sup> Patricia Owens, Katharina Rietzler, Kimberly Hutchings, and Sarah C. Dunstan, eds, *Women's International Thought: Towards a New Canon* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 18.

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four women of colour: 0.09%.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, in 1931, Tate was entering a newly established discipline where her race and gender meant she was intervening and breaking down patriarchal, academic, and career barriers for African American women whether she realized it or not.

Yet, Tate was not a novice in this traditionally male field. As far back as the Hynman Oratorical Contest at Battle Creek High School in 1923, she had displayed her international relations knowledge and early interest in geopolitics. Now in Geneva, she was impressed by the lectures in English and French presented by “international jurists from all over the world.”<sup>48</sup> Tate was in her element in this intellectual, multilingual, and multicultural environment. The knowledge she gained from this international relations course helped her to understand more clearly the connection between U.S. territorial, European colonial and imperial history, and the darker peoples of the world in the Americas, Africa, and Asia.<sup>49</sup>

She later analyzed this connection in her 1943 article, ‘The War Aims of World War I and World War II and Their Relation to the Darker Peoples of the World’:

All over the world the peoples of color are aroused, although in varying degrees, to the *Imperium* of the White nations. They are no longer willing to accept the white man’s exalted view of trusteeship . . . . Once the coloured races feared the white man; today that fear has turned to secret contempt.<sup>50</sup>

The summer international relations course had given her time to reflect on and formulate these views, and she began to identify and see herself through an international lens. She redefined herself as a member of ‘the darker peoples of the world’ (people of color and indigenous people) who were fighting against the European occupation and economic exploitation of their lands. Her 1931 summer study abroad sowed the seeds for her decision to drastically change her career from a high school history teacher to an international relations professor.

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<sup>47</sup> Patricia Owens, Sarah C. Dunstan, Kimberly Hutchings and Katharina Rietzler, ‘Theorizing the History of Women’s International Thinking at the End of International Theory’, *International Theory*, vol. 14 no. 3 (2022): 389.

<sup>48</sup> Tate, ‘Oral History Transcript’, 34.

<sup>49</sup> Savage, ‘Beyond Illusions’, 277.

<sup>50</sup> Tate, ‘The War Aims of World War I and World War II’, 521.

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When the course finished, she continued her solo travel around Europe and visited France, Germany, Austria, Italy, and England.<sup>51</sup> She traveled alone unrestricted by race, gender, or class as an independent Black woman who viewed herself as a global citizen on a mission to expand her intellectual, cultural, and scholarly pursuits. She could then use her first-hand experiences to enliven the textbooks and increase her students' knowledge and awareness of their increasingly interconnected global world. When she resumed her teaching at Crispus Attucks in the fall, she shared her European experiences with the students, staff, and her community by giving a two-part lecture in November. She formed a travel club for her students and led them on a spring 1932 trip to the nation's capital where they visited federal buildings and Howard University.<sup>52</sup> She shared her travel philosophy with the students and encouraged them to look beyond their local segregated communities and to envision educational possibilities in the wider world. Tate would very shortly have another opportunity to travel to Europe and advance her own education beyond America's shores.

### 6.3 The Oxford Application Process, 1932

Back in America, Merze Tate's future was being decided by events that she could not have predicted. While she was content in her role as a high school history teacher, her summer abroad had opened her eyes to the international possibilities that transcended America's borders. She now had a greater understanding and awareness of the connection between the slave heritage and civil rights struggles of African Americans and the ongoing independence campaigns of colonized and mandated peoples of color globally. This would have a profound effect on the choices she made about continuing her higher education. After her return to Indianapolis, Tate learned that her Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) sorority, which she had recently joined, was offering a one-year \$1,000 foreign fellowship for 1932-1933. The AKAs were formed in 1908 at

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<sup>51</sup> Tate, 'Oral History Transcript', 34-35.

<sup>52</sup> Savage, *Merze Tate*, 44, 47.



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Howard University as the first Greek-letter Black sorority.<sup>53</sup> Their decision to start a foreign fellowship for African American women to study abroad in the 1930s illustrates the forward thinking of this pioneering Black sorority.

The fellowship's purpose was to expose students to broader global perspectives and support their intercultural and intellectual development for their future careers, which would likely involve educating the next generation of Black students. These foreign fellowship recipients would be following in the footsteps of those Black Americans who traveled "across the Atlantic to Europe in order to fulfill their intellectual ambitions," a trend which Corey D. B. Walker noted began at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>54</sup> Tate's international relations course in Geneva had stirred her international thought and her desire to further her education abroad in this developing field. Her background made her an ideal candidate for the foreign fellowship, and she was selected as its 1932-1933 recipient. It was left to Tate to decide where she would use the fellowship, and she chose Oxford. She explained that:

I had heard of Oxford University and I'd read about it. And I knew that it was a very ancient and learned institution. But in high school, I think I mentioned in Battle Creek, I had this Miss Glass, who was my history teacher and she had spent a summer at Oxford. . . and I'd heard her talk about the place. Anyway, when I applied and where it says where would you plan to study, I put down Oxford University on my application.<sup>55</sup>

Along with what she had read about the "ancient and learned institution," Mrs. Glass's first-hand account appears to have stayed in her memory over the years, and it ultimately played a role in her decision to study at Oxford.

Once Tate decided to apply to Oxford in April 1932, she was determined to enroll in the postgraduate B.Litt. in International Relations course even though this two to three-year course would stretch beyond the limits of her \$1,000 foreign fellowship. Despite her outstanding B.A. and

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<sup>53</sup> Tamara L. Brown, Gregory Parks, Clarendia M. Phillips, *African American Fraternities and Sororities: The Legacy and the Vision* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 186.

<sup>54</sup> Corey D. B. Walker, "'Of the Coming of John [and Jane]': African American Intellectuals in Europe, 1888 -1938", *European American Studies*, vol. 47, no.1 (2002): 8.

<sup>55</sup> Tate, 'Oral History Transcript', 35.

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M.A. qualifications, it was not easy for Tate to be offered a place in Oxford's Colleges. In fact, it was a struggle, and the outcome was far from certain due to the competitive application process for the small number of available places for women at that time.

Before she could be accepted into Oxford as an international student, Tate had to undergo a rigorous application process. For American applicants, this required screening by the AAUW (American Association of University Women) headquartered in Washington, D.C. It was one of many U.S. women's organizations that did not admit African American women as members, and even without her attached photograph, her application would still have stood out. Many of her Western State Teachers College professors and an Indiana University professor referred to her race, 'colored people', and described her as a 'colored woman' or 'colored girl' in their letters of recommendation. Yet, Tate needed the AAUW's approval before her application could then be forwarded to Oxford for their consideration. From the outset, this meant that unlike White applicants, Tate's application process faced the possibility that she might have to overcome racism, which was ingrained in the AAUW's history.

The AAUW was founded in 1881 by White women to provide Whites-only social networking. According to Alison M. Parker, its purpose was "to provide white college-educated women with a social network and to promote academic and professional opportunities for women."<sup>56</sup> By 1929, it had 31,547 members and 475 branches, but it remained essentially segregated.<sup>57</sup> White AAUW members had resisted all efforts to integrate; instead, they kept a Whites-only policy to maintain "race purity."<sup>58</sup> Some Black members did slip through like Mary Church Terrell who received an automatic membership upon her graduation from the predominantly White Oberlin College, and

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<sup>56</sup> Alison M. Parker, *Unceasing Militant: The Life of Mary Church Terrell* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 250.

<sup>57</sup> Susan Levine, *Degrees of Equality: The American Association of University Women and the Challenge of Twentieth-Century Feminism* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995), 19.

<sup>58</sup> Parker, *Unceasing Militant*, 251.

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they may not have realized she was Black. The AAUW barred all graduates from HBCUs.<sup>59</sup>

The AAUW's national headquarters was located in the nation's capital, the symbolic seat of American democracy. Washington, D.C. resident, Mary Church Terrell's life work was her battle against "the hypocrisy inherent in an American democracy that upheld segregation."<sup>60</sup> Parker found that by 1946, the AAUW had more than 90,000 members, but only seven of the 1,000 local AAUW branches were integrated.<sup>61</sup> The situation came to a head that year when Terrell tried to renew her lapsed Washington branch membership, and it was a long drawn-out struggle for Terrell to be re-admitted. It took her three years and the help of some progressive-minded White members.

When "the oldest and most respected" Washington branch member Nettie Swift proposed Terrell for membership in 1946, the board members unanimously rejected her application. Terrell was only re-admitted to the AAUW three years later on June 22, 1949, after a long, intense campaign which included a federal lawsuit against the AAUW.<sup>62</sup> She was 85 years old. Nettie Swift's intervention was crucial, and their friendship was an example of Terrell's interracial networking and the help she received from some American White women in combatting institutionalized racism.

Back in 1932, Tate was forced to engage with the anti-Black AAUW if she wanted to get admitted into Oxford. Even though the March 1st application deadline had passed, the undaunted Tate still inquired and received permission to apply.<sup>63</sup> Tate mailed the AAUW two documents on April 12, 1932. One was the Oxford application form, and the second was addressed to Mrs.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 254.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>62</sup> Parker, *Unceasing Militant*, 259, 252-259. The national AAUW had overruled the branches and stated that all qualified applicants regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion were welcome to join. Terrell was admitted to the Washington, D.C. branch along with "fifty college-educated African American women" who also joined. (Ibid, 259-260).

<sup>63</sup> Tate, 'Oral History Transcript', 36. Tate said the AAUW replied to her inquiry, and stated that: "The committee on our admissions to Oxford has already met for this year." However, they assured her that if she sent them her application, transcripts, and letters of recommendation, they would be "circulated . . . to the various members of the committee." At this point, they would have been unaware that Tate was Black.

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Esther Caukin Brunauer in the Office of International Relations at the AAUW. Her letter to Mrs. Brunauer was typed on Crispus Attucks High School stationery and designed as a Curriculum Vitae. A meticulous Tate highlighted her B.A. and M.A. degrees and emphasized her straight-A grades and the fact that she had completed her four-year B.A. in only three years. She included her five years of experience as a high school history teacher, and her study abroad the previous summer at Zimmern's School of International Relations in Geneva.<sup>64</sup>

Her application was followed by incredibly supportive letters of recommendation from Nancy Scott, Professor of European History at Western State Teacher's College, Bertha S. Davis, the Dean of Women at the College, and D. C. Shilling, Professor of Political Science at Western State among others. While they all showered Tate with praise for her academic excellence, her integrity, energy, and determination, almost all her referees felt the need to make non-academic comments about her physical appearance and her features. Professor Scott wrote that "she is not very dark skinned. She has regular features, and beautiful hair."<sup>65</sup> One noted that she speaks well and is a credit to her race while Dean Bertha S. Davis stated: "Miss Tate is a young colored woman of good appearance."<sup>66</sup> One of her referees, Marion Patton Terpenning, acknowledged that being Black was an obstacle for students like Tate. She wrote in her recommendation letter to Mrs. Brunauer that Tate "has a good mind and an aggressive personality, and evidently made up her mind in childhood to scale the heights in spite of all the obvious obstacles in the path of a colored child."<sup>67</sup> This would imply that as a "colored child," Tate's presumed lower class status would be an major obstacle in climbing the educational ladder to success.

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<sup>64</sup> Merze Tate, St. Anne's College Archives, Oxford University. Letter from Merze Tate to Mrs. E. C. Brunauer, April 13, 1932.

<sup>65</sup> Tate, 'St. Anne's College Archives'. Letter of Recommendation from Nancy E. Scott, Professor of European History to Mrs. Brunauer, Secretary, AAUW, April 18, 1932.

<sup>66</sup> Tate, 'St. Anne's College Archives'. Letter of Recommendation from Bertha S. Davis, the Dean of Women to Mrs. Brunauer, Secretary, AAUW, April 13, 1932.

<sup>67</sup> Tate, 'St. Anne's College Archives'. Letter of Recommendation from Marion Paton Terpenning to Mrs. Brunauer, Secretary, AAUW, April 17, 1932.

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Tate's letters of recommendation provide a picture, however small, of race relations in America which call for analysis. What they suggest is that her White professors could only see Tate as the 'other'. Although they truthfully reported her academic excellence, intelligence, and propriety, they attached significant importance to her physical appearance and characteristics and measured them in terms of their own: straight hair, light-skinned, with European features. It is unlikely that they would have mentioned in such detail the physical characteristics of their White students. What is more concerning is that they were probably unaware of their color prejudice.

In contrast, Tate's recommendation letter from her AKA sorority did not mention her color or physical features at all. Her letter from Hattie J. Edwards, the Basileus of the local Washington, D.C. chapter spoke only of her "remarkable scholastic achievements" and her "studious, conscientious" qualities. Instead of praising Tate as a credit to her race, Edwards stated: "we feel that she will not only be a credit for Alpha Kappa Alpha, but to the United States and to college women in general."<sup>68</sup> She saw no need to recommend Tate on any other criteria than her academic qualifications and scholastic achievements.

However, Tate not only had to prove that she had the academic qualifications, but she also had to show that her coursework had prepared her with the skills to undertake postgraduate research, and she had to verify the accreditation of Western State Teachers College. She also had to satisfy the AAUW selection committee that she had the stamina, mental and physical fitness (through a medical examination) to undertake the rigors of one or more years of study at Oxford. Mrs. Brunauer wrote to Miss Hadow, the Principal of the Society of Oxford Home-Students and explained that the AAUW selection committee members had doubts about Tate's physical fitness

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<sup>68</sup> Tate, 'St. Anne's College Archives'. Letter of Recommendation from Hattie J. Edwards to the AAUW, Washington, D.C., April 3, 1932.

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for two years at Oxford based on an earlier bout of illness. Her doctor dismissed their concerns and declared that Tate was physically fit to study at Oxford.

After Tate had overcome this medical hurdle, Mrs. Brunauer wrote back to Miss Hadow on June 1, 1932, and she stated that Tate's credentials, including her medical certificate, were all in order.<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, this information about Tate was written in the same letter and on the same page in a paragraph below the AAUW's unanimous recommendation for another applicant Miss Genevieve Larmore.<sup>70</sup> Unlike the clearly worded recommendation for Miss Larmore, it is noticeable that Mrs. Brunauer did not state that the AAUW had recommended Tate; she merely clarified the doubt in the committee members' minds about Tate's "physical equipment for two years at Oxford."<sup>71</sup> Mrs. Brunauer ended her letter by stating that this letter was "the last set of credentials you will have from us this academic year."<sup>72</sup>

However half-hearted the AAUW's final letter to Oxford was, the first part of Tate's grueling application process was over. In the end, she was able to overcome possible racialization of her application by the AAUW, and she achieved another first: she was the first African American woman whose credentials the AAUW had forwarded to Oxford for admission even though Tate was still not welcome as a member because she was a Negro. In the end, the AAUW committee was apparently unable to deny her outstanding academic qualifications and achievements and her superlative letters of recommendation.

After she passed this screening by the AAUW, Tate still needed an official offer letter from Oxford and the approval of the Society of Oxford Home-Students. Grace Hadow was the Principal of the Society from 1929 until 1940, and Tate's St. Anne's Archives include their

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<sup>69</sup> Tate, 'St. Anne's College Archives'. Letter from Mrs. Brunauer, AAUW to Miss Hadow, June 1, 1932.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. Tate, however, stated in her oral history transcript that: ". . . they [the AAUW] recommended me unanimously for admission to one of the women's colleges at Oxford . . . to consider my application." See, 'Oral History Transcript', 36.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

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personal correspondence about her application. These letters reveal the reasons why Oxford was reluctant to admit her, despite her straight-A's, and her B.A. and M.A. degrees. The university still questioned her academic preparation, which they felt lacked sufficient research training. They also questioned the accreditation of her undergraduate university, Western State Teachers College.<sup>73</sup> Tate, however, strongly disagreed with this assessment, because she had excelled in several courses in European history, the British Empire, and international relations at Western State. She also noted that "I studied at [Columbia] Teachers College, Introduction to the Study of History, a course which prepares for research in history."<sup>74</sup> Tate strongly believed that her B.A. and her M.A. degrees should be given greater weight.

After several months of deliberation, Miss Hadow offered Tate a place in the Economics Diploma to start in the Michaelmas term, 1932. Tate officially but reluctantly accepted this offer from the Society of Oxford Home-Students on August 29, 1932.<sup>75</sup> Her disappointment was clear in her words that ". . . this was not the type of work I wished to do at Oxford. I set about to gain admission to higher research requiring two to five years of residence."<sup>76</sup> The difference between the Economics Diploma and the B.Litt. was an important distinction for Tate who already had a Bachelor's and a Master's degree. She believed the B.Litt. was the equivalent of an American PhD and the French Doctorat.<sup>77</sup> It was not an easy decision, but she felt obligated to accept this lesser degree since her AKA fellowship was only valid for the 1932-1933 academic year.<sup>78</sup>

Still, Tate was not one to accept defeat easily or without a reply. Undeterred, she requested admission as a Probationer-student for the B.Litt. degree. She typed letters to Miss Grace Hadow and to Miss Ruth F. Butler, the Society's vice-principal and an economics tutor to plead her case.

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<sup>73</sup> Tate, 'St. Anne's College Archives'. Letter from Miss Hadow to Merze Tate, June 25, 1932.

<sup>74</sup> Tate, 'St. Anne's College Archives'. Letter from Merze Tate to Miss Hadow, June 30, 1932.

<sup>75</sup> Tate, 'St. Anne's Archives'. Post Office Telegram from Merze Tate, Indianapolis, Indiana to Miss Hadow, Principal, Society of Oxford Home-Students, August 30, 1932.

<sup>76</sup> Tate, 'Three Years in England', 18.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Tate, 'St. Anne's College Archives'. Post Office Telegram from Merze Tate, Indianapolis, Indiana to Miss Hadow, Principal, Society of Oxford Home-Students, August 30, 1932.

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She used a legal approach, and she referred to Oxford's statute for probationary admission into the B.Litt. program. Her biggest appeal was for acceptance of her Western Michigan Teachers College degree. Tate launched into a legalistic and principled defense, and she explained that:

The point of issue now is whether the Hebdomadal Council will approve my previous degree. The English attitude toward Teachers Colleges may influence this council. I should like its members to know that the Teachers Colleges (not normals) in Michigan have an A rating among American colleges and are members of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. I should also like for them to know that Western State Teachers College has a higher rating, larger and better faculty and larger enrollment than the Kalamazoo College (Baptist) which is on the list of colleges from which degrees are accepted by Oxford as conferring "senior status".<sup>79</sup>

Tate was not finished yet. She further explained that Columbia University had accepted her B.A. from Western State Teachers College for admission to its graduate school. She was certain, therefore, that the Hebdomadal Council would accept a Bachelor of Arts from Columbia University and she held a Master of Arts from Columbia.

She ended the letter by requesting that: "Therefore, not on the basis of a B.A. Degree but on both the Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts Degree, I ask to be admitted to a Probationer-student for the Degree of Bachelor of Letters."<sup>80</sup> Tate's defense of her Western State Teachers College qualification was on a par with a lawyer's defense in court. Her letters show her unwavering determination to study for the B.Litt. research degree, and the value she placed on her preparation despite the conclusion of the Society and Oxford's admission council. This incident provides insight into the strength of Tate's Black female agency, which she demonstrated by her self-belief and her staunch resistance to the university's decision and her determined efforts to upgrade her entry for the B.Litt. degree. Tate's pro-active response foregrounded the resourceful approaches she would use during her three years at Oxford to deal with the academic and financial problems she faced. Nonetheless, in this instance, Tate's request for entry into the B.Litt. as a Probationer-student was not accepted, and her only alternative was to continue with the Economics Diploma.

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<sup>79</sup> Tate, 'St. Anne's College Archives'. Letters from Merze Tate to Miss Grace Hadow and Miss Ruth F. Butler, October 11, 1932.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.



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### 6.4 Study Abroad Experiences at Oxford, 1932-1935

Tate arrived at Oxford in the fall of 1932 at a time when British women were still fighting for higher education equity with male students. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, they had pushed for equal educational opportunity and their right to attend university, and Oxford was no exception. Women campaigned for liberal reforms at the university in the 1860s, and they succeeded in 1874 when ‘Lectures for Ladies’ in classics, modern languages, and mathematics were offered in the Old Clarendon Building.<sup>81</sup> The gender resistance and dynamics were such that women had to wait until 1880 before they were allowed to attend lectures at the men’s colleges.

In the meantime, women’s residence halls were finally established in the 1870’s, and Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville Hall were the first to open in 1878 at Oxford. By comparison, Girton College, the first college for women at Cambridge opened in 1869 almost a decade earlier. However, Somerville and other women’s halls and associations were not recognized by Oxford until 1910, and they did not become full members of the university until 1920. It was only then that women students were allowed to matriculate and take degrees. Despite this achievement, they were subjected to quotas, which kept their numbers low, so it was an incomplete victory.<sup>82</sup>

Tate was admitted as a member of the Society of Oxford Home-Students which was founded to aid students who could not afford to live on-campus in the women’s halls. The Society, which was founded in 1878, was administered by the Association for the Education of Women (AEW). It did not have a permanent location, so Tate and the other students lived in private residences across the city. As Tate settled into her new surroundings, there was a pressing issue of concern which she had brought with her from across the Atlantic. As much as she appreciated this

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<sup>81</sup> Vera Brittain, *The Women at Oxford; A Fragment of History* (London, UK: The Macmillan Company, 1960), 44-46, 49. See also Faculty of History, ‘A Short History of Women’s Education at the University of Oxford’, October 14, 2020. accessed September 10, 2023. <https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/article/a-short-history-of-womens-education-at-the-university-of-oxford>. To put the year 1920 in context, it was only in 1918 that women in the UK over 30 were first allowed to vote albeit with minimum property qualifications.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid; and Savage, *Merze Tate*, 56.

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opportunity to study at Oxford, Tate acknowledged her racialization, and she usually referred to herself as a colored woman, a status she seemed to wear as a badge of honor. By asserting that she was the only colored woman from America at Oxford, she reinforced the responsibility and obligation she felt to succeed not only for herself but also for her race.<sup>83</sup> African Americans who managed to succeed at the highest levels were usually singled out by White Americans for being ‘a credit to their race’, words which they did not feel were needed for achievements by Whites. The underlying message was that White achievements were the norm, and Black achievements were deviations from the norm.

Therefore, if a Black person succeeded in the intellectual realm of academia (or in any other area) despite all the segregation and racial discrimination obstacles they faced, to White America, they were an aberration and, therefore, an anomalous credit to their race. I propose that this racialized exceptionalism was used as a mask to hide a skewed playing field which excluded and marginalized Tate within mainstream American academia. She was brought up in this racially and psychologically constructed American reality, and she understood that her success or failure would be used to collectively judge *all* African Americans. Barbara Savage notes that in her daily work and scholarly life Tate “carried the obligations of gender and race representation; that too shaped the contours of her thinking and her work.” However, Savage points out Tate saw these racially constructed restrictions “not so much as impediments, although they were, but as motivators for her to fight herself as “free” of the constraints of gender and race as possible in order to do the scholarly work she felt compelled to do.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> It should be noted that Tate’s reaction to her racialization contrasted with that of Toni Morrison who decades later “wanted to be liberated from being ‘raced’ as a writer. Morrison sought to find a way to free her “imagination from the impositions and limitations of race” and its centrality in the world. I propose that it was trailblazers like Tate who helped to create a less racialized world for Morrison. See ‘I wanted to carve out a world both culture specific and race-free’: an essay by Toni Morrison’, August 8, 2019. accessed June 10, 2021.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/aug/08/toni-morrison-rememory-essay>

<sup>84</sup> Savage, ‘Beyond Illusions’, 267.

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Tate brought this American trope of a credit to his/her race with her when she departed from New York and sailed to England on the *SS Bremen* on September 30, 1932. She was acutely aware of the responsibility and the enormous burden she placed on her shoulders. On the voyage over, before her ship docked, she wrote a poem to express her feelings about her need to succeed for the good of the race. In her 'Thoughts on Entering Oxford', she noted that:

When I consider what before me lies/ A chance to make a name/ A chance to die/ A chance to gather from these ancient walls/Covered with ivy, hiding famous halls/ What this mother of learning is ready to bestow/ On one who has the courage to bestow/ On one who has the courage to go/. . . my one big wish a prayer to be/ A credit to my race and my country.<sup>85</sup>

She made no celebratory mention of the respite from American racism which she knew, based on her European experiences in 1931, would come with this opportunity; instead, she described the courage it took to pursue it, and her focus was on being "a credit to my race." She vowed that she would not disappoint her race or her Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. The burden of her race is clearly on her mind, and she believes her "chance to make a name", or "to die" within Oxford's ivy-covered walls will directly affect her fellow African Americans back home. While she took time to consider what was before her, the determination in her words and her reliance upon faith left no doubt that for Merze Tate, failure was not an option.

### *First Year--1932-1933*

Merze Tate began her studies at Oxford in October 1932. She had agreed, against her will, to take the one-year Economics Diploma course, because she lacked both a place and funding for the longer B.Litt. course, which she so desired. Tate had only one objective in mind when she began the diploma course, and it was to transfer to the postgraduate B.Litt. research degree as soon as possible. In the meantime, she applied herself to her studies and began to adapt to her new Oxonian lifestyle. In the back of Tate's mind, I believe she was still trying to make the best of an unwanted situation.

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<sup>85</sup> Jane Knowles, 'Thoughts on Entering Oxford', *The Ship*, Oxford University St Anne's Annual College Record (2010-2011): 7-10.

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Like most university students living and studying abroad in a different culture, Tate's first year in England was a period of adjustment. She said that she learned to understand the King's English, although she did not speak it. However, she may have spoken it better than she realized, because when she returned to America in 1935, her students at Barber-Scotia College noticed a distinct difference in her English. Tate admitted: "I was sort of a freak to the girls. It was apparently an interesting freak because my language was different. I had in the three years I'd been abroad, I'd acquired I guess some of the Oxonian accent."<sup>86</sup> Tate had successfully adjusted to this accent far beyond her expectations.

She may have unconsciously identified with this upper-class accent, because she held the university in such high esteem and lauded it as "the most ancient of Anglo-Saxon institutions of learning" and "a centre celebrated for its brilliant minds."<sup>87</sup> This linguistic shift by Tate may have eased her immersion into British culture and her relationships with her peers, tutors, and professors. Her esteem for Oxford was supported by her privilege to be mentored and advised by Professor Zimmern. Tate explained that: "Instead of having to drift for a year without a settled or definite program, as is so common at Oxford, I was extremely fortunate in finding a helpful and inspirational supervisor in Alfred E. Zimmern, Burton Professor of International Relations."<sup>88</sup> Zimmern would remain a lifelong friend.

In addition to getting used to the King's English, Tate had to adjust to the British climate, customs, and food in her first year. She made valuable friendships which she nurtured throughout her stay. She had an international and interracial outlook in her relationships, which led her to associate with people not because they shared the same skin color but because of their personalities and shared interests. However, she was not alone as a pioneering woman of color at the university during the interwar years.

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<sup>86</sup> Tate, 'Oral History Transcript', 86.

<sup>87</sup> Tate, 'Three Years in England', 18.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

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When Oxford began awarding degrees to women in 1920, women of color began to appear among its students, and there are two notable students besides Tate who attended in the 1920s and 1930s. One was Mākereti Papakura (1873-1930), a Māori woman from New Zealand. She enrolled in 1924 at age 51 and studied for her BSc in Anthropology also at the Society of Oxford Home-Students. Anthropology was a nascent field at Oxford, and Sarah Stockwell claims that in the interwar years, it was associated with imperialism and viewed as “the science of colonialism,” because it was used to train colonial administrators.<sup>89</sup> Papakura took no heed and boldly researched an incongruous anthropological thesis based on her own Māori people in a field that included few women and almost no indigenous students.<sup>90</sup>

Unfortunately, Papakura died unexpectedly in 1930 before she finished her degree, but her thesis ‘The Old Time Māori’ was published posthumously in 1938. The book, which was autobiographical and focused on Māori ways of knowing, was significant because it was “the first extensive published ethnographic work by a Māori scholar.”<sup>91</sup> Importantly, and related to my theoretical frameworks, Papakura’s thesis applied a decolonizing methodological approach which validated Māori, non-Eurocentric ways of knowing. This was likely the earliest application of this theoretical approach at Oxford.

While Papakura was a pioneer for indigenous women, Tate studied alongside a pioneering African woman. Her 1932-1935 enrollment coincided with that of Kofoworola Moore (Ademola), a member of the Egba royal family of Nigeria. Moore, as she was known then, became the first Black African woman to graduate from Oxford in 1935, the same year as Tate.

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<sup>89</sup> Sarah Stockwell, *The British End of the British Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 28. Stockwell also added that: “Oxford and Cambridge “formed an integral part of the ‘the apparatus of Britain’s imperial system’, both providing ideological justification for Empire and playing a leading role in general training programmes for the Colonial Office in the interwar period.” (Ibid, 23).

<sup>90</sup> Emma Gattey, ‘Makereti: Māori ‘Insider’ Anthropology at Oxford’, *Oxford and Empire Network*. accessed December 11, 2023. [https://oxfordandempire.web.ox.ac.uk/article/makereti#\\_edn14](https://oxfordandempire.web.ox.ac.uk/article/makereti#_edn14).

<sup>91</sup> June Northcroft-Grant, ‘Mākereti Papakura’, *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 1996). accessed December 11, 2023) <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3p5/papakura-makereti>. Also known as Maggie Papakura she was the daughter of an Englishman, William Arthur Thom and Pia Ngarotū Te Rihī who was a high-born Te Awara Maori woman.

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She studied humanities and social sciences as an undergraduate in St. Hughes College. Moore said she did not experience any overt racism at Oxford; however, she described feeling exasperated at being viewed “as a curio” or “some weird specimen of Nature’s product, not as an ordinary human being.”<sup>92</sup> She was equally irritated by ignorant comments about her amazing cleverness and ability to speak English and wear English clothes.<sup>93</sup>

Unlike Moore, Tate did not describe feeling like a curiosity at Oxford; however, she did report being stared at in France.<sup>94</sup> It is essential to understand this phenomenon from a Black woman’s perspective. Unlike Tate and Moore, White female students like Tate’s roommate Margaret Johnson would not have been stared at “as a curio” because of their skin color at Oxford. While they may have attracted the unwelcome or disapproving male gaze because of their gender, Tate and Moore had both gender *and* race to contend with. Free from the simultaneity of these two intersectional oppressions, the White female students would not have experienced Oxford in the same way as these Black women, and their standpoints would have been shaped by different perspectives.

Like Tate, Moore was “active in a number of student societies: the African Society, the English Literature Club, the Anthropological Society, the Labour Club, the Geographical Society, the Imperial Club, and she attended meetings of the Indian Students’ Union and the Oxford Union.”<sup>95</sup> She returned to Nigeria after her studies, married, and became a renowned educator, women’s rights organizer, and author of children’s books. She also became a Member of the Order of the

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<sup>92</sup> Imaobong Umoren, ‘Kofoworola Moore at the University of Oxford’, *Voices Across Borders* (October 2, 2015) accessed December 11, 2023. <https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/article/kofoworola-moore-at-the-university-of-oxford>. See also K. A. Moore, ‘The Story of Kofoworola Aina Moore, of the Yoruba Tribe, Nigeria, Written by Herself’, in Margery Perham, ed, *A Collection of Life Stories: Ten Africans*, (London, UK: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1936), 339. Moore’s experiences could be interpreted

<sup>93</sup> Perham, ed, *A Collection of Life Stories*, 335.

<sup>94</sup> Savage, *Merze Tate*, 39. Tate described being stared at in a bathing resort in Bolougne, France during her 1931 summer trip to Europe. She reported that; “I was the only colored girl there. I certainly had many stares.” Also, at the Paris Colonial Exposition during the same trip, she believed that just as with the exhibits, “I am a curiosity myself.” (Ibid). Tate did not state whether she believed the starers were racists.

<sup>95</sup> Umoren, ‘Kofoworola Moore at the University of Oxford’.

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British Empire.<sup>96</sup>

In her oral history interview, Tate only mentioned Moore in passing without naming her.

According to Tate:

The year that I matriculated was a rather unusual year for women at Oxford. It was the first time that they admitted Chinese women. Two women from Turkey, and you'll have to realize that they've just come out from behind the veil I mean . . . with the republic, the democracy that came in Turkey, the overthrow of the sultan. After World War I . . . you see, the early thirties, before World War II. There was one African woman from Lagos and she was at St. Hughes. But she was undergraduate. Not a graduate student. I guess they went liberal that year.<sup>97</sup>

Tate emphasizes that she was a graduate student while Moore was only an undergraduate. This speaks to the high value she placed on the B.Litt. degree versus the Economics Diploma. She already had a Master's degree, and it was important to her to point out her graduate status at Oxford, which she appeared to value highly. Moore and Tate were also members of different colleges, which may have restricted their interactions. Nevertheless, the presence of these two Black women from different continents at Oxford in the 1930s was trailblazing and historically significant, because it directly contradicted the doctrine of Black intellectual inferiority still prevalent at the time. In fact, England still had human zoos which featured Africans. Jacob A. Rees reported that in 1925, the Bell Vue Zoological Gardens in Manchester featured a display at the zoo called "Cannibals" and had Black Africans depicted wearing alleged "native" dress.<sup>98</sup>

In sharp contrast to the display of Africans at the human zoo in Manchester, Tate was warmly welcomed by the women in the Society of Oxford Home-Students, and Miss Hadow helped her to find accommodation. She was invited to teas, dinners, and excursions by members of her Society. She enjoyed a full cultural and social life and attended Oxford's cultural events, its theater performances at the Oxford Dramatic Society, and she joined the debating club, the Oxford Branch

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Tate, 'Oral History Transcript', 42.

<sup>98</sup> Paul A. Rees, *An Introduction to Zoo Biology and Management* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 44. Rees includes a photograph as evidence.

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of the League of Nations Union, and other clubs and organizations. She even joined a punting club and learned to ride a bicycle as she joined the hordes of campus cyclists.<sup>99</sup>

Tate explained that her first year “laid the foundation for the following years,” and as she adjusted to English customs, the food, climate, and culture, she developed lasting friendships during her stay. As the only ‘colored woman’, this interracial networking would become characteristic of Tate’s ability to navigate race or gender issues and neutralize them with her intellect, confidence, and personality. She described her close relationship with her roommate Margaret Johnson who was a history major and how they kept in touch after they left Oxford.<sup>100</sup> Tate fondly remembered their long-standing friendship:

Now Robert Johnson was a Rhodes Scholar from the United States from the state of Washington, handsome, tall, athletic gentleman, doing the B.A., of course, as Rhodes Scholars do. Well, he and Margaret married and later came to this country. . . [and] I stayed in their home in Cambridge my first summer at Radcliffe.<sup>101</sup>

Tate’s circle of friends like Margaret and Robert, her club memberships, and her cultural, social, and sporting activities created a feeling of belonging, and she admitted that: “By June, 1933, I felt myself, a part of Oxford life and society and was reluctant to leave.”<sup>102</sup>

After the 1932-1933 academic year ended, Tate spent part of her summer vacation tutoring a teenaged French girl at Château des Roches.<sup>103</sup> She used the income to fund her travel around Europe again as she had done during the summer of 1931. After her vacation break, Tate faced a serious financial crisis which she had to solve if she wanted to remain at Oxford for 1933-1934 and enroll in the B.Litt. course. Her \$1,000 dollar AKA foreign fellowship was only meant to cover her expenses for the 1932-1933 academic year, and she had no funds left to support another year, much less the two years needed for the B.Litt.

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<sup>99</sup> Savage, *Merze Tate*, 57; Tate, ‘Three Years in England’, 40.

<sup>100</sup> Tate, ‘Oral History Transcript’, 60.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>102</sup> Tate, ‘Oral History Transcript’, 39; and Tate, ‘Three Years in England’, 18.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 19.



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When her oral history interviewer asked her how she was able to secure funding for another year, Tate responded that “By God’s will and friends and scholarships after I was there a year. . . my sister helped me . . . Loans which I repaid.” In her AKA article, she explained that:

I was informed that the [Phelps-Stokes] Fund would offer me financial assistance for the year 1934. This scholarship, along with the Home Students grant, a gift from an anonymous Oxonian, a loan from the Bertha Johnson Fund from Oxford, and still another from my sister proved sufficient to carry me through till June, 1934.<sup>104</sup>

This financial assistance meant that she could return for the 1933-1934 academic year, and she pressed on with her request for senior status and matriculation into the B.Litt. program. Finally, her persistence was rewarded when in the summer of 1933, she was allowed to switch to the B.Litt. research degree.<sup>105</sup> However, Tate admitted that the year she spent on the Economics Diploma course was not wasted and that it was beneficial to both her B.Litt. and Harvard PhD research. In her words: “the work in economics paid dividends.”<sup>106</sup>

### *Second Year--1933-1934*

Tate’s second year at Oxford began very well. Her determination and perseverance had paid off, and she was finally admitted into the B.Litt. program for the 1933 Michaelmas term. The Society of Oxford Home-Students had approved her transfer, and she had already obtained the necessary funding to continue her studies from her sister, loans, and scholarships. Her B.Litt. supervisor was James L. Brierly, professor of International Law and a former World Court Commission jurist, because as Tate explained: “Professor Zimmern spent the first half of the academic year 1933-1934 on a lecture tour in America.”<sup>107</sup> She worked diligently on her research throughout the year, and she spent Easter 1934 not on holiday in Paris but at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France again as she had done during Easter the year before. She also completed research at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, the Foreign Office in London, and the British Museum inside and outside of term time. She emphasized

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>106</sup> Tate, ‘Oral History Transcript’, 40.

<sup>107</sup> Tate, ‘Three Years in England’, 18.

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in her AKA article that: “the short vacations between terms and the long summer holidays were used for further research on my special subject, for travel, or for studying a foreign language.”<sup>108</sup> She wanted her sorority sisters to know that she took advantage of her vacation periods and always found time for study and research even during her travels away from Oxford.

She chose disarmament as her thesis topic, which was a subject she had studied at Zimmern’s School of International Relations in 1931. She theorized there was a link between the colonial powers’ buildup of armaments which fueled their continuous wars, and that their mandates and trusteeships were a threat to “a just and durable peace” especially for the darker peoples of the world.<sup>109</sup> Unfortunately, shortly before she was scheduled to submit and defend her thesis in May 1934, the unthinkable happened. Tate was involved in a bicycle accident on May 4th, the day before she was scheduled to submit her thesis for her viva voce. She fractured her foot and was convalescing in nursing homes and rehabilitation centers outside Oxford.<sup>110</sup> Tate remembered it vividly 44 years later during her oral history interview: “I had had a bicycle accident . . . I had broken a metatarsal bone in my foot and was crippled, semicrippled.”<sup>111</sup>

Tate’s two thesis examiners were Oxford historians Agnes Headlam-Morley and Ernest Llewellyn Woodward, and they gave her the option of delaying her viva voce. However, Tate chose to proceed, and she took her examination from her “sick bed” on May 26th.<sup>112</sup> However, on June 12th, the Examination Board neither passed nor failed her; instead, they recommended that she resubmit her thesis the following academic year.<sup>113</sup> Her examiners informed her that the scope of her thesis, ‘The Movement for Disarmament 1853-1914’, was too broad and needed to be revised and shortened, and she would be allowed to rewrite it. Tate interpreted this to mean that she had failed, not only herself,

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 18-19.

<sup>109</sup> She wrote about this topic again in ‘The War Aims of World War I’, 521-524.

<sup>110</sup> Tate, ‘Oral History Transcript’, 71.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Tate, ‘Three Years in England’, 19.

<sup>113</sup> Elizabeth Dawson, ‘Merze Tate (1905-1996)’. accessed August 15, 2023. <https://www.st-annes.ox.ac.uk/life-here/library/blog/merze-tate/>.

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but her race and her sorority.

Tate's private correspondence in her St. Anne's College Archives shows that since failure was never an option, this was a crushing blow which she took extremely hard personally. In a letter to Miss Grace Hadow on June 15, 1934, Tate declared: "I have failed." She wrote:

The great pity is that in the final analysis – and in simple language – I have failed . . . It is most unfortunate that I as a pioneer had to face so many difficulties and then not succeed. It is the first great failure of my life but I am anxious that others [of her race] should not suffer because of my failure.<sup>114</sup>

From her standpoint as a trailblazing colored woman and a role model at Oxford, she had indeed failed, and this was the first time the straight-A Tate had ever faced an academic failure. When analyzed from this perspective, Tate's devastation and martyr-like reaction are understandable. Yet, she did not share her "failure" with her oral history interviewer or in her AKA article. This disparity in her primary sources shows that Tate was keen to maintain her image of unfettered success at Oxford and uphold her role as a credit to her race.

Despite this unexpected adversity, Tate used her characteristic Black female agency and resolve to overcome the most serious threat to obtaining her B.Litt. she had encountered at Oxford. Tate considered her examiners' advice over the summer of 1934, and although financially strained, she explained that: "I . . . chose to return to Oxford, to take advantage of the priceless opportunities there offered, and to pave the way for future research toward its highest degree."<sup>115</sup> Tate mentions none of the angst of her perceived failure in this quote from her AKA article, which she presented to the AKA Boulé (Conference) in 1935 for her sorority sisters. In fact, Tate had accepted her tutors' and Zimmern's advice, because it was the only option available and the only way forward to earn her coveted B.Litt. degree. By stating that it was her choice to return, she asserts her authority and control over her life and avoids any discussion of her thesis setback. She chooses to create a positive image of both herself and Oxford. She shook off her disappointment of "failure" and agreed to revise her thesis and continue her B.Litt. studies at Oxford in fall 1934.

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<sup>114</sup> Tate, St. Anne's College Archives', Letter from Merze Tate to Miss Grace Hadow. June 15, 1934.

<sup>115</sup> Tate, 'Three Years in England', 19.

## Chapter Six: Merze Tate

In the meantime, she gave herself permission to take a break away from her academic tensions, and she began her 1934 summer vacation by tutoring her student again in Château des Roches for two weeks. Next, she traveled to Germany where she visited the Rhineland: Cologne, Heidelberg, Mainz, and historic Munich and Augsburg. She also visited friends in Geneva, perhaps the van Gessel family, and she ended her busy summer in the South of France on the Côte d'Azur, and she visited Cannes, Nice, St. Tropez, and Monte Carlo.<sup>116</sup> With her decision to return to Oxford, her summer vacation was the respite she needed to face the challenges in the year ahead.

### *Third Year--1934-1935*

When Tate began her final year at Oxford in October 1934, she found herself in more dire financial straits than ever before, but once again the resourceful Tate, with the help of Miss Hadow, secured additional loans from Oxford and from friends to cover her expenses. She changed her thesis title to 'Public Opinion and the Movement for Disarmament 1888-1898' to narrow her focus and address the examiners' concerns that her historical context was too broad for proper analysis and critical engagement with the scholarship. Tate likely realized that it had been unwise to take her viva voce while she was still recovering from her bicycle accident, and she could see that this second chance gave her the opportunity to revise and submit a more manageable and acceptable thesis. Zimmern, Agnes Headlam-Morley, and Miss Hadow fully supported her decision to continue her studies at Oxford and revise and narrow her chronological scope. She received valuable and strategic tutorial help in European history from Mary Choate of St. Hughes College. Tate successfully defended her thesis in June 1935 and was finally awarded her treasured B.Litt. degree.<sup>117</sup> This was not only a personal victory, but she was no doubt also pleased to be a credit to her race and sorority. In her 1935 AKA article, Tate did not forget to mention Professor Zimmern, and she stated:

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Tate, 'Oral History Transcript', 62.

## Chapter Six: Merze Tate

Although I had attended Professor Zimmern's School of International Relations at Geneva in the summer of 1931 . . . I had never dreamt of being privileged to sit under his individual and personal instruction in Oxford, where, in a centre celebrated for its brilliant minds he is an outstanding figure.<sup>118</sup>

Zimmern's impact on Tate is clear in her respect for him as both her "personal" mentor and as an esteemed Oxford professor. She wanted her sorority sisters to know that at elite Oxford, she had been guided by one of its most "brilliant minds" and that she appreciated his help.

Looking back on her three years at Oxford, Tate acknowledged that she had carried the burden of succeeding for her race and sorority on her shoulders throughout her entire time in England. After her Oxford graduation, she expressed these sentiments when she reflected that:

In both curricula and extra-curricula activities, in both the lecture and drawing room, I was continually mindful of my representing a race which is ever striving, against almost unsurmountable difficulties to reach seemingly unattainable heights in history. . . Throughout the three years I spent in England I was ever conscious of being a pioneer representing AKA in particular and Negro womanhood in general.<sup>119</sup>

Tate showed that she was acutely aware of her place in history and the impact that her study abroad and her Oxford degree would have for all African Americans, women in particular. She reasoned it would provide evidence that African Americans had the courage, intelligence, and academic abilities to succeed at Europe's most prestigious universities (and in her words its most "ancient" university) against the odds. Fueled by her determination, she creatively overcame every obstacle that stood in her path until she succeeded.

Black newspapers hailed her success, and *The Washington Tribune* published a front-page article on October 12, 1935, and reported on her Oxford graduation and B.Litt. degree, her study at the University of Berlin, and her European travel.<sup>120</sup> Although this marked a great triumph for Tate and African Americans, not much had changed in America for race relations. For historical perspective, just above her article was news about a Black couple, Mr. and Mrs. James P. Uzzell,

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<sup>118</sup> Tate, 'Three Years in England', 18.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>120</sup> See 'Holds Degree from Oxford', *The Washington Tribune*, October 12, 1935, 1.

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titled: 'Driven from Native Home by Virginia Mob'. They were forced to flee from a small Virginia town leaving their business behind, because of the wrath and envy of a [White] mob.<sup>121</sup>

### 6.5 Post-Oxford and Legacy

Although the central concerns of this chapter end in 1935 when Tate received her B.Litt. from Oxford, it is impossible to ignore the educational and professional firsts and achievements which she continued to accumulate for the rest of her life. Like Terrell, Tate became involved in her transnational activities after her study abroad. She continued to break down barriers in America and around the world not only for Black women but for all women. Characteristically, she spent her last summer in Europe pursuing more study and travel. She studied German at the University of Berlin in the summer of 1935 and followed in the footsteps of Georgiana Simpson, Mary Church Terrell, and W.E.B. Du Bois, who were all German speakers. She did not experience racism; however, she was living in Nazi Germany and inadvertently attended an anti-Jewish rally in the Sports Palace as part of a class trip with her professor and fellow students.<sup>122</sup>

When she returned home, Tate worked as a professor and administrator at several HBCUs before she received her PhD in Government from Harvard's Radcliffe College in 1941. She carved out her legacy as a proactive transnational scholar and a visionary in her international thought about the pressing need for disarmament and the effects of nuclear weapons. She wrote dozens of articles and authored five books, and her first book, *The Disarmament Illusion: The Movement for a Limitation of Armaments to 1907* (1942) was based on her PhD dissertation.<sup>123</sup> It received positive reviews and praise from White and Black academics including Rayford Logan and Carter G. Woodson. Logan spoke highly of its "meticulous and scholarly" quality and acknowledged Tate as an international relations expert, and Woodson agreed with her anti-imperialist stance.<sup>124</sup> Tate's

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Tate, 'Oral History Transcript', 66. Tate describes this incident in her oral history interview but not in her AKA article. See also Savage, *Merze Tate*, 68.

<sup>123</sup> See Merze Tate, *The Disarmament Illusion: The Movement for a Limitation of Armaments to 1907* (New York, NY: MacMillan and Company, 1942).

<sup>124</sup> Savage, 'Beyond Illusions', 275.

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research examined the role of non-state actors in disarmament and this analysis contributed to its originality and made it insightful and uniquely prescient.

Based on my research, I believe that Tate's scholarship and expertise in international relations, her broad knowledge of European diplomatic history and disarmament, combined with her educational background, her transnational experience, and multilingual abilities qualified her to be a U.S. Ambassador to a European country. However, Ambassador Tate was not to be. Instead, it was Patricia Harris, Tate's student at Howard University, who served as the first African American female ambassador to a European country, Luxembourg, from 1965-1967. Nevertheless, it was Tate who had issued an internationalist challenge to the next generation of African American women like Harris through her Oxford study abroad, her teaching at Howard, and her transnationalism. She contributed to knowledge production in the tradition of African American women intellectuals, and her international relations research, insight and warnings about disarmament, nuclear weapons, and the mandate system are still relevant today.

Her legacy lives on in her many academic and professional honors and awards, her philanthropic endowments, and eponymous scholarships, buildings, and centers at Western State University and Oxford. The Merze Tate Room in Oxford's Faculty of History building is named in her honor. An important part of Tate's legacy is the Merze Tate Explorers, which are a section of the Merze Tate Travel Club. Sonya Bernard-Hollins started the Explorers in 2008 as a grassroots project to empower girls with the historical knowledge, foreign language and communication skills to succeed as leaders in a global world beyond America's borders.<sup>125</sup> Tate's legacy means there could be a U.S. Ambassador, Secretary of State, or even a U.S. President among them.

### 6.4 Conclusion

This chapter examined Merze Tate's early life in America, her AAUW admission process, and her academic, social, and cultural experiences in Geneva and at Oxford from 1931-1935 through

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<sup>125</sup> See Merze Tate Travel Club. accessed October 5, 2021. <https://www.merzetate.org/about-us/>.

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the lens of Black Feminist Thought and intersectionality. The findings show that her 1931 studies at Zimmern's School of International Relations in Geneva stirred her intellectual ambition to pursue her Oxford B.Litt. degree in this nascent White male-dominated field. Her primary and secondary sources reveal that she did not suffer from America's institutionalized racism during her European studies and travels. Instead, the findings show that Tate placed the responsibility and burden of being a credit to her race squarely on her shoulders throughout her time at Oxford.

During her self-described three crowded years, she led a full academic, social, and cultural life, and her skin color was never a problem at Oxford. The findings further reveal that Tate succeeded because of her broad intellect and academic talent which were supported by her steadfast determination to be a credit to her race and to make her Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority proud as its foreign fellowship recipient. She was aware that her success would refute those in America who believed that someone who looked like her was never expected to be a student in the elite halls of Oxford and much less to succeed. At the end of her three years, she fulfilled her desire to be a credit to her race.

Her 'determination' was the one word that was used consistently to describe Tate by her American referees, and this is a core component of Black female agency. They never failed to mention her intellect and integrity, and they predicted her success. Tate showed these attributes in her challenging but successful admission process with the AAUW. During her time at Oxford, she faced a myriad of challenging academic issues, constant funding struggles, and an unfortunate bicycle accident which threatened to derail her promise to succeed. Tate depended upon her agency, initiative, and interracial networking to overcome these threats to her success.

Her study abroad experiences in both Geneva and Oxford had the greatest impact on her decision to pursue a career in international relations. As an internationalist and innovative thinker, she identified with people of color worldwide in their ongoing struggles against colonialism and imperialism. She considered herself to be a citizen of the world unhindered by



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race, gender, class, age, or nationality intersections. She distinguished herself in her post-Oxford career as a rare Black female voice and renowned expert, lecturer, and scholar in international relations, disarmament, and diplomatic history. Nonetheless, she faced gender discrimination during her years as a professor in Howard University's history department. Today, her legacy is being kept alive by her broad endowments and the students in the Merze Tate Explorers and Travel Clubs. Based on these research findings, as a trailblazer, Merze Tate can serve as an inspirational role model for contemporary Black women's study abroad in Europe and at Oxford in particular.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This thesis focused on the trailblazing European study abroad experiences of Sarah Parker Remond, Mary Church Terrell, and Merze Tate. They were among the earliest African American women to study in Europe, and they created a path for scores of others to follow; yet, there is a dearth of literature about this important topic, which is needed for an inclusive history of African American women in transnational American Studies and the history of higher education literature. While there is literature about African American women's higher education in America, there is virtually none about their study abroad. This is despite the fact, as I have shown, that African American women have a long history of traveling abroad to advance their education, especially in Europe. This thesis fills that gap by focusing on the early history of their study abroad as far back as the antebellum era during slavery.

Moreover, this thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge, because it focuses on the women's experiences abroad both inside and outside of the classroom from the critical theory perspectives of Black feminist epistemologies which current literature has not sufficiently addressed. This is also the first time that the European study abroad histories of these three influential African American women are presented in one study for a comparative diachronic analysis. This thesis also presents original historical contexts to situate the case studies within key themes of people, places, and events which were significant in the development of early African American study abroad in Great Britain, Germany, and France where these women studied. All these novel approaches combine to place this research outside the normal top-down historical methods of the field. This is significant because these approaches value the women's subjective voices as particular rather than general from a bottom-up perspective.

Given that the research focused on their European study abroad and experiences from 1859-1935, finding documentation was quite challenging, because the history of African American women has been archivally marginalized as I have discussed in Chapter One. The dates were based on when the first trailblazer Remond began her studies at the Bedford College for

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Women in London and when the last trailblazer, Tate, completed her studies at Oxford. To overcome this research challenge, the scope had to be limited to those few women whose primary sources, memoirs, diaries, oral histories and autobiographies are extant. I took advantage of this small population and decided to use an-depth historical case study bounded by time, place, race, gender, and class issues to generate a comparative diachronic study. I sought to discover not only the facts about their achievements but *how* they were able to succeed against the odds as Black women when higher education for all women during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not only problematic but an academic and political battlefield. It pitted women labeled radicals and feminists against the status quo of historically male-dominated institutions of higher learning.

To gain understanding and insight into how they succeeded, I investigated core research questions about their academic, social, and cultural experiences, how they navigated the intersections of race, gender, and class at home and abroad, and how their European experiences shaped their identities, careers, and transnational activities. Their experiences were examined in historical contexts through the theoretical lens of Black Feminist Thought and intersectionality. These theoretical frameworks intervened in the default Western research paradigms to decolonize Eurocentric masculinist frameworks and allow the women's marginalized voices to be heard from their Afrocentric standpoints and lived experiences.

The main findings show that abolitionist Sarah Parker Remond was the first known African American woman to study abroad in Europe at the Bedford College for Women in London. She began her studies in 1859 during the antebellum era in America, which was a time of entrenched slavery, Anti-Literacy Laws, and profound discrimination against Free Blacks like Remond. The American federal government denied her citizenship, and the States restricted her educational, economic, social, civil, and mobility rights. She navigated systemic racism in America by challenging and confronting it directly with successful lawsuits, and she resisted its educational

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apartheid by completing her university education in England and Italy. The results reveal that she was a vanguard who established the tradition of African American women's European study abroad, Black feminism, transnational activism, and interracial networking.

When Terrell's life is compared to Remond's, several similarities and differences can be seen. First, they were two of the earliest African American women to study abroad in the nineteenth century when higher education was restricted and rare even for White women in both America and Europe. Their backgrounds and social status were remarkably similar. They were both members of the Black Elite, and they grew up in families headed by literate and enlightened activist parents who were entrepreneurs with successful businesses. Remond's family was not as wealthy as Terrell's, but their education, middle-class standing, comfortable lifestyle financed by their independent businesses qualified the Remonds as Black Elites during slavery in the antebellum era. Their mothers raised them with feminist ideologies which challenged the male patriarchy that marginalized them. They, along with Tate, adhered to their Black feminist standpoints and maintained their respectability throughout their lives both in America and Europe. This allowed them to combat stereotypes about Black women that portrayed them as promiscuous and responsible for their own sexual violence, and it enabled their messages to be taken seriously. It also influenced what they chose to remember, include, and exclude in their writing and memoirs.

Terrell, like Remond, lived independently in Europe, and they both defied Victorian era gender conventions which expected young, single women to be chaperoned when traveling or venturing out in public. All three women lived and socialized in interracial environments with upper-class European women and men who appeared to regard them as equals despite their skin color. They all successfully navigated racism and did not dwell on any microaggressions they may have experienced. America's racism was implicit in their abundant praise about their favorable racial treatment in Europe. This could be seen as subtly coded resistance to and

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rejection of their racialized positions in America. None of the women reported any racism from the Europeans they met; however, they may have chosen to ignore minor racial slights and maintained their dignity in response.

Despite all the racial issues they faced in America, Terrell and Tate returned to their homeland after they had completed their studies. Terrell's experiences abroad, which included several marriage proposals from Europeans, made her realize her duty was to return to America and uplift the race, and Tate wanted to continue to be a credit to her race in America rather than remain overseas. Remond, however, decided to stay in Europe, and she lived and worked in Italy for the rest of her life. She was unwilling to live in a racist society again, and she believed that even after emancipation, racism had not abated in America. She navigated American racism by making the ultimate decision to avoid it entirely by living abroad as an expatriate in "cosmopolitan Europe" as her biographer Sirpa Salenius labeled it.<sup>1</sup>

All three women were multilingual intellectuals and Black feminists who were ahead of their time in their transnational geopolitical ideologies and activism. In fact, they all studied nonconventional subjects for women at the time. Remond studied medicine, Terrell, Greek, Latin, and multiple foreign languages, and Tate, concentrated on international relations. As a result, they refuted the myths of Black intellectual inferiority and broke down racial, gender, and subject barriers in women's higher education. One common thread which links these women together is how their study abroad affected their careers and how it ignited their interest in working transnationally for universal human rights. Their European experiences led all the women to establish interracial transnational networks of friends, colleagues, academic, and professional acquaintances. Remond collaborated with leading radical British feminists, and she worked with Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini in London to further his unification cause.

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<sup>1</sup> Sirpa Salenius, *An Abolitionist Abroad: Sarah Parker Remond in Cosmopolitan Europe* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 2-3, 12.

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Terrell's experiences abroad informed her interracial outlook, and she collaborated with White American women like Jane Addams and British women, including noble women, in her transnational suffrage and peace activities. She identified with Pan-Africanism and sought to associate with indigenous and colonized women of color from around the world as a member of The International Council of Women of the Darker Races. Like Terrell, Tate also considered herself a member of the darker races of the world based on the knowledge she gained during her study abroad at the School of International Relations in Geneva. Tate's interracial connections were evident in her long-standing academic and personal relationship with Professor Alfred Zimmern, who served as her mentor and supervisor at Oxford. She became an expert in international relations, a field dominated by men, and she credited Zimmern for her career choice and success.

In Chapter One, I argued that this study is a critical area of research to help us understand why so many influential and notable African American women have completed their higher education abroad in Europe since the mid-1800s. The findings show that African Americans obtained greater geographical mobility to travel abroad when they were granted citizenship in 1868 by the Fourteenth Amendment and thereby access to U.S. passports. This newly gained freedom of mobility is one of the reasons why so many influential African Americans, especially the Black Elite who had the financial means, increasingly made the long transatlantic journey to travel and study abroad at some of Europe's most prestigious institutions. My findings relate to Corey D. B. Walker's conclusion that African Americans traveled to Europe to study for their PhD's at the beginning of the twentieth century to expand their intellectual opportunities. This was certainly true in the case of Merze Tate and her extremely determined and successful efforts to get admitted into Oxford and obtain her B.Litt. degree which she viewed as the equivalent of the American PhD or French Doctorat.

In Europe, Remond's, Terrell's, and Tate's education elevated them to a higher-class status,

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which allowed them to gain cultural capital and relative privileges which they would never have received in America. As a result, they enjoyed interracial social circles, which would not have welcomed them back home, and the AAUW is but one example. At the same time, their experiences crystalized for them the universal need for racial equality, civil, and women's rights, and they became influential transnational leaders in the struggle to gain these rights. However, they never lost their identity as African American women during their time overseas. Instead, their study abroad experiences solidified their commitment to advocate for African American civil rights and social justice.

These research findings have led me to conclude that Remond, Terrell, and Tate succeeded in their study abroad achievements because of their initiative, unwavering determination, and perseverance characteristic of Black female agency. This agency was supported by their reverence for education passed down intergenerationally by their parents, some who were born enslaved. Remond, Terrell, and Tate highly valued education, especially higher education for women as a prerequisite for the advancement of Black Americans. They used education to resist the racialized and gendered positions assigned to them at birth by taking advantage of opportunities to study abroad in Europe outside their country's restrictive racial boundaries. In Europe, because they were educated women, they also had social mobility which, in addition to their unwavering determination, contributed to their success.

These historical case studies have revealed that with courage, strength, perseverance, and determination, African American women reached unparalleled heights in their European study abroad that transcended the intersectional oppressions in their racialized, gendered, and classed positions in America. This is an important and rich history worthy of further discussion and research given the contemporary racialized and gendered status of Black women in higher education in America and Europe as well. Their legacies can inspire Black women who are currently underrepresented in study abroad programs at European institutions.

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### *Suggestions for Further Research*

This thesis has shown that there is a critical need for more inclusive scholarship about the history, achievements, and contributions of African American women who have been archivally marginalized. Karen Cook Bell is the general editor of the newly commissioned book, *The Cambridge History of Black Women in the United States*. This chronologically and thematically arranged five-volume history applies an intersectional approach to highlight the experiences of Black women in the United States in all areas. It updates earlier scholarship by examining “historiographical, methodological, and theoretical advances in Black women’s history today.”<sup>2</sup> This is a welcome and significant scholarship development which can serve as a prototype for a volume on the history and development of African American women’s study abroad in Europe.

A further area for research is an investigation into how these women’s legacies can be used to inform the continuing underrepresentation of African American women in contemporary European study abroad programs. Stephanie Y. Evans found that fears of racial discrimination still prevent Black students from studying abroad outside of the Caribbean and Africa. Remond’s, Terrell’s, and Tate’s study abroad accomplishments in Europe provide unique starting points for dialogue. These women’s histories are powerful lessons from the past which can still resonate today, but only if they are known to the wider public. On a theory to praxis level, they can provide an alternative to Black students’ deficit models and allow them to diversify their experiences abroad.

However, the trailblazing contributions of these three women to the early development of African American women’s study abroad in Europe must not be limited to Black audiences. They need wider public exposure, because they eclipsed by far their socially constructed race and gender intersections and studied abroad successfully. Public historians, historical societies, and

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<sup>2</sup> Karen Cook Bell, ‘The Cambridge History of Black Women in the United States’, *Black Perspectives* (April 10, 2024). accessed May 15, 2024. [The Cambridge History of Black Women in the United States - AAIHS](#)



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museums can organize and present exhibitions about these women and other pioneers to show the educational benefits, personal development, and transnational impact of African American women's European study abroad.

Their stories are long overdue chapters in American history just like the neglected and marginalized histories of the Black women of NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) and the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion of World War II. Their pioneering civilian and military histories are finally receiving attention in mainstream literature, documentaries, and films like *Hidden Figures*, 2016, and *Six Triple Eight*, 2023.<sup>3</sup> A film about any of these trailblazers, Remond, Terrell, or Tate that highlights their European study abroad would be a welcome tribute to their memories.

The catalyst that prompted this research was my discovery of Anna Julia Cooper and her PhD in History from the Sorbonne in March 1925 and my desire to learn more about her and other African American women who were study abroad trailblazers in Europe. It was further fueled by the lack of literature on this topic and the archival marginalization of African American women's history. My research has shown that all three women had extensive interracial networks and connections abroad, but further research is needed to investigate their relationships with local Black people of African descent.

Further research into the origins and development of African American Germanophilia would also be beneficial since dozens of African Americans, including former slaves received

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<sup>3</sup> Margot Lee Shetterly, *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Who Helped Win the Space Race* (New York, NY: William Morrow/Harper Collins, 2016). The 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion was an all-Black women's military unit that served in World War II. In 1945, a few months before the war ended, the Six Triple Eight as they are known, was the only Black women's unit which the U.S. government finally and reluctantly deployed overseas in their segregated armed forces. They suffered from racism throughout their military service in America as did their fellow Black male servicemen and from exported White American racism overseas. Their critical support to the war effort and heroism have only been recognized belatedly by the American government and military in recent years with mostly posthumous honors and awards. See Charity Adams Early, *One Woman's Army: A Black Officer Remembers the WAC* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1995); and Brenda L. Moore, *To Serve My Country, to Serve My Race: The Story of the Only African-American WACS Stationed Overseas During World War II* (New York, NY; New York University Press, 1996).

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their PhDs from German universities beginning in the early part of the twentieth century.

In closing, I hope that this study and its findings will inspire other scholars to imagine further questions and theoretical approaches for gender research about the early history of influential and lesser-known African American women who studied abroad in Europe.

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