

Professional Anxiety: African American Female Journalists Writing Their Way to Legitimacy,  
1880-1914

by

Monica Clare Mulcahy

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Department of English and Film Studies  
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## Abstract

Situated at the juncture of black periodical studies, periodical studies more broadly, the history of American journalism, and black women's historiography, *Professional Anxiety* contributes to a growing trend in scholarship that explores black female journalists' writing. This study considers the meaning of professional legitimacy for African American women, and their complex work to claim it, in the press at the turn of the century. Focusing on leading black female journalists, including Gertrude Mossell, Victoria Earle Matthews, Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells, Lucy Wilmot Smith, and Addie Hunton, I argue that their negotiation of professional standards is made evident through their writing on journalism and on the black domestic worker, a controversial figure within the black press and broader turn-of-the-century American society due to her centrality to such pressing issues as migration, education, labour, and civil rights. Whereas extant scholarship on middle-class black women's writing on the black domestic worker often positions it as classist or emerging from social reform work and the black women's club movement, I contend that for black female journalists addressing this figure constituted both an important strategy toward solidifying their tenuous claim to professional legitimacy even as they used it to challenge dominant notions of professionalism within journalism.

My project explores black female journalists' efforts to negotiate their marginalization by aligning themselves with legitimizing collectives while simultaneously working to redefine their roles within them. Chapter One examines the ways that, through their writing on the profession, they simultaneously upheld models of respectable journalism within the black press that promoted racial collectivity, yet undermined them by championing a careerist, feminist collectivity with other black female journalists, even over loyalty to "the race." In the subsequent chapters, I build on this analysis by interrogating black female journalists' navigation of gendered

and racialized meanings of professionalism, not only within the black press but also within American journalism, through their writing on the black domestic worker. In both Chapters Two and Three, I argue that this strategic negotiation of journalistic professionalism often came at the cost of creating a dichotomous relationship with black domestic workers that undermined their labour movement. I argue in Chapter Two that black female journalists endeavoured to rhetorically manage their proximity to this figure in order to construct themselves as informational journalists, a significant move given that this prestigious form of journalism was widely racialized as white and gendered as male. In Chapter Three, I read their engagement with the black domestic worker within the context of the “servant problem” debates as an attempt to lay claim to markers of professionalism, which were denied to them through systemic oppression, and yet were increasingly privileged in an era of professionalizing American journalism.

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## **Professional Anxiety: African American Female Journalists Writing Their Way to Legitimacy, 1880-1914**

### **Introduction**

On 8 March 1906, T. Thomas Fortune's *The New York Age* (1887-1953), a leading black weekly, pronounced the "domestic service problem [...] the paramount issue with us at this time" and declared: "Our newspapers all along the line would do the race an inestimable service by taking up this question" ("Domestic Service" n.p.). As the *Age*'s coverage indicates, domestic work<sup>1</sup> and the black domestic worker in particular were subjects of intense scrutiny within and beyond the pages of the black press,<sup>2</sup> in part because of the role this figure played within the

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<sup>1</sup> In this project, I refer to women who carried out domestic work for pay as "domestic workers" or "domestic labourers," rather than the commonly used turn-of-the-century term "servant," to highlight the physically demanding nature of this occupation and to acknowledge the black domestic workers who condemned "servant" as connotative of slavery (Sutherland 125). "Domestic workers" or "domestic labourers" indicates women because they comprised the majority of all domestic workers and because this project specifically addresses black women's evolving role in the occupation (Katzman 283). "Domestic work" or "domestic labour" encompassed a wide range of specialized positions that differed in wages, prestige, and/or day-to-day tasks, including housekeeper, cook, lady's maid, nursemaid, parlor maid, chambermaid, scullery maid, kitchen maid, laundress, and maid-of-all-work (Clark-Lewis, *Living In* 141-142; Sutherland 89-94). I will occasionally address these subsections of domestic labour in more detail, but for the most part I make use of these umbrella terms. I also often refer interchangeably to "employers" and "white Americans" because the majority of the people who hired black domestic labourers were white, though the wealthiest African Americans occasionally employed them (Hunter 110; Mack 62). Finally, this project primarily addresses black and white domestic workers because this racial divide dominated the "servant problem" debate upon which this project focuses as central to black female journalists' negotiation of the profession.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this project, I refer to the black press to denote periodicals that were primarily published, edited, written, distributed and read by African Americans, and to the white press to similarly signify periodicals that were primarily produced, circulated and consumed by white Americans. Though they were two distinct and often oppositional cultural institutions, the black and white press did not operate in isolation from each other, and the line between the two was neither fixed nor stable. For example, Ellen Gruber Garvey argues in *Writing with Scissors* that it was vital for African Americans to read white periodicals in order to ascertain what was written about them, both because of its news value and because of the potential to utilize this writing to monitor and criticise the white press's racist assertions (133). Furthermore, Eric Gardner and Joycelyn Moody query whether "recognizing the work

“servant problem,” a colloquial phrase that referred to three interconnected concerns: that there were not enough domestic workers, that those available to hire were not “good servants,” and that the unstandardized nature of domestic work rendered it a dysfunctional occupation (Katzman 37-38; Smith, “Regulating” 865-866). The national contest surrounding the “servant problem” was dominated by middle- and upper-class whites, including politicians, educators, and employers, and “took place not just on the women’s pages of local newspapers but also in a host of magazines, newspapers, professional journals, and published muckracking investigations” (May 18). African American professionals also joined the debate about the black domestic worker, including social reformers, educators, social scientists, and journalists and editors (Ryan 91; Higginbotham 216). I would argue that, for these black professionals, the black domestic worker did not simply signify a key factor in the “servant problem,” but also a crucial figure in the most contentious issues facing black communities across the country, such as labour, education, civil rights, and geographic and economic mobility. As I will explore, for the black women who increasingly pursued journalism during this era, their writing on the black domestic worker was informed not only by the larger debate surrounding this figure but also by their marginalized position within the profession.

In this project, I take up black female journalists’ attempts to claim professional standing through their columns, editorials and articles on journalism and the black domestic worker, published in the black press between 1880 and 1914. I situate my project at the juncture of

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of black printers (including enslaved printers) [should] reshape our conceptions of ‘white’ periodicals? How did white printers – common to most nineteenth-century black periodicals – complicate labeling [...] And what about practices of reprinting and repurposing texts between white and black periodicals?” (108). Provocative questions such as these call for further research into the interrelationship between the black and white press and into the factors we use to classify a black or white periodical as such.

periodical studies, black periodical studies, the history of American journalism, black women's historiography, and scholarship on black female journalists' writing on the black domestic worker, and build on these fields by conducting a more thorough investigation into the meaning of legitimacy for black female journalists of the period, both within the black press and within American journalism more broadly. These fields of scholarship routinely overlook the writing of black female journalists, or interpret it not as journalistic but primarily as a product of their social reform work. I work against this erasure by recovering black female journalists' writing and reading it as navigating the dominant ideals of female journalism within the black press, developing professional hierarchies within American journalism, and specific press conventions. I argue that writing on the black domestic worker constituted for black female journalists a rare and important opportunity to undermine exclusionary standards of "real journalism" while simultaneously demonstrating their ability to adhere to them. In contrast to extant scholarly interpretations of black female journalists' writing on the black domestic worker as emerging out of social reform work and/or classist motivations, I explore the complex gendered and racialized definitions of professional journalism that shaped their writing on this figure and motivated them to use her as a tool in their struggle for legitimacy, even as engaging with her also often constituted a threat to that legitimacy.

### **Object of study**

This project takes as its time span 1880 to 1914, an era of both increasing opportunities for black women in journalism and increasingly rigid professional hierarchies. Though, as Jane Rhodes argues, black women were writing for and editing a variety of periodicals decades before the Civil War (212-216), the turn of the century witnessed a higher number of black women

joining the profession than ever before (Wade-Gayles 139-140).<sup>3</sup> This milestone was facilitated by two key turn-of-the-century developments: the rapid rise in the number of black periodicals published and the emergence of new journalism. In a period in which racial violence and discrimination increasingly threatened and devalued the lives of African Americans, the black press served as an important institution through which to debate the central issues of the day, to protest oppression, to celebrate achievements, to encourage cultural production, and to represent black lives with a complexity not afforded by the white press (Fultz 98; Washburn 83).<sup>4</sup> The turn

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<sup>3</sup> It is difficult to determine the exact number of black women who worked as journalists in this era. For example, *Negro Population 1790-1915*, produced by the US Bureau of the Census, records twenty black female editors and journalists in 1910, comprising nine percent of the total number of black editors and journalists working in that year (United States, *Negro Population* 525). However, in all probability the census did not account for all black female journalists in these years, because the majority of them held at least one other job in addition to journalism (Wade-Gayles 144). In 1910, census takers were informed that if a person had two occupations, they should "return only the more important one - that is, the one from which he gets the more money" (United States, *Thirteenth Census* 87). If black female journalists did not derive the bulk of their income from journalism, census takers would not have categorized their occupation as journalism. This is a likely scenario in light of black female journalists' low wages, which were a result of the financial instability of black periodicals, as I discuss in more detail below. For example, journalism historian Alice Fahs cites white female journalists at the turn of the century claiming that most white women in their field were paid twenty to thirty-five dollars a week, or approximately one thousand to eighteen hundred dollars a year, while their highest salaries ranged from three thousand to ten thousand dollars a year (33-34). By comparison, in the 5 June 1886 instalment of "Our Woman's Department," Gertrude Mossell, one of the most accomplished black female journalists of her era, advised women aspiring to join the profession that they could earn "three hundred to five hundred dollars yearly" (n.p.), while Mary Church Terrell noted in her autobiography that she received "\$4 a week" for her contributions to the *New York Age* (Terrell, *Colored Woman* 222). Given that their wages constituted a fraction of those of their white counterparts, it is likely that the number of black female members of the press was much higher than the twenty recorded by the 1910 census. Jacqueline Jones Royster lists eighty black women working as publishers, editors, and/or journalists in the black press at the turn of the century, in addition to the other forms of employment they held simultaneously, and emphasizes that this list is far from exhaustive or comprehensive (289-293).

<sup>4</sup> During the Reconstruction period immediately following the Civil War, African Americans had reason to look forward with optimism to being full citizens, with the abolishment of slavery, the establishment of the Freedman's Bureau, which provided education and employment for newly freed slaves in the South, and the passing of a series of Civil Rights Acts in Congress (Washburn 45). However, African Americans soon lost many of the rights they had fought to win when Reconstruction ended in 1877, Democrats regained power in the South, and Republicans increasingly refused to advocate for or protect African Americans

of the century witnessed an explosion in the black press facilitated by national advances in printing technology,<sup>5</sup> postal regulations,<sup>6</sup> and transportation<sup>7</sup> that made it cheaper to produce and distribute periodicals, by rising black literacy rates that created a wider population of potential readers and subscribers, and by trends in urbanization that made the audience for black periodicals more centralized, further simplifying issues of distribution (Danky 342).<sup>8</sup> The growth

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(Brown and Stentiford 295-296). They were systematically disenfranchised, restricted to the most exploitative fields of employment, and subjected to segregation, which was enforced by law, custom, and extralegal means, and confined African Americans to separate and often dilapidated or underfunded public spaces, including housing, schools, hospitals, and recreation facilities (Carlton-LaNey and Hodges 257).

<sup>5</sup> In the late nineteenth century, producing periodicals became cheaper and swifter due to new inventions and the refinement of preexisting technologies. These developments included the Linotype and the Monotype, both of which dramatically sped up the printing process (Benton 152). The 1890s witnessed improvements in wood-pulp paper production, which increased the supply and lowered the cost of newsprint, and in stereotype plate technology, which enabled faster printing (Kaestle and Radway 11). Finally, incorporating images into a periodical became simpler and more affordable in the 1890s through the perfection of techniques such as halftone reproduction (Kaestle and Radway 13).

<sup>6</sup> Changes in postal regulations meant that turn-of-the-century periodicals were also cheaper to distribute. These changes especially favoured annual, monthly, and quarterly periodicals and those that incorporated advertising into their pages. For example, whereas 1863 postal laws meant that periodicals published less often than once a week "cost nearly six times as much to mail as did daily and weekly papers," in 1879 Congress enacted a uniform rate for all periodicals of two cents per pound (Casper 185-186). The 1879 act undid the work of previous acts that had categorized periodicals with advertisements as "third-class mail," making them more expensive to post than those that did not have advertisements, thereby facilitating the rise of advertising-dependent new journalism (Casper 186).

<sup>7</sup> In addition to reduced postage rates, the distribution of periodicals was facilitated by the expansion of the national railroad. Railroads had been established in the early nineteenth century, especially in the Northeast, and had served as a means of promoting the consumption of periodicals, since most railroad stations included vendors who sold them to travelers to read on the train (Kilton 40). The rapid expansion of the railroad in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, due in part to technological developments in the production of steel, also increased its ability to deliver periodicals (Winship 120). The first transcontinental railroad line was completed in 1869 (Kaestle and Radway 9), and by 1900 there were four new transcontinental lines that not only connected major cities like New York and San Francisco, but also towns like "Kewanee, Illinois" and "Aberdeen, South Dakota" (qtd. in Kliebard 3). Through the railroad, editors could reach new and larger audiences, with their periodicals being delivered to a small town and to a major metropolis on the same day (Nerone 239).

of the black press created more entry points for black women aspiring to become journalists, particularly as new journalism rendered female journalists in general crucial to the financial success of periodicals. At its height between 1880 and 1920, new journalism was characterized by dramatic headlines, photographs, and, at its most extreme, sensational stories, and by its reliance on advertising rather than sales, resulting in publishers making “a definitive shift” from selling periodicals directly to readers to “selling their readership to advertisers” (Garvey, *Adman* 11). As women became a key demographic for advertisers, new journalism editors hired female journalists to appeal to this audience by addressing “feminine” topics or “soft” news, such as domesticity, society news and human interest stories.<sup>9</sup> These lower-prestige and often lower-paying forms of journalism ensured that new journalism marginalized female journalists even as it offered them access to the profession. This marginalization was further compounded by the prestigious publishers, editors and journalists who championed the “masculine” informational journalism, which promoted objectivity, empiricism, and educational content, as an antidote to the rise of new journalism and the female journalist (Gottlieb 55).

Black female journalists in particular were further delegitimized by dominant discourses surrounding the professionalization of journalism. At the turn of the century, many of the members of the press promoted the adoption of the standards that typified established professions, including founding professional associations and privileging formal education over

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<sup>8</sup> The black literacy rate rose from approximately 5 percent in 1860, to 30 percent in 1880, and to 77 percent by 1920 (Danky 341-342).

<sup>9</sup> In *A Magazine of Her Own?*, Margaret Beetham states that, in the late nineteenth century, the “feminine role of providing for the household became increasingly defined as shopping - as well as - or instead of making,” and that this redefinition of women from producers of goods to purchasers of goods rendered them an increasingly significant consumer base for advertisers (8). Beetham refers specifically to Britain, but American women underwent a similar transformation, as Ellen Gruber Garvey argues in *The Adman in the Parlor* (1996).

on-the-job-training. This professionalization would, they argued, aid journalists in gaining legitimacy, public support, and better wages (Winfield 1-3). Yet black women were often barred from press clubs on the basis of their race and/or gender,<sup>10</sup> and, due to racial segregation, African Americans in general had less access than their white counterparts to the journalism schools and programs that were established at the turn of the century.<sup>11</sup> Finally, in a period when members of the press upheld higher wages as a marker of professionalization, black women were chronically underpaid. Though the black press rapidly expanded at the turn of the century, the average black periodical remained financially unstable, mainly because of its smaller readership, in comparison to white periodicals, and an advertising base that was primarily restricted to black businessmen and women, who were far fewer in number than the white entrepreneurs who purchased advertising in the white press (Simmons 5-6). As a result, many black editors and publishers could only afford to pay their journalists low wages or not offer any wages at all (Streitmatter, “Economic Conditions” n.p.). Additionally, as I explore in this project, dominant discourses within the black press about “respectable” female journalism served to naturalize black female journalists’ under- or unpaid labour by pathologizing signs of careerism as blatant self-interest,

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<sup>10</sup> The majority of white press clubs, and white women’s press clubs more specifically, remained segregated well into the twentieth century. For example, the Woman’s National Press Club, a prominent white women’s organization founded in 1919, only admitted its first African American member in 1955 (Beasley, “Women’s National Press Clubs” 288). Similarly, black press clubs were established and dominated by black men. As I discuss in more detail in my Conclusion, the National Afro-American Press Association, founded in 1881, was a powerful national organization with a mainly male membership, and with few black women delivering speeches at their annual conventions or being elected to committees (Wells, *Women Writers* 206-210).

<sup>11</sup> For example, the first school of journalism, established at the University of Missouri, remained segregated forty-three years after it opened its doors in 1908, and that policy only changed after a major discrimination lawsuit and the desegregation of other universities (Perry and Edmondson 304).

thereby suppressing their attempts to seek higher wages.

Black female journalists, then, faced particularly daunting obstacles to claiming professional status due to intersecting gender, race and class oppression. Given the emergence of these intense professional hierarchies, I would argue that this period is a particularly important one to explore the ways in which black female journalists endeavoured to write their way to professional legitimacy. The fact that this era had a higher number of black women in the field than ever before also means we have a critical mass, enabling a nuanced analysis of their professional strategies rooted in a large body of writing. My project addresses collective concerns, not individual ones, and takes up a range of black female journalists, including Fannie Barrier Williams, Victoria Earle Matthews, Gertrude Mossell, Katherine Tillman, Addie Hunton, Ella V. Chase Williams, Alberta Moore Smith, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, and Ella L. Mahamitt. Through the breadth of my focus, I avoid reducing a group of black female journalists to a single figure or their work to a single genre, and thereby endeavour to draw attention to the complexity of their writing.

1880-1914 was also a period in which both the evolving structure of domestic work and the dominant discourses around this occupation meant that writing on the black domestic worker provided multiple opportunities for black female journalists to advance professionally. 1880 marked the beginning of a decades-long rise of the black domestic worker, as black women came to comprise a larger and larger percentage of all domestic workers.<sup>12</sup> Black female journalists could claim expertise on the black domestic worker because they alone amongst their fellow

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<sup>12</sup> Due to issues including white-collar occupations opening to white women while remaining closed to black women, the latter group steadily made up a larger and larger proportion of all domestic workers at the turn of the century (Hart 28). For instance, whereas black women constituted 27 percent of domestic workers in 1880, that number rose to 40 percent in 1910, and 45 percent in 1920 (Ruggles et al n.p.).

journalists shared a common race and gender with this figure, and I would argue that this self-positioning enabled them to write with authority on a wide range of interconnected issues, including the “servant problem,” as well as the “Negro problem,” migration and urbanization. A common turn-of-the-century phrase, the “Negro problem” referred to the question of African Americans’ place within the American nation, with a particular focus and stress on the “recently emancipated” (Cumberbatch 174; Norrell 117). White educators, politicians, and philanthropists positioned domestic work and manual labour more broadly as key to solving the “Negro problem,” and propagated this ideology specifically through industrial educational institutes for African Americans (Anderson, *Education* 72).<sup>13</sup> Within the intense debates about this “solution” amongst African Americans, including race leaders, social scientists, social reformers, educators and members of the press, manual labour and the domestic worker more specifically served as a symbol not just of black employment opportunities but also of education and civil rights (Ryan 89-92).<sup>14</sup>

Black women’s domestic work also intersected two of the other most pressing issues of the day: black urbanization and migration. Though the Great Migration of millions of southern African Americans to the North and Midwest has typically been marked as spanning from 1915 to 1970 (Tolnay, White, Crowder, and Adelman 253-254), scholars have established that it had its roots in the turn of the century when southern rural African Americans were “pushed” by factors including disenfranchisement, segregation, a collapse within the agricultural industry, and

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<sup>13</sup> Many of the proponents of industrial education insisted that African Americans primarily needed a vocational, not a liberal arts education, and advocated for them to turn their attention away from political or social advancement and toward economic advancement through values like hard work and thrift, and through manual labour training (Wexler 107; Anderson, *Education* 72).

<sup>14</sup> See also Knupfer (1996); Wolcott (2001); Danky (2009); Hicks (2010); and May (2011).

racial and sexual violence, and “pulled” to the North and Midwest by hopes for better civil rights, housing, schools, and employment (Phillips 14-27).<sup>15</sup> This turn-of-the-century migration compounded a broader national trend toward black urbanization, particularly as the majority of southern black women moved to northern and midwestern cities where they could secure employment in domestic work (Strasser 176; White, Crowder, Tolnay and Adelman 219). The black domestic worker was a flashpoint within the debates that rose up around black urbanization and migration amongst elite whites and African Americans in particular, for whom these two dramatic demographic shifts also symbolized other upheavals, including socioeconomic instability and political unrest and violence (Zackodnik, *The Mulatta* 100; Cumberbatch 173-174). Due to her intersectional nature, this figure functioned as an access point for black female journalists into a wider range of topics, including inter- and intraracial relations, education, employment, civil rights, and regional and national economies. By addressing these broader issues through their writing on the black domestic worker, black female journalists could lend their perspectives on them some of the credibility they had accrued by positioning themselves as experts on this figure. This sense of credibility was particularly significant in a period in which gendered hierarchies in journalism prohibited female journalists from writing, and certainly from writing with authority, on ostensibly “masculine” subjects like the economy.

In addition to legitimizing their writing on many of the most pressing issues of the day, I would argue that the black domestic worker served as a means for black female journalists to navigate racial and gender hierarchies within journalism. Parallel themes ran through dominant discourses surrounding both this figure and the meaning of legitimacy within journalism. As a

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<sup>15</sup> See also Jones (1985); Carby (1992); Tolnay (1998); Maloney (2002); Hicks (2010); and Phillips (2012).

through-line connecting the “servant problem,” urbanization, migration, and “the Negro problem,” debates on the black domestic worker evoked a range of interconnected concerns about femininity, the body, the domestic sphere, education, and urbanity. Within American journalism, these same concepts functioned as symbols of new journalism, informational journalism, and professionalization. In my project, I explore the ways that black female journalists worked to redefine their relationship to these concepts through their writing on the black domestic worker, even as the mere fact of addressing the markers of racialized and gendered standards of professionalism served as a threat to their tenuous positions within journalism.

Finally, I would argue that black female journalists wrote on the black domestic worker in an effort to have their writing reach wider audiences. Taking up this figure had the potential to raise their visibility and advance their careers by exposing their writing to the many stakeholders in debates about the “servant problem,” the “Negro problem,” urbanization and migration. Indeed, 1914 marks the end date of my project in part because, in the subsequent decade, the stakeholders who black female journalists could reach would diminish considerably. Scholars have marked the turn of the century as a period in which the most intense debate raged about the “servant problem” due to factors including a labour shortage, the shrinking number of native-born white women entering “service,” and the emergence of domestic science, which promoted the professionalization of the roles of both the female employer and domestic worker.<sup>16</sup> By the late 1910s and early 1920s, the debate lost its fervor as the live-in domestic labourer became less central to the standard definition of an American household (Neuhaus 4).<sup>17</sup> By the 1920s, manual

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<sup>16</sup> See, amongst others, Katzman (1978); Strasser (1982); Ryan (2006); Fahs (2011); and Neuhaus (2011).

<sup>17</sup> A rise in apartment living and increased accessibility of household technology lessened the need for live-in domestic workers, and black domestic workers in the North and Midwest in particular further facilitated this transition by advocating for the live-out system, in which

labour had also ceased to be one of the most contentious issues facing African Americans. The 1880s and 1890s witnessed great advancements in manual labour as the “solution” to the “Negro Problem,” including the founding of a wide number of black industrial schools and the rise of Booker T. Washington as the most vocal and celebrated black advocate of industrial education (Anderson, *Education* 66, 72-73). By 1925, Washington was dead, most black schools included at least some combination of industrial and liberal education, and manual labour had lost much of its claim to being the predominant solution to the “Negro Problem” (Neverdon-Morton 14). In the decade following 1914, therefore, the black domestic worker was no longer a means for black female journalists to gain access to two significant audiences of both black and white stakeholders in the “servant problem” and “Negro problem.”

On the other hand, the black domestic worker would remain crucial to black migration, and indeed domestic work functioned as a catalyst for the Great Migration. The beginning of World War I in 1914 helped to launch the Great Migration in earnest by restricting European immigration and increasing the demand for industrial labourers to the extent that, by 1916, northern and midwestern employers began for the first time to hire black men on masse, including southern migrants (Grossman 82; Jones 132).<sup>18</sup> Though the same industries that became open to black men remained virtually closed to black women, World War I similarly created a labour shortage in northern and midwestern domestic work. Native-born white women left “the service” for other wartime employment, particularly when the US joined the war in 1917, and the pool of European immigrants dried up, creating a gap in domestic work that

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they inhabited their own homes and had more clearly defined duties and work hours (Clark-Lewis, *Living In* 147).

<sup>18</sup> According to labor historian Eric Arnesen, roughly 450,000 to 500,000 black southerners relocated to the North and Midwest between 1915 and 1918 and at least another 700,000 migrated in the 1920s (1).

southern black women rushed to fill (Jones 141-144).<sup>19</sup> I would argue that the continuing centrality of the black domestic worker to migration renders my project particularly important to scholarship on black female journalists' writing during and following the War. In order to explore how black female journalists took up the Great Migration in the decades to come, it is necessary to understand how they engaged with the issues central to its build-up, which include the domestic worker. In other words, how can we read early twentieth-century writing on the Great Migration as informed by the work of the women who are the focus of my project?

The multiple concerns that the black domestic worker came to symbolize informed not only the time span of my project but also my selection of periodicals. This project focuses particularly on periodicals whose locality rendered them more likely to address the intersection between the domestic worker and the "servant problem," "Negro problem," urbanization and/or migration. For example, I researched the periodicals of Washington, DC, including *The Colored American* (1893-1904) and *The Washington Bee* (1882-1922), because, in 1909, the National Baptist Women's Convention founded the National Training School for Girls and Women in the nation's capital, a renowned black school that provided training in domestic work under the presidency of Nannie Helen Burroughs (Higginbotham 211-221). The establishment of this institute, as well as the years of planning and fundraising preceding its opening, heightened the possibility that Washington's black periodicals would engage with the debates surrounding the black domestic labourer. I also tracked patterns in the relationship between domestic labour and black migration in order to focus on periodicals published out of regions that were experiencing an influx of black

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<sup>19</sup> For example, by 1920, though black women made up only 3 percent of the population in New York City, they constituted 58 percent of women working as domestic labourers (May 114).

domestic workers, or in which black migration served as a potential threat to the pool of domestic workers available for hire. I mined statistical data from published censuses and the Integrated Use Microdata Series dedicated to the United States, IPUMS-USA,<sup>20</sup> and determined that the vast majority of black southerners migrating during my study's temporal period were born in border states such as Maryland, Kentucky, Tennessee, Oklahoma, and West Virginia, and settled in the mid-Atlantic states of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, and midwestern states such as Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, and Missouri, and that black women correspondingly comprised larger and larger percentages of all domestic workers in the latter regions (United States, *Negro Population* 81-82).<sup>21</sup> I focused my research particularly on periodicals published in these states, exploring, for example, the *Baltimore Crisis* (1910-), the *New York Freeman* (1884-1887) and *New York Age*, the Philadelphia *The Christian Recorder* (1852-), the Indianapolis *Freeman* (1884-1927), and the *Cleveland Gazette* (1883-1945). Throughout my analysis, I attended to the

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<sup>20</sup> IPUMS-USA is an online tool that compiles samples from the US population, drawn from federal censuses between 1850 and 2000 and from American Community Surveys between 2000 and 2012 ("Frequently Asked Questions" n.p.), and its establishment has made possible significant developments in research on the Great Migration and its lead-up during the turn of the century. See, amongst others, Tolnay, Stewart E. "Educational Selection in the Migration of the Southern Blacks, 1880-1990." *Social Forces* 77.2 (1998): 487-514. Print.; Maloney (2002); Adelman, Robert M. and Stewart E. Tolnay. "Occupational Status of Immigrants and African Americans at the Beginning and End of the Great Migration." *Sociological Perspectives* 46.2 (2003): 179-206. Print.; Tolnay (2003); Tolnay, Stewart E., Katherine J. Curtis White, Kyle D. Crowder, and Robert M. Adelman. "Distances Traveled during the Great Migration: An Analysis of Racial Differences among Male Migrations." *Social Science History* 29.4 (2005): 523-548. Print.; White, Katherine J. Curtis. "Women in the Great Migration: Economic Activity of Black and White Southern-Born Female Migrants in 1920, 1940, and 1970." *Social Science History* 29.3 (2005): 413-455. Print.; White, Katherine J. Curtis, Kyle Crowder, Stewart E. Tolnay, and Robert M. Adelman. "Race, Gender, and Marriage: Destination Selection during the Great Migration." *Demography* 42.2 (2005): 215-241. Print.; and Collins, William J. and Marianne H. Wanamaker. "Selection and Economic Gains in the Great Migration of African Americans: New Evidence from Linked Census Data." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 6.1 (2014): 220-252. Web. 1 July 2016.

<sup>21</sup> For example, between 1880 and 1910 the percentage of southern-born African Americans living in the mid-Atlantic states rose sharply by 21 percent (Ruggles et al n.p.).

regionality of these periodicals, analyzing their writing against the background of the structure of domestic work and its relationship to the local socioeconomic and political environment.

### **Fields of critical inquiry**

My project draws into conversation fields that often operate in isolation from each other: black periodical studies and periodical studies more broadly, the history of American journalism, black women's historiography, and extant scholarship on black female journalists' writing on the black domestic worker. Drawing on modernist periodical studies, which has its roots in fifty years of Victorian periodical studies preceding its emergence, has enabled me to research strategically and to attend to the periodical context and conventions in my analysis. The ongoing digitization of the black press constitutes one subfield of, to borrow a phrase from J. Stephen Murphy, the broader "blessing and the curse of periodical studies," in which the "potential for revelation is great, but so too is the potential for getting completely lost in the archive" (vi). In order to research the black press effectively, I utilized what periodical studies scholar Patrick Collier has termed "surface reading," after Margaret Cohen's theorizing of this practice, "recording and sorting surface characteristics - tropes, catchphrases, changes over time, rhetori[c]" before beginning the work of close reading individual writing (Collier 108). Through surface reading, I read laterally across periodicals, examining representations of the female journalist and the black domestic worker and exploring what Jean Marie Lutes refers to as the "print environment in which multiple texts self-consciously respond to each other" ("Beyond" 340). This exploration enabled me to interrogate how and why black female journalists engaged with this print environment to resist or adhere to dominant discourses about these two contentious figures. I also made use of surface reading to read a group of black female journalists' writing comparatively. I read the patterns in their writing that then emerged through the lens of both

histories of American journalism and periodical studies in order to trace the correlation between standards of professional journalism and black female journalists' rhetorical use of the black domestic worker, press forms, and conventions like the signature. Identifying these patterns also allowed me to highlight the heterogeneity of the black female journalists upon whom I focus, complex figures who were often united in their efforts to challenge their marginalization within the profession, yet who employed distinct and at times oppositional strategies to do so.

Though periodical studies has facilitated my research and analysis, within the field there is a tendency to focus primarily on white periodicals and members of the white press, and to neglect the contributions of African Americans (Gardner and Moody 110), a racial myopia to which black periodical studies serves as a corrective. This emerging field has in many ways been made possible by Frances Smith Foster, who, over her long career, has promoted a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis of the dynamic relationship between a specific text, the periodical in which it was published, and a wider black print culture.<sup>22</sup> Yet, though my project is indebted to

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<sup>22</sup> See, amongst others, Danky, James P. and Wayne Wiegman, eds. *Print Culture in a Diverse America*. Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 1998. Print.; Vogel, Todd, ed. *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays*. New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers UP, 2001. Print.; Fagan, Benjamin. "'Americans as They Really Are': The *Colored American* and the Illustration of National Identity." *American Periodicals* 21.2 (2011): 97-119. *Project Muse*. Web. 1 September 2016.; Fagan, Benjamin. "The North Star and the Atlantic 1848." *African American Review* 47.1 (2014): 51-67. *Project Muse*. Web. 1 September 2016.; Fagan, Benjamin. "Harriet Jacobs and the Lessons of Rogue Reading." *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 33.1 (2016): 19-21. *Project Muse*. Web. 1 September 2016.; Gardner, Eric. "African American Women's Poetry in the 'Christian Recorder,' 1855-1865." *African American Review* 40.4 (2006): 813-831. Print.; Gardner (2009; 2010); Gardner, Eric. *Black Print Unbound: The Christian Recorder, African American Literature, and Periodical Culture*. New York: Oxford UP, 2015. Print.; Gardner, Eric. "Accessing Early Black Print." *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 33.1 (2016): 25-30. *Project Muse*. Web. 1 September 2016.; Gardner, Eric, ed. *Jennie Carter: A Black Journalist of the Early West*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2007. Print.; Churchill, Suzanne W. "Modernism in Black and White." *Modernism/Modernity* 16.3 (2009): 489-492. Web. 1 July 2016.; Asukile, Thabiti. "Joel Augustus Rogers: Black International Journalism, Archival Research, and Black Print Culture." *The Journal of African American History* 95.3-4 (2010): 322-347. *GoogleScholar*. Web. 1 July 2016.; Ardis, Ann. "Making Middlebrow Culture, Making Middlebrow Literary Texts Matter: The *Crisis*, Easter 1912." *Modernist Cultures* 6.1 (2011): 18-40. *GoogleScholar*. Web. 1 July 2016.; Zackodnik (2011; 2015); Zackodnik, Teresa.

her work, it diverges from much of Foster's scholarship that focuses on the recovery and analysis of literature, particularly that by women, published in the black press.<sup>23</sup> This scholarship has been foundational for a renewed study of black women's writing in the nineteenth and turn of the century and for altering our understanding of how African American literature was produced and circulated; however, work influenced by Foster has come to form a broader trend that primarily situates the black press as a producer of fictional, poetic, and dramatic writing, a trend that

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"Recirculation and Feminist Black Internationalism in Jessie Fauset's 'The Looking Glass' and Amy Jacques Garvey's 'Our Women and What They Think.'" *Modernism/modernity* 19.3 (2012): 437-459. Web. 1 July 2016.; Gallon, Kim. "Silences Kept: The Absence of Gender and Sexuality in Black Press Historiography." *History Compass* 10.2 (2012): 207-218. *GoogleScholar*. Web. 1 September 2016.; Gallon, Kim. "How Much Can You Read about Interracial Love and Sex without Getting Sore." *Journalism History* 39.2 (2013): 104-114. Print.; Gallon, Kim. "Mining Images of Race and Gender in Twentieth-Century Black Popular Periodicals." *American Periodicals*. 26.1 (2016): 13-15. *Project Muse*. Web. 1 September 2016.; Razi, Alpen. "Colored Citizens of the World." *American Periodicals* 23.3 (2013): 105-124. Web. 1 July 2016.; Williams, Andrea N. *Dividing Lines*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2013. Print.; Williams, Andrea N. "Cultivating Black Visuality: The Controversy over Cartoons in the Indianapolis Freeman." *American Periodicals* 25.2 (2015): 124-138. *Project Muse*. Web. 1 September 2015.; Lewis, Adam. "A Traitor to His Brethren? John Brown Russwurm and the Liberia Herald." *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism and Bibliography* 25.2 (2015): 112-123. *Project Muse*. Web. 1 July 2016.; Moody-Turner, Shirley. "'Dear Doctor Du Bois.'" *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 40.3 (2015): 47-68. *Project Muse*. Web. 1 July 2016.; and Bowie, Rian E. "Discovering the Woman in the Text: Early African American Print, Gender Studies, and the Twenty-First-Century Classroom." *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 33.1 (2016): 8-11. *Project Muse*. Web. 1 September 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Foster famously rediscovered three novels by leading turn-of-the-century writer Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, *Minnie's Sacrifice* (1869), *Sowing and Reaping* (1876-77), and *Trial and Triumph* (1888-1889), all of which were originally serialized in the *Christian Recorder* (1852-) (Foster, "Introduction" xi-xxxviii). For further recovery and analysis of literary writing in the black press, see, amongst others, Foster, Frances Smith, ed. *A Brighter Coming Day: A Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Reader*. New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1990. Print.; Foster, Frances Smith. *Written by Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746-1892*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1993. Print.; Foster, Frances Smith. "Forgotten Manuscripts: How Do You Solve a Problem Like Theresa?" *African American Review* 40.4 (2006): 631-645. Web. 1 July 2016. Foster, Frances Smith. "Gender, Genre and Vulgar Secularism." *Recovered Writers/Recovered Texts*. Ed. Dolan Hubbard. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1997. 46-59. Print.; and Foster and Haywood (1995).

threatens to overshadow the non-fiction writing that also flourished in the black press.<sup>24</sup> My project mitigates this risk by highlighting black female journalists' non-fiction writing on the profession and the black domestic worker, and thereby also works to contribute to scholarship that explores black women's journalism in the mid-to-late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See, amongst others, Ernest (1995); Horvitz, Deborah. "Hysteria and Trauma in Pauline Hopkins' *Of One Blood; or the Hidden Self*." *African American Review* 33.2 (1999): 245-260. JSTOR. Web. 1 July 2016.; Haywood, Chanta M. "Constructing Childhood: The "Christian Recorder" and Literature for Black Children, 1854-1865." *African American Review* 36.3 (2002): 417-428. Print.; Toohey, Michele Campbell. "'A Deeper Purpose' in the Serialized Novels of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper." *The Only Efficient Instrument: American Women Writers & the Periodical, 1837-1916*. Ed. Aleta Feinsod Cane and Susan Alves. Iowa City: U of Iowa Press, 2001. 202-215. Print.; Carter, Tomeiko Ashford. "The Sentiment of the Christian Serial Novel: 'The Curse of Caste; Or the Slave Bride' and the AME 'Christian Recorder.'" 40.4 (2006): 717-730. Web. 1 July 2016.; Cole, Jean Lee. "Information Wanted: 'The Curse of Case, Minnie's Sacrifice,' and the 'Christian Recorder.'" *African American Review* 40.4 (2006): 731-742. Web. 1 July 2016.; Foreman, P. Gabrielle. "The 'Christian Recorder,' Broken Families, and Educated Nations in Julia C. Collins's Civil War Novel 'The Curse of Caste.'" *African American Review* 40.4 (2006): 705-716. Web. 1 July 2016.; Gardner, Eric. "African American Women's Poetry in the 'Christian Recorder,' 1855-1865." *African American Review* 40.4 (2006): 813-831. Print.; Gruesser, John, ed. *The Unruly Voice: Rediscovering Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins*. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1996. Print.; O'Brien, Colleen. "What the Dickens?: Intertextual Influence and the Inheritance of Virtue in Julia C. Collins's 'The Curse of Caste; of The Slave Bride.'" *African American Review* 40.4 (2006): 661-685. JSTOR. Web. 1 September 2016.; Wong, Edie. "Neither is Memory Always Thus Avenging." *African American Review* 40.4 (2006): 687-704. JSTOR. Web. 1 September 2015.; Bain, Alexander. "Shocks Americana!: George Schuyler Serializes Black Internationalism." *American Literary History* 19.4 (2007): 937-963. GoogleScholar. Web. 1 July 2016.; Fulton, DoVeanna S. "Sowing Seeds in an Untilled Field." *Legacy* 24.2 (2007): 207-224. Project Muse. Web. 1 September 2016.; Chiles, Katy. "Within and Without Raced Nations: Intratextuality, Martin Delany, and *Blake; or the Huts of America*." *American Literature* 80.2 (2008): 323-352. Web. 1 July 2016.; Stewart, Maria W. and Eric Gardner. "Two Texts on Children and Children Education." *PMLA* 123.1 (2008): 156-165. JSTOR. Web. 1 July 2016.; Dahn, Eurie. "Cane in the Magazines: Race, Form, and Global Periodical Networks." *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 3.2 (2012): 119-135. Web. 1 July 2016.; Wright, Nazera Sadiq. "Maria Stewart's 'The First Stage of Life': Black Girlhood in the Repository of Religion and Literature, and of Science and Art." *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the US* 40.3 (2015): 150-175. Project Muse. Web. 1 July 2016.; McGann, Jerome. "Rethinking Delany's *Blake*." *Callaloo* 39.1 (2016): 80-95. Project Muse. Web. 1 July 2016.; and Rudolph, Kerstin. "Victoria Earle Matthews; Making Literature during the Woman's Era." *Legacy* 33.1 (2016): 103-126. Project Muse. Web. 1 September 2016.

<sup>25</sup> See, amongst others, Rhodes, Jane. *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1998. Print.; Batker, Carol J. *Native, African, and Jewish American Women's Literature and Journalism in the*

This scholarship also writes black women back into histories of the black press and American women's journalism, a project to which *Professional Anxiety* contributes. When these histories take up black female journalists, they often focus solely on the iconic Ida B. Wells and overlook the careers of other turn-of-the-century black women in the profession.<sup>26</sup> I would argue that this neglect has been facilitated by dominant definitions of journalism that serve to deny the title to the many turn-of-the-century black women working in that field. Scholars of the black press and American women's journalism have noted that categorizing individuals as journalists according to whether or not they engaged in news reporting excludes the many women who were restricted to "soft" news at the turn of the century.<sup>27</sup> I would add that employing traditional definitions of journalism based on factors such as professional associations, accreditation, or paid positions reinforce the very turn-of-the-century dominant discourses surrounding "real" journalism that functioned to marginalize black female journalists in particular. In my project, I

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*Progressive Era*. New York: Columbia UP, 2000. Print.; Rooks, Noliwe. *Ladies' Pages: African American Women's Magazines and the Culture that Made Them*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers UP, 2004. Print.; Lutes (2006); Gardner (2009; 2010); Gardner, Eric. *Black Print Unbound: The Christian Recorder, African American Literature, and Periodical Culture*. New York: Oxford UP, 2015. Print.; Gardner, Eric, ed. *Jennie Carter: A Black Journalist of the Early West*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2007.; Zackodnik (2011; 2015); and Zackodnik, Teresa. "Recirculation and Feminist Black Internationalism in Jessie Fauset's 'The Looking Glass' and Amy Jacques Garvey's 'Our Women and What They Think.'" *Modernism/modernity* 19.3 (2012): 437-459. Web. 1 July 2016.

<sup>26</sup> See, amongst others, Ritchie, Donald A. *American Journalists: Getting the Story*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992. Print.; Mindich (1998); Washburn (2006); Creedon, Pamela J., and Judith Cramer. *Women in Mass Communication*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007. Print.; Whitt, Jan. *Women in American Journalism: A New History*. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2008. Print.; Eaman, Ross Allan. *Historical Dictionary of Journalism*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow P, Inc., 2009. Print.; González, Juan and Joseph Torres. *News for all the People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media*. London and New York: Verso, 2011. Print.; Daly, Christopher. *Covering America: A Narrative History of a Nation's Journalism*. Amherst and Boston: U of Massachusetts P, 2012. Print.; and King, Elliot and Jane Chapman, eds. *Key Readings in Journalism*. New York: Routledge, 2012. Print.

<sup>27</sup> See Streitmatter (1993); Beasley (2001); and Gardner (2010).

utilize the word “journalist” to refer to an individual who published five or more pieces of non-fiction in periodicals. I would argue that the act of repeatedly publishing non-fiction in periodicals would heighten an individual’s awareness of the conventions of journalism sufficiently to enable her to negotiate them within her writing. As I explore in this project, publishing again and again under a specific signature also enabled black female journalists to build a reputation that they ultimately leveraged for both their own professional advancement and that of other black women in the field. This deliberately broad definition not only challenges conventional understandings of “journalism” that exclude black women, but also constitutes an important strategy toward recovering black female journalists’ writing. My broader definition of journalism enables me to investigate little-known black female journalists and to recast *as* journalists black women previously studied primarily as social reformers, activists, or literary writers. For instance, my project draws attention to Maude K. Griffin, about whom little biographical information is known and who is categorized as a short story writer in Jean Fagan Yellin and Cynthia D. Bond’s foundational bibliography of black female writers before 1910, *This Pen is Ours* (Yellin and Bond 263; Wallinger 241).<sup>28</sup> Yet, as I establish in Chapter Two, Griffin was employed by the Associated Press and published widely on fashion (“Miss Maud K. Griffin” n.p.). By recovering Griffin’s career as a journalist, I align with Eric Gardner, who urges scholars to “broaden even further the list of authors and texts we study” in black periodical studies (*Unexpected Places* 8). Though Gardner addresses black literature, I would redirect his statements toward black female journalists in order to argue that their writing “was much richer than our scholarship and our teaching often suggests,” a richness that I attempt to elucidate

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<sup>28</sup> *This Pen is Ours* was published in 1991 as part of The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers series.

through this project (*Unexpected Places* 8).

Drawing on these fields has enabled me to complicate and challenge extant interpretations of black female journalists' writing on the black domestic worker. This writing is chronically understudied, and, when addressed within literary or historical scholarship, it is often situated within a larger context of social reform movements and as part of the black women's club movement, which, by the late nineteenth century, counted hundreds of black women's clubs, culminating in the founding of a national organization in 1896, the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) (Shaw, "Black Club Women" 10-11).<sup>29</sup> Black women's clubs promoted a range of activism, such as anti-lynching campaigns and woman's suffrage, and established institutions, often in support of women, children, and the elderly (Knupfer 1-2). This movement has been central to black women's historiography, and, perhaps because of the prominence of the movement, scholars interpret black female journalists' writing on the black domestic worker as representative of the clubs with which they were associated.<sup>30</sup> Fannie Barrier

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<sup>29</sup> Black women's voluntary organizations had a history that dated back to the late eighteenth century. One of the earliest black women's clubs was the Female Benevolent Society of St. Thomas, a mutual aid society established in Philadelphia in 1793, and by 1830 there were at least twenty-seven female mutual aid societies in Philadelphia alone (Scott 6). For further scholarship on black women's early voluntary organizations, including benevolent societies, see, amongst others, Yee, Shirley J. *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860*. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1992. Print.; Yellin, Jean Fagan and John C. Van Horne, eds. *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1994. Print.; Tate (2003); and Dunbar, Erica Armstrong. *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2008. Print.

<sup>30</sup> See, amongst others, Lerner, Gerda. *Black Women in White America*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972. Print.; Lerner, Gerda. "Early Community Work of Black Club Women." *The Journal of Negro History* 59.2 (1974): 158-167. Print.; Giddings (1984); Dickson, Lynda. "Toward a Broader Angle of Vision in Uncovering Women's History: Black Women's Clubs Revisited." *Black Women in American History*. Ed. Darlene Clark Hine. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1990. 103-120. Print.; duCille, Ann. *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993. Print.; Knupfer (1996); White, Deborah Gray. *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999. Print.; Royster (2000); Wolcott (2001); McHenry (2002); Murdy, Anne-Elizabeth. *Teach the Nation*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.; and

Williams (1855-1944) was a prolific journalist who published in the black and white press, including the *Colored American Magazine* (1900-1909), *The Woman's Era* (1894-1897), *Voice of the Negro* (1904-1907), and the white periodical *The Independent* (1848-1928) (Yellin and Bond 207-210). She was also a pioneering social reform worker and activist, who was, for example, a founding member of both the NACW and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (Deegan, Introduction xxxii), yet she is often identified solely as a clubwoman.<sup>31</sup> This tendency perpetuates a broader scholarly trend of locating early black women's emergence "into public politics [...] with the development of the national black women's club movement," a trend that both marginalizes previous black feminisms and over-emphasizes the black club movement as *the* form of turn-of-the-century black feminism (Zackodnik, *Press* xvii). Reading black female journalists' writing against the history of American journalism has allowed me to pursue an exploration of alternate black feminisms and forms of engagement within the public sphere, and to interrogate the interconnection between journalism and social reform work. In my project, I argue that black women's social reform work often proved a means of both seeking legitimacy within journalism and a threat to that legitimacy.

By examining black female journalists' professional strategies in their engagement with the black domestic worker, my work also differs from much of the scholarship that utilizes their writing primarily as a window into a historical period. For instance, Katherine D. Tillman (1870-

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Rooks, Noliwe. *Ladies' Pages: African American Women's Magazines and the Culture that Made Them*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers UP, 2004. Print.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Brown, Ella Barkley. "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere." *Public Culture* 7 (1994): 107-146. Print.; White, Deborah Gray. *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999. Print.; and Hicks (2010).

?), more commonly known as a poet, novelist and playwright, also regularly wrote non-fiction pieces for the black press, particularly as the editor of a column that went under multiple titles and was published irregularly between 1898 and 1900 in the *Iowa Bystander* (1894-1986) and covered a range of topics including society news, religion, literature, and civil rights. Her article “Paying Professions for Colored Girls,” published in 1907 in the well-respected monthly Chicago magazine *The Voice* (1906-1907), provides details and advice on a range of employment options for black women, including domestic labour, and has been mined for historical information by scholars of black history and black biography.<sup>32</sup> While black female journalists’ writing and the black press in general has proved an invaluable resource for investigating turn-of-the-century black history, I would argue that the scholarly trend of utilizing this writing as an accurate historical account rests on a literal interpretation that necessarily ignores the rhetoric of a figure like Tillman. The focus within black periodical studies and periodical studies more broadly on a close attention to rhetorical address, press forms, and the periodical context has enabled me to challenge this scholarly trend by analyzing the ways that their writing constituted professional strategy, not simply historical record.

My study moves from a focus on black female journalists’ efforts to negotiate the standard of respectable journalism within the black press to the ways their writing on the black domestic worker signaled their attempts to negotiate dominant understandings of legitimacy within American journalism. This trajectory enables me to elucidate black female journalists’ strategic performance of and challenges to multiple meanings of professionalism. Chapter One

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<sup>32</sup> See, amongst others, Knupfer (1996); Alexander, Eleanor. *Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow: The Courtship and Marriage of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Alice Ruth Moore*. New York: New York UP, 2001. Print.; and Bundles, A’Lelia. *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker*. New York: Scribner, 2001. Print.

explores the ways that black female journalists attempted to insert themselves within and reshape the black press through their writing on journalism. This chapter interrogates dominant discourses about the black female journalist in the black press and “race biographies,” a dominant black print culture form that articulated the achievements of individual African Americans as part of a larger narrative about the progress of “the race.” I identify the ideal of black female journalism that emerged from these print culture forms and that policed the behaviour of women working within the profession as it functioned in the interests of collective racial advancement within the public sphere. Black female journalists such as Katherine Tillman, Lucy Wilmot Smith, Anna Julia Cooper and Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin utilized their writing on journalism to negotiate this ideology by promoting professional advancement and what I have retroactively termed feminist collectivity amongst black women in the field, even over racial collectivity. Yet, I also argue that these women sought to gain public support and acceptance from their colleagues for this redefinition by simultaneously performing the traditional ideal of black female journalism through their writing. Chapter One, then, takes up the ways that black female journalists were forced to adhere to a certain extent to the behavioural norms, language, and ideology of the black press in order to validate their attempts to alter that collective.

Chapter Two continues this analysis of the affordances and limitations of operating within a collective as a minority by focusing on black female journalists’ writing on the black domestic worker, as well as the interconnected figure of the black urban woman, within the context of dominant discourses surrounding black urbanization and migration. I analyze editorials, columns and articles by black female journalists such as Addie Hunton, Ella Chase Williams, Victoria Earle Matthews and Maude K. Griffin, who worked to highlight employers’ sexual violence against black domestic workers and challenged stereotypes of the innately immoral urban black domestic worker and black urban woman more broadly. Their efforts were particularly important

in a period in which such violence was prevalent but rarely addressed, and in which this stereotype served to justify the policing of black urban women and the black urban and migrant population. Yet such writing necessitated that black female journalists distinguish themselves from black domestic workers, as well as the black urban woman, in order to maintain legitimacy. Due to the race, gender, and class of the black domestic worker and black urban woman, and their centrality to rising anxiety about black urbanization and migration amongst upper- and middle-class whites and African Americans, these figures were associated with corporeality and urbanity in a period when these characteristics were, in turn, linked to new journalism. I argue that by differentiating themselves from the black domestic worker and black urban woman, black female journalists could dissociate themselves from this ostensibly inferior form of journalism and align with informational journalists, a prestigious stream of journalism that was widely racialized as white and gendered as masculine. Chapter Two explores the ways that operating within the collective of informational journalism lent credibility to their efforts to subvert systems of oppression, even as it simultaneously limited the kind of advocacy they could pursue on behalf of the black domestic worker and black urban woman.

Chapter Three builds on this focus on the restrictions of working within informational journalism by addressing black female journalists' writing on the "servant problem" and the black domestic worker and homemaker more specifically. Black female journalists such as Fannie Barrier Williams, Mary Church Terrell, Alberta Moore Smith and Ella L. Mahammitt primarily avoided the fraught topics of corporeality and urbanity, while continuing to distance themselves from the black domestic worker, as well as the homemaker, in order to claim membership within two collectives: informational journalists and the wide range of stakeholders in the "servant problem" who sought to "fix" the ostensibly flawed homemaker and domestic worker. I argue that, for black female journalists, positioning themselves within these collectives

constituted an opportunity for professional advancement by lending their writing the legitimacy of informational journalism and thereby increasing the chances of exposing it to these stakeholders in the “servant problem.” By positioning themselves as informational journalists, they also aligned with the movement toward professionalization to which this stream of journalism claimed to contribute, and dissociated themselves from new journalism, which was widely perceived as a barrier to this movement. Yet, in order to manage their proximity to the homemaker and domestic worker, they reinforced damaging stereotypes about these figures, which functioned in particular to prohibit black domestic workers’ attempts to secure professional status and autonomy. This chapter argues that black female journalists’ efforts to position themselves as informational journalists and stakeholders in the “servant problem” necessitated creating a hierarchy between themselves and the black domestic worker and homemaker, with these figures signifying the cost of gaining membership to these collectives.

*Professional Anxiety* builds a layered understanding of black female journalists’ adherence to standards of professionalism within the black press and American journalism, which in turn limited the kinds of writing they could pursue. Yet this project also makes legible the ways in which they consistently worked to redefine their relationship to these restrictive models of legitimacy, even as this work often had negative consequences for the black domestic worker, compromising their efforts to ameliorate her position within “the race” and her occupation. In these chapters, then, collectivity becomes an inclusionary *and* exclusionary act, as black female journalists endeavoured to negotiate their exclusion from legitimizing collectives and from the ability to define professionalism within their field by building collectives of careerist, feminist black female journalists that often defined themselves in opposition to black domestic workers.

## Chapter One:

### Collectivism and Careerism in Writing by and about the Black Female Journalist

In the 5 June 1886 instalment of her column entitled “Our Woman’s Department,” published in T. Thomas Fortune’s weekly *New York Freeman*, leading black female journalist Gertrude Mossell advised her female readers that journalism constituted the “best means of reaching our people, and even making money. Yes, [...] we candidly say, Work, and you can succeed and make money” (n.p.). This combination of promoting journalism as a means of uniting members of “the race” and as a means of black women achieving personal success typified much of black female journalists’ writing on the profession. This chapter analyzes their articles, columns, editorials, and collections of essays, published in the 1880s and 1890s, and argues that they constitute a negotiation of racial collectivity, a dominant ideology amongst African Americans that promoted forms of racial solidarity and collaboration within the public sphere (Brooks 73). Though it enabled African Americans to defend and uplift “the race,” racial collectivity also condemned personal ambition, particularly amongst women, and, in journalism, this opposition to ambition compounded black women’s marginalization in a period in which this field was highly male-dominated. I would argue that, through their writing on the profession, black female journalists worked to intertwine collectivism and careerism by constructing black female journalists’ drive to advance professionally as ultimately serving the interests of “the race” as a whole. While repeatedly performing their race loyalty, they endeavoured to redefine women’s place within racial collectivity by promoting a collective of feminist, ambitious black female journalists.

This chapter takes as its focus black female journalists’ engagement with the black press as a counterpublic, a theoretical term that builds on and challenges Jürgen Habermas’s *The*

*Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962).<sup>33</sup> In a cornerstone of Habermas's theorizing of the public sphere, he claims that it enables individual citizens to engage in "rational-critical debate" about issues of "public concern" in order to hold the state accountable to citizens through systems such as free speech, free press, and free assembly (179, 127, 83). According to Habermas, the centrality of this rational-critical debate to the public sphere meant that citizens must come together as "common human beings," bracketing differences in political or socioeconomic status, and being swayed only by the most well-reasoned argument (54). Though *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* has been foundational to public sphere theory, it has been widely contested for its conception of a unified public sphere to which all citizens had equal access. For example, Russ Castronovo argues that Habermas creates a "fantasy of commonality and equality" that obscures and thereby perpetuates the systems through which social and material resources are unequally distributed (118-119). Indeed, Habermas's insistence that citizens become "common human beings" through their engagement with the public sphere erases the ways that the concept of personhood has historically been highly racialized and gendered (Castronovo 118). Out of criticisms such as these has emerged the concept of multiple publics and counterpublics.

In an argument that has been highly influential to scholarship on the public sphere, Nancy Fraser asserts that minorities have always formed "alternate publics" or counterpublics, in which they can "invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (123). For Fraser, counterpublics push back against many of the

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<sup>33</sup> An influential theorizer of the public sphere, Habermas claimed that it developed in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries in Europe and flourished in the early nineteenth century. It was fostered and sustained by forms of print, especially newspapers and novels, and by communal spaces such as coffeehouses and salons, and promoted citizens' ability to act as a check on the state via publicity (Habermas 27-140).

limitations of Habermas's public sphere by enabling "alternative styles of political behaviour and alternative norms of public speech" (116). This function of counterpublics is particularly valuable given the ways that "rational-critical debate" is both racialized and gendered as white and masculine forms of discourse (Zackodnick, *Press* xxiii-xxiv).

Scholars of black counterpublics have also theorized the ways these spaces resist the inherent liberalism of the dominant public sphere.<sup>34</sup> Drawing on democratic individualism, Habermas conceives of the public sphere as a space in which individuals have the freedom and moral authority to ensure, by majority rule, that they are fairly ruled by the state (Kateb 278-279). By making the individual the "unit of analysis [...] and its primary project," Habermas theorizes a dominant public sphere that is inherently opposed to collectivity, with the coherence and continuity of groups serving as an antithesis to individualism (Brown, *Regulating* 21). In contrast to the liberalism of Habermas's analysis of the public sphere, African Americans historically entered the public sphere through what Joanna Brooks refers to as "bounded collectivity," not with the "negative identity of the disinterested individual citizen, but through positive collective incorporation" (85, 73). Through the black press and other counterpublics, African Americans practiced the rights that "whites under the auspices of racial privilege assumed, understood and enjoyed as the natural provenance of the individual," establishing a dialectical relationship

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<sup>34</sup> See, amongst others, Baker, Houston A. *Critical Memory: Public Spheres, African American Writing, and Black Fathers and Sons in America*. Vol. 8. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001. Print.; Brown, Ella Barkley. "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere." *Public Culture* 7 (1994): 107-146. Print.; Dawson, Michael C. "A Black Counterpublic?: Economic Earthquakes, Racial Agenda(s), and Black Politics." *Public Culture* 7.1 (1994): 195-223. Print.; Black Public Sphere Collective. *The Black Public Sphere*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995. Print.; and Squires, Catherine. "The Black Press and the State." *Counterpublics and the State*. Eds. Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer. Albany, State U of New York P, 2001. 111-135. Print.; Squires, Catherine. "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres." *Communication Theory* 12.4 (2002): 446-468. Print.

between black collectivity and white democratic individualism well before they had full access to civic participation (Brooks 85). Though Brooks refers to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, her argument is applicable to the turn of the century, when African Americans built new counterpublics and nurtured pre-existing ones, including the black press.

The black press promoted this sense of collectivity in part through the process that Benedict Anderson has influentially theorized as an “imagined community,” in which individuals who are separated geographically are bonded through the act of simultaneously reading a periodical, with each one “well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands [...] of others of whose existence he is confident, yet whose identity he has not the slightest notion” (36). The “imagined communities” of the black press and other black counterpublics were by no means homogenous or harmonious, but members were united by a common thread of racial solidarity and collaboration. “Blackness” was a pre-requisite and a constant source of discussion, with black counterpublics serving as spaces in which African Americans could imagine new possibilities for their group and work to defend “the race” from those who would harm it.

That “harm” could come, it was believed, from other African Americans as well, exemplifying the ways that black counterpublics were not solely formed as sites of opposition to dominant white society, as has often been the focus of scholarship on them, but also marshalled intraracial concerns.<sup>35</sup> Fractures within black counterpublics, often around contentious issues such as gender, class, sexuality, region and religion, meant that African Americans regularly disagreed about the best strategies to promote the advancement of “the race.” One of the most

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, *Keepin It Hushed* (2011), in which Vorris Nunley criticizes Michael Dawson’s influential theorizing of black counterpublics for being too “concerned with and dependent upon Black life and culture as resistance and opposition” (34).

effective ways of shoring up support for a particular argument was to claim that an opponent betrayed “the race” through her actions or ideas, mobilizing the dominant ideology of racial collectivity. That accusation had such power that even T. Thomas Fortune, one of the most well-respected black newspaper editors of the turn of the century, faced accusations of disloyalty amidst rumours that he was a Democrat, a party that most African Americans reviled due to its history of promoting white supremacy. In response, Fortune had to publicly claim that he was a “Negrowump,” a term that meant that his loyalty to his race trumped his political leanings (qtd. in Kachun 192). I would argue that members of the press such as Fortune were especially susceptible to assertions that they had betrayed “the race” because their writing was vulnerable to the scrutiny of a large number of readers and their representations of African Americans had the potential to influence interracial relations, for good or for ill.

As professional women, black female journalists were even more likely than their male counterparts to be denounced for betrayals to “the race” due to dominant ideology surrounding black working women. Many African Americans supported middle-class black women earning wages because black families simply could not survive without that source of income and because they perceived these women as key to furthering the project of racial respectability. A prominent ideology at the turn of the century, racial respectability was a discourse of racial collectivity that held every African American responsible for improving him or herself morally, intellectually, and economically, and for encouraging other African Americans to do the same (Rael 186; Higginbotham 196). In a period in which African Americans were increasingly constrained by the systems of white supremacy, they strategically adopted racial respectability both in the hopes of promoting racial progress and disproving myths of black inferiority so soundly that white America would be forced to grant them respect and equal rights (Rael 159). For many African Americans, black professional women had the potential to embody the values

of racial respectability by gaining a higher education and demonstrating a strong work ethic (Logan 153). Yet African Americans' policing of black women due to their centrality to the project of racial respectability restricted them to a limited model of professionalism. In order to counter long-standing stereotypes of masculinized and sexualized black women that served to perpetuate white supremacy, African Americans often promoted a vision of a highly respectable black woman who would create a moral black family and "race" (Gaines 5-6). For many of these African Americans, black women who devoted themselves to personal success undermined the project of racial respectability by neglecting their primary responsibilities to "the race" as wives and mothers (Perkins 24). As Stephanie Shaw argues, middle-class black women were also socialized to believe that they must employ their higher education to serve their community, and that shirking this responsibility would be perceived as selfish, even traitorous (*What a Woman* 119). As I explore in this chapter, members of the press publicly criticized black female journalists who failed to uphold these standards, employing the black press to reinforce a narrow definition of professionalism.

The turn-of-the-century transition from anonymous to signed publication compounded black female journalists' already complex relationship to collective interests. I would argue that anonymous publication had enabled black women to enact a kind of self-effacement that echoed the standards of respectable black womanhood. Anonymity was the standard until the 1880s and 1890s because, according to many members of the press, it depended on the collective authority of the periodical and encouraged impartiality over self-interest in journalists (Schudson 140-142; Law 18-19). Through anonymous publication, black women adhered to the ideology of racial collectivity by dispersing their individual voices into a larger black counterpublic. By contrast, the late nineteenth-century rise of the signature over anonymous publication promoted individualism in journalism (Beetham "Periodicals" 236). The signature symbolized

simultaneously a sense of continuity and novelty, like the periodical genre itself, which, as Margaret Beetham argues, is always “different but is still ‘the same’ periodical” (“Towards” 28). The repetition of a signature functions to draw readers to a specific signed piece by reminding them of the quality or politics of the writing previously published under that name, and any contrast between two or more pieces emphasizes the journalist’s ability to be innovative. Through the use of signature, journalists’ names became brands, promising a particular kind of journalism to both readers and potential employers, and this commercialization was further facilitated by the turn-of-the-century rise of new journalism (Campbell 125).<sup>36</sup> Bylines were standard within new journalism, and, accompanied by the use of the signature, female journalists built their careers by merging their responses to an event with their report on it (Wiener 192). Female journalists were no longer disembodied voices, dispersed within the larger periodical, but were instead the objects of publicity, which came with additional opportunities and concerns to manage, particularly for black female journalists (Lutes, *Front Page Girls* 15). In order to negotiate the fraught nature of these individualistic new journalism conventions, black female journalists strategically performed their dedication to the ethos of racial collectivity through their writing on the profession. This chapter reads their repeated declarations of race loyalty as a route to gaining the support and respect of their colleagues and the public.

Yet, even as black female journalists’ writing reproduced the ethos of racial collectivity, it also promoted what we can retroactively term feminist collectivity. Scholars have long noted that the turn of the century marked an intensification of the formation and influence of black feminist

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<sup>36</sup> In the 5 January 1889 issue of the Indianapolis *Freeman*, Gertrude Mossell articulated the draw of the signature in her description of fellow journalist Ida B. Wells, stating: “One always reads her articles to the end and never casts aside the humblest publication after seeing her signature, until one finds what she has to say” (“Our Women of Letters” n.p.).

collectives, through, for example, the church and the black women's club movement.<sup>37</sup> Though not all of the women who are the focus of *Professional Anxiety* would have identified as feminists, they were virtually all members of such organizations, if not founders and leaders of them, and I would argue that their project of developing feminist collectivity extends beyond social reform and activist movements and into their journalism. Through their writing, they modelled a feminist journalism that privileged loyalty to black women in the profession over "the race," and their signatures became symbols of their ability to continue to publish even while modelling this standard of journalism that represented a challenge to racial collectivity. With disparate strategies but common goals, they endeavoured to advance the cause of all black female journalists by advocating for this collective, exposing the systems of gender oppression that served to marginalize them, and promoting careerism amongst women in the field. Though the word "careerism" might suggest individualism, it is important to note that black female journalists maintained a sense of racial collectivity throughout their promotions of careerism by building black women's collectives, working to develop counterpublics such as the black press, and endeavouring to uplift "the race." Black female journalists therefore continued to reject the rewards of liberalism, of individual freedom and autonomy, even as they negotiated the ways the ethos of racial collectivity positioned careerism as a negative characteristic in black women. I position their careerist collectivity, then, as a form of feminist action that challenged both the liberalism of the dominant public sphere and the structure and ideology of the counterpublic of

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<sup>37</sup> See, amongst others, Lerner, Gerda. *Black Women in White America*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972. Print.; Lerner, Gerda. "Early Community Work of Black Club Women." *The Journal of Negro History* 59.2 (1974): 158-167. Print.; Giddings (1984); Dickson, Lynda. "Toward a Broader Angle of Vision in Uncovering Women's History: Black Women's Clubs Revisited." *Black Women in American History*. Ed. Darlene Clark Hine. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1990. 103-120. Print.; Higginbotham (1994); Knupfer (1996); White, Deborah Gray. *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999. Print.; and Wolcott (2001).

the black press.

In scholarship on these prominent black female journalists, their promotion of a careerist, feminist model of black female journalism and their strategic use of racial collectivity to articulate it are overlooked. Their articles, columns, editorials, prospectuses, and collections of essays are chronically understudied within scholarship on the black press, often only appearing as a footnote and mined for historical details.<sup>38</sup> For instance, Lucy Wilmot Smith's article "Some Female Writers of the Negro Race," published in 1889 in the trade publication *The Journalist*, has been repeatedly used as a source of historical information about black female journalists.<sup>39</sup> The literary scholars and historians who study these texts in a more in-depth manner often read them as evidence that these women were primarily committed to adhering to the standards of racial respectability<sup>40</sup> or as proof that black male editors and journalists welcomed black women into the profession.<sup>41</sup> I would argue that these approaches are problematic in a number of ways.

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<sup>38</sup> See for example Gere, Anne Ruggles. *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1997. Print.; Karpf, Juanita. "The Early Years of African American Music Periodicals, 1886-1922: History, Ideology, Context." *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 1.2 (1997): 143-168. Print.; Beasley, Maurine H. and Sheila J. Gibbons. *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism*. State College, PA: Strata Publishing, Inc., 2002.; and Bradley, Patricia. *Women and Press: The Struggle for Equality*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2005. Print.

<sup>39</sup> See for example Perry, Carolyn and Mary Weeks-Baxter. *The History of Southern Women's Literature*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 2002. Print.; Bradley, Patricia. *Women and Press: The Struggle for Equality*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2005. Print.; and Fahs (2011).

<sup>40</sup> See for example Washington, Mary Helen. Introduction. *A Voice from the South*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988. Print.; duCille, Ann. *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993. Print.; Streitmatter ("Gertrude Bustill Mossell" 1993); Higginbotham (1994); Booker, Christian Brian. *"I Will Wear No Chain!": A Social History of African-American Males*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2000. Print.; Nelson, Emmanuel Sampath, ed. *African-American Authors, 1745-1945: Bio-bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000. Print.; and Chambers, Steiner and Fleming (2004).

<sup>41</sup> See early histories of black female journalists at the turn of the century, including Wade-Gayles (1981); Snorgrass, J. William. "Pioneer Black Women Journalists from the 1850s to

For one, they indicate a confirmation bias toward finding further “proof” of the racial respectability narrative that runs throughout many scholarly biographies, historiographies of black feminism, and scholarship on black women’s writing at the turn of the century. I would also assert that reading black female journalists’ writing on the profession literally is problematic since its gendered dynamics meant they could hardly express negative or mixed views of black male members of the press, the black press in general, or their own position within journalism. In contrast to these scholarly trends, I would ask: How might we read black female journalist’s writing as strategically negotiating collectivism? What might doing so tell us about how they were actively constructing what their work and their place within journalism meant?

### **Betrayals in the black press: Ida B. Wells**

The dominant discourses about respectable black female journalism that these women negotiated were articulated in the black press. In their repeated praise of specific values in prominent black female journalists, members of the black press constructed a self-effacing ideal that dedicated herself to helping others, particularly the black family and “the race.”<sup>42</sup> This ideal reaffirmed the importance of loyalty to African Americans, especially when entering the public sphere, and created an implicit threat against black female journalists who might be tempted to “betray the race” by prioritizing individualism over collectivism. When black female journalists deviated from this model, their colleagues were quick to publicly discipline them through the

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the 1950s.” *Black Women in American History*. Ed. Darlene Clark Hine. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1990. 591-608. Print.; and Streitmatter, Rodger. “African-American Women Journalists and Their Male Editors.” *Journalism Quarterly* 70.2 (1993): 276-286. Print.

<sup>42</sup> See, amongst others, Joannah. “A Brilliant Lady Journalist.” *The Freeman* 6 September 1890; “Among the Reformers.” *Colored American Magazine* January/February 1902; and “The Colored Women in Literature.” *The Broad Ax* 11 May 1912.

pages of the press, as is perhaps most evident in the case of Ida B. Wells (1862-1931), the famed crusader against lynching, co-owner and editor of the *Free Speech and Headlight* (1888-1892), and later journalist for the *New York Age*. Arguably the most prominent and influential black female journalist of her day, she became a source of debate amongst African Americans partly due to her overt militancy as both a journalist and an activist (Schechter 67-68). Scholarship on Wells has also repeatedly suggested that she was a divisive figure because her outspoken nature created a mutual enmity among social reformers and activists,<sup>43</sup> race leaders,<sup>44</sup> and her fellow members of the press. For example, in 1890, Edward E. Cooper, the editor of the weekly Indianapolis *Freeman* who had been critical of Wells since the outset of her career, printed dual illustrations that depicted her first as stating, “I wish I were a man,” and then as a yapping dog (qtd. in Schechter 63). By dehumanizing her and impugning her womanhood, this vicious attack both delegitimized Wells and marked journalism as a risky endeavour for black women in general. To what extent was Cooper, and the other journalists and editors who berated Wells, motivated by her refusal to adhere to the ideal of black female journalism and to the ethos of racial collectivity more broadly? How does our understanding of this iconic journalist change if we reinterpret her public quarrels as negotiations of the behavioural norms of black women in

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<sup>43</sup> Often social reformers and activists served as a source of support for Wells, as in 1892, when whites, enraged by her editorials on interracial sex as it related to lynching, burned down the offices of *Free Speech and Headlight* in Memphis, forcing her to move North. Two hundred and fifty black female activists, community organizers and professionals gathered in New York later that same year to honour her and to raise funds for her forthcoming pamphlet on lynching (Giddings 29-30). Yet Wells also had significant personal and political disagreements with leading members of the black women’s club movement in particular, including Mary Church Terrell and Fannie Barrier Williams (McMurry 249-256).

<sup>44</sup> For example, Wells was a fierce critic of Booker T. Washington’s accommodationist racial politics, with biographer Kristina DuRocher stating that she appeared “to thrive on conflict with the Tuskegee president, almost gleefully attacking his points and countering them with her own” (n.p.).

journalism?

In her journalism, Wells was certainly capable of emphasizing the value of modesty and domesticity, as is evident in “Woman’s Mission,” an article that appeared in 1885 in the *New York Freeman* and that was published years before she began her notorious campaign against lynching in 1892. This article is positioned directly next to “Our Woman’s Department,” Gertrude Mossell’s column that ran between 1885 and 1887, relegating “woman’s issues” and female journalists to one corner of the *New York Freeman*, separated from the rest of the issue and from pieces by “real,” male journalists. Wells furthers this gender hierarchy through her performance of the ideal black female journalist by employing the language of what scholars have retroactively labelled maternal feminism. A common strategy amongst turn-of-the-century social reformers, especially white women, maternal feminists argued that as mothers and caregivers, women were responsible for the moral and social well-being of the nation (LeGates 247). Wells draws on the language of maternal feminism in her assertion that women have historically had “boundless” capacity to influence others, particularly in their roles as wives, mothers, sisters and daughters, beginning with Eve and the Virgin Mary (“Woman’s Mission” n.p.). She urges black women to follow the “standard of earnest, thoughtful, pure, noble womanhood,” so they too can guide and comfort others, and implicitly positions herself as adhering to this standard (“Woman’s Mission” n.p.). Constructing herself as a “race woman” who promotes respectability and a collective-orientation amongst black women, Wells represents her journalism as furthering the project of racial respectability. Through these performances of the ethos of racial collectivity, we see Wells working to claim professionalism at this early stage of her career.

Though Wells explicitly represents herself as a respectable black female journalist in “Woman’s Mission,” on other occasions she deviated sharply from this standard, particularly

after she achieved the powerful positions of co-editor and publisher of *Free Speech and Headlight*. Though she dedicated much of her life to fighting racial injustice, she was also quick to condemn other African Americans in her writing. For instance, as Wells recalls in her autobiography, she once printed “a very caustic comment” about a black minister who had an affair with a married woman, and in response, the black clergymen of Memphis vowed to boycott the *Free Speech* (Duster 40). In her next issue, Wells published the names of every clergyman who announced his intention to wage war against her paper, accusing them of upholding “the immoral conduct of one of their number” and asking the readers “if they were willing to support preachers who would sneak into their homes when their backs were turned and debauch their wives” (Duster 40). In her autobiography, she concludes triumphantly: “Needless to say we never heard any more about the boycott, and the *Free Speech* flourished like a green bay tree” (Duster 40). Her willingness to publicly attack black men and to explicitly address the “unladylike” subject of sex obviously violated the ethos of race loyalty and the black female journalism ideal. This conflict marks Wells as masculinized, not simply because she entered the male-dominated territory of journalism, but also because she violated the boundaries of respectable black womanhood.

Incidents like these earned Wells a reputation as an outspoken writer, garnering her both praise and censure from black male members of the press, with some applauding her for using her sharp tongue in defense of “the race” and others insisting that she was pursuing journalism out of self-interest. For instance, in 1892 in the Indianapolis *Freeman*, Cooper warned her condescendingly not to give the impression “that she is a poser for attention” (qtd. in McMurry 153). Other pieces in the black press asserted that she was motivated by a desire for fame or money. In 1894, the *People’s Friend* (1894-1896), a black weekly published out of Topeka, Kansas and edited by William Jeltz, reported on Wells’ tour of England and Scotland, where she

gave lectures and interviews in order to gain international support for her anti-lynching campaign. The paper announced, “No one will be benefited by it but Miss Wells, who no doubt will return to her native land with a well-filled pocket” (qtd. in McMurry 218). Such public accusations that Wells did not serve the greater good, but instead was motivated by a crass careerism, reveal the high cost of not conforming to the ideal of black female journalism.

Other black male editors insisted that Wells had actively damaged racial progress through her journalism and activism. Blanche K. Bruce, a former Senator whom she had once censured for prioritizing personal ambition above racial solidarity, wrote in 1894 in his paper, *The Leavenworth Herald* (1894-1899), that members of the press “resent this egotistic, self-appointed, bossing principle which seems to underlie Ida B.’s makeup” (qtd. in McMurry 232). Cooper, maintaining his antagonistic attitude toward Wells, complained in the Indianapolis *Freeman* in 1902 that she had assumed the role of “uncrowned queen of the Negroes of America” and accused her of “boldly insisting [that] Negro men had not sufficient intellectual fibre or courage to shape thought or mould opinions for the race” (qtd. in McMurry 233). Cooper and Bruce position Wells as undermining the project of racial respectability by displaying an unladylike ambition to direct African Americans as a whole, including black men. They mobilize the ethos of racial collectivity as a policing measure, suggesting that for women to usurp black men’s “natural” positions as leaders within the black press and black activism is tantamount to a betrayal of “the race.”

Though attacks against Wells were numerous and often vicious, she also had a large number of supporters within the black press, especially amongst black male editors such as T. Thomas Fortune of the *New York Globe* (1880-1884) and its successors, the *New York Freeman and Age* (1887-1953), and George Knox, who purchased the Indianapolis *Freeman* from Edward E. Cooper in 1892 (McMurry 90-92, 232). However, these “defenders” routinely minimized her

power and skill as a journalist, editor and activist in the process of defending her, often by describing her in diminutive terms. As Linda McMurry notes, black men praised Wells in highly gendered language, “full of such phrases as ‘noble little heroine,’ ‘solitary little woman,’ ‘brave little woman,’ ‘brilliant little being’” (232). This praise challenges figures like Cooper who sought to delegitimize her by masculinizing her, yet, in their focus on her “littleness” and femininity, these men also suggest that the black press is a male-dominated space in which she will always be an anomaly, always be vulnerable and, implicitly, always in need of their protection and guidance.

Many of her supporters also depicted Wells as a fervent race woman in order to defend her. When she published her infamous pamphlet, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All its Phases* (1892), the *American Citizen* praised her for the “noble position she took in defending her race [...] She is a heroine; would we had more such zeal and nobility of womanhood” (“A Distinguished Woman Honored” n.p.). Similarly, many male editors reported enthusiastically on her anti-lynching tour in the United Kingdom in 1893 and 1894, stating that she was lecturing “on the outrages [perpetrated] against her race in America,” and describing her as the “race-loving and patriotic young editress” (“Sentiment Against Lynching” n.p.; “Miss Ida B. Wells” n.p.). These statements refuted the critics who argued that Wells was motivated by self-interest, but the repetitive nature of the praise suggests that it is dependent on her remaining focused on serving “the race.” Like many of her detractors, these pieces measure Wells’s value as a journalist and activist in terms of her adherence to the ideal black female journalist and to racial collectivity.

I would argue that these appraisals of Wells amongst male editors and journalists functioned to define the kinds of work black women could do within the counterpublic of the black press. Michael Warner theorizes the process of public-building in *Publics and Counterpublics* (2005),

arguing that to belong to a particular public “is to be a certain kind of person, to inhabit a certain kind of social world [...] to be motivated by a certain normative horizon, and to speak within a certain language ideology” (10). By praising specific characteristics in her and censuring others, members of the press worked to define the “social world” of the black press and her role within in it, and to welcome into the profession a “certain kind” of black women who had all of Wells’s positive traits and none of her supposed flaws. Since she was the most iconic black female journalist of her day, in many ways she served to make legible the restrictions within which she operated to other women in the profession or aspiring to join it. We cannot categorize the ways black male members of the press appraised Wells as indicative of simple personal antipathies, but must instead understand her as a living example to other black women of the professional risks of deviating from the ideal of black female journalism.

### **Manipulating race biography**

“Race biographies” simultaneously reproduced this ideal and constituted an important strategy in black female journalists’ efforts to redefine the work they could do and its value. Race biographies were a popular genre that appeared in the black press from the late 1880s to the early twentieth century and in book form in the 1890s and early 1900s. In the race biographies I analyze, the authors expressed admiration for the personal characteristics and professional milestones of prominent black female journalists, doubly linking them to the ethos of collectivity by positioning them as part of larger narratives about the accomplishments of African Americans as a whole and as symbolic exemplars of “the race.” These race biographies, then, reinforced the idea that African Americans, particularly black women, must prioritize racial collectivity when entering the public sphere and disciplined black female journalists’ personal and professional behaviour. The repetitive nature of these texts also served to establish the conventions of race

biographies that addressed black women in the profession, conventions that black female journalists would both reproduce and subvert in their own writing.

Though African Americans had been writing “communal narratives” since the 1780s, race biography or race history became an increasingly popular genre at the turn of the century due to factors such as increased literacy and the professionalization of historians (Maffly-Kipp 7). Race biographers focused on the “brave deeds and noble characteristics” of notable African Americans from the past and present, as lawyer and educator Edward A. Johnson stated in his own communal narrative, *A School History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1890* (1911) (qtd. in Maffly 201-202). These publications undermined the stereotypes of African Americans promulgated by plantation fiction, blackface minstrelsy, vaudeville, racist pseudo-science and Social Darwinism, presenting African Americans as intelligent, hard-working, and often middle- or upper-class professionals (Hall 152). They endeavoured to “restructure the *race’s* image of *itself*” by instilling pride in both black history and a present in which African Americans made their mark on the political, cultural, economic and religious realms, defying the expectations of racist whites (Gates, “The Trope” 140).

Race biographers further endeavoured to empower African Americans by countering the widespread myth that as a racial group they had no history. Whites justified this assertion by arguing African Americans had achieved nothing noteworthy in their centuries in America and that their homeland, Africa, had similarly produced no history or civilizations before European colonization, claims that were legitimized by Euro-American scholars and intellectuals (Adamo 9).<sup>45</sup> These arguments in turn shored up support for systemic racism, with whites insisting that

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<sup>45</sup> For instance, in his lectures on the philosophy of history, Georg Hegel stated: “Africa is no historical part of the world. It has neither movement nor development to exhibit” (qtd. in Adamo 9).

uncivilized, historyless African Americans were not capable or deserving of full political and civil rights (Hall 153). Race biographers defied these claims by cataloguing educated, cultured, moral, and politically astute African Americans from the past and their contemporary moment, suggesting that, as a racial group, they had never been inferior to whites, nor would they ever be.

In the process of recording the past and present achievements of “the race” and imagining its impressive future, many race biographies functioned to set a standard of professional and personal behaviour for contemporary black women in a range of fields, including journalism. Their depictions of prominent black female journalists suggest that these women must dedicate themselves to aiding “the race,” a marker of professionalism also made legible through the writing on Wells in the black press. For instance, in *Noted Negro Women: Their Triumphs and Activities* (1893), which focused explicitly on the accomplishments of black women, Munro Majors states of Mary Cook, journalist and professor of Latin: “what the future holds in store for [her] depends largely upon her own progressive efforts in behalf of her race. To become great depends upon the ease of losing sight of self to accomplish good for others” (196). Majors depicts Cook as a “race woman” who demonstrates her dedication to other African Americans not only through her profession but also, more importantly, through her ability to sacrifice any personal ambitions in favour of the black collective. This passage is not only anti-careerist, but also creates clear restrictions on the subject matter and types of journalism black female journalists could pursue, limiting them solely to the kind of work that could be construed as furthering racial progress. This emphasis on racial solidarity confirms Brooks’s contention that African Americans entered the public sphere not through a democratic individualism but collectively, to the point that it becomes both a defining and disciplining feature of what it means to be a respectable black female journalist.

Whereas criticism and praise of Wells primarily addressed her loyalty to “the race,” in race

biographies we also see the ethos of racial collectivity articulated in depictions of black female journalists' dedication to the black family, reinforcing dominant discourses that demanded that black women in general must prioritize their roles in the domestic realm even while entering the public sphere (Long vi-xix). For instance, in *Women of Distinction* (1893), Lawson Scruggs frames Julia Ringwood Coston's founding of *Ringwood's Afro-American Journal of Fashion* (1891-1892?), the first popular magazine published by and for black women, as an extension of both her happy family life and her husband's literary background. Discussing her husband, Reverend W.H. Coston, pastor and author, Scruggs credits him with her achievement, with his "practical experience [enabling] him to suggest plans and methods for the realization of that cherished desire of her heart [*Ringwood's*] which will forever distinguish her among Afro-American women" (142). Coston's ability to carry out the complex roles of editor and publisher of a black periodical are reduced to an emotional impulse, and *Ringwood's* becomes an extension of a patriarchal marriage, binding her work in the public sphere to her ability to perform her duties in the private sphere. Though similar to broader dominant discourses about women in the public sphere foregrounding their domesticity, Scruggs's description of Coston serves a particular and racialized purpose. His emphasis on the family-oriented nature of the ideal black female journalist challenges myths of black inferiority by demonstrating that black women remain respectable even when entering a male-dominated profession like journalism, which many members of the press claimed would sap female journalists of their "natural" femininity.<sup>46</sup>

Like Scruggs's sketch of Coston, James T. Haley's description of journalist and temperance

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<sup>46</sup> For example, Edwin Shuman, an editor at the *Chicago Record-Herald*, published a book in 1899 called *The Art and Practice of Journalism*, in which he predicted what would happen to women when they attempted to lead the life of a journalist: "Women will swiftly lose many of their high ideals and tender ways, as inevitably as if they had been run through a machine for the purpose" (qtd. in Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming 73).

worker M.A. McCurdy in *Afro-American Encyclopaedia* (1895) similarly intertwines devotion to the black family and achievements in journalism. Haley positions McCurdy's professional decisions as motivated primarily by difficulties in her personal life, particularly her work as co-editor of the weekly *Southern Recorder* (1886?-1888?), located in Atlanta and edited by Bishop M. Turner: "[God] suffered her to become deprived of her husband. Thus left to herself she became more anxious to do something to elevate humanity" (137). He positions McCurdy as having been robbed of her ability to carry out her wifely duties and taking up journalism, not out of ambition, but because it offered her access to a new and even larger collective to aid. This promotion of collectivity over personal aspirations is compounded by Haley's representation of McCurdy's relationship to Turner, with whom she shared editorial duties for at least "half the time" in which he was editor of the *Southern Recorder*: "The good Bishop enjoyed frequent hearty laughs over [...] other papers [addressing] the wise sayings in his paper that were thought to be his but were things said by Mrs. M.A. McCurdy" (139). By upholding a figure like McCurdy as the ideal black female journalist, who is supposedly content to have her work go unacknowledged and misattributed, this passage reveals the ways that ideal functioned to reinforce the male-dominated nature of the black press and to prohibit black female journalists' professional advancement. That Haley represents this misattribution of McCurdy's editorial work as humorous suggests the ways that these race biographies worked to normalize and codify black female journalists' abandonment of careerism in favour of collectivity.

In addition to insisting that black female journalists must aid their families and "the race," race biographers employed them as a symbol of the achievements of black women and African Americans in general. In *Evidences of Progress among Colored People* (1902), G.F. Richings describes Alice Ruth Moore, a club woman and contributor to *The Woman's Era*, as "a talented young woman, and a noteworthy representative of the educated, cultured and refined class of

colored women” in the United States (419). Richings’s suggestion that one black female journalist represents a much larger collective is reflected in the structure of many race biographies. For instance, Majors attaches an appendix to his book entitled “Other Exemplars of Our Progress,” introducing additional women who have found success in a range of occupations and providing much shorter but still enthusiastic descriptions of them. His race biography suggests that the sheer number of accomplished black women could not be contained by the three-hundred plus pages that precede his appendix, an idea that is stated explicitly in other race biographies. In *Twentieth Century Negro Literature*, for example, Daniel Culp anticipates the accusation that “the one hundred men and women mentioned in this book are the only Negro scholars in this country” (6). On the contrary, Culp claims, “there are hundreds of other Negroes who are as scholarly, as prominent and as active in the work of uplifting their race as the one hundred herein given” (6). Countering myths of black inferiority, these race biographies form an overarching narrative of racial progress within which a black female journalist’s career is significant because it is a valuable but small part of a larger race exemplarity, encouraging individuals to serve a collective.

Race biographies, then, demonstrated the professional risks for black women who aspired to become journalists by magnifying the significance of their personal, often gendered, characteristics and career choices, yet disciplining them to the needs of “the race” as a whole. Though this imbued black female journalists with the power to signify racial progress, it also ensured that they must remain within a narrow definition of respectable black female journalism, a definition they negotiated in their own race biographies. Black men wrote the preponderance of book-length race biographies, often with a focus on men as the drivers of racial progress (Maffly-

Kipp 247).<sup>47</sup> Even though, to a lesser extent than men, black women also produced book-length race biographies, the black press became the locus of the majority of woman-penned race biographies, marking their publication with the ephemerality of the periodical press (Maffly-Kipp 248).<sup>48</sup> As Margaret Beetham has argued, in many ways periodicals are “[a]mong the most ephemeral of printed forms,” with each issue of a periodical becoming “obsolete as soon as the next comes out” (“Open and Closed” 97). This obsolescence was compounded by the physical fragility of turn-of-the-century periodicals, which were primarily made of materials “designed for speed of production and cheapness rather than durability” (Beetham, “Open and Closed” 97). These black women’s race biographies, like periodicals in general, had a greater likelihood of being thrown out, degraded, or repurposed to other means than the book-length biographies that were primarily written by black men (Lutes, “Beyond” 339). This disparity in the medium in which men and women’s race biographies were published signals a gender hierarchy in who is able to record the past, present and future of “the race,” and whose version of race history is valuable enough to preserve. Yet black female journalists also employed the black press as a tool to challenge the idea that their race biographies could be easily dismissed and that male-dominated narratives constituted a complete account of “the race.”

Pauline Hopkins, novelist, playwright and journalist, actively reinserted black women into black history during her tenure as editor of the well-respected and widely circulating monthly, the

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<sup>47</sup> For instance, Culp dedicates *Twentieth Century Negro Literature* to making known the black “men and women” who have “made themselves illustrious” through their scholarship, “their integrity of character,” and their work uplifting “the race,” but out of the one hundred figures he discusses, seventy-eight are black men (5-6).

<sup>48</sup> These include Gertrude Mossell’s *The Work of Afro-American Women* (1894), which I discuss further below, Susie King Taylor’s *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp with the 33rd U.S. Colored Troops, Late 1st South Carolina Volunteer* (1902) and Lelia Amos Pendleton’s *A Narrative of the Negro* (1912) (Dagbovie 247; Hall 175-180).

*Colored American Magazine*. Hopkins held the position of editor between 1900 and 1904, a rare feat for a black woman, and between 1900 and 1902 she published “Famous Men of the Negro Race” and “Famous Women of the Negro Race.” These race biographies worked against the national erasure of slavery in the New Negro by creating clear points of comparison between contemporary and historical figures (Zackodnik, “Memory” 152-153). Though Hopkins echoed other race biographers by depicting African Americans’ accomplishments in spite of the legacy of slavery, she also deviated from male-dominated race biographies by splitting her focus equally between “Famous Women” and “Famous Men.” Through this structure, she suggested that the former group was as essential as the latter to the history and progress of “the race.” Moreover, in contrast to her “Famous Men” series, which focused on individual black men, the majority of her “Famous Women” series is comprised of “group portraits of community endeavour,” including black women educators, literary workers, artists and social reformers (Doreski 17, 21). By applauding black women’s collaborative achievements, Hopkins promotes black women’s work within the public sphere as enacted, not simply through racial collectivity, but through the “positive collective incorporation” of black women more specifically (Hall 177; Brooks 73). This privileging of feminist collectivity, even over racial collectivity, also runs through black female journalists’ race biographies on other black women in the profession.

For black female journalists, taking on the role of the race biographer constituted an opportunity both to subvert and adhere to the ethos of racial collectivity. In the 1880s and 1890s, in speeches, articles in the black press and, with less frequency, collections of essays, prominent black female journalists detailed the personal and professional milestones of select black women in the field. In doing so, they demonstrated their dedication to chronicling the achievements of “the race,” positioning themselves as “race women” and therefore as ideal black female journalists. Yet they deviated from male-authored race biographies by foregrounding their

professional accomplishments over their feminine devotion to the black family or even “the race.” Indeed, often in the hands of these race biographers, the value of black female journalists becomes their ability to express loyalty, not to the “race,” but to other black female journalists.

In its form and content Susan Elizabeth Frazier’s “Mrs. Wm. E. Matthews,” published in an 1894 issue of *The Woman’s Era*, both reproduces the conventions of other race biographies and ultimately redirects them toward feminist, careerist ends. Frazier was an educator who, amidst much controversy and resistance, secured employment at a white school in New York City in 1896 (“Susan Elizabeth Frazier” n.p.). She was also a contributor to the Philadelphia quarterly *A.M.E. Church Review* (1884-) and the *Era* (Yellin and Bond 262). The *Era*, a monthly founded in Boston, was the first periodical run for and by black women, edited and published by Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin and featuring the writing of a variety of black club women from across the nation (Streitmatter, *Raising* 69-70). Like many race biographies, Frazier’s article about Victoria Earle Matthews, leading activist, literary writer, and journalist for such black newspapers as the *Boston Advocate* (1885-1887), *Cleveland Gazette*, and the *New York Globe and Age*, includes a photograph that evokes the tradition of turn-of-the-century middle-class portraiture (Foreman 252). Similar photographs appeared in the *Era* throughout its run, serving a dual purpose that in many ways symbolizes black female journalists’ simultaneous promotion of racial and feminist collectivity.<sup>49</sup> In a period in which the photograph signified verisimilitude (Wexler 66), photographs of respectable middle-class African Americans functioned as powerful counternarratives to the racist caricatures that circulated widely within advertising, newspapers, postcards, and other print culture (Foreman 263). In addition to operating in defense of “the race,” portraits like Matthews’s marked the *Era* as a modern, professional endeavour because

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<sup>49</sup> See, for example, the March 1894 and April and August 1895 issues.

photographs were enabled by recent innovations such as halftone technology. Imbuing the *Era* with a sense of professionalism also positions Ruffin as an accomplished editor and publisher who had risen to these heights through collaboration with other black women. The *Era* serves, then, as a model of a careerist, feminist collectivity that other black female journalists women could adopt.

Frazier's biography further promotes that professionalism by addressing Matthews's own historical writing in a kind of metacommentary on race biographies. She states that Matthews is "quite an authority" on history and that her historical research has made her determined "to write a series of text books [...] which will trace the history of the Africans [...] and his descendants" (1). Frazier's article challenges the idea that race biographies and black history more broadly were the purview of black men and represents Matthews as making history by *writing* history, though there is no record of her publishing such textbooks (Yellin and Bond 124-125). Indeed, she states that once these histories are published, "the name of Victoria Earle" will "become a house-hold word" (1). Intertwining the development of Matthews's reputation with her work as a race biographer, Frazier promotes a careerism achieved through racial collectivity.

Like Frazier, in "Some Female Writers of the Negro Race," Lucy Wilmot Smith, editor of columns in *The American Baptist* (1879-?) and *Our Women and Children* (1888-?) (Penn 376-381), both reproduces and revises the conventions of race biography, despite Smith facing external pressure not to "betray the race."<sup>50</sup> Published in 1889 issue in *The Journalist* (1884-1907), a white trade magazine, "Female Writers" was comprised primarily of biographical sketches of ten black female journalists, often with accompanying portraits, as well as an additional list of black women who occasionally "contribute valuable articles to weeklies and

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<sup>50</sup> No extant copies of *Our Women and Children* have yet been found.

monthlies” and editors (6).<sup>51</sup> Prior to its publication, the black press reported on the fact that Allan Forman, the editor of *The Journalist*, had requested that Smith write a piece on black women in the profession. On 5 January 1889 the Indianapolis *Freeman* and the weekly *Cleveland Gazette* both printed an exchange from the black monthly *Our Women and Children* that encouraged her to take advantage of this opportunity to counter myths of black inferiority: “she is now endeavoring to make that article such as will reflect credit and convince a reading people of the ability of a rising people” (“Personal” 5; “The Race Doings” n.p.). This exchange simultaneously builds Smith’s reputation as a professional journalist, with Forman actively soliciting her writing, and narrowly defines the type of article she should produce as one focused primarily on African Americans’ accomplishments as a group. Though it is impossible to know whether Smith saw these announcements before she wrote “Female Writers,” she did indeed defend and promote “the race,” and when the *Freeman* ultimately reprinted her article in the 23 February 1889 issue it constituted a stamp of approval from her colleagues.

Smith’s affirmation of racial collectivity is nowhere more evident than the opening paragraphs of her article, which frames her discussion of select black female journalists. “Female

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<sup>51</sup> Smith provides full biographical sketches for Mosell; Wells; Matthews; Mary V. Cook, editor of the woman’s department in the *American Baptist* and educational department in *Our Women and Children*; Lucretia Newman Coleman, who contributed literary writing to *Our Women and Children* and scientific articles to the *A.M.E. Church Review*; Amelia E. Johnson, founder of the monthly children’s magazine *The Ivy*, about which little is known as no extant issues have been discovered; Lillian Alberta Lewis, who wrote a column for *The Boston Advocate* under the pen name Bert Islew; Mary E. Britton, editor of the woman’s department for the *Lexington Herald*; Ione E. Wood, editor of the temperance department of *Our Women and Children*; and Katie D. Chapman, journalist for *The Christian Recorder* and *Our Women and Children*. Under “Occasional Contributors,” with little explanation of what they contributed, Smith briefly lists: Francis Ellen Watkins Harper, Charlotte Grimké, Cora C. Calhoun, Olive Clanton, Lavinia E Sneed, Josephine Turpin Washington, Georgia M. DeBaptiste, Julia J. Mason, Alice Henderson, and Mata Pelham. She also references several editors: Mrs. Amos Johnson of *The Western Herald*, Carrie Bragg of *The Lancet*, Amelia L. Tilghman of *The Musical Messenger*, Mrs M.E. Lambert of *St Matthew’s Lyceum*, and Alice McEwen, assistant editor of the *Herald* (Smith 4-6).

Writers” subverts the logic of white supremacy by praising black men’s respect for working black women as an advantage they enjoy over the white woman who has “had to contest with her brother every inch of the ground for recognition [...] the Negro man, having had his sister by his side on plantations in race swamps, keeps her there, now that he moves in other spheres” (4). Smith expands on this point by turning to black women in journalism, stating: “As she wins laurels he accords her the royal crown [...] Doors are opened before we knock” (4). Depicting African Americans as successful professionals, Smith positions white men as the uncivilized figures who force white women to fight for respect and black men as chivalrously “open[ing] the door.” Yet that door must be opened before black women can enter. She performs her race loyalty by exposing a large white audience to these counternarratives of African American civility and by constructing herself as self-effacing and submissive, suggesting that she belongs to the group of black women who have succeeded in journalism by the grace of black men. Simultaneously, she also signals limitations within the black press, with doors that can be opened but can also be kept shut.

Literary scholars and historians of women’s journalism have repeatedly interpreted “Female Writers” as proof of gender harmony within the black press, with black men fostering black women’s careers within the black press and black female journalists proudly aligning themselves with “the race” in their writing. For example, Rodger Streitmatter argues that black men have historically “supported” black women who “succeeded in journalism,” a generalization that encompasses a century of black female journalism, and that utilizes Smith’s description of black men opening the door to the black press as evidence (“African-American” 276). Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner and Carole Fleming reference the same passage in their history of female journalists in the United States and United Kingdom and assert that, for black women, “journalism was not a profession but a calling that they took up specifically and explicitly as

African American women” (22). I would argue instead that Smith’s construction of journalism as a “calling” was a deliberate strategy to ward off damaging accusations of individualism by aligning with other middle-class black women who claimed that they were “called” to join the market in order to aid their communities (Shaw, *What a Woman* 36). Black female journalists’ self-identification as “race women” cannot be interpreted as a straight-forward choice, made of their own volition, in light of the backlash “race women” and journalists like Wells endured when black male editors accused them of being motivated by personal ambition.

Even as Smith was limited by the ethos of racial collectivity, the article itself is also representative of the potential for small but meaningful change within the black press. By dedicating noticeably less time to black female journalists’ physical appearance than did “traditional” race biographies, she implies that black women should be valued for their success in journalism, not because they contribute to a larger narrative of respectable black womanhood. Smith can be read as speaking back to race biographies such as Lawson Scruggs’s description of Gertrude Mossell as having “a plump, compactly built body, five feet high; [...] eyes that dance with fun, or are eloquent with tender feeling” (24). Such detailed descriptions of black female journalists’ feminine bodies challenged widespread stereotypes of the masculine black woman, which lay at the centre of interlocking systems of racial, gender, and economic oppression (Hicks 126). Yet race biographers like Scruggs also delegitimized black female journalists by emphasizing their physicality in a period that promoted a primarily intellectual, disembodied form of journalism, which I address more fully in Chapters Two and Three. By contrast, Smith remains focused throughout, not on her subjects’ bodies but on their professional accomplishments and aspirations, a focus that runs through other black female journalists’ writing on their colleagues. In the same year as the publication of Smith’s article, in the Indianapolis *Freeman*, Mossell, educator, literary writer and journalist for periodicals such as

*A.M.E Church Review*, *New York Freeman*, and *Our Women and Children*, addresses Josephine Turpin Washington, who contributed articles to a range of black periodicals, including the *Virginia Star* (1877-1888), the *Richmond Planet* (1883-1945), and the *Peoples' Advocate* (1876-1886?) under the pen-name "Joyce" (Mossell, "What a Woman" n.p.). Mossell describes Washington's marriage in terms of its impact on her career in journalism: "[Josephine] resigned to marry Dr. S.S. H. Washington [...] She has not ceased her literary labors, nor does she intend doing so" ("What a Woman" n.p.). The word "resigned," coupled with the firm pronouncement that Washington will continue to work after marriage, stands in stark contrast to the idealized black female journalist who prioritized her duties in the domestic sphere over those in the market. In their careerist race biographies, Smith and Mossell mark their subjects as professionals, helping them to build their reputations and endeavouring to redefine what African Americans value in black female journalists.

Even as Smith deliberately adapted the conventions of traditional race biographies in order to promote new standards by which to measure the value of black female journalists, to some extent she reinforced the image of a harmonious race that was prevalent within these race biographies. By representing black men and women as united within the field of journalism, she obscured the workings of gender oppression within the black press and "the race." In contrast, other black female journalists like Mossell, Matthews and Katherine Tillman subverted the intended purpose of traditional race biographies by exposing and even amplifying gendered fractures amongst African Americans. In doing so, they suggested that the marginalization of black female journalists and the subjugation of black women more broadly constituted barriers to achieving true racial collectivity, and promoted a careerist feminist collectivity as a corrective to these issues.

In the "Opinions of Mrs. N.F. Mossell," the only "opinion" written by a woman in Irvine

Garland Penn's race biography, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (1891), Mossell highlights the ways that black female journalists are complicit in the reification of gender hierarchies within the black press.<sup>52</sup> She simultaneously promotes racial collectivity and calls into question its value, specifically for black female journalists. Mossell represents the black press as a means of resisting racial oppression, stating that black men are "rapidly pushing their way, strengthening race pride, and making their wants and oppressions known" (487). Yet she also highlights the male-dominated nature of the black press by creating a comparison between her representation of black men "pushing" and "strengthening" and her passive language in her depiction of black female journalists: "few have become independent workers in this noble field of effort, being yet satellites, revolving round the sun of masculine journalism. They still remain willing captives, chained to the chariot wheels of the sterner element, and deem it well if 'united they stand'" (490). With the term "willing captives," Mossell articulates the ways in which black female journalists perpetuate their own marginalization through their adherence to racial collectivity, a pattern that she challenges, declaring, "Let the woman select her *nom de plume*, or take her own name [...] and use it always [...] Write oftenest for one journal and on one subject [...] until a reputation has been established" (491). Demonstrating her clear understanding of the potential for the signature to be used as a careerist tool, she urges black female journalists to hone their voices into a marketable brand that would appeal to readers and employers alike, and to thereby disrupt the ideology of racial collectivity that would render them "satellites."

Whereas in "Opinions of Mrs. N.F. Mossell" Mossell addresses black female journalists'

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<sup>52</sup> Penn commissioned "opinions" from African Americans on the black press and included these short essays in his race biography. The fact that all of these opinions other than Mossell's were written by prominent black men both reflects and reproduces the male-dominated nature of the black press.

participation in their own subjugation, in “Our Women of Letters,” published in 1889 issue in the Indianapolis *Freeman*, she takes up black male hostility to black women in the profession. The potential backlash she faced from her male colleagues and the public was likely mitigated by the fact that by the time she published “Our Women of Letters” she was an established journalist who had published widely in the black press, as well as editing a syndicated woman’s column for four years (Streitmatter, “Gertrude Bustill Mossell” 319). Mossell’s professionalism is reaffirmed by the enviable position of “Our Women of Letters” within the *Freeman*: it occupies four and a half of the six columns on the page, and is accompanied by a sizable montage of select black women’s portraits.<sup>53</sup> Appearing above the fold, this arresting illustration, combined with a substantial amount of text, signals Mossell’s status as a skilled journalist who can command almost an entire page. She ultimately leverages this reputation to manage the risk of criticizing black male members of the press and defending her fellow black female journalists, thereby demonstrating a kind of professionally dangerous feminist collectivity.

Mossell’s feminist careerism is most obvious in her section on Caroline Bragg, editor of *The Lancet* (1882-1886):

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<sup>53</sup> This montage depicts Wells, Josephine D. Heard, whose poetry was published in *The Christian Recorder*; Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, the prolific literary writer and prominent journalist for black periodicals such as *The Christian Recorder*, *A.M.E. Church Review* and the *Anglo-African*; and Mary Ella Mossell, Mossell’s aunt through marriage. Though “Our Women of Letters” references her “labours with the pen,” there is no record of Mary Ella Mossell as a journalist or literary writer in biographical accounts of her (n.p.). See, for example, Smith (1996); Byrd (2016); and Seraile (1998). In addition to these women depicted in the montage, Mossell also writes biographical sketches of Fannie Jackson Coppin, journalist and literary writer for periodicals such as the *Christian Recorder* and *Harper’s Weekly*; Bragg; Cordelia Ray, who published poetry in the *A.M.E. Review*; Grimké, contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly*; Florence Lewis, who wrote for “several white journals” that Mossell leaves unnamed; Alice Modly, who “has done some excellent literary work for the *Philadelphia Echo*”; and Mary Ashe Lee, the poet who published in the *Christian Recorder* (“Our Literary Women” n.p.). Without providing any biographical or detailed professional information, she also lists as “literary women” Matthews, Lewis, Anna E. Geary, Mrs E.E. Buckner, Susan McKenny, Mattie F. Roberts, Ada Newton Harris, Washington, Mrs. Newman Coleman, Alice Felts, Belle Dorce, and Miss H. Rice (“Our Women of Letters” n.p.).

Miss Bragg won our admiration [...] not only by excellent editorials, but by the patience and equanimity [...] which she bore with her masculine competitors for editorial honors. They seemed to consider it unparalleled temerity for a woman to enter [...] their journalistic field and never tired of perpetrating jokes and witticisms at her expense, but she conquered for herself a place, held her own and gained the respect of all. (n.p.)

She avoids tones of individualism by refusing to convey any personal frustrations she may have with male members of the black press, and similarly protects Bragg's reputation by claiming for her a self-contained, modest femininity, suggesting that she faced these attacks with "patience and equanimity." Nevertheless, Mossell clearly risks "betraying the race." Whereas traditional race biographers praised black women's career milestones, more impressive for having been made in spite of oppressive racial prejudice, she positions black men as a similarly detrimental force that prohibits black women's professional success. Yet, by stating that Bragg eventually won "the respect of all," Mossell suggests that the system in which racial solidarity hinges upon black women not threatening black men's power and privilege within the press is already being dismantled by talented and determined black women. There is a sense of inevitability to her implication that she and Bragg, with their feminist careerism, are on the right side of history, and this sense of inevitability serves as both a warning to male members of the press and an expression of solidarity with other women in the field.

Mossell expanded upon this future-oriented view of black female journalism in "Our Women in Journalism," a chapter of her book, *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* (1894), which was comprised of non-fiction essays and poetry. *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* was a rare book-length race biography written by a black woman about black women, particularly those in the work-force, and "Our Women in Journalism" offered professional advice to aspiring female journalists by addressing black women's historical contributions to the field. This chapter thus

both echoes and functions as a counternarrative to a race biography like Penn's *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors*, which sketched the history of the black press from the founding of *Freedom's Journal* (1827) in New York City to late nineteenth-century publishers, editors, journalists and periodicals. Despite the fact that women wrote for and edited periodicals from the earliest days of the black press (Rhodes 212-216), Penn details a history dominated by men, confining black women's accomplishments primarily to a single chapter out of twenty-eight. This single chapter, entitled "Women in Journalism," suggests that black female journalists are somehow distinct from the "real" history of the black press. In contrast, Mossell places a primacy on the history of black women in the black press.

Mossell not only suggests that black women have made noteworthy contributions to the black press in the past, but also that their roles will expand and grow in complexity in the future. Futurity is central to the final pages of the chapter, in which she argues for the establishment of a "woman's journal, by our women, for our women," anticipating *The Woman's Era*, which would be founded in the same year that she published *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* (102). She affirms that women will make good editors and publishers because they have "learned to follow," a seemingly submissive and self-effacing statement that in fact serves to promote Mossell's feminist history of black journalism (102). The word "follow" takes on a new connotation when she declares that black women should take as their "bright and shining" example Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Fanny Jackson Coppin, and Sarah M. Douglass and "other consistent, industrious workers" (102-103). These three black women were all successful journalists in the mid- to late nineteenth-century; indeed, Harper is often heralded as the "mother of black journalism" and Douglass was one of the first women to enter the press with her writing

for *The Liberator* in the early 1830s (Foster and Haywood 28; Zackodnik, *Press* 187-189).<sup>54</sup> By reclaiming territory for black women within the history of the black press, Mossell refutes the idea that black female journalists are a fad that might soon vanish or an anomaly within the male-dominated black press.

In “The Value of Race Literature,” Victoria Earle Matthews similarly roots predictions of black female journalists’ future advances in the field in a record of their past accomplishments. Though “The Value of Race Literature” promotes the creation, circulation and consumption of literature written by women *and* men, it was also key to building a black female collective, as it was a speech delivered at the First Congress of Colored Women in July 1895 (McHenry 191). Called by Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, this conference was held in order to promote collaboration amongst middle-class black women in analyzing and addressing their particular political challenges, and led to the founding of the National Federation of Afro-American Women, which would evolve in 1896 into the National Association of Colored Women (Logan 133). Through her speech, Matthews compounds Congress’s sense of feminist collectivity by highlighting black women’s contributions to the history of the black press. In her description of *The Anglo-African* (1859-1865), the well-respected New York monthly, Matthews declares that the “brave” journalists who took on the “current questions of the day” within the pages of this periodical include: “Frederick Douglass, William C. Nell, John Mercer Langston, Theodore Holly, J. Sella Martin, Frances Ellen Watkins, Jane Rustic, Sarah M. Douglass” (141).<sup>55</sup> By including almost the same number of nineteenth-century black female journalists as black male journalists in her

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<sup>54</sup> Douglass also published literary and non-fiction writing in the early-to-mid-nineteenth century in prestigious black periodicals such as the *North Star* and the *Anglo-African Magazine* (Yellin and Bond 252-253).

<sup>55</sup> “Jane Rustic” was the pen name for an unknown writer who published a series entitled “Town and Country” in the *Anglo-African Magazine* (Ernest, *Liberation* 315).

description, Matthews depicts black women as essential to the success of this prestigious magazine, and by extension to the black press more generally. Her references to pioneering black female journalists also frames her discussion of *The Woman's Era*, which she describes as produced by the “ablest intellects of colored women” (145). Like Mossell, the history Matthews outlines serves to position the black women who edited, published, and wrote *The Woman's Era* as a logical continuation of a well-established tradition of black women working in the black press.

Yet even as Matthews depicts *The Woman's Era* as a successful and significant periodical, she suggests that it does not represent the heights to which black female journalism can reach. Rather, women writers, inspired by *The Woman's Era*, will produce “much more glorious results” and a “grander diffusion of mental light” in the future (145). This promise of greater things to come aligns with Katherine Tillman’s “Afro-American Women and Their Work,” an article published in 1895 issue in the *A.M.E. Church Review*. As part of a longer history of black women’s labour, Tillman references several black women who are currently “engaged in journalism,” including Lillian Lewis, Victoria Earle Matthews, and Ida B. Wells, while simultaneously stating that in journalism, and literature more broadly, “the work of our women is barely begun. With their vivid imaginations and quickness of perception, [black women] are destined to fill an important place in the ranks of the literati of this land” (295).<sup>56</sup> Matthews and Tillman employ a common trope of exemplarity, and thereby suggest that the accomplishments of prominent black female journalists represented only a fraction of black women’s collective talents and potential to succeed within the profession.

Indeed, Mossell, Matthews, and Tillman worked within the conventions of race biography to

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<sup>56</sup> Tillman also addresses Lee, Grimké, Harper, Heard, Ray, and Lambert.

claim further gravitas for their representations of black female journalism. Black female journalists in general promoted a kind of linear progression through their race biographies, as did traditional race biographies. However, in Mossell, Matthews and Tillman's race biographers, that arc was not simply of "the race," but of black female journalism. They suggested that, just as the black race was steadily advancing politically, culturally, and economically, black female journalists were steadily advancing toward greater power and equality within the black press.

### **Redefining the ideal of black female journalism**

In addition to their manipulation of race biographies, in their writing on the profession black female journalists promoted a new model of black female journalism that adhered to the ethos of racial collectivity and yet was explicitly feminist and careerist. They addressed more than one audience within a single piece, writing in what Mae Gwendolyn Henderson theorizes, after Bakhtin, as a "simultaneity of discourses" (117). Black literary study since 1989 has argued that African American forms of address are "double-voiced" (Gates, *The Signifying Monkey* xxii),<sup>57</sup> but Henderson was quick to intervene in 1990 to remind those working in the field of intersectionality that necessarily meant, "As gendered and racial subjects, black women speak/write in multiple voices — not all simultaneously or with equal weight, but with various and changing degrees of intensity, privileging one *parole* and then another" (137). This foundational theoretical insight is applicable to black female journalists' writing on their

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<sup>57</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argued that "double-voicedness" is a distinctive characteristic of African American literature, stating that it shares "much with, far more than it differs from, the Western textual tradition," but that "black formal repetition always repeats with a difference" (*The Signifying Monkey* xxii). Similarly, in *Liberation Historiography*, John Ernest analyses late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century black writers' need to "contend with and against the developing tradition of white American" thought in order that they would be heard within a white supremacist society (40).

profession. They deliberately performed to representations of the ideal black female journalist, emphasizing their commitment to racial collectivity. By demonstrating their dedication to the standard of professional respectability in this era, they ensured that their writing was published, gaining exposure for their vision of a new black female journalism and lending it legitimacy, even as their new model served to undermine the very ideal they professed to embody.

Black female journalists employed a “simultaneity of discourses” in their discussions of the black press, which they repeatedly praised even while attempting to undermine the gender hierarchies within it. In an editorial published in 1895 in *The Woman's Era*, editor Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin works to persuade African Americans of the value not just of the *Era* but of “colored papers” more broadly (“Editorial” 8). She defines the black press as key to the survival and advancement of “the race,” asserting that the “need of our better representation through the press grows stronger every year [...] so long as we all suffer together, just so long must we all work together to bring about a different state of affairs” (“Editorial” 8, 9). She strategically constructs the *Era* as collective-oriented by positioning it as one more “colored paper” dedicated to unifying and defending “the race,” and in doing so attempts to garner support for this feminist periodical from other members of the black press and the public more broadly. In the 8 May 1886 instalment of “Our Woman’s Department,” Gertrude Mossell strikes a similar balance between promoting the black press and the advancement of black women working within it. Quoting the *Waterbury Daily American*, a white paper founded in Waterbury, Connecticut, she states, “It is no longer possible to reckon on any matter affecting the colored race without counting in the influence of the colored press,” and adds that she wishes to call the attention of black women to this fact, “for in it they might see a new opportunity for advancement for themselves and their sex” (2). Mossell constructs the black press as both a powerful cultural institution for all African Americans and a potential tool for black feminisms. Through their praise, Ruffin and Mossell

position feminist collectives of black female journalists as ultimately serving the larger goals of the black press to defend and uplift “the race.” Representations of black female journalism such as these in turn served as protection from potential accusations of “betraying the race” when black female journalists promoted a kind of feminist careerism amongst other women in the field.

In their writing on the profession, black female journalists routinely encouraged each other and those aspiring to join the field to seek money, fame, and higher positions of power. These expressions of careerism were invariably couched in declarations of collectivity that render black female journalists’ writing more palatable to both their colleagues and the public. Often the more explicit their careerism, the more consistently and emphatically they constructed themselves and other women in the field as collective-oriented, dedicated not just to aiding “the race” but also their readership and humankind in general. These pieces reveal a common strategy in their efforts to promote personal ambition as a valuable characteristic, a strategy that persisted across time and black female journalists.

In “Some Painful Truths,” published 1886 in the *New York Freeman*, Gertrude Mossell positions herself simultaneously as a “race woman” and an entrepreneur, but one working on behalf of a larger collective, the black press itself. She opens by insisting that her fellow African Americans cannot seek employment in the white press because it is primarily invested in ridiculing “the race” and depicting African Americans “in their ignorance and superstition” (1). Yet, she also asserts that the low remuneration within the black press creates obstacles to retaining talented African Americans who can produce high-quality writing. In order to solve this problem, Mossell suggests that black editors form a syndicate, a seemingly straight-forward proposal that serves to position her as a forward-thinking business-woman. Syndication agencies made it possible to print the same pieces of writing and advertisements simultaneously across America, enabling smaller papers to include both local and national news in their pages and

transforming the way editors and publishers ran periodicals (Johanningsmeier 311). Mossell's proposal was particularly daring because, whereas white syndicates had risen to prominence after they were first founded in 1861, African Americans did not create their own national syndicate until 1919 when Claude Barnett, Ida B. Wells's husband, established the Associated Negro Press (Pride and Wilson 164-165).<sup>58</sup> According to Mossell, a black syndicate could commission articles on issues of common interest to African Americans, pool resources to fund well-researched pieces, and publish them across America. With this suggestion, she simultaneously refutes the assumption that men are the "natural" leaders of the black press and solidifies her reputation as a "race woman" working on the black press's development.

Mossell capitalizes on this self-positioning in order to advance the cause of black women in journalism in general. She validates her perspective on syndicates by referencing her "two years' experience in an office of publication" and several years' "experience in the work of contributor," offering insight into the mechanisms of both the white and black press (1). She represents her career as having provided the necessary training for her to help guide the future of the black press, yet her career also serves as a new model of black female journalism to which black women can aspire. Mossell presents herself as a would-be editor, publisher, and businesswoman, and invites other women to follow in her footsteps by posing an open question about how black women, "old and young," can contribute to the success of black periodicals "beyond the one fact

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<sup>58</sup> Ansel Nash Kellogg, David Atwood, and Horace E. Rublee were the first white men to form syndicates in America. In 1861 Kellogg, publisher of the *Baraboo [Wisconsin] Republic*, requested that Atwood and Rublee of the *Wisconsin State Journal* print news of the Civil War on one side of folio sheets and ship these sheets to him. Kellogg used these "ready-prints," as they were often called, as the basis of his four-page paper, filling in the rest of the space with local news. Atwood and Rublee subsequently expanded this service until they furnished ready-prints to thirty papers by 1865. Kellogg also went into the ready-print business, and had even greater success, founding the A.N. Kellogg Newspaper Company in 1881, which served 1,957 periodicals by 1900 (Johanningsmeier 36-37).

of subscribing" (1). She encourages them to refuse to be content as subscribers, or even as journalists, and to join her as future leaders within the black press, with her efforts to demonstrate her dedication to the black press and the racial collective more broadly giving her license to promote careerism amongst black female journalists. Her article, then, serves not only to build her reputation as a savvy businesswoman and opinion-maker, but to channel her individual career to mould the collective of current and future black female journalists.

Carrie Langston similarly frames her pro-careerist writing with repeated declarations of collectivism, specifically through the rhetoric of maternal feminism, in "Women in Journalism," published in the fall of 1892 in the newspaper *The Atchison Blade* (1892-1898). Langston would eventually become the mother of Langston Hughes, but in 1892 she was finishing high school and writing for the *Blade*, an Atchison, Kansas weekly co-founded by her brother (Rampersad 8-9; Terborg-Penn, "Black Male" 40).<sup>59</sup> Other black female journalists similarly employed maternal feminism in writing on the profession, including Anna Julia Cooper, famed author of the *A Voice from the South* (1892) and journalist for periodicals such as *The Crisis* and *The Southland* (1890-1891). In an 1890 issue of the latter monthly, Cooper draws on this rhetoric in dedicating her forthcoming woman's column to aiding the "mothers of this generation" to uplift the "toiling, sinning, repenting, falling, aspiring humanity" (337, 336). However, Langston is singular in her efforts to combine an ethics of caring with a distinctly careerist attitude.

Langston repeatedly engages with the rhetoric of maternal feminism, beginning early in her article with her description of "the earnest heart of a true woman [...] beating with ambition to do something good," to enrich "the country in which she lives, mentally, morally or socially"

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<sup>59</sup> In addition to Nat T. Langston, the *Blade* was founded and published by Grant Brown and William Harris (Rampersad 8-9).

(339). A paragraph later, Langston similarly states that women writers aid “the world, morally, socially and intellectually,” and, still further, argues: “Woman has indeed blessed the world by her writings; she has [...] awakened that sense of duty in [readers’] minds, that man has failed to reach” (340, 341). She employs the commonly held belief that men and women were innately different to her advantage, arguing that female journalists enrich their profession, their readers and humankind in general. Drawing on the powerful rhetoric of maternal feminism, she works to concretize the image of black female journalists as nurturing so that her insistence that they should also be careerist appears as the fulfillment of their “womanly” duties.

This careerism becomes explicit in the conclusion of “Women in Journalism,” with Langston noting that the black female journalist “has brought holiness and knowledge into a sin-darkened world, but [...] she has missions yet to fulfill [...] The time is not far distant when woman shall have no rival at her work in the field of letters. She is now climbing the ladder of fame” (342). In contrast to dominant discourses about the ideal black female journalist who must sacrifice personal ambitions for the sake of the collective, Langston constructs achieving fame and power as an equally valid and important “mission,” and as equally valuable to humankind, as enlightening the world. She works to spread this “mission” by hailing her black female readers to join her on this path to professional success, endeavouring to build a collective of black female journalists who undermine the gender hierarchy in the profession by declaring, “try your luck as a journalist on THE ATCHISON BLADE, climb higher, until you reach the editor’s chair in one of the largest magazine offices of the world[,] [...] until your name shall have been written on the highest pinnacle of fame’s temple, until you have created a name the storms of time can ne’er destroy” (342). In her scholarship on historical and fictional female journalists at the turn of the century, Jean Marie Lutes interprets this passage as marking black female journalists’ responsibility to simultaneously pursue personal and racial progress, to “ensure racial survival in

an era when ‘the storms of time’ threatened to erase [...] entire communities” (*Front Page Girls* 52). I would argue, in contrast, that, though threads of racial collectivity run throughout the article as a whole, they serve to construct black women’s celebrity status and exceptionality within journalism as a positive force that promotes the advancement not just of “the race” but of humankind more broadly.

The location of Langston’s and Mossell’s article in many ways reinforces the balance they attempted to strike between racial collectivity and careerism. Both articles were published on the front pages of their respective periodicals, a prestigious location that lent credence to their arguments that careerist black women could succeed in journalism. Yet, even as this positioning validated their attempts to advocate for personal ambition, it also served to situate Langston and Mossell within the larger collective of the black press. Articles on the front page often functioned to demonstrate the opinions and style of the periodical in order to “promote and capture its intended readership” (Wood 352). Signed articles like Langston’s and Mossell’s, then, simultaneously promoted their individual voices and the “collective voice or identity” of the periodicals in which they were published (Wood 352). In contrast, the press form of the woman’s page enabled black female journalists such as Matthews and Margaret Black to build their own collectives and to encourage them to contribute to the black press “beyond the one fact of subscribing,” to borrow Mossell’s phrase.

Though female journalists addressed “women’s issues” in periodicals long before the advent of the woman’s page, this press form became a standard section with the rise of new journalism at the turn of the century (Kaplan, “From Partisanship” 128; Fahs 4). For many female journalists, the woman’s page constituted a rare opportunity for employment within the press, and an opportunity to shape their readership, particularly due to their serialized nature. As Mark Turner has influentially argued, built into the “notion of seriality is necessarily some

conceptualization of waiting [...] In the breaks in the narratives of periodicals [...] -- over a day, over a week, over a month -- is where meaning resides" (193-194). Like other serialized subgenres of the press, the recurring nature of the woman's page functioned to create a community of readers who eagerly expect the next instalment, ideally resulting in "reiterated purchase[s] over time" (Brake and King 134-135). In addition to financially benefitting the periodical in which they were published, the woman's page enabled its editors to build and mold a sustained reading public. Michael Warner argues that the discourse of a particular public declares "not only 'Let a public exist' but 'Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way.' It then goes in search of confirmation that such a public exists, with greater or lesser success -- success being further attempts to cite, circulate, and realize the world understanding it articulates" (114). Through the structure of the woman's page, its subject matter, and writing style, black female editors endeavoured to hail a specific readership with a shared "world understanding." For Matthews and Margaret Black, that understanding was comprised in part of the value of creating space for black women's writing within the black press and thereby undermining its male-dominated nature.<sup>60</sup>

Though woman's pages were not uniform in terms of title, size, and location, they all covered "feminine topics" as a means of attracting the female readers who were increasingly key to securing lucrative advertising campaigns.<sup>61</sup> Due to its commercial nature, members of the press

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<sup>60</sup> Little biographical information is known about Black, other than her status as a fiction writer and a journalist for the *Afro-American* (Collier-Thomas 1997).

<sup>61</sup> Some woman's pages had stable titles, whereas others changed from instalment to instalment. For example, in a three-month period in 1896, the woman's page in the *New York World* appeared under the following titles: "The Woman's Page," "The Interests of Women," "Woman's Latest Whims and Fashions," "The World of Women," "The Women Folk," "New Women and Their Doings," and "Woman and her Ways" (Fahs 59). Usually the woman's page was restricted to a particular area of the periodical, but the amount of space it took up, and the way it was laid out on the page, depended on the periodical; some took the form of a recurring column, while others occupied the entirety of a page (Fahs 59).

routinely dismissed the woman's page as a frivolous section as part of a larger discourse about the value of "hard news" over "soft news," and thereby delegitimized the women who edited these pages (Fahs 63-65). Indeed, woman's page editors were often paid less than their colleagues, even those who performed similar roles such as sports editors, reifying the notion that they were not "real journalists" (Lang 145). Yet I would argue that Black in particular strategically challenged the supposed function of the woman's page as solely providing superficial entertainment to its women readers. Margaret Beetham states that a "feminised space" like a woman's page has the "radical potential" to challenge "oppressive and repressive models of the feminine" (*A Magazine* 3), and I would argue that Black covered "women's issues" while redefining the meaning of that term. In "Women's Column," which appeared fortnightly in the Baltimore weekly the *Afro-American* (1892-1900), Black not only covered domestic issues, but also criticized, for example, restrictions surrounding women's education and promoted armed resistance to lynching.<sup>62</sup> By addressing these topics within the woman's column, she marked them as "feminine" issues that should be of common concern to her black female readers. Through this writing, Black also claimed professionalism by demonstrating an ability to write cogently on so-called "masculine" subjects such as racial violence.

Though Black worked through her writing to construct a public with diverse interests, both she and Matthews did not simply dictate these interests for their readership. Instead, they endeavoured to enable their readers to actively shape the content of their columns, as is made evident in the subheading from Matthews's 1897 column for the weekly *The Washington Bee*, "Home Circle," which she edited as "Victoria Earle": "ladies are earnestly requested to send original contributions (for which they will receive credit)" (14 May 1887 n.p.). Through this

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<sup>62</sup> See the 9 May 1896 and 30 May 1896 instalments.

subheading, Matthews constructs her column as a space in which her black female readers can share their knowledge and interests, and the reference to “credit” marks their contributions as valued. She capitalizes on her editorship of this supposed inferior press form to create a rare black women’s counterpublic within the black press through which black female readers could ensure that their particular concerns were addressed. Her woman’s column, then, serves as an example of the way that the black press, like the black counterpublic in general, is not singular, but spawns “oppositional publics organized around gender, class, color, and sexual identity” (Harris-Lacewell 6).

Like Matthews, Black works to build a black women’s counterpublic through her woman’s column, but directs this collective toward decidedly careerist ends. Her subheading declares that any “lady readers who desires to contribute something to this column [...] is at liberty to do so” (n.p.), and her dedication to creating a “Women’s Column” in collaboration with her readers is evident in installments in which she publishes their submissions.<sup>63</sup> Yet, despite her use of the woman’s column to enact such collectivity, Black expresses frustration with the restrictions of this press form in the 22 February 1896 installment: “True our space is limited; but I, the editor, wish the women of our city and our readers to take an interest in this column. The more contributors, the more space we can demand” (n.p.). Even while she highlights the relatively small amount of space allotted to her woman’s column and, by extension, to “women’s issues,” she also works against those restrictions by creating a feedback loop in which readers who contribute to her column would position it as highly marketable. Leveraging the readers’

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<sup>63</sup> For example, in 22 February 1896 installment, Black printed Cornelia Tydings’s writing on Booker T. Washington and, on 13 June 1896, included in her column E.J. Tyler’s “A Clear Conscience” (n.p.), complete with Tyler’s statement that she submitted her piece after “[h]aving read so many good things in your column and noticed that you desire others to contribute” (n.p.).

investment in a “Women’s Column,” Black endeavours to both create greater space in which their collective can communicate and to mark her as a successful editor to her current and future employers.

Through her column’s necessary seriality, Black also drove home the notion that the new model of black female journalism, which intertwined collectivism and careerism, could find purchase within the black press. With every signed instalment, she functioned as a concrete example that an explicitly careerist black female journalist who actively worked to build black women’s counterpublics could be successful within the profession. Indeed, all of the black female journalists who worked to redefine the ideal black female journalist affirmed its validity by embodying it in their work. They served as living proof that this vision of a careerist, feminist black female journalist was a feasible standard to which other black women in the field or aspiring to join it could adhere.

This chapter has explored the ways that black female journalists negotiated their marginalized positions within the black press in a period in which the restrictive ideal of the black female journalist and racial collectivity more broadly inhibited careerism and promoted serving the greater good, particularly the black family and “the race.” In contrast to the scholarship that often reads their writing as a historical record or as furthering the project of racial respectability, I have analyzed the ways that they worked within racial collectivity, subversively redirecting it toward building a collective of careerist, feminist black female journalists. Yet despite the feminist nature of this collective, it was consolidated and validated through the rhetorical exploitation of other black women, particularly the black domestic worker, as I will discuss in Chapter Two and Three. While black female journalists sought to highlight the gendered fractures within the black press, they also deliberately wrote on the black domestic worker in ways that leveraged their own privilege and positions of socioeconomic power. In an ironic twist, in much the same way that the

black press had worked to transform black female journalists into symbols of racial progress and collectivity, black female journalists created homogenizing symbols out of the black domestic worker in their on-going efforts to seek professional legitimacy. Their use of this figure to stand for various markers of unprofessionalism furthered their efforts to secure their positions amongst the most highly regarded and authoritative members of the profession, while simultaneously restricting black domestic workers' own negotiation of their positions within their field.

## Chapter Two:

### The City, the Black Female Body, and Disembodied, Dislocated Journalism

In the winter of 1897, Ella V. Chase Williams, writing in “Our Women,” her column for *The Washington Bee*, warns black urban women to dress modestly, stating that “Young women have no more right to expose a part of their person than young men” (8 January 1897 n.p.).<sup>64</sup> In her effort to exert control over the black urban woman’s body by sexualizing it, Williams contributes to broader discourses within the black press that policed this figure by constructing the urban space as one in which black women, particularly black working-class women such as domestic workers, were morally and physically corrupted. These discourses were key to a larger project amongst the black middle-class to produce a respectable black urban population, as Williams makes evident in her assertion that “there is too much a[t] stake from a racial point of view to allow such looseness [in urban black women]” (n.p.). In addition to promoting racial progress, for Williams, emphasizing the corporeality and urbanity of the black urban woman, as well as the black domestic worker, constituted a professional strategy that she shared with other black female journalists in their articles, columns, and editorials published between 1886 and 1912. This chapter focuses on the professional complexity of their efforts to advocate on behalf of the black domestic worker and urban black women, and the ways those efforts reveal the gendered and racialized restrictions surrounding dominant definitions of professionalism within American journalism. Firstly, prominent black female journalists highlighted the sexual abuse black domestic workers endured, endeavouring to raise awareness of this pervasive issue that was

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<sup>64</sup> A native of Washington, D.C., Ella V. Chase Williams moved to Abbeville, South Carolina, in the early 1880s to found the Ferguson Academy elementary school alongside her husband, Reverend Emory W. Williams. In addition to her role as principal of the Academy and as editor of “Our Women,” Williams remained an active social reformer, particularly through the Presbyterian Church (Smith, *Notable* 714-715).

rarely publicly discussed (May 32). Secondly, they often challenged the stereotype of the innately immoral urban black woman that circulated within debates about black migration and urbanization, movements to which domestic work was key. By creating counternarratives to this stereotype, black female journalists undermined its function within these debates as a means of policing the black urban woman and black urban and migrant populations.

Yet, in addition to analyzing the ameliorative effects of their writing on the black domestic worker and black urban woman, this chapter explores the ways that addressing these figures put black female journalists into dangerous proximity with new journalism, the stream of journalism that many members of the press derided. Due to both the conventions of new journalism and dominant discourses around it, it signified highly embodied, urban journalism. The black domestic worker was also an urban figure, as many black women secured employment in that field by moving from rural environments to urban centres.<sup>65</sup> As rising anxieties about black urbanization and migration focused on policing the body of the black domestic worker and black urban woman more broadly, writing on these two figures threatened to taint black female

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<sup>65</sup> Black women's urbanization was facilitated by the fact that they could find work as domestic labourers in cities, with their high concentration of middle- and upper-class families seeking "help" (Katzman 59; Brown, *Upbuilding* 88). Southern black women in particular migrated to northern and midwestern cities to fill gaps left behind by the white women who had traditionally dominated domestic labour in those regions (Strasser 176; White, Crowder, Tolnay and Adelman 219). At the turn of the century fewer native-born and immigrant white women became domestic workers due to new occupations opening to them such as retail and office work and to reforms that prohibited girls aged ten to fifteen from being employed (Hart 28; Katzman 52). At the same time, urbanization, industrialization and a population surge expanded the American middle-class; for instance, the number of managers swelled in the late nineteenth century, from 1,002 in 1860 to 34,510 in 1900 (Carter et al 2-135). The growth of the middle-class enabled more whites and African Americans to hire domestic workers and significantly altered the ratio of domestic workers to potential employers, an imbalance that was particularly pronounced in the North and Midwest (Smith, "Regulating" 860). During the same period, the percentage of black domestic workers in these regions steadily increased, enabled by migration; for example, whereas, in 1880 black women comprised 5 percent of all domestic workers in the East North Central region, that a number that more than doubled by 1910 to 12 percent (Ruggles et al. n.p.).

journalists with corporeality and urbanity and, by extension, associate them with this supposedly inferior form of journalism. Black female journalists endeavoured to navigate these risks by distinguishing themselves from the black domestic worker and urban woman, and, through this process, many positioned themselves amongst the prestigious informational journalists who claimed their labour was primarily intellectual, not physical. This strategy had both negative and positive implications for their subjects. Even as the legitimacy of informational journalism validated their efforts to challenge the oppression of black domestic workers and black urban women, by emphasizing the corporeal and spatial differences between themselves and these two figures, black female journalists often exposed them to public scrutiny and policing. This chapter, then, builds on Chapter One's focus on their writing as a negotiation of the idealized black female journalist by analyzing the affordances and limitations of working within definitions of professionalism in American journalism more broadly, and its impact on the figures they addressed.

At the turn of the century, multiple intersecting discourses functioned to emphasize, police and objectify the black female body. In the influential *American Anatomies*, Robyn Wiegman argues that the nineteenth-century rise of human sciences and comparative anatomy promoted a “strengthening of the corporeal as the bearer of race’s meaning” (23). These scientific fields produced an understanding of race as an “unchanging, biological feature [...] of which skin was only the most visible indication,” with the visible racial signifier of the skin giving way to the “authority of the invisible recesses of the body, to organs and functions” (Wiegman 31). Increasingly complex technologies were developed in order to measure racial markers in the body, though these technologies also called into question the ability of the naked eye to accurately read race in the “subterranean and invisible truths of the body” (Wiegman 22, 30-31). Within this culture that trained individuals to see race as corporeal, debates amongst whites and

African Americans about the black female body also constituted competing attempts to define “racial truth[s],” to use Wiegman’s phrase (28). Turn-of-the-century whites endeavoured to utilize the black female body to construct as natural and inevitable the exploitation and abuse of black women. They depicted black women as masculinized through an inherent biological ability to perform physical labour, a stereotype that dated back to slavery and that served to justify black women’s restriction to the fields of manual labour (Hicks 126; Santamarina 11). Additionally, through literature, art, mass media, advertising, and other print forms, whites circulated the myth of the “jezebel,” a stock type that was rooted in slavery but persisted well into the twentieth century. The proliferation of the jezebel across different media signals the dominance of this construction in white discourses about the black body. The jezebel was an aggressive, innately carnal figure that served as “proof” that black women were always available and eager for sex, erasing the long history of white men raping black women and justifying continued sexual violence (Tate, *Unknown Tongues* 90-91). These depictions of the “overwhelming corporeality” of the black female body, to employ Lindon Barrett's term in his analysis of slave narratives, also functioned as symbols of the supposed inferiority of black women, shoring up support for white supremacy (416).

In the face of such stereotypes emerging from a long history of black women’s exploitation, many turn-of-the-century African Americans policed the black female body in order to craft “racial truths” that countered those promoted by whites (Gaines 126). African Americans, particularly those in the middle-class, promoted Victorian sexual mores as a standard to which “the race” as a whole should aspire, emphasizing the value of chastity and heterosexual marriage (Gaines 2). Yet the responsibility of upholding this standard was unevenly weighted toward black women, with African Americans arguing that it was especially crucial that black women avoid sexual immorality in order to ensure the creation of a moral, respectable black family and race

(Higginbotham 202). By extension, nonconformity to these standards of sexual purity was a potential obstacle to racial progress that must be eliminated. Through institutions like the black press and black church, black men and women alike policed women's fashion, leisure activities, and sexual relationships, remaining hypervigilant for the ways black women's bodies could function as a "betrayal" to "the race" (Higginbotham 199-200).

African Americans' attempts to manage the black female body extended beyond policing black women's sexuality to debates about "appropriate" forms of employment. For many African Americans, black women's dominance of domestic work and manual labour more broadly constituted a threat to racial progress because it necessitated a display of physical strength in a period in which physical weakness and moral strength were the feminine ideal (Hicks 126). As Xiomara Santamarina argues, black women's "iconic debasement," produced by "slavery's 'degendering' of women" and by black women's disproportionately large presence in manual labour, could be viewed as "symptoms of racial and gendered 'degradation'" (5). Though Santamarina addresses literary representations of black women's work in the mid-nineteenth century, her arguments about the symbolic weight of black women's manual labour and her attention to the ways representation reflects real social investment in the black woman's labouring body remain accurate into the turn of the century. Many turn-of-the-century African Americans, including members of the press, race leaders, and social scientists, insisted that racial respectability depended on black men and women adopting the patriarchal gender relations that had been denied them throughout slavery, and argued that black men protecting black women "physically, economically, and politically from strenuous, menial labor" would facilitate this process (Williams, "Black Women's" 52). This act of protection, they reasoned, would enable the race to adhere to dominant gender norms, as black men would save black women from the degradation of masculinizing labour and reaffirm their own masculinity through this act of

patriarchal authority. Many African Americans therefore promoted what was called “clean work” for black women, a common turn-of-the-century term that denoted occupations that did not necessitate physical labour, including the professions, managerial and white-collar work (Drake and Cayton 219). By extension, they created dichotomies between middle-class “clean work” and working-class “dirty work.” Even as they sought to undermine myths of black inferiority by challenging the stereotype of the masculine black woman, African Americans contributed to broader white discourses that emphasized the overwhelming corporeality of the black female body and that positioned black women’s manual labour as a symbol of racial degradation.

These hierarchies between intellectual and physical labour were perpetuated by discourses about the two dominant streams of journalism, new journalism, which focused on emotional, entertaining storytelling, and informational journalism, which claimed to uphold dispassionate objectivity and empiricism (Mindich 13-14). Black female journalists were, like female journalists more broadly, positioned as unprofessional by their restriction to new journalism and its press forms like the woman’s page (Lutes, *Front Page Girls* 45). In *A Magazine of Her Own?*, periodical studies scholar Margaret Beetham posits that criticism of new journalism revealed an anxiety about the democratizing and feminizing effects of this form of journalism (114-116). Though she specifically addresses the white press in late nineteenth-century Britain, her arguments apply to the American context, where new journalism was derided for appealing to the uneducated working-classes and partially literate recent immigrants through its use of short paragraphs and illustrations (Williamson, “When ‘Popular’” 119), and for engaging readers on an emotional, not intellectual, level (Kaplan, “From Partisanship” 130).<sup>66</sup> Building on Beetham, I

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<sup>66</sup> Undereducated readers may well have consumed informational papers, as when Adolph Ochs, owner of the *New York Times*, dropped the cost of the *Times* from three cents to a penny, causing its circulation to skyrocket, but he and other informational editors constructed their papers for an imagined middle and upper-class audience (Schudson 114).

would argue that black female journalists were more thoroughly delegitimized by their association with new journalism than their white counterparts due to long-standing racial stereotypes that constructed African Americans as intellectually stunted. These stereotypes intersected with assertions that new journalists were “feather brained” and corrupted their readers’ minds, serving to marginalize black female journalists in particular (Kaplan, “From Partisanship” 130-131).<sup>67</sup> That informational journalists also criticized new journalism as appealing to the physical sensations of the body, such as sexual titillation, reproduced the long-standing gendering and racialization of the intellect as masculine and white and of the material body as feminine and “black” (Kaplan, “From Partisanship” 130). This racialization was reinforced by figures such as Charles Dana, owner of the informational paper the New York *Sun*. In his 1895 book *The Art of Newspaper Making*, Dana constructed informational journalism as a continuation of the white Western canon by insisting that all journalists should be well-versed in the “great writers” like Shakespeare and should study Greek and Latin (50, 36-37). In light of broader discourses that defined black femininity as inherently corporeal, Dana’s statements and debates about journalism in general created barriers to black female journalists’ attempts to construct themselves as professionals.

In response to these explicit and implicit depictions of their corporeality, black female journalists consistently constructed themselves as what I term “disembodied journalists.” By disembodied journalism, I refer to the ways that they emphasized their rhetorical and analytical

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<sup>67</sup> Matthew Arnold has been credited with coining the term “new journalism” in the May 1887 issue of the magazine *The Nineteenth Century*: “We have had opportunities of observing a New Journalism which a clever and energetic man has lately invented. It has much to recommend it; it is full of ability, novelty, variety, sensation, sympathy, generous instincts; its one great fault is that it is featherbrained” (qtd. in Beetham, *A Magazine* 115).

skills and markedly refused to depict their labouring bodies, in contrast to white female journalists, especially those in yellow journalism, who routinely highlighted the vulnerability of their physical bodies in their writing (Lutes, *Front Page Girls* 13-15). Black female journalists were not alone in this practice; Carla Peterson asserts that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century black writers rendered the black body invisible in order to focus on the “mind’s capacity to attain a level of culture commensurate to that of white Americans” (xii). Although Peterson posits that this trope served to affirm African Americans’ “potential to reach a level of cultural and intellectual achievement that would enable them to enter the national body politic as full citizens” (xiii), I would argue that, for black female journalists, constructing themselves as disembodied had an additional function. Disembodied journalism constituted a method of excising their bodies from public debate, suggesting that they were neither problems to be solved nor objects to be controlled and exploited. In order to solidify their status as disembodied, they utilized the black domestic worker as a “proxy” for corporeality, to employ Karen Sánchez-Eppler’s theoretical term (29-33). By creating a clear contrast between the disembodied nature of their labour and that of the black domestic worker, they attempted to both dissociate from the highly bodied new journalism and align themselves with the labour of informational journalists. In doing so, they also unsettled the dichotomies between female journalism, emotionality, corporeality, and male journalism, objectivity and intellect.

In addition to negotiating corporeality through their writing on the black domestic worker, black female journalists constructed themselves as “dislocated journalists,” by which I mean their attempts to use the black domestic worker and urban woman to position their labour as disembodied *and* as absent from any physical space, particularly the city, with its association of new journalism. Amongst middle-class African Americans who addressed urbanization and migration, including social reformers, educators and members of the press, the morality of the

black urban woman gave voice to larger anxieties about the potential for urbanization and migration to facilitate socioeconomic, demographic, and social upheaval (Zackodnik, *The Mulatta* 100; Cumberbatch 173-174). Within these debates emerged a stereotype of a naive woman who is corrupted by the city. This stereotype had a number of rhetorical functions in the work of African Americans who employed it to prohibit migration and those who utilized it to expose the systemic racial, gender, and economic oppression of black women. This recurring trope within the black press forged a connection between urbanity, the black female body, and immorality, a connection that was compounded by midwestern and northern whites who asserted that black urbanites in general were inherently and dangerously flawed, condemning them as yet another example of urban pathology, the social ills they argued were promoted by urbanization (Gaines 158-159). These dominant discourses threatened black female journalists' legitimacy when they wrote on the black urban woman by bringing them into proximity with female new and yellow journalists in the white press, who often depicted their bodies navigating urban spaces (Lutes, *Front Page Girls* 36; Fahs 190). In order to negotiate this professional risk, they repeatedly represented the urban black domestic worker and black urban woman as highly bodied and highly immersed in the urban environment, emphasizing their own dislocated journalism by contrast, a strategy that served to both prohibit and perpetuate the policing of these figures.

Yet, the professional stakes in how black female journalists would come to write about urban pathology and black domestic workers has been missed in literary and historical scholarship that repeatedly constructs classism as their primary motivation. In her influential article "Policing the Black Woman's Body in an Urban Context," Hazel Carby references black female journalists who, along with upper-and middle-class African Americans and whites more broadly, she claims identified the urbanizing and migrating black working-class woman as "sexually degenerate and, therefore, socially dangerous" within a larger discourse of urban moral

panic (116).<sup>68</sup> These accusations of classism reinforce the broader scholarly argument that middle-class African Americans were eager to construct hierarchical relationships between themselves and the working-classes in general. For instance, in his foundational study on the black strategy of “uplifting the race” by promoting racial respectability, Kevin Gaines argues that “many black elites sought status, moral authority, and recognition of their humanity by distinguishing themselves, as bourgeois agents of civilization, from the presumably undeveloped black majority” (2). Arguments like Gaines’s run throughout much of the scholarship on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century African Americans, with scholars asserting that the black elite sought to align themselves with white middle-class culture by establishing a hierarchy between themselves and the black working-classes.<sup>69</sup> I build on historians and literary scholars such as Carla Peterson (1995), Shirley Logan (1999), Cheryl D. Hicks (2010), and Teresa Zackodnik (2011), who complicate the idea that black female social reformers and journalists, and black middle-class women who belonged to other professions at this time perceived the black

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<sup>68</sup> For further scholarship that similarly argues that middle-class African Americans perceived black working-class women who were migrating or urbanizing as socially dangerous, see, amongst others, Rabinovitz, Lauren. *For the Love of Pleasure: Women, Movies, and Culture in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1998. Print.; Craig, Maxine Leeds. *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?: Culture, Social Movements, and the Rearticulation of Race*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2002. Print.; Ross, Marlon B. *Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era*. New York and London: New York UP, 2004. Print.; Najuma, Jacqueline. *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity*. Berkley: U of California P, 2005. Print.; and Tice, Karen W. *Queens of Academe: Beauty Pageantry, Student Bodies, and College Life*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2012. Print.

<sup>69</sup> See, amongst others, White, Deborah Gray. *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999. Print.; Batker, Carol J. *Native, African, and Jewish American Women's Literature and Journalism in the Progressive Era*. New York: Columbia UP, 2000. Print.; Shockley, Megan. “We, Too, are American: African American Women in Detroit and Richmond, 1940-1950.” Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 2004. Print.; Summer, Martin. *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2004. Print.; Brown (2008); and Hinton, Dawn. “Unheard Voices in the Community Building Process.” *Journal of International Women's Studies* 14.1 (2013): n.p. *World History in Context*. Web. 19 May 2016.

working-classes as inferior.

Though some black female journalists adopted tones of elitism, it would be an oversimplification to dismiss them as promoting hegemony. For the black female journalists I address in this chapter, constructing themselves as distinct from and therefore capable of advocating for working-class African Americans was a matter of professional necessity. Moreover, though black female journalists created distinctions between themselves and the subjects of their writing, they often simultaneously worked to expose and challenge the oppression of the black domestic worker, black urban woman, and urban and migrant populations in general. Their writing stood in contradistinction to the members of the white intelligentsia who addressed these issues by attempting to naturalize exploiting, abusing, and policing these demographics. This chapter explores the question: How does our understanding of black female journalists' relationship to the black domestic worker and black urban woman change if we interpret their rhetorical attempts to create distance between themselves and these figures, not as simple elitism, but as a professional strategy?

### **Urbanizing and corporealizing the black domestic worker**

The black domestic worker and black urban woman came to signify urbanity and corporeality through dominant discourses about the black urban population. Drawing on Katherine McKittrick's theorizing of the construction of space in *Demonic Grounds*, I would argue that dominant discourses about black urbanites make visible the economic, ideological, social, and political processes that restrict the black body within predetermined spaces and construct this restriction as "natural" (xv). At the turn of the century, urban socioeconomic elite whites and African Americans increasingly scrutinized the behaviour of urban black women and urban African Americans in general as part of larger debates about black urbanization and

migration. During this era, African Americans rapidly urbanized, a process that was both part of a national urbanization amongst all racial groups and included trends that were specific to African Americans, particularly the migration of hundreds of thousands of southern African Americans to the North and Midwest.<sup>70</sup> In an effort to manage these dramatic demographic shifts, Southern whites attempted to prohibit black urbanization and migration by insisting that African Americans “belonged” in the rural South and by depicting northern and midwestern cities as cruel, harshly competitive spaces in which naive southern African Americans would perish (Gaines 68).<sup>71</sup> Northern and midwestern whites were often equally intent on limiting these movements, motivated by their perceptions of black urbanites as embodying urban pathology, including violence, alcoholism, and unemployment (Gaines 158-159), and by their assertion that black southern migrants exacerbated this issue by spreading the crime and racial tension previously contained to the South (Morton 18).<sup>72</sup> The irony is that northern and midwestern whites were often to blame for the very factors they employed as proof of black urban pathology. Segregation forced many African Americans, particularly southern migrants or other recent arrivals, to inhabit run-down housing that was located in vice-ridden neighborhoods, which

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<sup>70</sup> Between 1880 and 1910 the black urban population doubled, comprising 13.9 percent of all African Americans in 1880 and 27.4 percent in 1910 (Ruggles et al. n.p.). The percentage of all Americans living in cities also rose sharply at the turn of the century. For instance, between 1890 and 1910, it rose from 22,720,223 to 42,623,383 (United States, *Negro Population* 78). In this same era, the number of southern-born African Americans who lived outside of the South also grew from 198,029 in 1880 to 440,534 in 1910 (United States, *Negro Population* 65).

<sup>71</sup> Music, drama, radio, popular literature, advertisements, photography and the white press repeatedly represented African Americans as contented and in their “natural environment” in rural locations, particularly in southern farmland. These stereotypes served to discredit urban migration and African American’s ambitions to escape manual labour (Gaines 68).

<sup>72</sup> For example, in the wake of a 1900 race riot in New York, a number of white periodicals stated that the North was becoming “southernized,” a claim that functioned to erase the history of violently enforced structural racism in the North (Hicks 70).

whites recast as evidence of black urbanites' innate criminality and immorality (Tolnay, Adelman, and Crowder 458; Corburn 695). In turn, northern and midwestern whites utilized the stereotype of black urban pathology to harass, arrest, and otherwise police the black urban population (Olzak 90). In the face of this intense hostility toward black urbanization and migration, many African Americans attempted to ensure that the black urban population remained respectable in order to limit racial violence and discrimination.

As with other issues of racial respectability, the black female body became the focal point of much of the African American discourses around urbanity. Many middle-class African Americans in the North, Midwest and South were opposed to migration, not only because of the racial subjugation migrants would face in northern and midwestern cities, but also because they perceived this movement as a potential threat to their socioeconomic status and to the interracial and social stability of their regions.<sup>73</sup> These debates about urbanization and migration, including those amongst social scientists, social reformers, and journalists, often centred upon the figure of an un- or under-educated, single black female urbanite, often a migrant and a domestic worker, who was physically and morally corrupted by the city (Hicks 90).<sup>74</sup> Through this stereotype,

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<sup>73</sup> For instance, many northern and midwestern African Americans were anxious about the potential for black migration to worsen racial tension and to destabilize class positions by creating increased competition for jobs, housing, and schools (Zackodnik, *The Mulatta* 100; Cumberbatch 173-174; Olzak 113). In the South, middle-class African Americans in particular, including business owners, professionals and clergy, argued against migration in order to maintain the markets and congregations upon which they depended for their livelihood (Grossman 93).

<sup>74</sup> This stock type perpetuated dominant discourses, particularly prevalent within late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historical and social scientific accounts of black migration, about rural, poor and illiterate black migrants who caused trouble for the midwestern and northern cities in which they settled (Tolnay, "The African American" 211). These accounts have been soundly challenged by recent scholarship on the Great Migration and its build up (Zackodnik 206), which, in contradistinction to the image of the un- or undereducated, single black female migrant, has ascertained that black migrants were significantly *more* likely to be literate than those who remained in the South (Tolnay, "The African American" 213) and tended to have married at the time of their move or shortly thereafter (Maloney 5). This scholarship suggests that the stereotype of the black female

these middle-class African Americans worked to police black female urbanites and to prohibit migration, and, in the process, reinforced broader discourses about the depraved and unhealthy city (Hicks 90). Their representations of the city demonstrate McKittrick's argument that space is not "secure and unwavering; we produce space, we produce its meanings, and we work very hard to make geography what it is" (xi). African Americans sought to define the city as degrading, particularly intertwining it with vices associated with the body such as drunkenness, sex, and violence, and simultaneously deployed "seemingly predetermined stabilities" to suggest that urban space "just is" morally and physically dangerous (McKittrick xi, x).

The black domestic worker was a particular point of concern within these debates as they played out within the black press, not only because she was central to urbanization and migration, but also because, in the eyes of many members of the press, her moral safety was called into question through the live-out movement, which had direct ties to migration. As southern black women migrated to northern and midwestern cities, they, alongside native-born black domestic workers, instigated the transition from the live-in system, which had been the norm in these regions, to the live-out system. In the former, domestic labourers were always "on call," and thus overworked, and inhabited the same homes as their employers, making them particularly vulnerable to sexual violence at the hands of male members of the family. This threat was so prevalent that one former domestic worker declared: "You couldn't be out working 'til you knew how people was raped [...] everyone told you something to keep you from being raped, 'cause it happened" (Clark-Lewis, *Living In* 48, 95). Live-out domestic workers, on the other hand, had their own homes and set time off. Often using quitting as a strategic negotiation tool, black

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migrant inhabiting the city circulated widely amongst African Americans, not because it was factual, but because it served a powerful rhetorical function in their efforts to negotiate intraracial and interracial anxieties provoked by the black migrant and urban "problems."

domestic workers were generally successful in their efforts to standardize living-out, achieving a reduction of work hours and greater personal and professional independence, not just for themselves but for all domestic workers regardless of race (Jones 165; Katzman 268-269).

As I discuss in more detail in Chapter Three, the black press depicted black domestic workers' efforts to gain personal and professional autonomy as tinged with sexual immorality, a response to the notion that these figures would move beyond their "natural" realm in the domestic sphere and into the public spaces of the city, including the highly sexualized city streets. Urban historian David M. Scobey argues that, for many mid-to-late nineteenth-century middle-class urbanites, city streets symbolized a threat to civic and moral order, in part due to their functioning as sites of forms of labour such as sex work that made the private pursuit of sexuality public (Scobey 174-175). This function imbued city streets with a sense of women's sexual agency, a perception that is evident in "State Street a Breeding Spot for Evil," by Frank A. Young, published in 1913 in the *Chicago Defender* (1905-).<sup>75</sup> Young warns parents that, if they do not carefully monitor their daughters who entertain young men in the city streets, these women will ultimately end in up in "the divorce court or the gutter later on" (n.p.). In its assertion that city streets enable immoral activity and that the women who spend time in them will be doomed to occupy other immoral spaces, this article produces an inevitability to the corruption of such women that the black press drew on in their writing on the autonomy of the black domestic worker.

"Domestics," also published in 1913 in the *Chicago Defender*, encourages black women

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<sup>75</sup> For additional writing in the black press on city streets, see, amongst others, "City or Country." *Hunsville Gazette* 10 February 1883; "Negro Commercial Club." *Plaindealer* 15 June 1900; "Negroes Should Keep Away From the City." *Colored Citizen* 28 February 1903; and "Negro Women Fare Better in the South than in the North." *The Savannah Tribune* 25 February 1911.

to become domestic workers, an occupation in which they “are in a measure watched over by their employers; they have less time to gad the streets, therefore less time to get into mischief” (n.p.). In its attempts to naturalize black women’s confinement to their employers’ homes, “Domestics” can be read as a backlash against the live-out movement, particularly because this piece was published in the Midwest where the fight for this system was taking place. In order to effect this naturalization, the article draws on dominant discourses around urbanization and migration. Though the *Chicago Defender* famously became one of the most vocal advocates of black migration, until 1916 it oscillated between supporting and opposing it, and “Domestics” evokes an anti-migration as well as anti-urbanization ethos by reinforcing the idea that black women get into “mischief” in the city streets (Grossman 81-85).<sup>76</sup> By using this powerful rhetoric to suggest that black domestic workers were morally safer in their employers’ homes than in the city streets, “Domestics” not only creates barriers to the live-out movement but also erases the sexual violence that these women faced in their work place, often at the hands of their employers.

Whereas “Domestics” depicted the domestic worker as a respectable occupation that would protect black women from the temptations of the cities, other members of the press created counternarratives to this discourse. In a trend that demonstrates the heterogeneity of perspectives on black urbanization and migration, many editors and journalists suggested both that the black urban woman were not universally or inherently immoral, and that flaws were a consequence, not

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<sup>76</sup> In 1916, previously segregated industrial occupations in Chicago opened to African Americans, new job opportunities that prompted editor Robert S. Abbott to promote migration with much more urgency and consistency (Grossman 82). Through the *Chicago Defender*, he exposed the horrors of southern white supremacy, championed the potential for individual and racial progress in the North and Midwest, and printed Help Wanted ads aimed at southerners (Grossman 81-85). For examples of the *Chicago Defender’s* early ambivalence about whether or not African Americans should leave the South for the North and Midwest, see, amongst others, the following issues of the *Chicago Defender*: 12 October 1912, 16 January 2015, 13 February 13, 3 July 2015, 27 March 2015, 30 October 1915, 5 February 1916, July 22 1916, and August 12 1916 (Grossman 303n39-43).

of racial inferiority, but of structural racism. By working to discredit the myth of black urban pathology, they subverted whites' attempts to employ it to justify racial discrimination and violence against black urban women, an act of subversion that further complicates scholars' assertions of classism as a primary motivator for members of the black press. Yet, in order to challenge the stereotype of the immoral black urban woman, they routinely utilized the body of the black domestic worker as a means of measuring the impact of city-living on African Americans, countering the notion that this occupation was "safe." These members of the press reinforced the connection between urbanity, black femininity and corporeality that would ultimately enable black female journalists to utilize the black domestic worker and black urban woman as proxies. These connections, however, would also make addressing these figures professionally risky for black female journalists, as we shall see.

A range of articles took up the black domestic worker as a means of addressing the broader topic of urban pathology, often to the detriment of this figure. In an 1889 issue of the *Indianapolis Freeman*, "Working-Girls in Cities" investigates whether or not working-class urban women were likely to become sex workers, and concludes that the "houses of prostitution are not recruited from working-women to any great extent [and] the working-women of this country are as honest and virtuous as any class of citizens" (n.p.). Though this passage problematically uses sex work as a synonym for immorality, it also functions to undermine the idea that working urban black women were coerced or tempted into sex work, a common trope within the black press that served to prohibit women's migration (Hicks 15). In order to validate its claim that not all women are morally corrupted by the city, the unnamed author of "Working-Girls in Cities" states that "the largest number of prostitutes coming from any occupation are those doing housework, hotel-work and cooking, this number being 30 per cent of the whole [...] but a fact which strikes one readily is the large number who enter prostitution from the home, which is 32 per cent" (n.p.).

The latter statistic positions black working women as statistically *less* likely to become sex workers than women supposedly sheltered within the domestic sphere, suggesting that the public spaces of the city including the market are no more morally dangerous than the home. Yet, the very act of stating that only thirty percent of all sex workers come from working-class occupations reifies the link between working-class women and sex work. Moreover, by claiming that the black urban women who *do* enter sex work are mainly former house workers, hotel workers, and cooks, “Working-Girls in Cities” employs the figure of the black domestic worker as a kind of outlier against which the rest of urban black women can be upheld as moral. Even as this article works to challenge the myth of black urban pathology, it sexualizes the black domestic worker and thereby lends support to larger efforts to police her body.

In “Health and Sanitary Conditions among Negroes,” published in 1914 in *The Savannah Tribune* (1875-), Dr. G.W. Smith similarly crafts a counternarrative to black urban pathology with complex implications for the black domestic worker. Though this article was published decades after “Working-Girls in Cities,” it continues to use the black domestic worker as a kind of litmus test for the status of a broader black urban population. Whereas “Working-Girls in Cities” utilized this strategy in order to address black urban women’s sexual morality, Smith employs it to take up the question of urban African Americans’ physical well-being. He asserts that in Savannah African Americans are forced to live in over-crowded and unsanitary homes, stating that the “death rate among Negroes is about twice as high as the whites” and that it could be lowered if “[a]ppropriate legislation [...] demanding the best sanitary conditions for the good of all the people” was implemented (n.p.). Smith counters dominant discourses about black urban pathology by constructing African Americans, not as innately predisposed toward vice, but as endangered by city living and by government legislation that does not ensure the safety of “all the people.” Aware that establishing a clear correlation between laws and high death rates amongst

African Americans might not be sufficiently persuasive to whites, he utilizes the black domestic worker to convince them to address structural racism by insisting that its effects on the urban black population threaten their own lives.

Smith manipulates dominant discourses about the potential for black domestic workers to carry diseases into the white home, a fear amongst white employers that was exasperated by the rise of the fields of bacteriology and epidemiology at the turn of the century. Often referring to the stereotype of the contagious black domestic worker as “Aunt Hannah,” white politicians and health reform advocates utilized anxiety about this figure to propose policy that would legalize the inspection and policing of black domestic workers’ bodies in the name of hygiene (Knadler 94-95). Drawing on the stereotype of Aunt Hannah, Smith asserts that the “health of the white people who employ Negro servants is somewhat jeopardized by the poor health of the servant in some cases, and for this reason alone they should assist us whenever possible” (n.p.). He capitalizes on pre-existing fears about the contagious black female body in order to convince whites of the urgency of ameliorating the living conditions of the black urban population and to subvert dominant discourses about black urban health in general. Particularly in the South, where his article was published, white scientists, physicians, and politicians endeavoured to employ urban African Americans’ health problems to ensure that they remained in their “natural” homes in the rural South, where their labour could be exploited, and Smith utilizes Aunt Hannah to counter these efforts to naturalize structural racism (Hunter 189-191). Yet, by fear-mongering through this figure, he also provides whites with further motivation to investigate black domestic workers’ health, and thus perpetuates a very real threat to the safety and autonomy of their bodies.

Smith’s arguments about the contagious black domestic worker were further validated by the fact that they echoed, though did not reproduce, those of W.E.B. Du Bois, the leading black

expert on black urban pathology, in *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), a methodical analysis of black life in the Seventh Ward of Philadelphia that was commissioned by white educators and philanthropists (Morris 46-47).<sup>77</sup> In a similar technique to Smith, he constructs black domestic workers as a conduit between urban pathology and the sanctity of the white home by stating that those who live out are “free at night to wander at will, to hire lodgings in suspicious houses, to consort with paramours, and thus to bring moral and physical disease to their place of work” (*Philadelphia* 141). DuBois utilizes this depiction of the live-out domestic worker to address structural oppression, asserting that they are examples of African Americans who have become “discontented and [...] without interest in their work” due to their restriction to the fields of manual labour (*Philadelphia* 138). Even though Du Bois endeavours to persuade the commissioners of his study of the urgency of racial discrimination, he also pathologizes the black domestic workers’ personal autonomy in ways that create obstacles to the live-out movement. Additionally, by reproducing the idea that black women who traversed metropolises were morally and physically corrupted, Du Bois reinforces the link between urbanity, immorality, and black female corporeality in ways that would complicate black female journalists’ own writing.

“Domestics,” “Working-Girls in Cities,” Smith and Du Bois differ in their suggestion that black domestic workers are prone to immorality or, alternately, that they are degraded by the combined effects of city-living and structural racism. Yet they were united in their focus on the vulnerability of the black domestic worker’s body in the city, and in producing an image of that

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<sup>77</sup> Du Bois was hired to produce this study by the University of Pennsylvania and the welfare organization the College Settlement Association (CSA), both of which drew on the logic of eugenicism to catalogue the vices of working-class African Americans in order that they might be contained and suppressed (Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois* 188). In his biography of Du Bois, David Levering Lewis states that the “conservative CSA gentry thought of poverty in epidemiological terms, as a virus to be quarantined - ‘a hopeless element in the social wreckage,’ as [CSA member Samuel McCune] Lindsay had written in a report on municipal welfare” (188).

space as morally and physically dangerous for black women to inhabit. These representations of the black domestic worker created professional risks to black female journalists' own efforts to address this figure and the black urban woman more broadly, due to their association with the conventions of new journalism, particularly its more extreme iteration, yellow journalism. Though yellow journalism was far more prevalent within the white press than the black, its conventions nevertheless informed the ways that black female journalists addressed these proxies.

At the turn of the century, many black periodicals adopted the conventions of new journalism as they became widely popular within American journalism, such as depending increasingly on advertising as a key source of income and, relatedly, focusing on appealing to a broader audience by introducing multiple new features and sections (Bullock 68-70). However, black periodicals avoided the sensationalism of yellow journalism until the early twentieth century, when the black press's inaugural yellow paper the *Chicago Defender* was founded in 1905 (Washburn 6). Yet even with the establishment of the *Defender*, black editors and journalists repeatedly condemned yellow papers in the white press and promoted informational journalism, asserting that yellow journalism "has no cause but to tickle, [startle] and incite to madness," and thereby perpetuating broader depictions of this form of journalism as corrupting the masses, as opposed to informational journalism's claim to educating them ("Yellow Journalism" 433; Kaplan, "From Partisanship" 130-131).<sup>78</sup> The black press likely eschewed yellow journalism because, in a period when whites employed the depiction of the violent

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<sup>78</sup> For other examples of anti-yellow journalism sentiment in the black press, see, amongst others, P.H. Bray. "Kelly Miller on 'Rape vs Rope.'" *Plaindealer* 17 November 1899; "Base Methods." *Plaindealer* 6 April 1900; and "Dirty and Low 'Journalism.'" *Cleveland Gazette* 6 December 1911.

African American to shore up support for white supremacy, the explicit anger of this form of journalism, particularly in its exposés on social problems, would have provided further justification for white control. This theory was borne out by the fact that in 1916 the FBI began surveilling the *Chicago Defender* under the assertion that it was promoting black-on-white violence (Kornweibel 156).<sup>79</sup> A 1906 article entitled “Yellow Journalism and Race Prejudice” suggests that members of the black press could not afford to explicitly condemn social ills in the manner of yellow journalism, because African Americans are “are always preaching loyalty to the flag, loyalty to ‘Uncle Sam,’ loyalty to the people” (n.p.). In other words, members of the black press did not have the luxury of conducting yellow exposés into racial inequality because they were already perceived as a problematic population who needed to be “fixed” or punished, often through violent means.

Moreso than their male colleagues, black female journalists had reason to avoid utilizing the conventions of yellow journalism. Due to their restriction to “soft news,” they were more clearly connected to this stream of journalism and to new journalism more broadly, and were delegitimized by that association. The highly urban and corporeal nature of yellow journalism within the white press provided further motivation for them to sever this connection. Yellow journalism was urban in that its most famous and influential papers emerged out of major metropolises and it often constituted an exploration of city life (Nord 126-127). Part of the

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<sup>79</sup> By 1916 the *Defender* was extremely popular amongst African Americans and despised by most whites for its explicit condemnation of segregation, racial violence, and disfranchisement, and for its promotion of the migration of southern African Americans. Responding to whites’ alarmist complaints, the FBI investigated the *Defender* and its editor, Robert Abbott, between 1916 and 1918, with assistance from the Post Office and Military Intelligence branches of the federal government. Historian Theodore Kornweibel argues that the investigations were suspended in 1918 when Abbott promised not to print anything inflammatory, though they were promptly renewed in 1921, with the FBI accusing the *Defender* of having communist leanings and inciting riots (155-166).

scandal of yellow journalism was that it enabled women to travel throughout the city, with their assignments giving them access to a range of “unladylike” public spaces, including hospitals, police courts, and prisons, and highlighting their sexualized physicality (Lutes, *Front Page Girls* 36; Fahs 190).<sup>80</sup> Female journalists titillated readers by providing explicit depictions of their bodies navigating these spaces at the same time as public anxieties about urban pathology increasingly linked the streets and the city in general with crime and sexually immorality. The widespread objectification and exploitation of the black female body made a similar display of black female journalists’ bodies complicated, marking the conventions of yellow journalism as professionally and personally dangerous for them.

Writing on the black domestic worker and black urban woman threatened to bring black female journalists into proximity with those conventions. In her work to theorize genre as “social action,” Carolyn Miller argues that audience’s experiences often “shapes [their] responses [...] by providing instructions, so to speak, about how to perceive[,] interpret[, and] anticipate” (159). When black female journalists took up these proxies, they addressed corporeality, urbanity, and women’s sexual immorality, all markers of yellow journalism, and the “instructions” of yellow journalism created an expectation in readers for black female journalists to describe their imperiled bodies navigating the city, like female yellow journalists. Such a depiction would not only align them with this inferior form of journalism but also position them as part of the “urban problem,” needing to be policed and “solved.” Yet, even as writing on the black domestic worker

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<sup>80</sup> For example, “Fair Women Rustlers,” published in the 11 May 1891 issue of the white daily *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, provides an interview with Elizabeth Jordan, who worked for the leading yellow paper the *World*. When asked about some of her “quite exciting” experiences, Jordan recalls being assigned to watching a dying consumptive’s “every movement and every change as she sinks to death and write a story of it” (n.p.). She claims that the consumptive held her hand so tightly that, after she died, a doctor had to “pry her fingers away from their clasp” and Jordan’s hand remained as cold and wet as if she “had plunged it into icy water” (n.p.).

and black urban woman was professionally and personally risky, they also used these proxies to manage their own relationship to corporeality and urbanity, and by extension to professional legitimacy, as we shall see.

### **Disembodying journalism**

In black female journalists' writing on male employers sexually assaulting black domestic workers, the focal point of this section, they oscillated between endeavouring to advocate for these women and negotiating the risk of directly addressing their sexualized bodies. This risk was heightened by the fact that, though they did represent the black domestic worker inhabiting the city, dominant discourses within the black press had so firmly intertwined her corporeality and urbanity that the former was tinged with the latter. The challenging nature of this topic likely deterred many black female journalists from explicitly depicting the sexual assault of black domestic workers. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter Three, black female journalists criticized a range of detrimental aspects of domestic work in such writing, from Ella L. Mahamitt analyzing unstandardized wages 1896 in the *Enterprise* (1893-1914) to Fannie Barrier Williams urging employers to "recognize a servant as a human being" in a 1904 issue of the Atlanta monthly *Voice of the Negro* (1904-1907) (n.p.; 302).<sup>81</sup> Yet when black female journalists took up the relationship between male employers and black domestic workers, often they described it in ways that compounded the latter's sexualization. In the 2 January 1886 installment of "Our Woman's Department," published in the *New York Freeman*, Gertrude Mossell, motivated by her particularly tenuous claim to professionalism as the editor of a

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<sup>81</sup> The western vice president of the National Federation of Afro-American Women, Mahamitt edited "Woman's Column" between 1895 and 1897 for the *Enterprise*, an Omaha weekly published by Thomas P. Mahamitt, her husband (Suggs 217).

woman's column, reproduces the idea of the morally compromised black domestic worker. She states that female employers perceive domestic workers as "rivals" and that a "large percentage of recruits to the ranks of the disreputable testify that they were first led astray by their employers" (1). Her reference to being "led astray" suggests that black domestic workers are victims, not of sexual violence, but of temptation. Even though Mossell's depiction of male employers as tempters subverts the stereotype of the jezebel who actively pursues and seduces sexual partners, she also reinforces dominant discourses surrounding urbanization and migration that depicted the black domestic worker as prone to sexually immorality. In turn, this representation of the black domestic worker creates an implicit moral hierarchy between herself and this proxy, and thereby distances her from yellow journalism and furthers her claim to professionalism.

Other black female journalists represented male employers as inflicting sexual violence on black domestic workers, while utilizing this proxy to negotiate the overwhelming corporeality of both the black female body and forms of journalism that were regarded as highly bodied. In contrast to Mossell, they worked to create a corporeal, not moral, distinction between themselves and the black domestic worker, and utilized the legitimizing effects of this distinction to validate their claims about the sexual assault of this figure, with both negative and positive implications for her. Their efforts to advocate on behalf of the black domestic worker while distancing themselves from her would become much more complex when they wrote explicitly on the black domestic worker in the city and black urban women in general, as we shall see in the subsequent section.

Though black female journalists were rarely employed in yellow journalism, occasionally they used its conventions, including the eyewitnessing that was typical of this stream of journalism. For black female journalists writing on black domestic workers' sexual abuse,

adopting the role of the eyewitness was both professionally advantageous and personally risky. Eyewitnessing signaled a first-hand presence that positioned them as authorities, particularly in contrast to the audiences who had no personal knowledge of what was being reported, an authority that was particularly necessary given the widely derided nature of yellow journalism (Zelizer 410-411). Yet functioning as eyewitnesses also heightened black female journalists' association with corporeality and urbanity due to the way it functioned within yellow journalism, particularly in the extremely popular genre of stunt reporting. Often operating undercover, female stunt reporters worked in factories and as domestic labourers, begged in the streets, and sought illegal abortions, creating anxiety and excitement about the idea of a white woman in physical and sexual danger.<sup>82</sup> Though derided by many of their colleagues, female stunt reporters often had more clout than women who did more "traditional" journalism and had the opportunity to move beyond "women's issues" to addressing "hard" political and criminal news. Yet their stories focused as much on their own experiences as they did on the corruption or scandal they investigated (Lutes, *Front Page Girls* 13-14). Female stunt reporters, and other female journalists who functioned as eyewitnesses within yellow journalism, acted both as agents of publicity, "empowered to inform the public," and as the "object of publicity" as Jean Marie Lutes has argued (*Front Page Girls* 15). Black female journalists who wrote in first-person on the sexual assault of black domestic workers endeavoured to legitimize their claims by employing this

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<sup>82</sup> In one of the most famous examples of new and yellow journalism within the white press, in 1887 Elizabeth Cochrane, under the pen name Nellie Bly, went undercover in a "mad-house" in New York City as an assignment for the *New York World*. The sensationalism of her writing rests not just on the possibility that she will be discovered as a fraud, but also on the fact that she must endure the same indignities as any other inmate. She provides copious details about the rough physical treatment of her body, as in the scene where other patients strip and wash her in "ice-cold" water: "They began to undress me, and one by one they pulled off my clothes. At last everything was gone excepting one garment. 'I will not remove it,' I said vehemently, but they took it off" (Bly 57).

convention and to simultaneously avoid making their bodies the “objects of publicity.”

Such a negotiation of corporeality is evident in Fannie Barrier Williams’s “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography,” published in 1904 in *The Independent*, a white weekly established in New York and edited by Hamilton Holt. In this autobiographical essay, Williams adopts and drops the role of eyewitness in order to manage her relationship to being an “object of publicity.” In a rare move for a black female journalist writing on the black domestic worker, she alternates between constructing herself as disembodied and referencing her own body. Though these references threaten Williams’s claim to professionalism, they serve a strategic purpose, challenging the dominant discourses about black women’s overwhelming corporeality that rendered eyewitnessing and other conventions of yellow journalism fraught for black female journalists.

Though Williams exposes the prevalence of racism in the North and thereby works against the widespread claim amongst northern and midwestern whites that racial conflict was a southern “problem” (Morton 18), the majority of her autobiographical essay is comprised of eyewitness accounts of structural oppression in the South, including a description of her passing as white.<sup>83</sup> This first-person narrative of her ride in the first-class section of a segregated train car in many ways echoes the undercover conventions of stunt reporting, including its embodied nature. Though Williams does not describe her body in the kind of lurid detail that often typified yellow journalism, she nevertheless adopts an embodied form of journalism by referencing the

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<sup>83</sup> For instance, Williams claims that, as a well-educated, middle-class New Yorker, she “experienced very few evidences of race prejudice” while living in the North, but asserts that it was much easier for “progressive white [northern] women to be considerate [...] to one colored woman whom they chanced to know [...] than to be just and generous to colored young women as a race” (92). She denounces the hypocrisy of progressive northern whites, a category to which many of the readers of *The Independent* likely belonged, who remain amiable in personal interactions with individual African Americans, yet help to maintain a system of oppression against African Americans as a whole.

fact that she was “mulatto in complexion” and by describing the train conductor asking whether she was “colored,” suggesting that he examined her skin colour (311, 315). She responded, “‘Je suis Français.’ [...] He then called to the brakeman and said ‘Take this lady’s money and go out at the next station and buy her ticket for her,’ which he kindly did, and I as kindly replied, as he handed me the ticket, ‘Merci.’” (315). Mary Jo Deegan notes that this short exchange has been denounced by most of Williams’s biographers and interpreted, inaccurately, as a sign that she *regularly* passed and therefore, at least momentarily, abandoned “the race” in order to enjoy white privilege (Introduction 115). I would argue that this description of passing instead functions as a means of exposing the fact that, as Sánchez-Eppler asserts, though “the body is an inescapable sign of identity, it is also an insecure and often illegible sign” (15). Williams’s narrative affirms what Wiegman has called a “break with the assurance of the visible” (30), evident in her act of passing, which marks the white conductor’s and brakeman’s inability to determine her race simply by scrutinizing her body. By revealing whites’ inability to accurately read her body, Williams also undermines the notion that black women’s sexual proclivity and innate physical strength were legible in their bodies, myths promoted by the stereotypes of the jezebel and the masculine black woman. Even as she renders her individual body vulnerable to the gaze of her white readers, she also unsettles their assumptions about the overwhelming corporeality of all black women.

Following this first-person narration, Williams abandons the role of eyewitness in order to recuperate her professional reputation after this highly bodied description of passing. She states that “colored women are just as strong and just as weak as any other women” (316), and utilizes the black domestic worker as proof for this claim:

I am constantly in receipt of letters from the still unprotected colored women of the South, begging me to [...] save [their daughters] from going into the homes of the South as

servants, as there is nothing to save them from dishonor and degradation [...] The moral feature of this problem has complications that it would seem better not to dwell on. (316)

In positioning herself as addressing the concerns of black mothers through her writing, Williams joins other black female journalists, including Gertrude Mossell, who, in an 1886 instalment of “Our Woman’s Department,” asks mothers to contribute to her future writing by submitting a “suggestion or comment tell[ing] us how they desire to have the work [of the column] go forward” (25 December 1886 n.p.). These claims justify their entrance into the public sphere by suggesting that they are motivated by a responsibility to serve a larger black collective through their journalism. For Williams in particular, this reference to mothers’ letters also signifies a dissociation from the proxy. By positioning herself as having only second-hand knowledge of the black domestic worker’s sexual assault, she distances herself from the actual act of sexual violence, and thereby creates not only a corporeal but a spatial distinction between herself and the proxy. Having utilized the conventions of yellow journalism to strategic effect, Williams now works to legitimize her claims by constructing her labour as disembodied and dislocated.

This distancing ultimately serves to protect the black domestic worker’s body, as well as Williams’ professional reputation. By dropping the role of the eyewitness, she misses an opportunity to more directly advocate for black domestic workers by describing their abuse and condemning predatory white male employers, but she also robs her audience of any voyeuristic thrill of reading about black domestic workers’ “degradation and dishonor.” By depriving them of such a scene, Williams centres the passing anecdote as the primary focus on the black female body in her essay. The reader is drawn away from explicit descriptions of the black domestic worker’s assault, which could resexualize this figure, and drawn back toward the notion that the black woman’s body cannot be reliably read or reduced to a single fixed meaning. Williams functions as the female body demanded by eyewitnessing as a genre, and thereby challenges

dominant discourses that subjugated and policed black women in ways that, in turn, complicated black female journalists' work in the conventions of yellow journalism.

For most black female journalists, Williams's efforts to strategically adopt the embodied conventions of yellow journalism necessitated professional and personal risks that they were not willing to take. With much more consistency, they utilized their writing on the sexual assault of the black domestic worker to align themselves with informational journalism, a strategy with its own affordances and limitations. In order to enact this alignment, they constructed themselves as disembodied by emphasizing their rhetorical skill and primarily intellectual labour, which stood in sharp contrast to their emphasis on the sexual vulnerability of the black domestic worker. This self-positioning undermined the idea that white men had a monopoly on informational journalism and lent authority to their controversial assertions that black domestic workers were sexually exploited. Yet, even as they employed informational journalism to reinforce their credibility, adhering to it meant black female journalists had to carefully negotiate how and whether to address the abuse black domestic workers endured. Informational journalism was thus a powerful rhetorical weapon and a limiting structure in which to operate.

Mary Church Terrell, leading organizer, activist, educator, and contributor to black periodicals such as *Voice of the Negro*, *The Crisis*, and *The Woman's Era*, endeavoured to construct herself as disembodied in "Girls Not All in Peril." In this article, she refuted the slanderous attacks made by members of the white press in response to a speech she delivered on black domestic worker's sexual assault.<sup>84</sup> Published originally in the 11 November 1907 of the

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<sup>84</sup> Terrell delivered her speech to the National Purity Congress, which met in Battle Creek, Michigan between October 31 and November 6, 1907. The National Purity Congress was the annual meeting of the American Purity Alliance (APA), a white organization founded in 1895 that promoted sexual purity amongst men and women and attempted to advocate for sex workers and poor labouring women. Terrell attended multiple Purity Congresses between

issue of *The Washington Post*, a white daily, and reprinted in the 14 November 1907 issue of the *New York Age*, “Peril” constitutes Terrell’s attempt to defend herself against these attacks by demonstrating her adherence to informational journalism and thereby reaffirming the validity of her claims. According to “Peril,” she declared that “colored domestics stand in such dread of the men in some of the families for whom they work in the South [...] colored mothers [...] are loath to see [their daughters] work in those communities, where their downfall is almost certain” (n.p.). She goes on to assert that black domestic workers’ sexual vulnerability is “a side of the servant problem [...] which is rarely presented to the public” (n.p.), an assertion that has been borne out by subsequent scholarship on the “servant problem.” Historian Vanessa May states that stakeholders in the “servant problem” debate, such as white employers and social reformers, overlooked the predatory behaviour of male employers toward domestic workers in favour of policing what they perceived as domestic workers’ proclivity toward sexual vice (30-32).<sup>85</sup> Though this stereotype condemned all domestic workers, it perpetuated the victimization of the black domestic worker in particular, who was already positioned as sexually immoral due to the wide circulation of the jezebel figure and to her centrality to debates about black urbanization and migration. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the entrenched nature of this stereotype, Terrell’s attempts to redefine dominant discourses around the black female body were met with rank hostility from whites, as she recalls in her autobiography; the Associated Press condemned her address as a “Bitter, Furious Invective against the People of the South” and white periodicals

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1905 and 1927, alongside members of a range of health reform movements, and was the only black speaker on the program in 1907 (Engs 19-20).

<sup>85</sup> This myth of the sexually immoral domestic worker proved a persistent one. Whereas Daniel E. Sutherland, in *Americans and the Servants: Domestic Service in the United States from 1800 to 1920* (1981), positions as dubious the idea that domestic workers were “at the mercy of male employers,” he maintains that “there was evidence of a serious sexual promiscuity” amongst this labour group (70).

across the nation echoed this report (*A Colored Woman* 183).<sup>86</sup> Such intense resistance marked the value of the figure of the highly sexualized black domestic worker to whites' efforts to police the black urban population and to the project of white supremacy more broadly.

Terrell negotiates the professional and personal risks of taking up such a charged subject by establishing a corporeal distinction between herself and the proxy. This distinction lent a much-needed credibility to her writing, particularly in light of the fact that she had a rare opportunity to directly address a white audience with her speech and later by initially publishing "Peril" in the *Washington Post*. In contradistinction to the black domestic worker, who is both a manual labourer and victim of sexual assault, "Peril" functions as a record of the disembodied nature of Terrell's work, detailing her researching and writing this speech and positioning her arguments with the white press as intellectual debates. She counters the white press's characterization of her claims as "wild, sweeping, and false," declaring they lack foundation and accuracy: "It is difficult to believe that the individual who sent out such a report could have made a mistake, if he heard my address" ("Peril" n.p.). Though Terrell may have feared for her physical safety in light of the such hostile white response to her speech, passages like this one represent her occupation as purely intellectual and her weapons as rhetorical ones, removing her body from the discussion of her journalism. Thus, she lends validity to her insistence that the bodily subjugation of black women is prevalent in the South by dissociating herself from corporeality.

Terrell further constructs herself as disembodied by highlighting the source material for her speech, which simultaneously validates her arguments and suggests the limitations of

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<sup>86</sup> For instance, *The Valentine Democrat*, a Nebraska weekly, accused Terrell of "Savagely Assail[ing] Southern Homes" and the *Bismark Daily Tribune* announced in large, bold font, **"COLORED WOMAN SAID HONOR OF A NEGRESS WAS NOT SAFE IN SOUTHERN HOME"** ("Startles Purity Congress" n.p.; "At the Purity Conference" n.p.).

informational journalism for black women. Echoing Ida B. Wells's technique of incorporating passages from white newspapers into her own anti-lynching writing, Terrell states that she drew on a keynote from Judge George Anderson of Vicksburg, Mississippi, in the section of her speech that addressed sexual violence: "I quoted from a statement which a white judge in Mississippi is said to have made [...] when the Circuit Court convened in Jackson, Miss., about two years ago, according to the reports from the newspapers" ("Peril" n.p.). Her meticulous citation of her source material positions Terrell as an ethical journalist in a period when professional codes of ethics championed accuracy and as much transparency as possible, both in terms of journalists' dealings with interview subjects and with their readers (Farrar 201-203).<sup>87</sup> Yet, in contrast to Wells, who employed excerpts from the white press on lynching to condemn whites with their own words (Zackodnik, *Press* 151), Terrell's use of Anderson to bolster her objectivity reveals her reliance on support for her argument from a white source. Quoting him indicates her efforts to mitigate the risk that, even with her clear adherence to the conventions of informational journalism, her writing would not be perceived as the "truth," particularly because she attempted to present truths about the loaded subject of white men sexually assaulting black women.

Terrell's reliance on Anderson not only makes legible the compromised state of her credibility, but also has a negative impact on black domestic workers because of the way he condemns *all* interracial relationships between white men and black women. Reproduced in the

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<sup>87</sup> In one of the earliest articulations of a journalism code of ethics, Charles A. Dana, editor of the *New York Sun*, delivered a speech to the Wisconsin Editorial Association in 1888. Amongst other rules, he asserted that journalists should "copy nothing from another publication without perfect credit. Never print an interview without the knowledge and consent of the party interviewed. Never print a paid advertisement as news-matter" (qtd. in Farrar 201-202)

winter of 1905 in *The Washington Bee*, his speech functions as an argument against miscegenation, which was illegal in Mississippi and twenty-seven other states across the nation, and was a point of contention amongst whites and African Americans alike, though for distinct reasons (Hrishi and Chin 14). Amongst other concerns, many African Americans condemned interracial relationships due to a long history of white men raping black women, a history Anderson works to erase in his depiction of the black domestic worker (Gaines 57-60). He states that, often, “instead of the servant being willing to give reference, she wants reference before she will go to work,” clearly indicating that many black domestic workers were fearful for their safety in the white home, but he does not condemn male employers as perpetrators of sexual violence (“Unlawful Habitual” n.p.). Instead, he blurs the line between rape and consensual sex by lumping male employers in with other white men who “indulg[e] in this evil” of interracial relationships, representing them not as rapists but as morally weak (“Unlawful Habitual” n.p.). Though Terrell attempts to edit out this blurring of nonconsensual and consensual sex, it bleeds through into “Peril”:

Judge Anderson’s charge to the grand jury was what he called the “unlawful, habitual relations” existing between colored women and white men. “The evil,” he declared, “is not confined to any cast or standard of society [...] and the result has been that I believe to a great degree the servant problem has become more serious [...] The colored women should not be made more to blame [...] than the men.” (n.p.)

Anderson’s conflation of all interracial relationships with rape remains intact, and his statement that black women “should not be made more to blame” further muddies the question of consent by suggesting that they deserve *some* blame for this “evil.”<sup>88</sup> Quoting Anderson, then, both

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<sup>88</sup> In presenting himself as fair-minded by insisting that white men *and* black women should be held accountable, Anderson echoes a key anti-miscegenation law, *Pace v. Alabama*,

legitimizes Terrell's argument and weakens it by simultaneously suggesting that black domestic workers are victimized by their male employers and, to some extent, are willing participants in sexual relationships that are conflated with that abuse.

Responses to "Peril" in both the black press and the white press demonstrate that Terrell's anxieties over her perceived objectivity were warranted. Though the black press expressed support for Terrell by reprinting "Peril," it also chastised her for being too overtly critical of whites.<sup>89</sup> Referencing "Peril," an editorial in the Indianapolis *Freeman* by then-owner George Knox claimed: "Mrs Terrell admits that she went too far in discussing this phase of the race problem, and has done the very gracious thing of retracting a part of what she said. Good will only result from moderation" ("Mrs Mary..." n.p.). Though the editorial does not specify which claims Terrell is meant to have revoked, it misrepresents "Peril" as a whole, which she employed as an opportunity to restate and reaffirm the validity of her speech, not to retract any portion of it. Inaccurately praising Terrell for adopting a more moderate stance, Knox obscures the issue of black domestic workers' sexual assault by condemning articles like Terrell's that "immoderately" exposed and condemned it. As well, by chastising Terrell, Knox paternalistically suggests that black women do not comprehend the boundaries of appropriate professional behaviour, whereas he does.

The white press, not surprisingly, were even more condescending in their coverage of "Peril." *The Columbus Dispatch*, a semi-weekly, accused Terrell of "chang[ing] her tune" between her

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which the Supreme Court upheld as just in 1883 because it punished whites and African Americans equally (Williamson, *New People* 3, 110-114).

<sup>89</sup> See, for example, "Mrs Mary Church Terrell..." *Nashville Globe* 8 November 1907: n.p.; "Would Require References!" *Plaindealer* 8 November 1907: n.p.; and "Among Our Exchanges." *The Indianapolis Freeman* 14 December 1907: n.p.

speech and “Peril,” baldly stating: “Veracity is not a characteristic of the colored race, and Mary evidently has the same weakness which is found in so many [African Americans]” (“Mary Church Terrell” n.p.). The *Dispatch* dismisses Terrell, her arguments, and “the race” in one fell swoop, sexualizing her with the inappropriately intimate use of her first name and disciplining her for her claims of white male rapaciousness and her attempts to dissociate herself from corporeality. The responses of both the white and the black press to “Peril” reveal the entrenched sexism and racism that Terrell was fighting against, while also suggesting that her rhetorical efforts to present herself as a disembodied, informational journalist could only do so much to change dominant discourses about black female journalism and black femininity more broadly.

Addie Hunton, educator, activist, and contributor to such black periodicals as *The Crisis* and *Colored American Magazine*, similarly reveals the complexities of addressing male employers’ sexual assault of black domestic workers within the confines of informational journalism. In “Negro Womanhood Defended,” published in 1904 in *Voice of the Negro*, she demonstrates adherence to informational journalism in order to validate her claims that efforts to “magnify the moral weakness of Negro womanhood” are unfounded (280). More so than Williams, who made a similar claim, Hunton constructs any “shortcomings” as rooted in structural oppression, including a legacy of exploitation dating back to slavery and “wages paid the Negro laboring woman [that] are so paltry as to scarcely provide her the necessities of life” (280-281). Like Terrell, Hunton works to legitimize her assertions by suggesting that she has a greater capacity for objectivity than her colleagues in the press, declaring that previous articles on black women’s morality have not been written “by those who have made a systematic and careful study of the question from every point of view, but rather by those whose conclusions are born of their own limited experiences” (280). By suggesting that “Negro Womanhood Defended” is informed not by her own “limited experiences” but by “systematic and careful study,” she aligns herself with the

methodical research promoted by informational journalism, a particularly significant move given that her article was published in a special issue entitled “Our Women’s Number,” which was dedicated primarily to the writing of eight black female journalists. Within this context, she becomes a symbol of black female journalists’ capacity for empiricism, refuting the notion that this marker of professionalism was the sole territory of white male elites.

Hunton works to further legitimize her writing by referencing W.E.B. Du Bois, race leader, sociologist, editor and author of the sociological text *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), which influentially theorized double-consciousness and included literary work like the short story “Of the Coming of John.” By citing the leading black sociologist of the period, she not only aligns herself with the informational journalists who patterned themselves after the social sciences (Maras 25), but also suggests that she cannot be accused of bias in favour of black women if a black man for whom objectivity is a professional standard corroborates her arguments. This self-positioning serves to validate her argument that black women’s “moral weaknesses” are rooted in a history of structural racism, yet weakens her efforts to address black domestic worker’s sexual assault. In order to maintain this sense of disembodied objectivity, Hunton works to distance herself from the scene of black domestic workers’ sexual assault and therefore from the fraught role of the eyewitness, abstracting Du Bois’s graphic depiction of sexual violence into a “picture of temptation.”<sup>90</sup> Though this distancing helps her to maintain her credibility, it creates ambiguity

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<sup>90</sup> In “Of the Coming of John,” Du Bois explicitly describes a black domestic worker named Jennie being accosted by her white employers’ son: “he caught at her arm. Frightened, she slipped by; and half mischievously he turned and ran after her” (*Souls* 165). Jennie’s brother, John, upon seeing “his dark sister struggling in the arms of a tall and fair-haired man,” kills her attacker and is subsequently confronted with an apparent lynch mob, and the story becomes one about, not just black women’s vulnerability, but black men’s inability to ensure their safety without facing their own threat of physical violence (*Souls* 166). Placing rape and lynching in proximity to each other also reveals their shared reliance on the idea of the “heightened sexual perversity” of the black body, in Wiegman’s words, with whites utilizing the stereotype of the hypersexual African American to justify not only raping black women but also lynching black men in order to “protect” white women’s chastity (*Souls* 83).

around the issue of consent. The idea that someone or something “forces itself upon the [...] servant girl” is confused by the word “temptation,” which renders unclear whether black domestic workers are victims of sexual assault or “led astray,” to use Mossell’s phrase. Like Terrell, through her efforts to construct herself as an informational journalist, Hunton risks blurring the line between consensual sex and rape.

In writing such as that by Williams, Terrell, and Hunton, black female journalists made deliberate decisions about how to invoke and use the bodies of black domestic workers. This ability to choose whether and to what extent to focus on that figure’s overwhelming corporeality also preserved their privileged position. Though they were marginalized within their professions, as journalists they could exert some small control over the way their bodies appeared or disappeared within the black press, whereas black domestic workers had no comparable power. This asymmetry becomes even more apparent in their writing on the urban black domestic worker and on the urban black woman more broadly. Because these figures clearly symbolized both the urbanity and corporeality associated with yellow journalism, black female journalists were further motivated to create not just corporeal but also spatial distinctions between themselves and these proxies.

### **Dislocating journalism**

Even moreso than addressing the sexual assault of the black domestic worker, writing on this figure in the city and on the black urban woman, with their stronger link to urbanity, threatened to position black female journalists as yellow journalists, perpetuating the idea that their value lay in the rhetorical exposure of their vulnerable bodies and not in their intellectualism

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or objectivity. The complexity of taking up these proxies meant that black female journalists adopted multiple strategies in their writing, but a common thread was their efforts to emphasize the ramifications of the black female body occupying an urban environment while dissociating themselves from that environment. In a similar strategy to their writing on black domestic workers' sexual abuse, black female journalists constructed themselves in contrast to these proxies as "dislocated," or primarily intellectual labourers and absent from the material realm. Even as they often endeavoured to ameliorate the lives of urban black domestic workers and black women by creating counternarratives to the myth of black urban pathology, by emphasizing the often sexualized corporeality of these figures, they also lent support to broader efforts within debates about urbanization and migration to police them. What scholars have interpreted as classism in black female journalists' writing on migration, urbanization, or the black working-classes in general becomes a much more complex professional necessity when read against the intersecting discourses about journalism and the black woman in the city.

In some cases black female journalists distanced themselves from dominant discourses about the black urban woman by demonstrating their abilities to identify the flaws in this figure. By creating a moral hierarchy between themselves and the urban black domestic worker and urban woman, black female journalists constructed themselves in contrast to these proxies and to the conventions of yellow journalism. Just as she worked to create such a hierarchy in her writing on the relationship between the white male employer and black domestic worker, Mossell establishes one between herself and the black urban woman in the 13 February 1886 installment of "Our Woman's Department" for the *New York Freeman*. Though she presents black women's urbanization as reasonable for its pursuit of "higher wages," she warns against black rural women "crowding into our large cities, where they meet with a class of men [...] without moral character [...] Should they marry such [a man] only misery untold can follow" (13 February 1886 n.p.).

Here, Mossell joins other members of the press in policing this figure's sexuality, and thereby suggests that she possesses the moral superiority required to manage it. Ella V. Chase Williams employs a similar strategy in "Our Women," her column for *The Washington Bee* that appeared irregularly, though usually on a weekly basis, between August 1896 and January 1897. Whereas Mossell adopted a tone of concern for black women considering urbanizing, Williams is sharply critical of black women who already inhabit the city, especially of what she represents as their potential for promiscuity. In her December 25 1896 instalment she asserts that "older girls on the street [...] ought to be [...] less demonstrative with young men," and in her 8 January 1897 instalment, similarly urges women "on the streets alone at night" to adopt "[p]urity of thought, purity of words, purity of action" (n.p.). In her specific references to "girls on the street," Williams draws on broader anxieties within the black press and beyond about the city streets as spaces of problematic sexual agency for black women. She endeavours to reexert control over these women, while positioning her policing firmly within the rhetorical, not the material, realm. She does not, for example, represent herself as navigating the city to report first-hand on the "girls on the street" and thereby dissociates from the corporeal urbanity of yellow journalism. The fact that Williams and Mossell were both editors of woman's pages suggests that operating within this "soft" press form created an urgent need to seek the professional cache of dislocated journalism by reinforcing, to varying degrees, the stereotype of the hypersexualized black urban woman.

Whereas Williams constructs both the streets and the black women who occupy them as inherently immoral, other black female journalists suggested that black women *become* corrupted by the forces of the city, while navigating an ongoing need to dissociate themselves from the proxies. In "The Slums of New York," published in 1897 in the Indianapolis *Freeman*, Victoria Earle Matthews was likely more motivated than most to create such a contrast due to her

background as both a former domestic labourer and southern migrant who settled in New York (Cash 736-737).<sup>91</sup> Her personal history brings her into dangerous proximity with the subject of her writing, urban black women in New York, particularly those employed in domestic work, and her efforts to delineate between herself and them is evident in her assertion that the need for an organization that will protect and aid black urban women is “so great [...] that I am pleading not for a luxury, but an influence that will strengthen the weak” (n.p.). Though Matthews risks association with yellow journalism through her use of first-person narration, she mitigates this risk by creating a sharp contrast between herself and the urban black domestic worker in particular. Other than her brief use of first-person in this passage, in the article as a whole she functions as a depersonalized presence, asserting, for instance, “we need [...] domestic training, [sic] for Afro-American women and girls” (n.p.); the use of “we” disperses her individual voice into the larger racial collective. In contrast to this abstraction, Matthews positions this proxy as firmly embedded in the material realm in her description of the black domestic worker’s leisure time after a day’s work:

When tired [...] it is the most natural thing in the world to be guided from dark tramping about into cosy pleasure gardens. At first the [black domestic worker] is content to sit and talk while her escort will smoke and indulge in beer. A few visits [...] accustoms her to beer; soon she tastes it and finds it not bad [...] by and by she leaves her place and leads an immoral life. (n.p.)

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<sup>91</sup> The offspring of a slave mother and her owner, Matthews spent her childhood in Fort Valley, Georgia, and Richmond and Norfolk, Virginia, before migrating with her family to New York in 1873. Forced to leave school due to family illness, she worked as a domestic labourer as a teenager, while endeavouring to educate herself through reading her employers’ books and attending lectures. After marriage, she began contributing literary and non-fiction writing to the black press (Cash 736-737).

Through her vivid depiction of both the environment and the bodily vices the black urban domestic worker pursues, Matthews marks this figure as highly corporeal and urban, in sharp contrast to her own dislocated presence in the article.

Though Matthews represents the black domestic worker as one of the “weak” black urban women, she clarifies that her “escort” is the one who persuades her to visit the “pleasure gardens” (n.p.). By focusing on this corrupting figure, she externalizes urban pathology from the black domestic worker to the “strong, unwholesome will” of the unnamed and unspecified “escort” (n.p.). She further challenges the image of the innately immoral black woman through the detailed nature of her article, tracking a gradual transition as the black domestic worker only falls into “an immoral life” after a “few visits.” In “Our Chicago Womanfolk,” published in 1907 in the *New York Age*, Fannie Barrier Williams similarly represents black urban women as *becoming* immoral, stating: “The city girl becomes a woman all too soon. She loses the bloom of girlishness while still a girl in years [...] and lose[s] all appetite for simple joys and wholesome amusements” (n.p.). By positioning herself as guarding black urban women’s “bloom of girlishness,” Williams joins other black female journalists in policing the sexuality of this proxy as a means of dissociating from her and from urbanity more broadly. Yet she also, like Matthews, creates a counternarrative to the myth of black urban pathology by suggesting that the black urban woman once held an “appetite for simple joys and wholesome amusements” that she lost through exposure to the city. Both Williams and Matthews, then, simultaneously reproduce the notion of the vice-ridden black urban woman in order to construct themselves as dislocated, yet they also position her immorality as learned, not innate, and thereby challenge even as they use dominant discourses about black urban pathology.

That use of the vice-ridden black urban woman meant that Williams and Matthews also increased their chances of having their writing read as part of debates about black migration and

urbanization. Because Matthews specifically addressed the urban domestic worker, she also increased the likelihood of having her writing recirculated amongst members of the “servant problem” debate, including white employers and social reformers, who positioned domestic workers as bringing the “theatre of public disorder” of the city into their employers’ homes (May 36-37). In many ways, Matthews affirms these anxieties about the domestic worker as tainted by urban pathology and therefore lends further credence to attempts to police domestic workers’ behaviour in order to protect the “sanctity” of the white home. Yet, by exposing their writing to such stakeholders, Williams and Matthews also exposed them to their representation of these figures as undergoing a gradual transition into an immorality caused by city-living, thereby challenging these stakeholders’ assertions that they were innately flawed. These journalists, then, construct a sense of sameness in order to draw the stakeholders into what Jacqueline Jones Royster refers to as a “consubstantial space” in which they can “construct new, more enabling points of view” (60). In this reading, Williams’s and Matthews’s use of stereotypes functions to hail a larger readership and to make persuasive their attempts to subvert dominant discourses about the urban black domestic worker and black woman, and about black urban pathology in general.

The distancing strategies Mossell, Ella V. Chase Williams, Matthews and Fannie Barrier Williams adopted in their writing on the urban black woman and domestic worker became more difficult to employ when black female journalists addressed their social reform work on the issues of the black urban woman and the urban female migrant. Black female social reformers, like social scientists, conducted empirical studies into social ills, and, with much more consistency and speed than their colleagues in the social sciences, they created practical applications of their social research, often establishing institutions or programs, including those aimed at ameliorating the lives of black urban woman (Wilson 90-93). Through the hands-on

practicality of their organizations, black female social reformers often worked within the urban communities they sought to aid, creating a professional dilemma for those who, as journalists, wrote on this work. Depicting the urban environment as morally and physically corrupting would position their social reform work as valuable and necessary in a period in which this labour was underfunded and easily dismissed as an inferior form of social research to that of social scientists, as I discuss further in Chapter Three (Wilson 109; Silverberg 3-9). However, such a depiction would also risk collapsing the distinction between themselves and yellow female journalists by suggesting that, through their hands-on social reform work, their bodies were endangered by the city. For black female journalists like Addie Hunton and Maude K. Griffin, their roles as journalists provided them with an opportunity to promote their social reform work, but its urbanity proved to be a liability for their credibility as journalists. I would argue that the fraught nature of their social reform work makes evident the importance of scholarly research that attends to the dynamic relationship between this work and their journalism, as opposed to privileging the former over the latter.

Addie Hunton addresses the Young Woman's Christian Association's (YWCA) efforts to assist the black urban woman and female migrant, a social reform organization of which she was the first black secretary and paid black staffer on the National Board, in "Women's Clubs," published in 1911 in the Baltimore monthly *The Crisis* (Weisenfield 35; Gyant 98). Like Ella Williams and Mossell, Hunton operated within new journalism through her role as editor of a woman's column, yet "Women's Clubs" appeared in a periodical that had multiple markers of professionalism. The official organ of the NAACP, *The Crisis* was a monthly whose seriality suggested that its readers require an extended period of time to fully read and digest its thought-provoking writing (Turner 194). In addition to the gravitas of its seriality, *The Crisis* was edited by W.E.B. Du Bois, and that, coupled with the fact that other social researchers contributed to the

periodical, lent it a sense of the empiricism prized by informational journalists.<sup>92</sup> Hunton attempts to dissociate from the reputation of woman page editors and align herself with the “serious” journalism of *The Crisis* through her description of black women who work as volunteers or in paid positions within the YWCA. She endeavours to not only position herself as an objective, dislocated labourer, but also to eradicate the image of the hands-on work of black female social reformers within urban locations that rendered social reform work professionally risky to address.

Though Hunton does not explicitly reference her role as secretary for the National Board, she transforms “Women’s Clubs” into a professional report, adopting a tone of neutrality that befits a secretary and that serves to align her with dispassionate objectivity, which, in turn, enables her to dissociate from the urban landscape. For example, she takes up the work of the Norfolk, Virginia branch of the YWCA in aiding black female migrants for whom this seaport functioned as a departure point for the North and Midwest: “The Norfolk Association is [...] giving its large number of migratory young women respectable and comfortable rooms [...] In one year 702 steamers and trains were met and 479 girls assisted” (368). By positioning the Norfolk Association, not its workers, as the subject of the sentence and by employing the passive voice in describing girls who were “assisted,” Hunton avoids depicting social reform workers like herself in urban spaces such as the train station and the docks, which were often positioned as fostering urban pathology in debates about black migration and urbanization.<sup>93</sup> Other black

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<sup>92</sup> For example, white social settlement worker Jane Addams published “Social Control” in the January 1911 issue and sociologist Kelly Miller was listed as a contributing editor of *The Crisis* in the early 1910s.

<sup>93</sup> For example, according to Steve Kramer, Victoria Earle Matthews concluded that she would have to employ dock agents through her social settlement, the White Rose Mission, to meet young migrants at the docks to prevent their entrapment by disreputable employment agents and others looking to “ensnare them in immoral activities” (251). Though operating within a distinct organization, Frances Kellor, the white sociologist, offered similar “services” for black female migrants through the National League for the Protection of Colored Women (NLPCW), which she founded in 1905 in New York and Philadelphia, and established in

female journalists similarly avoided positioning social reformers as traversing cities in order to aid black female migrants. In “The Negro Church and Its Social Work - St. Mark’s,” published in a 1905 issue of *Charities*,<sup>94</sup> Maude K. Griffin<sup>95</sup> notes that the Epworth League of St. Mark’s church seeks to aid southern black women who have settled in New York City: “The object of the Epworth League is not only to establish a home for such girls, but to seek them upon their arrival in the city” (365). Though Griffin published in a charity organization journal and addresses social reform work through the church, she adopts a strikingly similar technique to Hunton’s in personifying the organization in order to depict it, not social reformers, as navigating the urban landscape to “seek” black female migrants.

Notably, both Griffin and Hunton avoid explicitly depicting the black female migrant as morally and physically degraded by the urban environment, which would position social reformers who occupied the same space as vulnerable to the same degradation. Griffin focuses on

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Boston, Memphis, Baltimore, and Norfolk between 1906 and 1910. In addition to securing for black female migrants work and living quarters, and investigating the unethical practices of employment agencies that targeted them, the NLPCW sent social reformers to docks and train stations to protect these women at both arrival and departure points (Higginbotham 180).

<sup>94</sup> In 1897 the New York Charity Organization Society founded *Charities*, which reviewed and offered advice on local and national charities (Finnegan n.p.).

<sup>95</sup> Though there is a little known biographical information on Griffin, in addition to publishing a short story in the *Colored American Magazine* (Wallinger 241; Yellin 263), she wrote prolifically, on fashion in particular, in the early 1900s and 1910s. Likely facilitated by her employment with the Associated Press (“Miss Maud K Griffin” n.p.), Griffin’s writing appeared in both the white and black press. For example, in 1902 and 1903 the black weekly *American Citizen* (1888-1909) published her column entitled “New York Fashion Notes.” Her writing also circulated widely within the white press, particularly in the Midwest and South. See, amongst many others, “Fashion News.” *Albuquerque Daily Citizen* 21 June 1902; “New York Fashion Notes.” *Phillipsburg Herald* (Phillipsburg, KS) 26 February 1903; “More Easter Styles.” *The Daily Journal* (Salem, OR) 4 April 1903; “New York Fashion Letter.” *Bisbee Daily* (Bisbee, AZ) 11 October 1903; “New York Fashion Letter.” *The Evening Statesman* (Walla Walla, WA) 6 June 1903; “The Fashions as They Pass.” *East Oregonian* (Pendleton, OR) 17 November 1910; and “Fashion and Folies.” *Arizona Republican* (Phoenix, AZ) 13 September 1911.

the Epworth League, not on the bodies of the women they aided, stating that they intend to found a “place where self-respecting girls [...] may find shelter with home influences and comforts” (363). She distances the social reformers at Epworth League and herself from the stereotype of the immoral urban black woman by suggesting that they only interact with “self-respecting girls.” Hunton similarly describes the New York Branch of the YWCA as providing rooms for urbanizing and migrating black women, and as “finding employment [...] for those who seek it, offering opportunities for classwork and emphasizing the value of [...] Christianity” (368). Though these representations of the goals of the Epworth League and the YWCA in many ways echo Matthews’ call for an organization to house and educate black urban women in New York City, Hunton and Griffith entirely eschew Matthews’ vivid depiction of the urban vices to which unprotected women fall prey. In resisting a sensational depiction of the corruption of the single, undereducated, black female migrant living in the city, these women complicate a reading of black female journalists as uniformly pathologizing this figure.

This effort to dissociate from urbanity by refusing to depict the black female social reformer as traversing the city had both positive and negative professional implications for Hunton. In “Women’s Clubs,” she states, “Some four years ago, while [the YWCA National Board] decided to extend its manifold supervision to the work being done for colored young women, a representative was sent to study that particular field [...] Several city associations had [...] been launched, but only four were doing anything appreciable” (367). The “representative” to whom Hunton refers is in fact herself. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, black women autonomously established and managed YWCAs, but with the founding of the National Board in 1906, they were placed under the control of white branches, a structure that facilitated racial hierarchies and segregation in the national organization. Between September and December 1907, Hunton traveled through numerous cities in the South to investigate the state of

these black branches, and ultimately persuaded the National Board to commit to supporting them, particularly by hiring a permanent black staff member, Elizabeth Ross Haynes, to supervise their work (Gyant 97-98). By refusing to depict her own body navigating the urban landscape on behalf of the National Board, she lends credibility to her writing by distancing herself from urban, highly bodied journalism, a move that is particularly significant given the seriality of her column. Like the periodical issue itself, a reader's engagement with an individual instalment of a column is informed by those that have come before, functioning as a "place from which to look backward at a predecessor," to borrow James Mussell's phrase (345). Hunton therefore lends future instalments of "Women's Clubs" the reputation for dislocated journalism she endeavours to build in this July 1911 instalment. Yet, even as Hunton attempts to undo her implicit connection to yellow journalism, she also erases her pioneering work in helping lay the foundation for an eventual network of black YWCAs (Lutz 112-113). Her efforts to legitimize her journalism thus come at a cost, obfuscating the history of structural racism within the YWCA and abstracting her hard-won professional accomplishments by depicting them as achieved by an anonymous "representative."

Hunton is further dissociated from new and yellow journalism through the editorial choice to position a photograph of Haynes on the first page of "Women's Club." Within the white press, photographs often accompanied new and yellow female journalists' bylines, displaying their bodies as part of a larger project to transform them into unique and desirable commodities, a trend that was less common but nonetheless present in the black press (Foreman 261-263; Lutes, *Front Page Girls* 70). For example, between 1898 and 1900 Katherine D. Tillman edited a woman's column that went under multiple titles in the *Iowa State Bystander*, and the inaugural instalment, published on 23 December 1898, included her photograph, serving to attract readers and to mark her column with photography's sense of modernness in the periodical production.

Haynes's photograph distinguishes Hunton from her white female colleagues in new and yellow journalism and even from a fellow black woman in the field like Tillman by suggesting that, if any body must function as the "*object of publicity*," then it will be Haynes (Lutes, *Front Page Girls* 15). This photograph firmly positions her as a dislocated journalist.

In her eagerness to avoid depicting her body in the city, even to the extent of neglecting to acknowledge her significant accomplishments within the YWCA, Hunton makes evident the fraught nature of the urban space for black female journalists. Their writing on the black urban woman, domestic worker, and female migrant must be understood as navigating the professional risks of addressing such topics. Yet some of them also perpetuated these risks through their writing. In their efforts to dissociate from new and particularly yellow journalism, they contributed to a larger production of the meaning of the city that marked this space as morally and physically dangerous for black women, a meaning that rendered the topic of the black domestic worker and black urban woman professionally dangerous for black female journalists. By reproducing this image of the city, they perpetuated black female journalists' need to construct themselves as disembodied and dislocated when taking up these figures at the turn of the century and into the early twentieth century.

The professionally risky nature of the city and the black domestic worker's role within it motivated other black female journalists to avoid addressing this space when writing on this figure. As we shall see in Chapter Three, many of the black female journalists writing on the "servant problem" endeavoured to eschew it entirely by constructing domestic labour as "clean" work, or as respectable and primarily intellectual, not physical. Just as the black female journalists in this chapter sought to represent their work as disembodied and dislocated, ironically, those who are the focus of Chapter Three repeatedly refused to represent the black domestic worker's labouring body, particularly in the city, as a means of eradicating these fraught

subjects from their writing. Yet, even as their writing afforded black domestic workers respite from the focus on their urbanized and often sexualized bodies that exposed them to further scrutiny and policing, they, like the black female journalists of Chapter Two, endeavoured to dissociate from this figure. Due to the characteristics of professionalism that overlapped between their own field and that of the domestic work, they continued to utilize the black domestic as a proxy in their ongoing negotiation of their own professional status, in ways that often functioned to prohibit the agency of this figure.

### Chapter Three:

#### Professionalizing through the “Servant Problem”

In “Afro-American Women and Their Work,” published in 1895 in the *A.M.E. Church Review*, Katherine Tillman argues that some black women “look upon a life of service with such contempt that they fail to perform their duties in a satisfactory manner, and are constantly being discharged. Such women should remember that living in service is [...] a million times preferable to a life of shame!” (296). In positioning domestic work as preferable to “a life of shame,” she both draws on broader discourses within the black press that depicted black domestic workers, particularly those in the city, as vulnerable to sexual corruption, and challenges those depictions by constructing the field as morally safe. Even while alluding to the urbanity and sexualized corporeality of the black domestic worker, she endeavours to avoid those subjects by representing domestic work as “clean” labour, a common rhetorical move amongst black female journalists writing on the “servant problem.” She also contributes to a shared strategy amongst black female journalists who, in articles, editorials, and columns published between the late 1880s through to the early twentieth century, distanced themselves from the black domestic worker, as well as the homemaker, by claiming responsibility for solving this “problem.” Often, this distancing served to prohibit black domestic workers’ attempts to exert control over their field of labour, even as it also enabled black female journalists to negotiate the meaning of their own work.

As I began to lay out in my Introduction and Chapter Two and will unpack further here, the black domestic worker was the thread connecting some of the most contentious issues of the day, including black migration, urbanization, and the “Negro problem” or the question of what to “do” with African Americans. Many elite African Americans and whites claimed as the “solution” to this “problem” manual labour and the industrial education system that promoted

African Americans remaining restricted within these fields.<sup>96</sup> Though this chapter reads representations of the black domestic worker within the black press against the backdrop of dominant discourses surrounding the “Negro problem,” urbanization and migration, its primary focus is the circulation of the black domestic worker within the “servant problem” debate. A commonly used term with a variety of definitions depending on the user, the “servant problem” typically referred to the unregulated nature of domestic labour, to the shortage in domestic workers, or to the complaint that there were too few “good servants” (Katzman 37-38; Smith, “Regulating” 865-866). This chapter argues that the structure of the “servant problem” debate, as well as the structure of domestic work itself, enabled black female journalists to claim professionalism by writing on it, and especially by engaging with the recurring individualization of this “problem.” Whereas Chapter Two addressed black female journalists’ use of the black domestic worker and black urban women in general to navigate the embodied, urban nature of new and yellow journalism, Chapter Three focuses on their attempts to gain exposure and credibility and align themselves with the movement toward professionalization by managing their relationship to the black domestic worker, as well as her female employer.

Within the debate, whites, including legislators, employers, domestic scientists, and philanthropists, were often particularly focused on the notion that there were too few domestic workers to hire and that those that remained were “bad servants” (May 3, 20; Smith, “Regulating” 268-270). The complaint about a domestic worker shortage was based in historical

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<sup>96</sup> At the turn of the century, in forums including the black press, conferences, and social reform organizations, debates raged amongst members of the black intelligentsia about the merit of industrial education (Danky 342-345; Neverdon-Morton 114-123). Booker T. Washington, a powerful race leader, was the most prominent black advocates of industrial education, particularly through his role as founder and first principal of Tuskegee Institute and through his influence over the black press (Anderson, *Education* 106).

fact, with a growth in the middle-classes enabling more families to hire domestic labourers during the same period when fewer and fewer white women were joining the field. In contrast, historians, literary scholars, and art historians have argued that “bad” was a subjective category whose definition depended on factors such as domestic workers’ racial and ethnic background,<sup>97</sup> the region in which they lived, and their willingness to submit to the wishes of their employers.<sup>98</sup> Though varied in their definition of a “bad” domestic worker, many white stakeholders in the “servant problem” promoted a common solution: the socioeconomic elite would aid domestic workers in eradicating their flaws, a process I have termed “guided self-improvement.” They enacted this process through disparate means, including organizations such as training schools and print culture forms such as periodicals, marking guided self-improvement as a solution with both rhetorical and real-world significance (May 18; Strasser 168-169).

African Americans also promoted guided self-improvement in their efforts to address the symbolic status of the black domestic worker within the advancement of “the race,” a contentious issue. As I discussed in Chapter Two, many middle-class African Americans created hierarchies between “clean” and “dirty” labour, depicting black women’s dominance of the latter as a barrier to racial respectability. These African Americans promoted black women’s participation in occupations that did not necessitate physical labor, both to “protect” them from the masculinizing

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<sup>97</sup> See, amongst others, Katzman (1978); Sutherland (1981); Morgan (1995); Ryan (2006); and May (2011).

<sup>98</sup> For example, in the mid-to-late nineteenth century in the North, which was dominated by white domestic workers, employers depicted Irish domestic workers as drunken and ignorant, waxing nostalgic about a time when more native-born white women were available for hire. At the same time in the South, where black domestic workers were the norm, employers chastised their domestic workers for failing to live up to their retrospective imagining of black female slaves; whites argued that black female slaves had cooked, cleaned and cared for their white “families” on their own volition, and condemned contemporary black domestic workers for their supposed “disloyalty” (Katzman 162-163, 226-227).

effects of manual labour and to promote a patriarchal family structure that would signal racial progress (Harley 29; Drake and Cayton 219). Other middle-class African Americans, including race leaders, educators, and social reformers, endeavoured to construct domestic work as “clean” labour. These African Americans had various motivations, from the proponents of black industrial education who attempted to persuade African Americans of the “honour” in manual labour to the black social reformers who advocated for greater respect and better wages and working conditions for domestic workers (Wolcott, *Remaking* 26-27; Anderson, *Education* 72). Attempting to construct domestic workers as symbols of racial progress, these middle-class African Americans often endeavoured to raise domestic work to a respectable profession by focusing equally on policing black domestic workers’ behaviour and on improving their positions within their occupation and “the race.”<sup>99</sup> Though these attempts to uplift domestic work served to challenge the notion that black women’s manual labour was a symptom of “racial and gendered ‘degradation’” (Santamarina 5), this emphasis on moulding domestic workers’ character further lent credence to guided self-improvement as the solution to the “servant problem.”

For black female journalists, this focus amongst both white and black elites on the flawed black domestic worker as a problematic figure that needed to be “fixed” provided a rare

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<sup>99</sup> For instance, the National Training School for Women and Girls, established in Washington, D.C. in 1909, had a heavy focus on training for domestic workers, and founder and president Nannie Helen Burroughs combined a message of professionalization with character training (Higginbotham 211). In contrast to most black educators, Burroughs chose to rely on the financial support of other African Americans rather than white philanthropists (Taylor 394). Working from this precarious financial position, Burroughs attempted to secure donations by constructing her school as ensuring that black women would become not only skilled domestic workers but respectable members of “the race.” She promoted domestic science as a means of ensuring higher wages and better working conditions for domestic workers, while simultaneously attempting to instill in her students the value of uplifting “the race,” Christian morality, and heterosexual marriage (Wolcott, “Bible” 88).

opportunity for professional advancement. Their writing on the black domestic worker is often interpreted as representative of the black club movement with which so many of them were associated, a trend that overshadows a range of black women's other feminist engagements within the public sphere, including the feminist collectivity of black female journalists that I explored in Chapter One.<sup>100</sup> The assumption that black female journalists wrote primarily on behalf of their clubs or out of that context also overlooks the fact that they did not simply signal their status as club women in their writing, but also identified more broadly as members of the black middle-class through it, a pattern worthy of further investigation. As a corrective to this scholarly assumption, this chapter argues that black female journalists deliberately emphasized a range of middle-class identities as a means of gaining legitimacy within the "servant problem" debate and within American journalism. In order to analyze this strategy, I explore the ways they capitalized on the depiction of the "servant problem" as a "woman's issue" by claiming that they held a unique position within the debate due to their status as middle-class black women; they asserted that they understood the perspectives of female employers as fellow homemakers, and similarly constructed themselves as sympathetic to the black domestic worker along racial and gender lines. In a period in which female journalists in general wrote with credibility on few topics, the structure of the "servant problem" debate enabled black female journalists to claim authority within it.

Yet, establishing common ground with either the female employer or the black domestic worker threatened to taint black female journalists with the stereotypes of these two figures that circulated within the "servant problem" debate. In addition to being tinged with urbanity and

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<sup>100</sup> See amongst others Knupfer (1996); Robinson (2005); Robertson (2007); Hicks (2010); and Plastas (2011).

corporeality, the domestic worker, as well as the female employer, became representatives of many of the characteristics that signaled unprofessional journalism in a period that witnessed a rise of a movement toward professionalization. Though domestic scientists in the 1890s and 1900s claimed that the “servant problem” could be solved by transforming housework into a “profession” (Strasser 207-208), many members of the press represented the domestic worker *and* the female employer as too emotional and irrational to adhere to the scientific efficiency that domestic science promoted. I explore the ways that these dominant discourses motivated black female journalists to use these figures as proxies to position themselves as informational journalists who were aligned with professionalization, a strategy that lent them credibility that enabled them to gain exposure for their writing. By legitimizing their writing and promoting guided self-improvement, they adopted the language of many of the stakeholders in the “servant problem” and increased the likelihood of their writing being read and circulated widely by these individuals, with both positive and negative implications for black domestic workers. Many black female journalists endeavoured to ameliorate black domestic workers’ position within their occupation and within “the race” by constructing domestic work as “clean” labour. However, by reproducing dominant stereotypes of the black domestic worker as flawed and in need of the guidance of her socioeconomic superiors, black female journalists also contributed to the significant barriers black domestic workers faced in their ongoing efforts to advocate for themselves in order to improve their wages, hours, and working conditions.

This chapter continues the work of my first and my second to explore the ways in which black female journalists’ attempts to negotiate their marginalization through their writing held significance beyond simply building their individual reputations and careers, with positive effects for the wider collective of black female journalists. By adhering to dominant definitions of professional journalism, they worked to redefine the meaning of black female journalism for a

potentially large readership, and to set a new standard that other black women could follow. If we take seriously their attempts to claim professionalism for themselves and other black women in the field, then we must also ask: what are the costs of their attempts to position themselves within the “servant problem” debate as a central way to do so at the turn of the century?

### **Socioeconomic and professional instability**

Black female journalists’ efforts to claim professionalism by writing on the black domestic worker were part of a larger project amongst members of the black press to negotiate their professional status by taking up the “servant problem.” This negotiation, in turn, was made urgent by the unstable nature of the black middle-class and of journalism’s status as a profession. In both the antebellum and postbellum era, structural racism created multiple barriers to the formation of a black middle-class. In the mid-nineteenth century, as the white middle-class expanded due to factors like industrialization and urbanization, slavery made a parallel development within the black middle-class a near impossibility (Blumin 66). As David R. Roediger argues, in the years immediately preceding the Civil War the majority of African Americans had not been able to acquire capital because they had *been* capital; in 1860, for instance, slaves constituted almost \$4 billion in other people’s property, approximately equaling the gross national product for that year (70). Post-emancipation, the lingering impoverishing effects of slavery were compounded by overt discrimination in factors including government policies, mortgage lending and home sales, which systematically channeled property and wealth toward whites and away from African Americans. These forms of structural racism meant that there was no black upper-class comparable to the white upper-class, and that the black middle-

class struggled to develop (Lipsitz 2; Bowser 62, 142).<sup>101</sup> The growth of the black middle-class was further prohibited by a society that sought to naturalize black dominance of manual labour, particularly through the rise of black industrial education. The black industrial education model flourished especially in the South at the turn of the century and promoted training African Americans to be contented and successful within the fields of manual labour to which they were already restricted (Anderson, *Education* 71-72).<sup>102</sup> Proponents of industrial education helped to maintain the pool of cheap black labour upon which southern and by extension national economies depended, and thereby restricted socioeconomic mobility for the black working-classes (Morgan 94).

I would argue that the tenuous nature of the black middle-class was further compounded for members of the black press by ongoing debates as to whether or not journalism should professionalize. The subject of professionalization was a polarizing one amongst American journalists, with some arguing that journalism was and would remain a trade, pointing to the low salary, little job security, and physically demanding aspects of their “rough-and-tumble” work (Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming 19), and others promoting specialization, accreditation and organizational ethics in order to gain higher wages and greater respect (Steiner 328; Maras 47-48). These threads of anti- and pro-professionalization could also be seen in debates about the merit of the two dominant streams of journalism, new and informational journalism. After decades of intensely partisan reporting within American journalism in general, informational journalists asserted that they educated and critically engaged readers, and would, alongside

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<sup>102</sup> For example, Booker T. Washington, asserted in his 1895 Atlanta Exposition Speech, famously dubbed the “Atlanta Compromise,” that since the vast number of African Americans will “live by the production of our hands [...] we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labor” (186).

professionalization, win public support for the field again (Forde and Foss 138-139). In contrast to informational journalism's claim to recuperate the field's reputation, critics of new and yellow journalism positioned them as prohibiting professionalization due to the often questionable ethics of their practitioners and to the sensationalism of the latter's subject matter and writing style (Winfield 3).<sup>103</sup> By positioning new and yellow journalism as prohibiting the field from rising above the physicality of a "rough-and-tumble" trade, these critics reinforced the connection between these forms of journalism and corporeality in ways that would provide further motivation for black female journalists to dissociate from them, as we shall see below. These debates about journalism also reveal its tenuous claim to professionalism, which, I would posit, complicated the ability of members of the black press to claim middle-class professionalism.

The "servant problem" provided them with an opportunity to strengthen this claim. Male and female members of the press routinely policed black domestic workers' work ethic, morality and mobility, and thereby constructed themselves as part of the larger white and black socioeconomic elite that promoted guided self-improvement to address the "servant problem." I would argue that this self-positioning served to challenge middle- and upper-class whites' assertion that the solution to the "Negro problem" was to restrict African Americans in general to the fields of manual labour, including domestic work. By reinforcing class hierarchies between themselves and the black domestic worker and claiming moral authority over this figure, members of the black press suggested that they were not a part of the "Negro problem," but were a part of its solution, thereby solidifying their claim to a middle-class status. Members of the press also imbued themselves with a sense of professionalism by drawing on the rhetoric of other

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<sup>103</sup> Yellow journalists had a reputation for lying, bribing, eavesdropping, and stealing in order to secure a good story (Spencer 98).

professional stakeholders in the “servant problem.” Combined, these two strategies helped them manage journalism’s unfixed socioeconomic and professional status.

Such efforts to manage this status are evident in Nick Chiles’s “The Negro Must be Made to Work,” published in 1905 in his weekly *Plaindealer* (1899-1958). Chiles asserts that black domestic workers keep “late hours seven nights in a week, which unfits them for service, and leads them to become untruthful,” telling lies in order to justify missing work such as “that their relatives were ill” (n.p.). For him, these black domestic workers are a particularly pressing issue because they function as “false representative of the race[ , of] that class of people who are doing all in their power to uplift themselves as well as others” (n.p.). Chiles constructs the black domestic worker as a racial synecdoche (Santamarina 11), a decades-old technique that middle-class African Americans had traditionally used to excise those individuals who they perceived as threatening the moral character of “the race” (Rael 179). He publicly performs this excision by recommending that, in order to address the issue of negligent black domestic workers, the “police department should become more diligent and [...] compel them to work [...] and make themselves respectable” (n.p.). By promoting this harsh punishment, Chiles creates a clear moral distinction between himself and the problematic black domestic worker that serves to give him authority over this figure. Moreover, by demonstrating his ability to identify and “fix” the flaws of the domestic worker, he firmly aligns himself with the socioeconomic elite that promoted guided self-improvement.

Chiles’s assertion that black domestic worker’s “late hours” rendered them “unfit for service” also touches on a recurring theme within his periodical: that black domestic workers prioritized their personal lives over their obligations to their employer. Years later a 1913 article in the *Plaindealer* entitled “Colored Servants Block Uncle Sam!” continues to complain that black domestic workers “come at whatever hour they please and [...] will quit when they please

at night” (n.p.). Other periodicals launched similar attacks, with a 1905 issue of the *Colored American Magazine*, for instance, reprinting a speech by municipal judge R.H. Terrell, husband of Mary Church Terrell. The act of reprinting this speech lends the *Colored American Magazine* some of Terrell’s middle-class professionalism as a prestigious member of the legal profession, a status that is emphasized through his signature, “Justice R.H. Terrell.” Like Chiles and “Colored Servants Block Uncle Sam!”, Terrell argues that the black domestic worker “frequently goes out and stays all night and fails to turn up in the morning at her working place, and in many cases the employer has to go to work without his breakfast” (“The Negro in Domestic Service” n.p.). All three articles construct black domestic workers’ expressions of independence as unprofessional, suggesting that even their time off should be oriented toward moulding themselves to meet the demands of their occupation. By criticizing black domestic workers’ prioritization of their personal lives, they reaffirm the logic of legislative acts that left domestic work one of the most unregulated forms of labour. As labour came increasingly under government regulations, occupations dominated by African Americans and other people of colour, including domestic and agricultural work, were consistently excluded from labour legislation. This exclusion extended to laws aimed specifically at working women, including maximum-hour laws, which were first established in Massachusetts in 1867 and created a clear and mandated division between women’s work and personal time (Boris 47; Steinberg 132).<sup>104</sup> These articles blur this line in their

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<sup>104</sup> The history of protective legislation for women dates back to 1867, when Massachusetts textile workers successfully petitioned their state for laws regulating work hours for women and children (Steinberg 79). Following this model, in the subsequent decades thirteen other states passed maximum hours laws, culminating in the landmark 1908 Supreme Court decision, *Muller v. Oregon*, which linked labour legislation for women to their reproductive abilities. Justice Brewer, delivering the opinion of the court on *Muller*, stated that it was necessary to set a maximum number of hours for working women to ensure that they remained healthy enough to bear and raise children, claiming that they carried the responsibility for the “well-being of the race” (qtd. in Boris 47). Yet this ruling did not cover domestic work or agriculture, fields that were dominated by black women and other women of colour (Boris 47). The implicit assertion of Justice Brewer’s argument was that only white

insistence that black domestic workers' obligations to their employers do not end, even with the end of the work day. This argument, in turn, reinforced class hierarchies and imbued their authors with the professionalism of the educators and social reformers who similarly insisted that the "servant problem" could be solved by training domestic workers to be more loyal and dedicated employees (Sutherland 151-155).<sup>105</sup>

Yet the denial of black domestic workers' rights provided them further motivation to advocate collectively for themselves, a movement that threatened the authority members of the black press were endeavouring to establish by rhetorically managing them. In her history of early to mid-twentieth-century black domestic workers in Washington, DC., Elizabeth Clark-Lewis asserts that "[s]cholars all too often see household workers as merely products of change, never as its causes; as objects of events, not their subjects; as passive reactors, not as active forces in history" ("This Work Had a End" 211-212). As a corrective to this trend, scholarship on black women's labour has repositioned black domestic workers as agents of change within their field at the turn of the century.<sup>106</sup> Denied the protection of the courts, black domestic workers strategically worked to secure better wages, benefits, and work environments by forming labour organizations, unionizing, and striking (Hunter 74-97; Jones 128-135).<sup>107</sup> Black female migrants

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women were physically vulnerable and maternal, and that these qualities were requirements for being awarded labour legislation.

<sup>105</sup> For writing in the black press that promotes loyalty in black domestic workers to their employers, see, amongst others, "To Make Servants Stay." *Wisconsin Weekly Advocate* 16 February 1905; "The Servant Problem." *Broad Ax* 13 April 1907; "Puzzling Problem Solved." *The Bee* 13 June 1908; and "The Old Black Mammy." *New York Age* 3 May 1910.

<sup>106</sup> See, amongst others, Jones (1985); Clark-Lewis (1987; 1996); Kelley, Robin D.G. *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. New York: The Free Press, 1994. Print.; Hunter (1997), and May (2011).

<sup>107</sup> Unionizing and striking occurred across the nation at the turn of the century. In the early 1880s in Atlanta, black laundresses organized formally under the name the Washing Society and called a strike for a higher standard wage, an aim that they did not achieve. However,

to the North and Midwest, in collaboration with black domestic workers native to those regions, also worked to gain more professional and personal autonomy by leading the movement to live-out. Through their collaborative efforts to advocate for themselves, black domestic workers challenged the idea that they were the “problem” within the “servant problem” by asserting that white employers were the flawed figures who would have to change. By extension, they threatened the ability of members of the black press to construct themselves as middle-class professionals by claiming responsibility for “fixing” black domestic workers.

Within the context of this labour movement, articles like Terrell’s, Chiles’s, and “Colored Servants Block Uncle Sam” that work to restrict black domestic workers’ personal autonomy can also be read as an attempt to eradicate that threat by suppressing the live-out movement. Their efforts to persuade black domestic workers to orient all of their time toward the needs of their employers function as a barrier to the live-out movement, which, amongst other goals, attempted to create a firm division between their work day and personal time by establishing standardized work hours. Terrell and Chile strengthen those barriers by condemning black domestic workers’ movement beyond their employers’ homes during their evenings off, evoking dominant discourses about urbanization and migration within the black press that pathologized their agency by constructing them as morally safe only within their employers’ homes, not the public spaces of the city. These articles, then, construct their authors as part of the socioeconomic elite by aligning them with the employers who objected to the live-out system for limiting their control

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they demonstrated to the city the capabilities of black domestic workers as strategic negotiators. They drafted letters to the mayor, swelled the ranks of laundresses and sympathizers from twenty to three thousand within three weeks, and deliberately initiated the strike at the opening of the International Cotton Exposition, an event that drew huge numbers into Atlanta, increasing the demand for domestic workers (Hunter 74-97). Decades later and in the North, the 22 July 1909 issue of the *New York Age* described laundresses who responded to a spike in the cost of charcoal by collectively attempting to raise the price of a week’s wash (“Washerwomen Appeal to Mayor” n.p.)

over their employees and transforming what they perceived as an emotional relationship between themselves and their domestic workers into a business-like one (Sutherland 177-179). Moreover, by undermining the live-out movement, Chiles, Terrell and “Colored Servants Block Uncle Sam!” prohibit black domestic workers’ socioeconomic mobility and thereby reinforce the class hierarchies between the black middle-class and black domestic workers.

In addition to challenging proponents of the live-out system, the black press berated black domestic workers for their efforts to unionize and actively supported the members of the middle- and upper-classes who opposed this workers’ movement. Occasionally the black press promoted unions, though often in ways that worked to erase the structural change for which black domestic workers were advocating. For example, the 1913 issue of the *Chicago Defender* declares: “The housemaids of Cleveland, O, have formed a union [...] Better hours, better pay, better sleeping rooms - I hope the housemaids will get all these things” (“Kitchen Hath” n.p.). Yet, the unsigned author also trivializes these housemaids’ efforts to standardize their field by claiming that their most pressing question is where to receive their “gentlemen friends,” reinforcing the broader sexualization of the domestic worker (“Kitchen Hath” n.p.). Much more often, the black press avoided even such mixed support of unions as this, as in “Servant Girl Problem,” published in 1903 in the weekly *St. Louis Palladium* (1884-1911), and “The Servant Problem in Mississippi,” published a few years earlier in a 1901 issue of the *Plaindealer*. The fact that these two articles were unsigned positions them, not as expressing a single journalist’s opinion, but as representative of the larger periodicals in which they were published, suggesting that the *St. Louis Palladium* and *Plaindealer* were united in their opposition to unionizing and striking. “Servant Girl Problem” compares the United States, where it is impossible to secure “good help,” to England, where “[a]ll the scrubbing of floors, cooking of meals and making of beds are done without any [...] oratory, strikes or lockouts” (n.p.). “The Servant Girl Problem in Mississippi”

specifically targets black domestic workers in Jackson, Mississippi for forming a “secret union” and attempting to “specify to the lady of the house” what work they will and will not do (n.p.). This article depicts unionizing as upending the class hierarchy between the domestic worker and employer and reasserts “natural order” by threatening the domestic workers’ livelihood: “There is considerable earnest talk of sending North for white servants, and in fact, several families have already hired white women to do their cooking” (n.p.). This classic technique of promoting anxiety about racial competition to create dissension within the ranks of domestic workers sought to prevent the formation of larger interracial unions that would be “able to challenge hierarchies of both race and class” (Roediger 97). In positioning members of the black press within the collective of white and black elites who promoted guided self-improvement, “Servant Girl Problem” and “The Servant Problem in Mississippi” work to break collectives of domestic workers down into isolated and therefore less powerful individuals.

In order to solidify their middle-class professionalism, members of the black press repeatedly reinforced moral and economic hierarchies between themselves and the black domestic worker. They repeatedly suggested that their solidarity lay along socioeconomic and professional lines as opposed to expressing solidarity with all African Americans equally, regardless of class. For black female journalists, distinguishing themselves from the black domestic worker was of even greater necessity because, as black women, they were particularly vulnerable to being restricted, themselves, to domestic work as part of the solution to the “Negro problem.”<sup>108</sup> In addition to the risk of being identified *as* and not just *with* black domestic workers, the representation of the “servant problem” in the black press further rendered this topic professionally dangerous for

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<sup>108</sup> For example, in 1910 black female domestic workers comprised 39 percent of all working black women and 81 percent of all working black women were employed in fields other than agricultural labour (United States, *Negro Population* 509).

black female journalists. In its intense fixation on the morality and agency of the black domestic worker, the black press evoked broader discourses about this figure within debates about urbanization and migration, thereby tinging the “servant problem” debate with urbanity and corporeality, the very concepts that the black female journalists sought to avoid. Yet, I would argue that, though the “servant problem” was a risky topic, it also enabled black female journalists to advance professionally through rhetoric not available to the rest of the black press. Due to the particular structure of the debate, black female journalists, moreso than their male or white colleagues, could claim legitimacy by engaging with it. To that end, they deviated from the wider black press in their efforts to strategically manage their proximity to the black domestic worker as well as her female employer.

### **Gendering the “servant problem”**

Even more so than black men or white women in the field, black female journalists had limited access to many of the markers of professionalism. In addition to being excluded from journalism programs and press associations, and often even denied wages, black female journalists were positioned as unprofessional due to the construction of informational journalism as the territory of white men. Forced to negotiate these multiple layers of marginalization, black female journalists addressed the “servant problem” as a professional strategy through its feminization. The black press repeatedly focused on the domestic worker and the female employer as the cause of the “servant problem” and on the question of whether these figures should adopt the practices of the market as a “solution” to this issue. In many ways the domestic worker functions as a liminal figure bridging the home and the market, who, as Beverly Guy-Sheftall notes, is both a paid worker and carries out the work of a wife and a mother, though she operates within someone else’s home (154). Dominant discourses at the turn of the century

surrounding gender, labour, and professionalization further complicated her relationship to the market. According to Francesca Sawaya, many turn-of-the-century professionals from fields such as law, medicine, and the social sciences worked to solidify their professional identities by establishing a dichotomous relationship between themselves and the domestic sphere, representing the home as an unspecialized, unmodern space (59). On the other hand, domestic scientists promoted accreditation in and standardization of domestic work and insisted that homemakers must run their houses with the same scientific efficiency as managers in the market (Christensen 64). In its engagement with the “servant problem” the black press drew on these larger debates about the intersecting issues of domestic work, domesticity, and women’s ability to operate within the market and the professional realm more specifically, to both the detriment and benefit of black female journalists, who also took up this topic.

Members of the black press not only took up the “servant problem” themselves but also reprinted white “authorities” such as Augustus Moore, author of a collection of essays entitled *Domestic Blunders of Women* (1900). Moore published excerpts from this volume primarily in the white press under his pen name, “A Mere Man,” including a column entitled “The Management of Servants,” which also appeared in a 1904 issue of the black weekly *Rising Son* (1896-1918).<sup>109</sup> The signature A Mere Man positioned Moore as a representative of all men who “merely” desires to express the unvarnished truth, unpopular though it may be. His signature thus genders veracity and objectivity as masculine, a theme he expands upon in “The Management of Servants.” The article locates domestic workers’ and female employers’ shared “fickle and vain-glorious” nature as the root of the “servant problem,” while insisting that “we cannot change a woman’s nature any more than we can man’s” (n.p.). Other black periodicals similarly positioned

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<sup>109</sup> For other installments of the column, see, amongst others, the white newspapers *The Logan Republican*, *San Juan County Index* and *Kansas Agitator*.

these two figures, particularly the “mistress,” as overly emotional. In the same year, the anonymously authored “The Servant Problem,” published in the Indianapolis *Freeman*, asserted that the “servant problem” “depends on the character [...] of the employer. Many women mistresses are highly exacting and unreasonable” (n.p.). Yet A Mere Man makes more evident than “The Servant Problem” the connection between these innate flaws and women’s relationship to the market. Whereas, he claims, men successfully “manage shop girls, waitresses, factory girls, and all sorts of women engaged in their businesses,” the “deplorable state of the servant market” only proves women’s “incapacity” to manage workers (n.p.). The fact that “The Management of Servants” was, of all the columns in Moore’s series, particularly reprinted, especially within the midwestern white press, suggests support for the themes expressed therein, including the gendered hierarchy between the market and the domestic sphere.<sup>110</sup>

Other writing in the black press similarly feminize the “servant problem” while condemning the female employer, not for being too feminine, but for not being feminine enough. For instance, “Sound Advice to Mistresses,” published in 1913 issue in the *Chicago Defender*, recommends that “mistresses” be respectful toward domestic workers and “generous in [their] dealings with them” (n.p.). Decades earlier, “The Domestic Service Quest,” published in 1893 issue in *The Atchison Blade*, moved beyond simple generosity to promoting a maternalistic approach to the “servant problem” by enthusing about the “mistress” for whom her ““maids’ [...] were as much her charge as her own children, and they in turn treated her gentle rule as it deserved” (n.p.). In constructing the economic bonds of an employer/employee as purely relational ones, “The

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<sup>110</sup> For instance, it appeared in the white newspapers *The Red Cloud Chief* (29 January 1904) of Red Cloud, Nebraska; *The Coalville Times* of Coalville, Utah (5 February 1904); *The Logan Republican* of Logan, Utah (6 February 1904); and *Iron County Record* of Ironton, Missouri (27 February 1904).

Domestic Service Quest” promotes what Richard H. Brodhead has termed “disciplinary intimacy.” In Brodhead’s theorizing, “disciplinary intimacy” reinforces hegemony by intensifying the emotional bond between the authority figure and its charge to the extent that the latter feels an obligation to adhere to the authority figure’s imperatives (72). “The Domestic Service Quest” similarly sentimentalizes discipline by promoting domestic workers’ allegiance to the “gentle rule” of the employer, and thereby positions any attempts on the part of the black domestic worker to object to employers’ “rule” as the impetuosity of a child. Given that the *Atchison Blade* was, as a midwestern paper, located in one of the key regions in which black domestic workers were advocating to transition to living-out, “The Domestic Service Quest” can be read as suppressing the self-determination and autonomy that typified this labour movement. In addition to perpetuating structural inequalities within domestic work, this article also widens the gap between the market and the home by suggesting that homemakers should not adopt a managerial approach to their employees, but should embrace the feminine affect of the private sphere, compassion and maternal guidance. Though “Sound Advice to Mistresses” and “The Domestic Service Quest” differ from *A Mere Man*’s focus on the female employer’s failing to adhere to a masculine objectivity and efficiency, all three naturalize women’s restriction to the domestic sphere.

Similarly focusing on the relationship between the domestic worker and female employer enabled black female journalists to demonstrate their fluency in the language of the “servant problem,” ensuring that they were “heard” by stakeholders in the debate. Yet engaging with the black domestic worker was risky in a period in which this figure served as a proxy for corporeality and urbanity. That risk was compounded by the fact that, black female journalists, like the domestic worker and female employer, were widely perceived as unintellectual and overly emotional through their association with new and yellow journalism, and, consequently, as

unprofessional. Black female journalists' writing on the "servant problem" is marked, then, with efforts to navigate their proximity to these figures and by extension to the characteristics they symbolized as they utilized the female employer and domestic worker as "proxies" for unprofessionalism. Black female journalists' writing signifies an ongoing negotiation of their relationship to the female employer and domestic worker, oscillating between identification and dissociation in order to lend rhetorical support and authority to their writing.

In a period that attempted to restrict black women to the domestic sphere as domestic labourers or homemakers, black female journalists endeavoured to prove that they deserved their positions within the market as professional journalists through their writing on the "servant problem." By taking up the relationship between the black domestic worker and the female employer as the root of this "problem," black female journalists not only worked to claim authority over these two figures but also to construct themselves as informational journalists, thereby aligning with the field that claimed to further professionalization. In the 2 January 1886 instalment of "Our Woman's Department," published in the *New York Freeman*, Gertrude Mossell addresses this relationship, which was within her purview as the editor of a column that ostensibly focused on "women's issues." Yet, even as her position as editor of this new journalism press form lends her a sense of credibility, Mossell strategically positions herself in relationship to the domestic worker and female employer in ways that align her with informational journalism. In contrast to the focus within the black press on the morality and agency of the black domestic worker, she asserts that female employers and domestic workers must establish an understanding of each other's "rights [...] and have them well defined" (1). Other members of the black press would affirm her argument for a more firmly and thoroughly defined contract between the domestic worker and employer. For instance, in "An Extension of the Conference Spirit," published in 1904 in the *Voice of the Negro*, Fannie Barrier Williams

declares that employers must “clearly define [domestic workers’] duties,” a statement echoed in “The Servant in the South,” published in 1912 in *The Savannah Tribune*, which declares that employers should “Give shorter hours and more definite duties” (302; n.p.). Within these articles, the need to promote “more definite duties” is indicative of the gap between the market and the domestic sphere, with domestic work remaining an unregulated field. The fact that “The Servant in the South” promoted the same argument that Mossell had put forth over twenty-five years earlier reflects the continued failure of social reform organizations and employment bureaus to standardize the contract within domestic work.<sup>111</sup> Like Mossell, Williams and “The Servant in the South” endeavour to ameliorate the position of black domestic workers by promoting standardization of the field, but, in contrast to these two articles, Mossell’s advice is framed by references to her research into both the mistress and the domestic worker. Through this framing, she demonstrates her ability to present two opposing viewpoints to the reader without bias, signaling the kind of integrity and objectivity that was promoted by the informational journalists (Sawaya 82).

Though Mossell constructs herself as mediating between the female employer and the domestic worker, she also distances herself from these proxies through her insistence that she writes in response to “many source articles [...] on the lack of good servants in America” (n.p.). Through this emphasis on her reading “source articles,” she demonstrates a dedication to research that aligns her with informational journalism and therefore with the movement toward

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<sup>111</sup> Introducing a written contract that would define working conditions was a central focus of many turn-of-the-century social reformers, such as the Massachusetts Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, which, in 1897, founded an employment agency in which a domestic worker and her prospective employer both had to sign a contract (Smith, “Regulating” 882-883). Strategies like these largely failed, primarily because employers were under no legal obligation to utilize contracts and rejected them as prohibiting their ability to control and exploit domestic workers (Sutherland 248-249).

professionalization. Mossell further positions herself within the professional realm by suggesting that she is informed on the subject, not simply by her conversations with black domestic workers and their employers, but also through her immersion in discourses on the “servant problem” within the periodical press. Through this passage, Mossell navigates her proximity to these proxies by suggesting that, though she is sympathetic to them, she is not *one* of them. In contrast to this approach, in “The Problem of Employment for Negro Women,” published in 1903 in the *Southern Workman*, Williams oscillates much more dramatically between expressing solidarity with these figures and rejecting them, a strategy with professional advantages and inherent risks. By identifying along class, gender, and racial lines with the homemaker and black domestic worker, she simultaneously seeks legitimacy and threatens to collapse the distinction between herself and these proxies, a threat she must negotiate.

Through her discussion of the black domestic worker, Williams suggests that she has insight into the flaws of this figure, flaws which she has already overcome as a professional journalist. She discusses the discriminatory hiring practices black women endure, which, she argues, create “bad” black domestic workers out of women who are forced into the field (432-433). Having established herself as uniquely positioned to understand “bad servants” by virtue of their experiences of racism, Williams abandons this sense of racial collectivity and, by extension, her proximity to this proxy, stating that “it is largely in the power of the [domestic worker] to change and elevate the character of domestic service” (434). She further undermines collectivity by suggesting that “change” will come not through unions or labour legislation that would protect domestic workers from exploitation through collectivization, but through individual self-improvement. Other black female journalists similarly alternate between acknowledging that they, like black women in general, endure racial discrimination, and promoting individual morality as a corrective to this issue. Years earlier, in an 1895 issue of the *A.M.E. Church*

*Review*, Katherine Tillman states that black women's efforts to gain employment and succeed within their fields are stymied by racist whites who accuse them of "mental inferiority" ("Afro-American Women" 293). Like Williams, Tillman pivots from a focus on shared racial oppression to individual self-improvement, stating that black domestic workers must challenge this stereotype by performing "their duties in a satisfactory manner" ("Afro-American Women" 296). By simultaneously addressing and dismissing structural racism, Tillman and Williams imply that they have the authority to advise the black domestic worker because, unlike their subject, they have already developed the necessary character to succeed in their chosen profession. They suggest that, though racial discrimination frustrates black women's attempts to gain employment and advance within their fields, they are exceptions to that rule and models of success for the black domestic worker to follow.

That Williams published "The Problem of Employment for Negro Women" in the *Southern Workman* strengthened her claim to professionalism; this monthly paper was the organ of the Hampton Institute, which promoted guided self-improvement as a strategy not just to solve the "servant problem" but also the "Negro problem." Founded in 1868 by white educator Samuel Armstrong, Hampton functioned as a prototypical model of black industrial education, both because it was the first industrial school that served black students and because it received widespread funding and support on a national and international level (Anderson, *Education* 72; Wexler 107).<sup>112</sup> For Armstrong and his supporters, Hampton represented an answer to the fervent turn-of-the-century debate about what African Americans' role should be within dominant white society. Armstrong and his successors argued that the recent abolition of slavery meant that

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<sup>112</sup> Hampton was funded primarily by philanthropists, particularly those from the North, such as the American Missionary Association of New York, and by the federal government (Engs 118; Wexler 107).

African Americans were a “new race” who required the guidance of professionals to advance to the level of “civilized” whites and asserted that teaching their students the value of a strong work ethic and Christian morality would enable them to uplift “the race” (Engs 106). By publishing within the *Southern Workmen*, Williams lends greater value and significance to her writing, as it contributes to Hampton’s vision of how to “solve” not just the “servant problem” but the “Negro problem” more broadly. Moreover, by insisting that black domestic workers had the power to “elevate” the occupation, Williams adopts the language of proponents of black industrial education who claimed that manual labour in general could be made honorable through the hard work of black labourers. In this way, she heightens the potential for her writing to be read, perceived as authoritative, and even recirculated by the readership of the *Southern Workman*, which included the Hampton student body, northern white philanthropists and southern white political moderates who perceived African Americans as a “problem” that could be solved through manual labour (Anderson, *Education* 36-37; Zackodnik, *Press* 216).

Though promoting the ideology of Hampton granted Williams’s writing significance and a chance for exposure, it also creates professional complications for her, particularly in her focus on the black urban domestic worker. In contrast to that majority of the black female journalists who are the focus of this chapter, she addresses the body of this figure, stating that, in Chicago, black domestic workers are seemingly better dressed than their low income would allow, and claiming that “[t]here is a strong suspicion [...] that this fine dressing is at a cost that demoralizes the social life of our colored people” (435). By implying that black domestic workers gain their apparel through ill-gotten means such as sex work, Williams reinforces the idea that the midwestern city fosters sexual immorality in black women, and thereby works to appeal to the audience of *Southern Workman*. As I have previously discussed, dominant discourses about the degrading city functioned to prohibit urbanization and migration by suggesting that African

Americans were “safer” in the rural South, and Hampton supporters reproduced these discourses in their efforts to persuade African Americans to remain in the fields of manual labour in the South (Neverdon-Morton 27). Through her construction of the urban Midwest, then, Williams aligns with the investments of her audience and thereby works to advance professionally, yet this same construction also threatens her legitimacy. Because she previously claimed to share common experiences with the black domestic worker, Williams also risks identifying as this figure that she has, in this passage, reinfused with urbanity and corporeality. This identification would not only taint her with an association with yellow journalism, but also undermine her ability to position herself as a part of the solution to the “servant” and the “Negro” problems.

Similarly to some of the black female journalists who were the focus of Chapter Two, Williams attempts to create a moral hierarchy between herself and the urban black domestic worker that would enable her to recuperate her credibility, suggesting that she is part of the larger respectable racial collective who has been “demoralized” by the immorality this figure. She further dissociates herself from this proxy by aligning with the female employer, a strategy with its own inherent risks. Positioning herself as, like the “mistress,” “a woman and a housekeeper,” Williams emphasizes her middle-class status in order to distinguish herself from the black domestic worker (434). Like her expressions of solidarity with the black domestic worker, this statement positions her as having insight into the “servant problem,” yet also threatens Williams’s legitimacy by aligning her with a proxy of emotionality, domesticity, and unprofessionalism.

In order to manage this risk, she reproduces the stereotype of the “bad mistress” and constructs herself in opposition to it, stating that she is well aware that the “average housewife is apt to be a petty tyrant,” and urges the “housewife” to alter her “disposition and heart” toward her employees (434). In contrast to this stereotype, she demonstrates her level-headed reasoning by

stating, “Let me say by way of summary that I have dwelt mostly upon the opportunities of domestic service for the following reasons,” and subsequently providing a thorough and clear list of her key arguments (437). Her efforts to emphasize the methodical, logical nature of her writing was common amongst black female journalists. For instance, in “The Advancement of Colored Women,” published in 1905 in the *Colored American Magazine*, Margaret Murray Washington demonstrates her dedication to empiricism by incorporating statistical data in her writing on black women’s achievements, which includes a section on their employment as domestic labourers.<sup>113</sup> Focusing on black women’s education, she notes: “The census each year brings to us information that testifies to the gain in the life and activities of [...] colored women [...] In the last census 1,095,774 colored youths attended our schools over the country: 586,767 were young women” (184). Mary Church Terrell similarly demonstrates her familiarity with statistical data in “The Progress of Colored Women,” published in the 1904 issue of the *Voice of the Negro*, in which she, too, addresses the accomplishments of black women, particularly black club women’s efforts to ensure employment for black women in domestic labour. Attempting to dispel the “[f]oul aspersions upon the character” not just of black domestic workers but of black women in general, Terrell notes that statistics “compiled by men not inclined to falsify in favor of my race” show that sexual “immorality” is more common amongst Italian, German, Swedish, and French women than amongst black women (292). She subverts the idea of empirical research as inherently factual by positioning the presumably white men who compiled statistical data as biased against African Americans, and yet effectively utilizes this data to counter the widespread stereotype of the immoral black woman. Though Washington and Terrell do not address the

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<sup>113</sup> Washington was a contributor to periodicals such as *The Woman’s Era* and *Voice of the Negro* (1904-1906), an educator, a leader of the woman’s club movement, and wife to Booker T. Washington.

female employer, their use of statistics positions them amongst the informational journalists who championed fact-based reporting, lending support to Williams's suggestion that black female journalists have matured beyond the irrational bickering of women who have not had similar education, training, and experience in the professions. Just as she suggested that she, in contrast to the black domestic worker, had overcome racial discrimination within the market, she constructs herself as a model of professional exemplarity to which the homemaker could aspire.

Though black female journalists such as Mossell and Williams claimed professional status by constructing themselves as mediators between the homemaker and black domestic worker, to differing degrees, they endangered that status by closing the gap between themselves and their subjects. That gap was a matter of professional necessity, not only because homemaking and domestic labour were the two "natural" roles for black women of the era and were proxies for markers of unprofessionalism, but also because stereotypes of the female employer, journalist, and domestic worker were ridiculed within the same genre of the anecdote. The "mistress," "servant girl" and "lady journalist," as they were commonly labelled, served as the punch line in short, fictional, humorous anecdotes that were published from the 1880s to the early twentieth century and usually located in the middle or end of the newspaper amongst other comical pieces. This positioning further trivializes the "lady journalist," "mistress" and "servant girl," suggesting that they were not pressing front-page issues but subjects of amusement and nothing more. These three figures were drawn closer together still by the fact that they were drained of identifying features such as nationality and race and reduced to their class, gender, and "job." That these anecdotes were usually unsigned created a generalizing effect, suggesting that the black press as a whole mocked the "mistress," "servant girl" and "lady journalist." When Williams and other black female journalists identified, even briefly, with domestic workers or female employers, they risked inadvertently "linking" (Nord 254) their serious discussion of the "servant problem"

to the anecdotes lambasting the “lady journalist” and conflating her with the “mistress” and “servant girl,” thus undermining their credibility.

These humorous anecdotes perpetuate the idea that the “lady journalist,” “servant girl,” and “mistress” were similarly incompetent in their attempts to carry out their responsibilities, though the definition of those responsibilities varied. This recurring theme marks these figures with an emotionality and sexualized corporeality that serves to both police them and rationalize their exclusion from the public sphere and the market. Humorous anecdotes that focus on the “mistress” often, like *A Mere Man*, challenge the rhetoric of domestic science by suggesting that women’s excessive emotionality renders them incapable of becoming scientific managers, to the detriment of the other members of the household. Punch lines might describe her raging at “her maid until she can be heard away in the top flat” (“Calm and the Storm” n.p.). In addition to deriving comedy out of the physical abuse of domestic workers, these humorous anecdotes employed the “mistress” to further restrict and subjugate women. In “Woman’s Right!”, published in an 1883 issue of the A.M.E. biweekly *The Christian Recorder*, a man dismisses the fight for gender equality, stating “What more rights do they want? My wife bosses me, our daughters boss us both, and the servant girl bosses the whole family! It’s time the men were allowed some rights” (“Woman’s Right!” n.p.). “Woman’s Right!” constructs the “mistress’s” inability to fairly rule the home as a litmus test for women’s preparedness for full political and civil citizenship, justifying the structural oppression of women through this example of the “mistress’s” abuse of her power.

“Woman’s Rights!” claims that the “domestic worker” “bosses” her employers, a common complaint amongst employers that transformed an economic relationship in which domestic workers were historically exploited into an interpersonal dynamic in which employers are disempowered (May 28). This assertion that employers are the victims of domestic workers’

insubordination is reaffirmed in the anecdotes that focus primarily on the “servant girl,” depicting her as too insolent, immoral, cunning or stupid to be a “good servant”; like the “mistress,” the “servant girl” is depicted as an innately flawed figure, but the nature of her flaws are explained by her working-class status. “Obeying Orders,” published in 1895 in *The Christian Recorder*, constructs a dialogue in which a female employer reminds her “servant girl” that she was ordered not to receive too many male visitors:

“Mistress - Last night you were entertaining three policemen.

Pretty Domestic - Yes'm. I had them there so as to keep the others out” (n.p.).

The joke works on two registers: either the domestic labourer is playing at being naive while consciously circumventing her employer’s strictures, or she is so stupid that she sincerely believed that the policemen did not “count” as male callers. “Obeying Orders” suggests both that the “mistress” must be constantly vigilant in scrutinizing her employee’s behaviour and that she will never be able to successfully manage the “servant girl.” This and similar anecdotes promote the policing of domestic workers, while contributing to the broader narrative within these humorous anecdotes about the “mistress’s” inability to efficiently run her home.<sup>114</sup>

“Obeying Orders” also reinforces the idea that the domestic worker is a problematically “Pretty Domestic,” reinforcing employers’ assertion that domestic workers’ sexual proclivities would corrupt their homes, as well as broader discourses about black urbanization and migration that constructed this figure as sexually immoral (May 30). This sexualization of the “servant girl” is evident, for example, in “For Mamma to Think Over,” which was published years later in a 1912 issue of the *Chicago Defender*, suggesting the longevity of this stereotype. After

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<sup>114</sup> For further humorous anecdotes that depict the “servant girl” as intractable, see, amongst others, “Grocer.” *The Christian Recorder* 21 January 1884, and “Tea Biscuit.” *Wisconsin Weekly Advocate* 29 August 1907.

overhearing a conversation between his father and a friend, a child asks his mother what his father meant when he said, “You’ve got a good figure” (n.p.). The mother replies that it signified “a good price for some land he sold,” to which the child queries, “Mamma, has the servant girl been selling some land, too?” (n.p.). It is unclear whether or not this “servant girl” is a willing participant in a flirtation with the father or a victim of his sexual harassment because the focus remains firmly fixed on “Mamma’s” plight in the face of this employee with a “good figure.” Along with “Obeying Orders,” “For Mamma to Think Over” suggests that any “inappropriate” sexual relations in the work-place were caused by domestic workers’ irrepressibly seductive nature, thereby erasing the widespread sexual assault domestic labourers historically faced, often at the hands of their male employers. These anecdotes also delegitimize black domestic workers’ attempts to standardize their field by unionizing, striking, and initiating the live-out movement. By depicting the “servant girl” as primarily concerned with sexual interpersonal relationships, these anecdotes undermine black domestic workers’ efforts to construct themselves as professionals who have a business-like dynamic with their employers.

Like the “servant girl” and “mistress” anecdotes, those focused on the “lady journalist” have a punitive measure, suggesting their womanhood will be degraded by virtue of entering the public sphere. One features a group of Boston “lady journalists” who are “bright, but [...] not yet up to the ways and wiles of the metropolis” and who stride confidently into a restaurant only to be informed that they cannot enter without a male escort (“The Girls Didn’t Know” 2). Another derides a “newspaper woman” for being fashionably but inappropriately dressed for roaming through the city, as her job demands (“A Newspaper Woman” 2). Drawing on broader discourses about the moral danger of women independently navigating the city, these anecdotes position the “lady journalist” as urban and embodied, and therefore as a new or yellow journalist, utilizing their restriction in these streams of journalism as a mark against them. Like the “servant girl”, the

anecdotes sexualize the journalist in order to both police her behaviour and delegitimize her, barring her access to the public sphere through journalism.

In their depictions of the “mistress,” “servant girl,” and “lady journalist” inevitably failing in their attempts to navigate the market and the public sphere, these anecdotes serve to reinforce the distinction between the home and these spaces, penalizing these female figures for attempting to transgress beyond their “natural” realm. They gender the market, the public sphere, and professionalism as innately masculine, naturalizing women’s subjugation by obscuring the barriers that prohibited their success in journalism and the systems of oppression that undergirded the “servant problem.” In their specific focus on urbanity, sexualized corporeality, and emotionality, the anecdotes also imbue these figures with these markers of new and yellow journalism, providing black female journalists with further motivation to distinguish themselves from these caricatures of essentialized womanhood.

In the section that follows, I explore the ways that black female journalists endeavoured to firmly delineate between themselves and the female employer and black domestic worker by negotiating their relationship to expertise. The notion of expertise was central to dominant understandings of informational journalism and the movement toward professionalization, and black female journalists laid claim to this quality by constructing themselves as experts in domestic science through their writing on the black domestic worker. This claim is particularly significant in a period in which they were denied access to the formal education that typified dominant understandings of expertise, including professional associations and journalism schools and programs. Through their performance of this intellectual symbol of professionalism, they also dissociated from the corporeality of new and yellow journalism and from the physicality of journalism’s reputation as a “rough-and-tumble” trade.

## Performing expertise

Members of the press who advocated for formal education in journalism both reflected and reinforced larger understandings of professionalism as defined by expertise. At the turn of the century, the middle-class underwent widespread professionalization in the United States, with occupations like medicine, law, and the social sciences establishing standardized training and practices (Maras 26). These fields defined professionalism in large part as the ability to master and apply esoteric knowledge; indeed, accreditation was made a prerequisite for many professions in an attempt to ensure that “practitioners possessed the scientifically legitimated modes of practice and [...] carried them out properly” (Abbott 4, 191-193). This emphasis on accreditation was also part of the larger ethos of meritocracy running throughout dominant discourses about professionals, which represented them as not inheriting their class positions but earning them through hard work, intelligence, and training (McNamee and Miller 2); professionalism was a matter of “making oneself through a career, rather than being made” by entry into a pre-established station (Abbott 196). As with most systems that support the concept of meritocracy, professionals promoted a liberal ideology in their assertion that anyone could succeed in their fields, even while they denied many women and racial minorities access to the modes of professionalization (Sawaya 3).<sup>115</sup> I would argue that this exclusion amounted to a racialization and masculinization of expertise and functioned to define and defend their “jurisdictional borders,” most obviously from women and people of colour who sought to join the professional ranks (Abbott 2).

The professionalization of domestic science in the 1890s and early 1900s both challenged and

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<sup>115</sup> For example, chairs of the social sciences departments, who were typically male, consistently hired male instructors, enshrining the belief that men were the experts whose opinions should shape the field (Silverberg 9).

reaffirmed the masculinization of expertise in particular. During this period domestic scientists held conferences, organized nationally, and taught at every educational level, from grade school into colleges and universities (Strasser 207-208), insisting that the home must be run with the same kind of effective management as the market, and attempting to accomplish this goal by instilling a scientific efficiency in homemakers and, to a greater extent amongst African Americans, domestic workers (Christensen 64). Domestic scientists, then, subverted the idea of the domestic realm as unspecialized by insisting that housework could only become a “profession” with the efforts of trained experts like themselves (Strasser 209). Like other professionals, they constructed themselves in opposition to the supposedly unspecialized home, but their credibility also relied on the assertion that homemakers and domestic workers could become masters of esoteric knowledge.

Domestic scientists further sought legitimacy by adopting many of the methodologies and standards of traditionally male professions. Attempting to dispel any assumptions about the inferiority of their female-dominated field, they emphasized its scientific nature, as “domestic *science*” would suggest, and drew on research from the natural and social sciences in their teaching. They promoted the “utilization of all the resources of modern science to improve the home life,” as pioneer domestic scientist Ellen Richards proclaimed, and their emphasis on objectivity and rigorous study earned them influential supporters (qtd. in Strasser 210).<sup>116</sup> Domestic science thus reified the link between masculinity and professionalism even as it subverted dominant discourses that represented expertise as a solely masculine characteristic.

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<sup>116</sup> For instance, in 1897 Secretary of Agriculture James Wilson stated, “Today no doctor or engineer is fitted to pursue his profession until he has drunk deep at the fountains of science” and applauded domestic science for patterning themselves after these more established fields (qtd. in Strasser 210).

Against this backdrop, black female journalists promoted domestic science as part of their ongoing negotiation of their marginalized positions within journalism. By adopting the rhetoric of domestic science, black female journalists positioned themselves as masters of esoteric knowledge in a period in which that quality typified professionalism. By focusing on their relationship to this intellectual characteristic, they dissociated themselves from corporeality and thereby from the black domestic worker. Through their rhetoric, they further distinguished themselves from this proxy by reinforcing the idea that domestic workers were untrained in order to validate their claims that they would help solve the “servant problem” by establishing domestic science courses and programs through their social reform organizations. The proposed courses and programs had both positive and negative implications for black domestic workers, providing them with training that would potentially raise their social and economic status, while reinforcing the dominant discourses about the efficacy of guided self-improvement. Black female journalists’ attempts to train black domestic workers in domestic science also challenged the easy dismissal of their social reform work as social research, as I discuss below. Black female journalists, then, created a mutually reinforcing relationship between their journalism and social reform work, within which their promotion of domestic science signaled expertise in both of these vocations.

Amongst African Americans, domestic science targeted both homemakers and domestic workers, in contrast to dominant white models of domestic science, which primarily served to transform women into efficient household managers (Wolcott, *Remaking* 21; Higginbotham 215). Racial respectability ideologues, particularly advocates of black industrial education, promoted domestic science for all black women as a means of ensuring that they could facilitate racial progress by creating moral and hygienic homes and respectable families (Wolcott, *Remaking* 21;

Lasch-Quinn 81).<sup>117</sup> In a period in which domestic work was one of the only occupations open to black women, training in domestic science also served a pragmatic purpose of giving them an advantage in their efforts to secure employment (May 94). For many African Americans, particularly educators and social reformers, these courses and programs were also a means of redefining domestic work from a low-prestige occupation into a respectable one comprised of trained experts, thereby uplifting it from “dirty” to “clean” labour by moulding black domestic workers into exemplars of “the race.”<sup>118</sup> These widespread ideas that domestic science could uplift domestic workers as well as “the race” also provided black female journalists with an opportunity to negotiate their marginalized positions in both journalism and social research.

In their roles as social reformers, black female journalists operated within voluntary organizations, including but not limited to black women’s clubs, and often employed the methods of social research in their efforts to analyze and ameliorate social ills, work that included establishing domestic science courses for black women (Knupfer 16-17). However, the validity of their social research was called into question throughout the turn-of-the-century professionalization of the social sciences. The universities, professional organizations and journals that were key markers of professionalism ensured that these fields remained white male-dominated by, for example, teaching white male scholars, and, like other graduate degrees, restricting the access of women and people of colour to social science graduate programs (Wilson 109; Silverberg 3-9). Social scientists reinforced this hierarchy by insisting that their social research was valid because it was neutral and objective, and by deriding social reformers for their

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<sup>117</sup> At Tuskegee as well as Hampton, the leading models of black industrial education, domestic science was mandatory for its female students, who also were subject to strictures surrounding their morality, appearance, and health (Neverdon-Morton 23-28, 36-37).

<sup>118</sup> See, amongst others, Higginbotham (1994); Wolcott (1997); and May (2011).

explicit activism and supposed emotionality (Silverberg 5). This gendered binary had serious implications for black female journalists both because black women's social research was vulnerable to being labelled less authoritative than that conducted by social scientists, and because informational journalists deliberately patterned themselves after the social sciences, similarly prioritizing the value of dispassionate objectivity (Maras 25). In their writing on their efforts to found domestic science courses or programs, black female journalists challenged the hierarchy between social scientists and social reformers and by extension positioned themselves as adhering to the conventions of informational journalism.

Fannie Barrier Williams negotiated the definition of expertise as accreditation, one of social scientists' supposed markers of superiority, in "Let us Stand by Servant Girls," published in 1905 in the *New York Age*. In addition to her roles as an educator and regular contributor to black periodicals, Williams was a leader within the black women's club movement, helping to found the National League of Colored Women in 1893 and its successor, the National Association of Colored Women (Smith, "Fannie" 1254). She promotes this movement in her article by claiming that black domestic workers are in need of training in her native Chicago and across the nation, and, complaining that "all the schools of domestic science are overcrowded," calls on black club women to provide it (n.p.). In order to avoid depicting these women aiding black domestic workers in the city, Williams asserts that black club women should "get whatever literature is obtainable [...] on this new profession of domestic science" so that they can in turn train domestic workers (n.p.). She constructs black club women as intellectual labourers doing a literature review, which contrasts sharply with the kinds of hands-on research that was prevalent within the social sciences at the time, particularly in Chicago.<sup>119</sup> In constructing black club

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<sup>119</sup> This hands-on research was especially promulgated by Jane Addams and the other women of the Hull House. In 1889, Addams founded this social settlement in Chicago, which

women as dislocated, Williams echoes the strategies of black female journalists I addressed in Chapter Two, such as Addie Hunton and Maude K. Griffin, who endeavoured to manage the risk of describing social reform work immersed in urban settings. However, in contrast to these black female journalists, for whom their social reform work was a primarily fraught subject, Williams employs black women's social reform work to claim professional status as a journalist, as we shall see. This shifting significance of social reform work to black female journalists' professional legitimacy makes evident the need for attention to the relationships between these two forms of labour.

By encouraging black club women to gather "literature" on domestic science, Williams also constructs them as self-taught, which evokes their larger project of seeking legitimacy through self-education. Though black club women often focused primarily on community service when publicly discussing their social reform work, they incorporated self-improvement exercises into their clubs in order to ensure that their members were perceived as authoritative and persuasive when they attempted to expose the injustices that surrounded and oppressed them (McHenry 201). Williams validates their methods of self-education by insisting that black club women could become proficient enough in domestic science to teach it to domestic workers, and further positions them as masters of specialized knowledge by referring to the field as a "new profession." She both promotes domestic science and yet articulates alternate methods of gaining expertise that challenge dominant discourses amongst professionals, including domestic

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hosted intellectuals, social reformers, and academics associated with University of Chicago, and functioned as a home for a core group of women who investigated and endeavoured to address social ills in the city, and published their social research (Deegan, *Jane* 4-5). Mary Jo Deegan argues their methodologies directly informed those of the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, which was established in 1907 and was foundational to the development of the field of sociology (*Jane* 10-11).

scientists, that equated expertise with accreditation, an ironic strategy given her insistence that black domestic workers need formalized training. This seeming irony, however, serves to validate her work as a clubwoman and that of the wider black club movement by suggesting that the untrained black domestic worker is a pressing problem that they can solve. Given the fact that black domestic science was widely perceived as not just uplifting domestic work but “the race” in general, she lends relevance and significance to black club women by positioning them as instructors in it.

Through her urging that black club women should “get whatever literature is obtainable,” Williams also positions black club women as dedicated to basing their actions in an extensive review of available literature on a topic. By promoting such literary research, she aligns herself with the informational journalists who championed empiricism, and suggests that, far from being motivated by their emotions as social researchers asserted of social reformers, black club women were methodical, highly informed, and organized. Williams’s distancing from emotionality also reinforces divisions between herself and the homemaker and domestic worker, whose dysfunctional emotional relationship was positioned as the root of the “servant problem.” This rhetorical move echoes that of Alberta Moore Smith, a prominent black club woman and contributor to the weekly *Broad Ax* (1891-1903) and the *Colored American Magazine*, in her 1901 installment of her column for the latter paper, “Chicago Notes.” Moore Smith addresses the intensive research of the Colored Women’s Business Club of Chicago, a voluntary organization of which she was president, which sought to develop the “educational, professional and commercial conditions of Negro women,” and included an Employment Department that served to fill the demand for “well-trained domestics” (Moore Smith 469, 465). She notes that she and her collaborators established the Colored Women’s Business Club, after having “watched and studied the true conditions of many colored women’s work in [...] the city for the past two years”

(465). Though her reference to “stud[ying]” risks positioning her and her fellow social reformers as personally investigating these black working women in their urban settings, her word choice also suggests intellectual and therefore dislocated labour. Through this reference, Moore Smith further dissociates herself from urbanity and, by extension, yellow journalism, by constructing herself as an informational journalist who produces fact-based writing, which in turn lends greater weight to her insistence that black domestic workers must be “thoroughly trained in domestic science” (465-466). Moore Smith, then, intertwines her journalism and social reform, utilizing her journalism to mark her social reform with expertise and vice versa.

Though Moore Smith positions the Chicago Women’s Business Club as enabling black women to gain employment, her discussion of domestic science reveals the limited nature of the types of employment she and her colleagues were invested in securing for black working-class women. She states that black domestic workers who graduate from domestic science programs will be able to demand “salaries far in excess of those paid [to] many clerks” (466). The assertion that working-class black women were “better off” in domestic work was a recurring one amongst black female journalists, with Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin complaining in the May 1894 issue of *The Woman’s Era* that “girls who would find good [...] wages in domestic service prefer to crowd shops” (“The Problem of the Unemployed” n.p.).<sup>120</sup> This trope not only functions to persuade black women to be contented in one of the few occupations readily available to them, but also reinforces dominant discourses within the black press about urbanization, migration, and the live-out movement, which depicted the black domestic worker as safer in the homes of their

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<sup>120</sup> For further discussion of the superiority of domestic work to white-collar and factory work, see, amongst others, Fannie Barrier Williams “Industrial Education - Will it Solve the Negro Problem?” *Colored American Magazine* July 1904, and Gertrude Mossell “Our Woman’s Department.” *New York Freeman* 2 January 1886.

employers than the public spaces of the city. Because Moore Smith and Ruffin construct themselves as operating on behalf of the domestic worker, either by attempting to secure wages or protecting them from disreputability, they imbue their writing and, in Moore Smith's case, social reform work with an altruism that signaled expertise.

In addition to constructing themselves in opposition to the domestic sphere, professionals positioned themselves as distinct from other labourers by suggesting that they employed their mastery of esoteric knowledge to benefit the public. As Mary N. Woods notes, the ideal professional was depicted as resolutely unswayed by avarice or political influence, ensuring that the public could therefore put their trust in him: "Honor guided his actions, and authority was his due. He was a paternal figure who advised his clients on what was best for them; he did not sell them goods or services" (6). Of course, professionals were dependent on the market, though they were distinct from other wage labourers in that a large part of what "they [sold was] precisely their claim to be outside the market" (Sawaya 3). Turn-of-the-century journalism similarly attempted to embody disinterested expertise, as part of the larger movement toward professionalization, with informational journalists in particular constructing themselves as above the "wrangling" of the public-political arena. They positioned themselves as facilitating democratic individualism by providing the necessary facts that enabled the masses to function as fully informed citizens (Maras 10; Kaplan, *Politics* 168-169). In order to depict themselves as similarly altruistic, black female journalists drew, not on democratic individualism, but on the ethos of racial collectivity, which promoted black women sacrificing personal ambition when joining the public sphere. Positioning themselves as both ideal and professional journalists, they suggested that their social reform work and journalism were motivated not by greed but by a desire to uplift the black domestic worker through domestic science.

Like Moore Smith and Ruffin, other black female journalists demonstrated their capacity for

disinterestedness by foregrounding the classed distinctions between themselves and the black domestic worker, who they depicted as deeply entrenched in the concerns of the market. In the December 1894 issue of *The Woman's Era*, Mary Church Terrell invokes the fear-mongering technique of racial competition. Referencing Washington, D.C., she states that in a “few years hence” it will be difficult for black women to find employment as domestic workers, and adds that even in the South, “where colored help has always been preferred [...] it is growing quite common to employ white servants to the exclusion of the colored” (“Washington” 6). Warnings of racial or ethnic competition recurred in black female journalists’ writing on the “servant problem,” serving to police black domestic workers’ behaviour by suggesting that if they did not commit fully to being a “good servant,” black women would lose this crucial form of employment. In the 8 February 1896 installment of “Woman’s Column” in the *Enterprise*, Ella L. Mahammitt claims that “the sturdy uncomplaining class of foreign domestics” will soon have a monopoly on the occupation (n.p.). Years later, in a 1907 issue of *The Voice*, Katherine Tillman continued to issue similar warnings, declaring that while black women maintain an ambivalent attitude toward domestic work, “German, Irish and Swede girls crowd into [domestic work], learn quickly, and [...] start a bank account” (“Paying Professions” n.p.). These discussions of black women’s diminishing opportunities in domestic work enabled these black female journalists to adopt a tone of altruism, which Terrell makes more explicit by querying, “is it not possible for the thinking women among us to establish schools in which our girls may be educated to be first-class servants?” (“Washington” 6). She lends the black club women who produced and consumed the *Era* an aura of professionalism by representing them as future domestic scientists, exerting control over black domestic workers through this proposed education. Because “thinking women” includes the black women who published, edited and wrote for the *Era*, she also positions black female members of the press as driven by a similar

altruistic desire.

Terrell's attempts to construct both black club women and female journalists as motivated by a desire to aid black domestic workers, not by the demands of the market, is particularly ironic in light of the *Era*'s financial precariousness. Though the *Era* had a national audience, it deliberately focused its address to black women, perhaps resulting in the financial difficulties that continued to dog the periodical throughout its run, despite Ruffin's best efforts (Streitmatter, "Economic Conditions" n.p.). In its inaugural issue in the spring of 1894, Ruffin indicates that the *Era* was "gratified" by the number of submissions of writing from black women and declares that if the "paper receives proportionate financial encouragement the publishers will be only too ready and willing to enlarge it" ("Notes" 7). Like many of the black female journalists I addressed Chapter One, she manipulates the rhetoric of racial collectivity to legitimize her ambitions to edit this periodical and to build a collective of black female journalists publishing in it. She carefully avoids accusations of crass careerism by stating that she only wishes to "accommodate" the "hearty and ready response of our women," while simultaneously advancing black female journalism by carving out space for more black women to contribute to the *Era* (7). Ruffin's goals regarding enlargement were ultimately fulfilled when she expanded the *Era* from sixteen pages in its first issue to twenty in November 1894 and twenty-four by the next month, yet she continued to struggle to secure enough advertisers and subscribers to sustain the *Era*, and ultimately ended its production in 1897 (Streitmatter, "Economic Conditions" n.p.). These ongoing financial concerns are also evident in Victoria Earle Matthews's "New York" column, published in the December 1894 issue and written under the pen name Victoria Earle. She insists that African Americans must "subscribe promptly" if they want the *Era* to be a periodical that "can with pride be placed on the circulating files in our libraries, offered, as exchanges, with the most favored journals" (2-3). Amidst clear anxiety about subscribers, she reveals ambition that

matches Ruffin's by insisting that the *Era* will develop into a high-quality periodical that will rival the "most favored journals" of the day. Though her column borders on a discussion of the supposedly unprofessional issue of financial problems, Earle mitigates this risk by stating that the financially stable *Era* would contribute to the development of a strong black "literary productio[n]," which in turn would demonstrate the intellectual and creative capabilities of "the race" (3). In this way, she endeavours to dispel any hint of careerism by suggesting that the women who edit, publish and write for the *Era* serve "the race," and positions these same women as professional by emphasizing their altruistic intentions. Ruffin and Earle both reveal and endeavour to mask the highly "interested" nature of the collective of black women who were eager to ensure the financial security of the *Era* and to subvert the male-dominated nature of journalism by advancing within it.

Williams, Moore Smith, Terrell, Ruffin and Earle thus attempted to mark their journalism, their social reform work, or both with the kind of expertise professionals positioned as the territory of highly educated men, particularly white men. In doing so, these black female journalists complicated the idea that accreditation was the sole determinant of expertise. Yet by promoting domestic science, they also reinforced the privileging of institutionalized knowledge over self-taught or experiential learning by representing black domestic workers as in need of formal education. By advocating for domestic science for black domestic workers, black female journalists delegitimized the wide practice of black women training their daughters in domestic work at an early age, well aware that they would likely need these skills to gain employment as adults (Clark-Lewis, *Living In* 41-46).<sup>121</sup> Even as black female journalists sought to ameliorate

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<sup>121</sup> Indeed, many black women first performed domestic labour as young children, accompanying their domestic worker mothers into white homes. Former domestic worker Sadie Jones recalls, "At about eight, everyone [all girls] was going 'in' with their mamas.

black domestic workers' socioeconomic statuses by providing training and constructing their labour as "clean," they denied black domestic workers' expertise as a necessary step in their attempts to claim it for themselves.

Black female journalists' professionalism was repeatedly undermined in a period that equated African Americans with manual labour, femininity with emotionality, and expertise with white masculinity. By reading their writing on the "servant problem" not solely as emerging from their social reform work but as a negotiation of dominant discourses surrounding professional journalism, this chapter enables us to understand how they challenged these stereotypes in order to gain legitimacy, not just for themselves but for black female journalists more broadly. Often, they leveraged this credibility to endeavour to better the social or economic position of the black domestic worker through their writing, attempting to enact change within interlocking systems of oppression that exploited members of this occupation. Yet these efforts were complicated by the fact that their legitimacy depended on the idea that the black domestic worker was a flawed figure who could benefit from their expert assistance and on distancing themselves from this proxy, not only of unprofessionalism, but also of urbanity and corporeality. Thus, this chapter makes legible the professional barriers to black female journalists departing entirely from the widespread focus on the individual domestic worker as a "problem" to be "fixed."

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You'd do pick-up and watch some of the little white kids, or if she took up wash - you'd go help with the carrying and then the delivery" (Clark-Lewis, *Living In* 46).



## Conclusion

*Professional Anxiety* has worked to make legible the ways that black female journalists negotiated restrictive definitions of professionalism within the black press and American journalism through their writing on journalism, the black domestic worker, and the urban black woman. Analyzing their writing on the latter two topics is crucial to understanding their professional strategies, as these figures constituted both a means of claiming legitimacy and a threat to that claim for black female journalists. By exploring their negotiations of gender and racial hierarchies within the profession, this project has challenged scholarship that categorizes black female journalists' writing on the black domestic worker, the black urban woman, and the black female migrant as a product of their social reform work, not their journalism. As a corrective to these scholarly trends, *Professional Anxiety* has focused on the relationship between black female journalists' social reform work and their journalism, particularly in terms of their claim to professional legitimacy.

Though this study has both drawn on and built upon four primary critical fields — the history of American journalism, periodical studies and black periodical studies, black women's historiography, and extant scholarship on black female journalists' writing on the black domestic labourer — more work lies ahead to attend to the erasure of black female journalists from histories of American journalism, with its tendency to primarily address Ida B. Wells; periodical studies, with its myopic focus on the white press; and black periodical studies, with its trend of seeing the black press primarily as a site of recovery of African American literature. Constructing a complex understanding of the meaning of professionalism for black female journalists has enabled us to recognize and better understand the ways they adopted distinct strategies to negotiate their relationship to this concept. Though these strategies were diverse, black female journalists repeatedly sought legitimacy by aligning with preexisting collectives, of which they

were minorities, including the black press and its promotion of racial collectivity, informational journalists and their alignment with professionalization, and stakeholders in the debates around the black domestic worker and the black urban woman. Amongst other strategies, they formed collectives of feminist, careerist black female journalists that in many ways subverted the ethos of racial collectivity, and claimed informational, disembodied, dislocated journalism in a period when these were strongly associated with whiteness and masculinity. This repeated strategy of aligning with collectives while actively working to redefine their role within them suggests a need to explore other kinds of legitimizing collectives beyond those addressed in this project, and to conduct greater research into black press associations and how black female journalists navigated them.

Whereas my project has been focused on the ways that black female journalists negotiated their relationship to specific collectives through their writing in black periodicals, black press associations were interconnected with, yet distinct from, the black press. Because African Americans had limited access to the journalism programs and schools founded at the turn of the century (Perry and Edmondson 304-306), their black press associations constituted an alternate form of education. They served as spaces in which members of the black press could gain access to established publishers, editors, and journalists who shared their expertise through speeches and roundtables at annual conventions. At the turn of the century, the most prominent black press association was the American Press Association (APA), founded in 1881; the APA underwent a name change to the Colored Press Association of the United States (CPA) in 1886 and to the National Afro-American Press Association (NAAPA) in 1891 (Rivera 19; Fortune n.p.).<sup>122</sup> By 1910 the NAAPA lost much of its clout, particularly with the establishment of the rival

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<sup>122</sup> The first meeting of the APA was held in Louisville, Kentucky, and was organized by John W. Cromwell, editor of the Washington *People's Advocate* (Pride and Wilson 171).

organization the National Negro Press Association in 1909 (Rivera 19). However, before its decline the NAAPA was a powerful national institution, with a membership that boasted some of the most prestigious editors, journalists, and publishers.<sup>123</sup> In their annual conventions, held across the nation, the NAAPA debated issues of importance to the black press and African Americans in general (Wells, *Women Writers* 206-207). By holding sessions on publishing, editorial duties, journalistic writing and the function of the black press as a black counterpublic, members of the NAAPA also debated and defined professionalism. The fact that many of them were leading members of the black press lent these definitions credibility, and, because black periodicals heavily covered their conventions, their visions of professional journalism circulated beyond their membership to the black press more broadly. The majority of the extant historical and biographical scholarship on the CPA/AAPA/NAAPA positions it as a milestone in the black press, and provides insight into the political stances and leadership structure of this organization. Valuable though this scholarship has been, it often overlooks the question of how the CPA/AAPA/NAAPA worked to produce and reify gendered models of professionalism.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> This membership included Ida B. Wells, elected secretary in 1887 (McMurray 110), John Mitchell, Jr., the militant editor of the weekly *Richmond Planet* (1883-1945) who was elected vice president in 1890 and subsequently held the position of president for five years (Alexander 36), and "dean" of black journalism T. Thomas Fortune, who served as chairman of the executive committee and as president in the late 1890s (Johnson, *W.E.B. Du Bois* 26-27).

<sup>124</sup> See, amongst others, Perry, Clay. "John P. Mitchell, Virginia's Journalist of Reform." *Journalism History* 4.4 (1977): 142-147, 156. *GoogleScholar*. Web. 1 March 2017.; Gatewood, Willard. "Edward E. Cooper, Black Journalist." *Journalism Quarterly* 55.2 (1978): 269-275, 324. *Proquest*. Web. 1 March 2017.; Alexander, Ann Field. *Race Man: The Rise and Fall of the "Fighting Editor," John Mitchell Jr.* Charlottesville: U of Virginia, P, 2002. Print.; Bederman (2008); Justesen, Benjamin. *Broken Brotherhood: The Rise and Fall of the National Afro-American Council*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2008. Print.; Johnson (2008); Alexander, Shawn Leigh. *An Army of Lions: The Civil Rights Struggle before the NAACP*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2012. Print.; Thomas, Rhondda Robinson. "The First Negro Priest on Southern Soil: George Freeman Bragg, Jr. and the Struggle of Black Episcopalians in the South, 1824-1909." *Southern Quarterly* 50.1 (2012): 79-104. *Proquest Business Collection*. Web. 1 March 2017.; Garb, Margaret. *Freedom's Ballot: African*

Exploring black female journalists' role within and relationship to the APA/CPA/NAAPA would be important to analyzing its gender hierarchies and to further understanding the ways they negotiated meanings of legitimacy and professionalism through their writing.

Black female journalists were largely excluded from white women's press associations and, though they occasionally proposed forming their own, they ultimately joined those founded and dominated by black men, including the APA/CPA/NAAPA (Wells, *Women Writers* 206-207).<sup>125</sup> Though black women attended its earliest meetings, they were rarely selected to address the annual conventions, suggesting that their professional experience was not valued, a hierarchy that was furthered by its membership policy. "Colored Press Association," published in 1886 in the *New York Freeman*, quotes the constitution of the CPA, which states that there are two classes of membership, active and honorary: "All editors, associate editors and managers of bona fide colored papers, are members of the active class. All correspondents and reporters are members of the honorary class. The active members alone are entitled to hold office and vote in the association" (n.p.). Because so few black women were editors or publishers, the vast majority would have fallen within the category of "honorary" members who could not vote or hold office. This policy essentially ensured that black female journalists were restricted from determining the course of this powerful organization.<sup>126</sup> Black press associations, then, constitute another

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*American Political Struggles in Chicago from Abolition to the Great Migration*. Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2014. Print.; and Rivera (2013).

<sup>125</sup> In his history of southern female writers and journalists in the nineteenth-century, Johnathan Daniel Wells posits that the state branches of the National Negro Press Association, such as Kentucky and Virginia, had a higher percentage of female members than the APA/CPA/NAAPA, though women remained a minority (210).

<sup>126</sup> Very few women were elected to office. In addition to Wells's tenure as secretary, in 1883 Sarah G. Patton of the Galveston *Spectator* was named secretary pro tem and Josie D. Heard, who contributed poems to *The Christian Recorder*, was elected secretary in 1891 (Wells, *Women Writers* 207-208).

legitimizing collective black female journalists navigated, provoking further research questions: What kinds of privileges were afforded to the primarily male members of the APA/CPA/NAAPA? Can we read black female journalists' writing as a negotiation of gender hierarchies within this organization?

Gertrude Bustill Mossell's writing on black press associations is suggestive. Though biographical accounts make no mention of Mossell being elected to office within any press association, or delivering a speech at a convention, she endeavours to rectify that fact in "Some Painful Truths," originally published in the *Indianapolis World* (1883-1932) and reprinted in the 20 November 1886 issue of the *New York Freeman*.<sup>127</sup> I addressed in Chapter One Mossell's proposal within this article to form a black syndicate, a business that would, according to her, distribute well-researched and well-written articles to black periodicals across the nation. Mossell specifically references the CPA in the article, stating: "It was not our privilege to be present at the Colored Press Convention held in Atlantic City, but it was our hope that some definite method of bettering our colored journals might be settled" (n.p.). Against the backdrop of the CPA's gender hierarchies, Mossell's seemingly innocuous comment that it was not her "privilege to be present" at Atlantic City can be read as a pointed statement about the fact that she, like so many black female journalists, were barred from full participation within this organization. Yet she wields the ethos of racial collectivity, which often functioned to limit black female journalists' careerism, to further her professional goals by endeavouring to persuade the CPA to take seriously her bid to found a syndicate.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> See, for example, Streitmatter, "Gertrude Bustill Mossell" (1993) and Terborg-Penn (1992).

<sup>128</sup> Mossell continued to advocate for a syndicate in the essay she contributed to Irvine Garland Penn's *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (1891), in which she declares,

Mossell's attempt to utilize the CPA as a tool through which to promote her plan met with mixed results that reveal the ways this organization worked to reify the expertise of its male members. Though the CPA did in fact attempt to found a syndicate, in its coverage of this campaign the black press made no mention of Mossell, and instead positioned T. Thomas Fortune as championing the idea through his speech on "The Necessity of Syndicating Our News and Other Matter," delivered at the 1891 convention. For instance, "A Patent Back 'Opinion Moulder,'" published in 1900 in the Indianapolis *Freeman*, notes that the NAAPA's efforts to establish a syndicate ultimately never came to fruition, and states, "It would be a boon to the colored press if, as Editor Timothy Thomas Fortune suggested some years ago at a press convention, a permanent [syndicate] service could be established" (n.p.). The fact that the unnamed author of this article credits Fortune reveals the power of this black press association in enshrining the professional ideas of its male leaders, both by functioning as a venue through which they could address and promote these ideas and by facilitating their dissemination through the black press. This article suggests that the APA/CPA/NAAPA helped to write a history of the black press that positioned its membership, particularly its leaders, as *the* key innovators within the black press, and thereby overshadowed figures like Mossell. Though she was a prominent black female journalist, she was denied access to the legitimizing effects of this organization and written out of the history of its movement. This erasure is particularly egregious because Fortune, as editor of the *New York Freeman*, had reprinted "Some Painful Truths," and must, therefore, have been cognizant of her desire to address the CPA on the issue.

In addition to indicating the rhetorical power of the APA/CPA/NAAPA, Fortune's

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"Form syndicates and pay for good articles on selected subjects from our best writers and authors" ("Opinions of Mrs. N.F. Mossell" 490).

attempt to found a syndicate also reveals the material power of this black press association. In an article entitled “The Race Press,” published in 1891 in the *Cleveland Gazette*, Fortune is credited with contributing one hundred dollars to the proposed syndicate, and raising another eight hundred and seventy-five dollars from his fellow black male members of the press (n.p.).<sup>129</sup> Fortune’s status as the “dean” of black journalism and a leader in the APA/CPA/NAAPA would have facilitated his efforts to secure these funds, but this article also offers insight into the resources available to members of this black press association. A lack of such resources was key to black female journalists joining black press associations like the APA/CPA/NAAPA, according to Mossell’s 25 December 1886 instalment of “Our Woman’s Department.” In this column, ironically published in Fortune’s *New York Freeman*, she states that it is “not desirable” to form a “Colored Women’s Press Association” because, “If with superior ability, cash, and leisure, the colored men’s press association has accomplished so little, we might still do less” (n.p.). Mossell’s apparent reference to black men having greater “ability” in fact functions as an argument that their “cash and leisure” alone enabled them to found such organizations. This wonderfully backhanded compliment makes it clear that black women were prohibited from forming their own black press associations due to structural oppression, and “The Race Press” makes legible the ways that an organization like the APA/CPA/NAAPA perpetuates this inequality. Mossell reveals a system in which black female journalists, already lacking in “cash,” were, as minorities within black press associations, denied their resources.

Mossell’s writing, then, provides insight into the ways that black female journalists were

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<sup>129</sup> The complete list of “subscribers” and the amount of their pledge is as follows: T. Thomas Fortune, \$100; Harry C. Smith, \$100; John C. Dancy, \$100; Robert G. Pelham, \$100; John Mitchell, Jr., \$100; E.E. Cooper, \$100; J. Gordon Street, \$100; Dan A. Rudd, \$50; J.D. Howard, \$50; John L. Waller, \$50; M. M. Lewey, \$50; Reverend J. Francis Robinson, \$50; C.D. Cooley, \$25 (“The Race Press” n.p.)

restricted in their access to the legitimizing effects and resources of black press associations like the APA/CPA/NAAPA. Yet, even though we can read her writing as symbolic of their male-dominated nature, it also represents her efforts to challenge her own marginalization and that of black female journalists. By stating that the black men who primarily led these organizations have “accomplished so little” and failed to determine methods by which to “bette[r] our colored journalism,” she positions herself as capable of both identifying the flaws in these organizations and addressing them, a claim that is borne out by her pragmatic plan for a syndicate. Mossell suggests that entrepreneurial and innovative thinking should constitute the criteria for leading black press associations, not gender or professional clout, and thereby endeavours to unsettle the male authority within them. Her attempts to prove her value to the APA/CPA/NAAPA also works to suggest that black female journalists in general offer significant and valuable contributions to black press associations.

Mossell’s attempts to align herself with the APA/CPA/NAAPA by criticizing its inefficiency suggests the value in analyzing black female journalists’ writing on black press associations. Such an analysis would necessitate exploring the models of professionalism these organizations produced, and the question of how they were informed by broader issues of race, gender, and class. Identifying these models would enable us to gain important insight into how they overlapped with or differed from dominant definitions of professionalism within the black press and American journalism, and to read black female journalists’ writing through the lens of these definitions. By interrogating black female journalists’ strategic alignment with black press associations, we would further our understanding of the ways that they negotiated their relationships to collectives as part of their efforts to write their way to legitimacy.

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