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Mothers of the City: The Phyllis Wheatley Club and Home,
the Great Migration, and Communal Family in Black Chicago, 1910-1930

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Afro-American Studies

by

Abraham Carter Kimani Sr.

2012

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Mothers of the City: The Phyllis Wheatley Club and Home,
the Great Migration, and Communal Family in Black Chicago, 1910-1930

by

Abraham Carter Kimani Sr.

Master of Arts in Afro-American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Aisha K. Finch, Chair

This thesis will examine the Phyllis Wheatley's activism in the settlement housing movement in Chicago between 1910 and 1930. Beginning in 1908, the Phyllis Wheatley Home housed Black migrant women and girls who arrived to Chicago without relatives and economic resources. The home was established due to racial segregation in housing and mainstream settlement homes; unsanitary housing conditions; and the sexual exploitation of Black women. The Phyllis Wheatley Home offered adequate housing for Black migrant women; and protection from sexual exploitation. However, the Phyllis Wheatley Club relied on the financial resource from Black civic organizations and institutions toward fulfilling their objectives. The club's settlement work exemplified what sociologist Patricia Hill-Collins labels their "other mothering" role to Black migrant girls and women. I contend that the Phyllis Wheatley Club's other mothering combined elements of feminism and Black economic nationalism in their quest for

uplifting Black migrant women, and the Black Belt community.

The thesis of Abraham Carter Kimani Sr. is approved

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University of California Los Angeles

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Introduction

Mothers of the City examines the Phyllis Wheatley Club's settlement work and community activism in Chicago between 1910 and 1930. Through analyzing the Club's settlement work in the Phyllis Wheatley Home, I propose that the Home exemplified the communal family structure historically central to Black communities. The Phyllis Wheatley Club expanded their maternal responsibilities to the physical and social welfare of Black migrant women and girls. Since the Phyllis Wheatley Home was both a private and public institution, the club was able to infuse the domestic ideologies of motherhood into its professional employment as settlement workers. Consequently, the Phyllis Wheatley Club's professionalization of motherhood and settlement work generated much needed economic resources from African-American civic organizations and institutions that kept the home in operations. The Home became an important platform for Black clubwomen's community activism within the larger social issues of residential segregation and racial inequality in housing conditions during the Great Migration. Essential to the Club's campaign was to shelter Black migrant women from poverty, to provide sanitary housing, to offer educational programs, to assist Black women in finding work, and to protect Black women from exposure to illicit institutions.

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, Chicago was a major site for the mass migration of working-class African-American southerners seeking upward mobility through housing, education, and employment opportunities that were prohibited in the south. The decision for Black southerners to relocate to Chicago was influenced through the circulation of the Black newspaper, the *Chicago Defender* and its propaganda that guaranteed decent housing, education, and employment for Blacks moving to Chicago from the rural south through the campaigning efforts of Robert Abbott, founder and editor of the *Chicago Defender*.¹

Furthermore, the racial and sexual violence against African-American men and women in the forms of lynching and rape proved to be an added incentive for Black southerners to migrate to cities across the northeast and Midwest.²

With no prospects of decent housing, education, and employment, African-American working-class southerners migrated to Chicago in hopes of gaining access to better schools, homes, and jobs. However, the migration of African-American southerners to Chicago increased racial tensions between whites and European immigrants, and African Americans. Racial segregation in Chicago's industrial labor force, schools, and residential neighborhoods challenged the efforts of African-American migrants to achieve social and economic upward mobility.³

Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier's book, *The Negro Family in Chicago* (1932) was one of the earliest studies of Black migrant families in Chicago during the early twentieth century. Frazier contributes the failure of Black migrants to achieve upward mobility in Chicago to their severance of two major Black institutions in the rural south; the extended family and the Black church. Frazier's argument is based on the intertwining factors of lower educational attainment, higher rates of juvenile delinquency among African-American youth, lack of a patriarchal influence in the home, and the inability of Black mothers to supervise their children's activities because of their participation in the labor force.⁴ Frazier's critique of the Black family in Chicago during the first Great Migration Era is based on the premise that Black working-class families failed to follow the white middle-class model of the patriarchal nuclear family. This model requires women to stay at home and serve as mothers and caretakers of children, and men to work outside the home to provide for the family, as well as protecting their wives and children.

Because Frazier is only examining nuclear Black families in migration-era Chicago, he fails to take into account the significance of Black women's community organizations and institutions, namely settlement and orphanage homes that provided an extended and communal family atmosphere for native African-American Chicagoans and southern Black migrants moving to Chicago, particularly working-class women and children. Although scholarly works on the Great Migration in Chicago between 1910 and 1930 have documented the social and political activities and activism of African-American women's clubs, relatively few scholarly works center the community activism of African –American clubwomen within the context of the Black extended and communal family structure.

One exceptional scholarly work that foregrounds African-American clubwomen's activism is that of educator Anne Meis Knupfer's *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood: African-American Women's clubs at the Turn of the Century Chicago* (1996). Knupfer makes a compelling argument that African-American women's activities were representative of the domestic ideology of motherhood within the public spheres of Chicago's African-American community. Knupfer's analysis of African-American middle-class women's clubs focused on the establishment of orphanage and settlement homes for African-American women and children, homes for elderly African-Americans, fundraising activities, industrial and classical educational programs, and political representation for African Americans in Chicago as markers of what sociologist Patricia Hill-Collins calls the "other mothering" tradition of African-American women.⁵ Furthermore, Knupfer gives some attention to the concerns of African-American clubwomen in regards to the illicit activities of African-American youth in general, and African-American girls and women in particular inside of Chicago's brothels and saloons. However, Knupfer falls short of analyzing the "other mothering" of African-American

clubwomen's communal family structure of settlement homes within the larger discourses of Black Nationalism and Black feminism.

While African-American clubwomen established numerous settlement and orphanage homes in Chicago between 1910 and 1930, I will limit my focus to examining the Phyllis Wheatley Club's settlement activism. Founded in 1896 in Chicago, the Phyllis Wheatley Club was comprised of Black middle-class women whose social reforms were geared toward the racial uplift of the Black Belt community. More specifically, the Phyllis Wheatley Club's reform programs targeted African-American working-class migrant women moving to Chicago without familial ties, employment, and housing.⁶

The Phyllis Wheatley Home was established in 1908 over Black clubwomen's concerns over the larger social issues of racial segregation in residential spaces and white settlement houses; the deterioration of housing and environmental conditions in the Black Belt; and the sexual exploitation of Black women in houses of prostitution proliferating in the Black Belt.⁷ Ultimately, the Phyllis Wheatley Club's objective was to provide sanitary housing, and to protect Black migrant women against sexual exploitation in the Black Belt's houses of prostitution. I argue that the Phyllis Wheatley Home represented a female-headed Black communal family structure combining elements of Black economic nationalism and feminism in the struggle for upward social mobility and respectability in accordance with the Black middle-class ideology of racial uplift. Furthermore, the Phyllis Wheatley Home served as a domesticated public institution where Black clubwomen were employed as settlement workers, and at the same time, fulfilled and transcended their expected maternal role of looking after the physical and social welfare of Black children and women.

The success of the Phyllis Wheatley Home can be largely attributed to their ability to

organize social events to solicit economic resources from Black civic organizations and institutions.⁸ As Knupfer's study of Black clubwomen's settlement work in Chicago during the early twentieth century points out, the majority of Black settlements were short lived due to the lack of economic resources from the Black community, as well as from white philanthropists.⁹ Unlike most Black settlements however, the Phyllis Wheatley Home was unique in that the Club rarely relied on white philanthropist to financially support the Home.¹⁰

The Phyllis Wheatley Club's economic organizing of fundraising and charity drives enlisted the support of Black women's clubs and civic and religious institutions to provide much needed money toward household supplies and mortgage payments for the home. The economic abundance of resources Black civic organizations and institutions donated made the Phyllis Wheatley Home the longest running Black settlement on Chicago's South Side during the early twentieth century.¹¹ Thus, the Club and the Home fulfilled, according to historian Kevin Gaines, one crucial aspect of racial uplift ideology, the "accumulation of wealth."¹² Without the accumulation of economic resources from the Black community, the Phyllis Wheatley Home would not have survived as a settlement that served to shelter Black migrant women from sexual exploitation; to provide sanitary housing for Black women; to offer educational programs; and serve as an employment agency to help Black female migrants find work. Therefore, it is important to examine the racial uplift ideologies of the Phyllis Wheatley Club and their settlement work through the lenses of Black economic nationalism and feminism in the face of institutionalized racism against African Americans in Chicago during the early twentieth century.¹³

Statement of Problem/Background

Historian Kevin Gaines argues that middle-class Blacks in the early twentieth century

used the discourse of racial uplift ideologies to claim equal access to citizenship and human rights. According to Gaines, the characteristics of racial uplift included, “temperance, thrift, social purity, and patriarchal authority.” By living up to these values, middle-class Blacks, like their European immigrant counterparts were capable of assimilating into American society.¹⁴ Through clinging to this argument, middle-class Black community activists fought to desegregate schools and residential spaces; to improve housing conditions in the Black Belt; to gain suffrage rights; and to have political representation. However, American social and political institutions remained highly segregated and excluded African Americans well into the latter half of the twentieth century. As a result, African Americans established, funded, and held positions of leadership in their own social and political institutions. The Phyllis Wheatley Club’s involvement in the Black settlement housing movement demonstrates this case in point.

Historian Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn’s study of Black settlements throughout the United States between 1890 and 1945 highlights the racial exclusion of African-American youth from mainstream settlements that catered to the Americanization of Eastern and Southern European immigrants. Quinn’s analysis illustrates how white social reformers made distinctions between European immigrant and African-American families to justify their exclusion of Blacks from their settlement homes. White social reformers like Jane Addams criticized Black families for failing to adhere to the white middle-class model of the patriarchal family. Consequently, Quinn concludes that Addams and other white social reformers blamed the lack of a paternal influence of Black families for the sexual promiscuity and exploitation of Black girls and women.

In contrast, white social reformers praised Eastern and Southern European immigrant families for sharing similar values of the patriarchal family, specifically the father’s protection of the sexual purity of their daughters. Thus, white social reformers argued that foreign born

Europeans, unlike U.S. born Blacks, were capable of becoming assimilated as citizens of American society.¹⁵ In return, African-American youth in Chicago were denied the social reform programs in domestic science, education, and job training offered in mainstream settlements that were proliferating during the early twentieth century.

As such, Black women's clubs like the Phyllis Wheatley Club established settlements in the Black Belt as a response to the racial segregation in mainstream settlement homes. Historian Wilson Jeremiah Moses contends that as "domestic feminists," Black clubwomen applied the Black Nationalist component of "institutional separatism" in establishing Black settlements.¹⁶ Central to the success of the Phyllis Wheatley Home was the clubwomen's ability to intersect the ideologies of domestic feminism and Black economic nationalism. Domestic feminism refers to the maternal role of women as homemakers through providing shelter, education, and protection for their children.¹⁷

As a private space, the Phyllis Wheatley Home represented the club's acquiescence to mainstream and Black middle-class expectations women's role as mothers and caretakers of the home. This aspect of the club's domestic feminism made the Home appealing to Black middle-class men and women. By taking on the maternal responsibility of providing a settlement home for migrant Black women, the Phyllis Wheatley Club and the home generated much needed money from Black civic organizations and institutions. However, the Phyllis Wheatley Home was also a public space. Thus, the Phyllis Wheatley Club professionalized Black motherhood through its employment of Black middle-class women in settlement work.¹⁸ Through hosting fundraising drives, house parties, and social events, the Phyllis Wheatley Club used the money to properly sanitize the home and pay the mortgage payments to keep the home operating as a business.¹⁹ The Club's concern for the physical welfare of Black migrant women added to the

necessity of keeping the Home open. By doing so, the Phyllis Wheatley Home served as the platform for the club to position themselves as social, political, and economic leaders within the Black settlement housing movement, and Chicago's Black Belt region in general.

Research Methodology

An archival and textual analysis in the African-American newspaper, *Chicago Defender* is useful for examining the social activities and community activism of the Phyllis Wheatley Club and Home in Chicago. In general, Black newspapers are an excellent source of analyzing the social, political, cultural, and historical significance of organizations and institutions in African-American communities that received lesser attention in scholarly literature on the Great Migration. As a well-known Black women's organization, the meetings and events hosted by the Phyllis Wheatley Club were often publicized in the *Chicago Defender*. The posting of the club's meetings and events in the *Defender* reflected their status as respected community leaders in the Black Belt. Furthermore, articles written by the Phyllis Wheatley Club in the *Defender* called for African-American civic organizations and institutions to support the social events hosted by the clubwomen in their settlement home, and in various Black civic spaces.

The secondary literature on Black feminism offers an historical and sociological analysis on the role of African-American working and middle class women in the domestic sphere and public institutions. Black feminist scholars discussed the ideology of extended family and communal motherhood through examining African-American women's community activism. In order to understand this ideology, I will look at the Black feminist theory of motherhood. Patricia Hill Collins', *Shifting The Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing About Motherhood* (1994); and Ula Taylor's, *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* (2002) shed light on the social constructions of Black motherhood that negotiate and intertwine the

domestic and public responsibilities of women in the African-American community. Furthermore, Collins's and Taylor's respective works suggest that Black women's active participation in the labor force, and their activism and leadership in Black civic organizations and institutions were a critical aspect of their maternal responsibility in uplifting their homes and communities.

Literature Review

This thesis will draw from historical and sociological bodies of literature in order to demonstrate the importance of the Phyllis Wheatley Club's settlement work and community activism in Chicago during the Great Migration. Scholarship on Black feminist theory is absolutely necessary for analyzing the ideology of domestic motherhood within the context of communal institutions as a source of social, economic, and political empowerment of the African-American community. Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins argues that the public/private ideologies of "motherwork" amongst African-American, Asian, Latino, and Native American women are not dichotomized between men's work in the public sphere and women's work in the private sphere. Rather, Collins posits that the public/private ideologies of motherhood were interconnected and interdependent on women of color's participation in the public work force as part of their maternal responsibility to provide for the home. Collins critiques white feminist scholarship on motherhood for ignoring the intersections of race and class in their analyses of the balance of work and family as a central aspect of mothering among women of color. Focusing on working class women of color, Collins stresses the significance of women's employment in the labor force for the physical, social, and economic autonomy and survival of African-American, Asian, Latino, and Native American communities and families.²⁰

Historian Ula Taylor's biography of Amy Jacques Garvey's long history of activism in

the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) exemplified what she calls “community feminism.” Taylor posits that community feminists worked on behalf of empowering men, women, and children within the African American community. Furthermore, Taylor situates community feminism within the intersections of Black feminism and nationalism. According to Taylor, however, Black men’s sexist attitudes toward Amy Jacques Garvey’s role in the UNIA perpetuated the problematic challenges of gender relations within Black Nationalist organizations. Taylor’s analysis of Amy Jacques Garvey’s role in the UNIA illustrates that as a community feminist, Garvey accepted the expectations of Black women’s role as mothers and caretakers of the home. Yet, Garvey emphasized that as educated women, Black women’s activism and influence in public spaces where male leadership dominated served as an asset to Black men, challenged male patriarchy, and helped to uplift the community in general.²¹

Historian Kevin Gaines explores the early twentieth century ideologies of racial uplift among middle-class African Americans through the lens of race, class, and gender. Gaines argues that African-American middle-class status was based on the racial uplift ideologies of self-help, temperance, hard work, sexual morality, and education rather than occupations, income, and material possessions. Gaines’ analysis of Black racial uplift discusses the Black middle class’s issues of racial identity, cultural assimilation, political representation, Black Nationalism, racial and sexual violence, gender relations, and intra-racial class tensions. Furthermore, Gaines highlights an important component of uplift ideology: to protect Black women from sexual violence, and denounce the sexual stereotypes of Black women’s sexual promiscuity used to justify the victimization of Black women through rape.

A comparison of African-American women’s participation in the southern and northern labor force is necessary to examine the strengths and pitfalls of the Great Migration for African

American working-class women and families. Historian Jacqueline Jones points out that African-American women's participation in the labor force was necessary for the family economy because of racial discrimination against Black men, and the low wages they received in the northern and southern labor forces. However, Jones also highlights the marginalization of Black women from industrial labor unions, the low wages and low hierarchical positions of Black migrant women in the industrial labor force, and the sexual harassment Black female domestic workers continued to face in white households. Jones discusses the different responses of African-American women in challenging the racist and sexist division of labor. According to Jones, these strategies ranged from their reliance on extended family networks to provide household labor and economic stability to engaging in illicit activities as an alternative form of employment, namely engaging in sex labor in brothels and cabarets through the South side of Chicago.

According to historian Cynthia Blair's study of African-American female prostitutes in Chicago between 1870 and 1930, the factors that drove working-class Black women into the illicit sex trade included discrimination and exclusion from the industrial labor force and their refusal to work as domestics and laundresses for little pay. Blair acknowledges the risks and dangers facing African-American female prostitutes of catching venereal diseases, sexual assaults, arrest, and jail sentences. However, Blair contends that African-American working-class female prostitute's decision to participate in the illicit sex economy was an act of challenging Black middle-class ideals of respectability and gaining a sense of agency over their bodies.

Historian Chad Heap (2009) addresses the historical practice of slumming among middle-class whites who traveled into immigrant and Black working-class communities in Chicago and

New York between 1885 and 1940. Heap argues that by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, slumming had a different connotation and purpose for middle-class whites that it did in the mid-nineteenth century. Heap notes that slumming activities among middle-class whites during the late nineteenth century were centered on morally reforming white immigrant working-class communities from illicit activities such as gambling, alcoholism, and prostitution. By the early twentieth century, Heap argues that the activities of white middle-class slummers in immigrant and Black communities in Chicago and New York shifted from moral reform to engaging in these same activities of prostitution, gambling, and alcoholism. Consequently, Heap points out that by partaking in illicit activities in African-American working-class communities, white slummers reinforced the notions of moral inferiority to be associated with African Americans. More specifically, the presence of white male slummers and their illicit sexual relations with Black prostitutes threatened the efforts of middle-class Black Belt leaders to eliminate the vice of prostitution in the Black Belt, and to denounce the stereotypes of Black women's sexual promiscuity.

Historian Kevin Mumford (1997) explores interracial sex relations between Blacks and whites in Chicago and New York between 1900 and 1930. According to Mumford, Black/white sexual relations in Chicago and New York must be understood within the historical context of the Jim Crow era. Mumford discusses the sexual violence committed against Black women at the hands of white men during the early twentieth century. Also, African-American men who were accused of sexually assaulting white women in the south were lynched. Although Mumford also highlights what he calls the "sexual racism" of whites against blacks in northern cities during the early twentieth century, Mumford declares that due to the Great Migration, black/white sexual relations in northern cities such as Chicago and New York were more frequent, and to an extent,

more acceptable than in the south.²² Mumford posits that the examination of race relations in urban leisure spaces of cabarets, speakeasies, and saloons are important to determine the extent to which African-American migrants enjoyed the freedom of sexually intermingling with white northerners without the threat of racial violence and criminal prosecution. The segregation of Blacks and whites from social institutions was influenced by the notion that Blacks were morally inferior to whites.

African-American clubwomen's settlement activism in Chicago stemmed from the racial exclusion of Blacks from mainstream settlements that catered to the Americanization of Eastern and Southern European immigrants. Historian Thomas Lee Philpott (1991) analyzes the dynamics of race, class, and immigration within the context of residential segregation in the Settlement Housing Movement taking place in Chicago between 1880 and 1930. Philpott contends that middle-class white American reformers were more interested in assimilating Eastern and Southern immigrants into American cultural values and society, while refusing African American admission into homes such as Jane Addams' Hull House, declaring Blacks were incapable of assimilation and moral reform. Philpott emphasized that the Americanization of white ethnic groups who immigrated to the United States through educational programs and preparation for the labor force could move them out of the slums and poverty. By contrast, racial segregation in housing, schools, and jobs kept Blacks confined to the deteriorating conditions in the ghetto.

Historian Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn (1993) similarly challenges the claim that white middle-class settlement workers in the northeast and Midwest between 1890 and 1945 held liberal views of race in the Settlement Housing Movement. Lasch-Quinn criticizes mainstream settlement houses like Jane Addams' Hull House for refusing to extend their services to Blacks, while

serving white immigrants of all nationalities. Lasch-Quinn's discussion of the American Settlement Housing Movement from World War I to World War II discusses the decline of Eastern and Southern European wave of immigration into the United States, and the increasing presence of Black youth in settlement houses. Lasch-Quinn argues that Black women settlement workers responded by establishing settlement homes and community centers for Black youth in the southern, northeastern, and Midwestern cities in the face of segregation and racism from mainstream settlement houses.

Chapters

This thesis will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter will analyze the Phyllis Wheatley Club's settlement work within the larger context of residential segregation and racial discrimination in the mainstream settlement housing movement. I argue that the mass migration of working-class Black southerners to Chicago heightened racial tensions between Blacks and whites over the issue of housing segregation. More specifically, I contend that residential segregation and deteriorating housing conditions affected middle-class Blacks as much as it did their poor and working-class counterparts. This chapter examines the unsanitary housing and environmental conditions under which African Americans of all socioeconomic backgrounds were forced to live; and the economically exploitative practices of white landlords who charged Black tenants higher rent payments for homes that were similar to those of European immigrants. Also, I will discuss the significance of restrictive covenants in limiting the spatial expansion of the Black Belt, and excluding middle-class African Americans with the financial means to move into white neighborhoods. Consequently, the deterioration of housing conditions and de facto segregation in residential spaces contributed to the rapid spread of diseases that claimed the lives of numerous African Americans in the Black Belt.

The second chapter will discuss the establishment of the Phyllis Wheatley Home as a response to the unsanitary housing conditions in which Blacks were forced to live, and the exclusion of Blacks from settlement homes of white social reformers. This chapter will utilize Patricia Hill-Collins's model of "motherwork;" Ula Taylor's model of "community feminism;" and Wilson Moses's model of "domestic feminism" to highlight the intersection of the ideologies of motherhood, feminism and Black economic nationalism in the Phyllis Wheatley Club's settlement work. I analyze the significance of collective economic organizing among the Phyllis Wheatley Club members, and their work with other Black women's clubs and civic institutions to demonstrate the intersection of these ideologies. Through hosting charity and fundraising drives, parties, and social events, the Phyllis Wheatley Club solicited funds to sanitize and beautify the home; pay the mortgage; and expand the size of the home to house the increasing numbers of Black migrant women. I contend that the Phyllis Wheatley Home served a twofold purpose. On the one hand, the Phyllis Wheatley Club fulfilled the mainstream social expectations of women's role as mothers and caretakers of the home. At the same time, the Phyllis Wheatley Home operated as a business and public space. Thus, the Phyllis Wheatley Club's settlement work and maternal responsibilities became professionalized. The Phyllis Wheatley Club served as an important site of Black clubwomen's leadership in public spaces. The Phyllis Wheatley Club campaigned for better housing and environmental conditions for the Black community in general, and women in particular.

The final chapter of this thesis will examine the Phyllis Wheatley Home as a refuge for Black migrant girls and women from sexual exploitation in the Black Belt's illicit houses of prostitution. Moreover, this chapter will explain the factors that led to the rise of prostitution in the Black Belt. I analyze how the limited job opportunities that confined Black women to

domestic work, the expulsion of Blacks and whites involved in the red-light district's sex economy, and the "slumming" activities of whites in the Black Belt contributed to the moral deterioration of the Black Belt. However, articles from the *Chicago Defender* reveal that Black male leaders were primarily concerned with the sexual exploitation of Black women at the hands of white men. In contrast, the Phyllis Wheatley Club sought to completely shut down houses of ill-repute, and expel those of all racial backgrounds involved in the growing Black Belt sex trade. As part of their "other mothering" activism in the anti-prostitution campaign, the Phyllis Wheatley Club established the home to restore the respectability of Black womanhood, and the Black Belt in general.

Implications for Study

Mothers of the City contributes to the understanding of Black motherhood beyond the immediate nuclear and extended family structures. As a communal institution, the Phyllis Wheatley Home garnered economic resources from various Black middle-class organizations. The Phyllis Wheatley Club member's ability to involve the Black middle-class community in their settlement project exemplified the necessity of middle-class Blacks to look after the social and physical welfare of Black migrant women arriving in Chicago. As a result, the Phyllis Wheatley Club, and the Black middle-class community in general, constructed and maintained a communal family atmosphere for Black migrant women who did not have family to turn to for housing upon relocating to Chicago. Examining the Phyllis Wheatley Club's settlement work through the intersection of various ideologies of Black feminism and motherhood with Black economic nationalism demonstrates their centrality to the Black social, political, and economic activist landscape during the Great Migration. In the process, Black civic organizations and institutions generously supported the leadership and professional work of the Phyllis Wheatley

Club as “other mothers,” settlement workers, and agents in the uplift of the Black Belt community, and in particular, Black migrant women.

Notes for Introduction

¹ Grossman, James R. *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) Chapter 3.

² Sernett, Milton C. *Bound for the Promised Land: African-American Religion and the Great Migration*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997) pg. 9.

³ Spear, Allan H. *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) Chapter 11.

⁴ Frazier, E. Franklin. *The Negro Family in Chicago*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932) Chapter 4.

⁵ Knupfer, Anne M. *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood: African-American Women's Clubs in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*. (New York: New York University Press, 1997) Chapter 1; Hill-Collins, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd Edition. (New York: Routledge Press, 2000) pg. 178.

⁶ Davis, Elizabeth L. *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Women's Clubs*. (Introduction by Sheila Smith McKay, New York: G.K. & Hall Co., 1997) pg. 95.

⁷ Knupfer, Anne M. *If You Can't Push, Pull, If You Can't Pull, Please Get Out of the Way: The Phyllis Wheatley Club and Home in Chicago, 1896-1920*. Journal of Negro History, Vol. 82, No. 2 (Spring 1997) pg. 221.

⁸ Jackson, Philip. *Black Charity in Progressive Era Chicago*. Social Sciences Review, Vol. 52, No. 3 (Sept, 1978) pg. 400.

⁹ Ibid, pg. 99.

¹⁰ Davis, pg. 96.

¹¹ Knupfer. *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, pgs. 81-84.

¹² Gaines, Kevin K. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) pg. 2.

¹³ Moses, Wilson J. *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) pg. 103.

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¹⁵ Lasch-Quinn, Elizabeth. *Black Neighbors: Race and the Limits of Reform in the American Settlement Housing Movement, 1890-1945*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993) pgs. 14-15.

¹⁶ Moses, pg. 103.

¹⁷ Knupfer, *If You Can't Push, Pull, If You Can't Pull, Please Get Out of the Way*, pg. 223

¹⁸ O'Donnell, Sandra. *The Care of Dependent African-American Children in Chicago: The Struggle Between Self-Help and Professionalism*. Journal of Social History, Vol. 27, No.4 (Summer 1994) pg. 763.

¹⁹ Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, pgs. 81-84.

²⁰ Hill-Collins, Patricia. *Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood* (from eds. Evelyn Nakano Glenn et.al. *Mothering: Ideology, Experience, and Agency*, New York: Rutledge Press, 1994) pgs. 44-61.

²¹ Taylor, Ula Y. *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) pg 2; and Chapter 4.

²² Mumford, Kevin J. *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) Introduction.

Chapter 1- A Promised Land Without Promising Homes: Race, Class, and Housing in Migration-era Chicago

Introduction

Between 1910 and 1930, The Great Migration of poor and working-class African Americans from the rural south quintupled Chicago's Black population from 44,000 to over 233,000.¹ African-American migrants referred to Chicago in biblical iconographic terms like the "Promised land" because of their belief in better housing, education and employment opportunities, political representation, and escape from racial and sexual violence in the south. Yet, among other things this "Promised land" did not guarantee adequate housing for African Americans migrating in Chicago. African Americans across class and cultural lines were subjected to the same forms of residential segregation as a result of the racial hysteria produced by these waves of Black migrants from the south. The Phyllis Wheatley Club established the Phyllis Wheatley Home as a response to racial segregation and inequality in residential spaces and the mainstream settlement housing movement.

This chapter will discuss the historical origins of the Black middle-class in order to understand the struggle of Chicago's middle-class Black Belt community against residential segregation and housing inequality during the 1910s and 1920s. First, this study will examine the unsanitary housing conditions of Black homes. Second, I will address the economic exploitative practices of white landlords in renting out houses to Black tenants. Third, I will analyze restrictive covenants seeking to keep Blacks of all classes out of Chicago's white neighborhoods. Lastly, I will discuss racial discrimination against African American migrants in mainstream American settlement homes. the Phyllis Wheatley Club's establishment of the Phyllis Wheatley Home as a response to racial segregation and inequality in residential spaces and the mainstream settlement housing movement.

The Black Middle-Class

In her study of Black middle-class residents in the South Side of Chicago suburb of Groveland, sociologist Mary Pattillo-McCoy devotes her first chapter to examining the historical origins of the Black middle-class. Throughout the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction eras, Black middle class was defined by lighter skin complexion, spatial proximity to whites, and acceptance of white middle-class values.² African-American southerners migrating to Chicago in the late nineteenth century either came from middle-class backgrounds, or accumulated enough wealth and status in Chicago to become part of the Black middle-class. These African-American migrants were educated, employed in professional and public service occupations, and involved in civic organizations.³ Furthermore, the population of Blacks did not exceed 10,000 until 1890.⁴ It is important to mention that the relatively small numbers of African Americans in northern and Midwestern cities in the late nineteenth century accounts for the less strict boundaries of residential space shared between elite Black and white residents. In fact, the population of Blacks did not exceed 10,000 until 1890.⁵

It was not until the early twentieth century that white real estate agents and property owners in Chicago began to harden the boundaries of residential segregation based on race. This was largely due to the migration of thousands of poor and working-class Blacks, mostly from the rural south, to northeastern and Midwestern cities. With this mass migration, middle-class whites began moving to more affluent neighborhoods in Chicago.⁶ Thus, the spatial boundaries of residential segregation based on race and color became the basis for exclusion of Blacks from living in white neighborhoods. Consequently, Chicago's South Side became an "all-Black ghetto."⁷

Though spatially segregated from Chicago's white elite, middle-class Blacks shared the

mainstream cultural values of middle-class white Americans. The discourse and ideologies of racial uplift exemplified the extent to which middle-class Blacks attempted to assimilate into white American society; united with the Black masses based on race; and separated themselves from the Black masses based on class differences. As historian Kevin Gaines explains,

African Americans have described themselves since the post-Reconstruction era as middle-class through their ideals of racial uplift, espousing a vision of racial solidarity uniting black elites with the masses. For many black elites, uplift came to mean an emphasis on self-help, racial solidarity, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority, and the accumulation of wealth.⁸

Despite of institutionalized racism and violence against Blacks, middle-class African Americans viewed themselves as being superior to their poor and working-class counterparts. The Black middle-class distinguished themselves based on the principles of hard work, education, sexual purity, sobriety, and male-domination in the family.⁹ The Black middle-class emphasized racial solidarity with their poor and working-class counterparts because African Americans across class lines were subjected to racial violence and institutionalized racism in schools, housing, and the labor force. However, racial unity between the Black elite and the masses was conditional. Racial unity required poor and working-class Blacks to adhere to mainstream middle-class norms of work, family, and proper moral behavior.

The settlement work of the Phyllis Wheatley Club exemplified the desire of the Black middle-class to unify with the working-class Blacks migrating to Chicago. Central to the settlement and community activism of the Phyllis Wheatley Club was their drive to alleviate unemployment, poverty, and inequality in housing conditions. Because working and middle-class Blacks in the Black Belt were forced to live in segregated neighborhoods, unequal houses conditions, and pay higher rent payments, the Phyllis Wheatley Club 's settlement work primarily focused on providing a decent and affordable home for Black working-class migrant

women who moved to Chicago without family, money, and shelter.¹⁰ Conditions of poverty, segregation, and discrimination reached their peak in the Black Belt between 1905 and 1918.¹¹ The Phyllis Wheatley Home opened its settlement home in 1908 to accordingly reduce the rates of unemployment, and dilapidated and unsanitary housing conditions among Black working-class migrant women moving into the Black Belt.¹²

The Phyllis Wheatley Club's settlement work was centered on the ideology of domestic feminism, which emphasized the role of women as being mothers and homemakers. However, the Phyllis Wheatley Home was as much a public institution as it was a private institution. The home provided a space for the Phyllis Wheatley Club to expand their role as mothers and homemakers to Black working-class migrant women. As part of their domestic feminism, the Phyllis Wheatley Club not only offered a home, but industrial education programs in domestic science for Black working-class migrant women. Classes in "sewing, cooking, and other domestic skills" prepared Black working-class migrant women for employment, most likely in domestic service since this was the primary source of work available to the majority of Black women in Chicago during the early twentieth century. Between 1908 and 1914, the Club sheltered over 300 girls resided in the Home and found work for an additional 500 girls. As domestic feminists, the Phyllis Wheatley Club acted as "mothers" to Black migrant women by providing the home as a refuge from homelessness. Also, the Phyllis Wheatley Club took on the responsibility of offering Black working-class migrant women educational programs and job training. These activities demonstrated the Phyllis Wheatley Club's domestic feminist approach to the racial and gender uplift of Black working-class women. In the struggle for racial uplift, the Phyllis Wheatley Club's settlement work reflected the desires and challenges of the Black middle-class to fight for social and economic equality in housing and neighborhood conditions,

and in the labor force.

However, the Phyllis Wheatley Club only admitted Black migrant women who desired upward mobility through education and work. Black women who were criminally prosecuted for prostitution were not accepted into the Home, which I will discuss further in chapter 3. African-American middle-class organizations like the Phyllis Wheatley Club distanced themselves from poor and working-class Blacks who did not follow the middle-class norms of work, education, family, and proper moral behavior. Class divisions existed within the Black Belt based on cultural values and socioeconomic status, namely in the form of class segregation of neighborhoods.

Frazier's study of the Black Belt's seven zones demonstrates the class segregation of residential areas based on occupation, marital status, education, and rates of crime. The fifth, sixth, and seventh zones were occupied by middle-class Black Belt residents, whereas the first four zones were occupied by poor and working-class Blacks.¹³ Blacks living in the latter three zones possessed higher levels of educational attainment, employment in professional and skilled occupations, home ownership, marriages, and children living in a patriarchal household.¹⁴ In contrast, first four zones had higher rates of female-headed households, unskilled and semiskilled employment, illicit activity (i.e. prostitution). Also, most Blacks living in the first four zones were not well-educated.¹⁵

In short, the latter three zones of Chicago's South Side represented a group of middle-class Blacks striving to apply the middle-class values of racial uplift through their professions, marital status, education, patriarchal family structure, and moral conduct in public spaces. In contrast, the first four zones of the Black Belt did not live up to the ideologies of middle-class racial uplift, as indicated in the lack of educational attainment, higher rates of crime, increased

numbers of female headed households, and sexual promiscuity, namely through prostitution. Thus, African Americans living in the seven zones of Chicago's South Side lived in segregated neighborhoods marked by socioeconomic and moral differences. Yet, since all seven zones were in close proximity to each other, working and middle-class Black Belt residents were equally affected by the physically, socially, and morally deteriorating conditions that caused the spread of disease, crime, and death throughout the Black Belt. Residential segregation and housing inequality made it difficult for many middle-class educated Blacks to live in decent neighborhoods outside the Black Belt of Chicago.¹⁶ Despite of the socioeconomic factors of educational attainment and home ownership, working and middle-class Blacks were unable to escape living under deterioration housing and environmental conditions.¹⁷

Even when taking the factors of education and occupation into account, between 12 and 25 percent of Blacks living in the fifth, sixth, and seventh zones possessed homes.¹⁸ Thus, the overwhelming majority of middle-class Blacks in the fifth, sixth, and seventh zones were forced rent homes, most likely from white landlords. Consequently, Blacks from all socioeconomic backgrounds suffered the indignity of living under unsanitary conditions, and the economic exploitation of white landlords who charged higher prices for renting to Black tenants.

Unsanitary Housing in the Black Belt of Chicago

Earlier on, I mentioned that racial segregation and housing inequality contributed to the formation of the Black Belt as a ghetto. In drawing the distinction between slums occupied by Eastern and Southern European immigrants and ghettos occupied by African Americans in Chicago, historian Thomas Philpott writes, "When white people were poor, they lived in districts of low-grade housing, the slums. Economic advances-better jobs with higher pay, and savings enabled them to move out to better neighborhoods... But the experience of African Americans

was different. It was their color, not class that confined them to a slum that was permanent and inescapable, the ghetto.¹⁹”

Newspaper articles from the *Chicago Defender* addressed complaints from African-American tenants on the issue of housing in the Black Belt. White landlords were criticized for failing to remodel and sanitize homes rented to African-American tenants. For example, an article from the *Chicago Defender* written in 1912 entitled, “Prejudice the Ban In Securing Homes” reports, “Negroes of this city live chiefly in old tenements sadly out of repair, quarters with insanitary surroundings with poor light and ventilation, and that the abodes are commonly overcrowded. In one district in which colored people live, the tenants reported that they found it impossible to persuade their landlords either to make the necessary repairs or to release them from their contracts.”²⁰ Other broken appliances and sanitary problems that were neglected by white landlords included, “broken toilet and baths, no heat for hot water, no water for cooking and drinking, bad plumbing, broken windows, and no gas.”²¹ These unsanitary conditions existed in over 80 percent of the homes rented to Black tenants.²²

Thus, white property owners in Chicago forced Blacks to live in unsanitary homes “without making repairs or releasing them from their contracts.”²³ This led to two devastating consequences. First, white landlords indiscriminately associated Black neighborhoods with dirtiness, irrespective of their class status. White landowners refused to repair broken bath tubs, and supply water for houses on the South Side of Chicago, Black tenants were forced to find water outside the home for “carrying to the bath tub” in order to take a bath or shower.²⁴ As a result, Black tenants found it difficult to exercise good personal hygiene.

For middle-class Blacks, cleanliness was one essential aspects of racial uplift. As historian Wanda Hendricks points out, teaching good habits of personal hygiene and cleanliness

was a top priority for the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, one of numerous social responsibilities "to be the moral caretakers and uplifters of the masses."²⁵ Ultimately, the challenge for middle-class African-American organizations and community activists rested on dismantling the respective dichotomy of Black neighborhoods as inherently dirty, and white neighborhoods as inherently clean. Moreover, the survival of African Americans in a segregated society where environmental conditions proved to be hazardous and life threatening was of major concern.

The Phyllis Wheatley Club held numerous conferences at the Home that focused on the theme of domestic science with a specific emphasis on household sanitation. These papers addressed issues such as "the scientific method of household keeping, the value of sanitation, consumption, ventilation, and the importance of water (both for drinking and bathing), sanitary plumbing, and pure food."²⁶ The Phyllis Wheatley Club's education in domestic science was a salient aspect of their feminism in settlement and community activism for sanitary housing conditions for Black working-class migrant women. Moreover, the objective of the Phyllis Wheatley Club was to teach the values of cleanliness and health to Black migrant women to dismantle the respective dichotomy of Black neighborhoods as inherently dirty, and white neighborhoods as inherently clean.

Collaborating with various African-American women's clubs, the Phyllis Wheatley Club mobilized fundraising and charity drives to solicit money and household supplies toward the home. The Phyllis Wheatley Home received supplies such as "soap, towels, beds, sheets, wash boilers, curtains, bed sheets, and electric lights."²⁷ As mothers and caretakers of the Phyllis Wheatley Home, Black clubwomen provided critical household supplies for Black working-class. More importantly, the sanitation of the home served to protect young Black working-class

migrant girls and women from contracting environmental diseases.²⁸ The survival of African Americans in a segregated society where environmental conditions proved to be hazardous and life threatening was of major concern in the Black Belt.

A proposal written to President Woodrow Wilson from Oswald Garrison, chairman of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's in June 1914 captured the impact of residential segregation and environmental conditions on the livelihood of African-American residents living on the South Side of Chicago:

Very often the property rented or owned by them [Blacks] is in a segregated and neglected part of the city from the viewpoint of paved and cleaned streets, efficient light and water supply, the proper drainage, and collecting and disposal of garbage, and the proper inspection of the alleys, the fumigation and general sanitary inspection of housing conditions, and the rigid enforcement of the laws on land lords who failed to keep their property in a habitable condition.²⁹

Because white landlords were not legally reprimanded for neglecting their obligation to service utilities and collect trash in Black neighborhoods on the South Side of Chicago, Black residents were blamed for the dirty and impoverished conditions that existed in their homes and neighborhoods. Second and more seriously, diseases that proliferated in African American communities were directly linked to the refusal of white landowners to sanitize homes rented out to Black tenants on the South Side of Chicago. As a result, Blacks living on the South Side of Chicago were stricken with diseases such as “tuberculosis, pneumonia, and bronchitis at a particularly high rate.”³⁰

The rapid spread of bronchitis, tuberculosis, and pneumonia in the Black Belt were not based on racial, but environmental factors, including “crowded, unsanitary housing; hard work for long hours; often exposed to the weather, insufficient food, clothing, and rest; confinement and lack of ventilation; and the strain of urban life.”³¹ Diseases such as pneumonia, bronchitis, and tuberculosis were associated with living in or near impoverished and deteriorated

neighborhoods. Although poor whites were stricken with these diseases and died from them, the mortality rates for Blacks were two to three times higher.³² The lack of air and heat, and unrepaired broken windows left Black tenants exposed to extremely hot temperatures during the summer, and cold temperatures in the winter; therefore contributing to the spread tuberculosis, pneumonia, and bronchitis. While statistics do not show the socio-economic status of African Americans who contracted pneumonia, bronchitis, and tuberculosis, the majority of victims were likely poor and working-class Blacks. If this was the case, it is likely that middle-class Blacks were exposed to the same fate due to their close residential proximity to poor and working-class Blacks.

The issue of securing sanitary housing as a basis for racial equality exemplified the struggle for middle-class Blacks to assert their humanity. Yet, white landlord's intentional neglect of dilapidated buildings and unsanitary conditions in the homes they rented to Black tenants helped to perpetuate stereotypes of Black neighborhoods as dirty and diseased. The associations of Black residents and the Black Belt community with dirt and disease deeply wounded middle-class Blacks and their struggle to challenge these stereotypes. Middle-class Blacks with financial resources could not move out of the Black Belt into white neighborhoods; and they were confined to live near their working-class counterparts under such conditions.

Thus, the Phyllis Wheatley Club's settlement work was an essential aspect of its community activism to provide a home for Black migrant women as an alternative to the dilapidated and unsanitary houses where Black tenants lived. Moreover, members of the Phyllis Wheatley Club likely lived in the Black Belt. Therefore, the Club was personally invested in curbing the issues of disease, poverty, and unsanitary housing conditions.

Economic Exploitation in Renting Housing to African-American Tenants

In addition to inadequate and unsanitary housing, both middle and working-class Black Chicagoans experienced economic exploitation from white landlords who charged higher rents for African-American tenants in comparison to native white and European immigrants living in similar housing structures. As the size of the Black population grew due to the increased migration of southern working-class Blacks in Chicago, white landlords increased the rent payments for Black tenants even more. An October 1912 article from the *Chicago Defender* compared the monthly payments white immigrants and African Americans showing that “immigrants pay not more than \$8.50 a month for four bedroom apartments, yet quarters of the same size in the neighborhoods where Negroes dwell bring in at least \$12 a month in rent.”³³ Three years later, Black tenants paid \$16 a month to live in a four bedroom apartment.³⁴ By the early 1920s, the monthly cost for rent for a seven and eight bedroom house was “\$25.00 for whites and \$37.50 for colored people.”³⁵ Another article from an April 1925 issue of the *Chicago Defender* complained that Blacks in Chicago were paying “twice as much for the same apartment as white tenants.”³⁶ In fact, an article from the February 1921 issue of the *Chicago Defender*, entitled “Pulling the Rent Hog’s Teeth,” expressed outrage over the severity of economic exploitation by white landlords who “in many incidents raised rents from one hundred to five hundred percent.”³⁷

White landlords additionally increased their financial profits by exploiting the system of “lodging” commonly practiced by poor and working-class African-American migrants on Chicago’s South Side. In this system, one family allowed additional families to live in the same household in order to assist in the monthly rent due to the landlords.³⁸ Although European immigrant families used the lodging system, this system was more prevalent among Black

families because Blacks were charged paid more than European immigrants to live in rented apartments.³⁹

This system ensnared Black migrant women with little access to money, shelter, and family to lodge with other Black families.⁴⁰ Aware that many Black migrant women moved to Chicago without family, money, and shelter, the Phyllis Wheatley Club's settlement home "accommodated twenty girls at the cost of one dollar and twenty-five cents a week."⁴¹ The more affordable cost of five dollars a month for lodging in the home demonstrated the Phyllis Wheatley Club's critical stands against the economic exploitative practices of white landlords.⁴²

White landlords created their version of a lodging system in the Black Belt section of Chicago by taking a single apartment or house, dividing it into multiple units, renting each unit out to one Black family, and charging each family the same price per unit as the price for the entire house rented only for one family.⁴³ The excessive financial gains of white landlords through the lodging system became more apparent when there was shortage of housing in Chicago during World War I. According to a September 1919 issue of the *Chicago Defender* the building of homes throughout the city of Chicago were stagnated.⁴⁴ The shortage of housing continued in white and Black communities in Chicago throughout World War I.

However, unlike in white neighborhoods on Chicago's North side, the shortage of housing in the Black Belt lasted well into the 1920s. Refusing to build additional homes for the growing population of the Black Belt during the World War I migration era, white landowners took advantage of the lodging system of Black families. Four years later in September 1923, the *Chicago Defender* notes, "we find two, three, and sometimes four married couples living in one seven or eight bedroom apartment."⁴⁵

One might presume that middle-class Black families in Chicago were less likely to use

the lodging system to share the responsibility of paying rent to their landlord each month. Yet, a November 1927 article of the *Chicago Defender* entitled, “For Better Homes” suggests that the system of lodging also existed among middle-class Black residents in the Black Belt because “where there are decent places to live the rents are exorbitant. This condition makes for the worst kind of home life because it becomes necessary to crowd 10 people into an apartment intended for five.”⁴⁶ Thus, middle-class Blacks were forced to live in overcrowded spaces with other Black families. Furthermore, restrictive covenants contributed to the overcrowding and limitation of residential space in the Black Belt. Restrictive covenants demobilized the efforts of Black residents to physically move out of the Black Belt region, more specifically, middle-class Blacks with enough money to afford homes in white neighborhoods. Therefore, conditions of overcrowding, economic exploitation, and residential segregation were common forms of oppression that residents of Chicago’s Black Belt endured, irrespective of class.

Restrictive Covenants

Residential segregation and the confinement of Blacks on the South Side of Chicago emerged from racial rather than class differences. Consequently, Blacks who could afford to move out the Black Belt were not welcomed with a friendly reception into white neighborhoods.⁴⁷ Prior to World War I, white property owners protested for the exclusion of Blacks from purchasing homes in white neighborhoods through organizing housing associations, destroying Black homes, and physically assaulting Blacks residents.⁴⁸ The primary fear of white Chicagoans, particularly those of middle-class stature, was that the migration of southern Blacks to Chicago would expand the small section of the Black Belt, which comprised of, “State, Federal, and Dearborn Streets, Wabash, Michigan, South Park, and Grand Boulevards, and Wentworth Avenue,” eventually spilling over to white neighborhoods of “Woodlawn, Hyde

Park, and Kenwood.”⁴⁹

Before, during, and after the Chicago Riots of 1919, numerous homes of middle-class African Americans in Chicago’s white neighborhoods were bombed by white gangs and property owners.⁵⁰ However, during the mid-1920s, a different tactic was devised to permanently keep Blacks from renting or purchasing homes in Chicago’s white middle-class neighborhoods: restrictive covenants.⁵¹ Restrictive covenants were legal deeds white property owners and real estate agents used to ban the selling of property in white neighborhoods to Blacks.⁵² Middle-class Blacks who “could pay the rent, could afford to live in decent housing in clean neighborhoods-white neighborhoods,” were the primary targets of restrictive covenants.⁵³ By 1930, 75 percent of homes in Chicago could not be sold to African Americans.⁵⁴ The repercussions of restrictive covenants hindered the ability of most middle-class Black Chicagoans to spatially distance themselves from working-class and poor Black migrants. Instead, they sought to do so through making class distinctions based on the principles of racial uplift, such as, “temperance, thrift, chastity, and social purity.”⁵⁵

Before restrictive covenants came into effect in the mid-1920s, many African-American middle-class residents lived in areas of Chicago’s Black Belt that were filled with illicit and criminal enterprises. For instance, numerous prostitution houses were located in the third zone.⁵⁶ Middle-class African Americans living in the Black Belt section of Chicago expressed their frustrations toward poor and working-class Black migrants who engaged in illicit forms of employment and leisure that stood in opposition to middle-class values of respectability of sobriety, celibacy, legitimate employment, and education. Pushing of illicit institutions into Black neighborhoods on the South Side of Chicago was considered the most damaging possible attack on Black middle-class respectability.⁵⁷

Prior to and following the enforcement of restrictive covenants in Chicago during the 1920s, the residential segregation of neighborhoods was based on the characterization of African Americans, irrespective of class as promiscuous, lazy, alcoholics, and criminals. The presence of restrictive covenants suggested that white property owners did not make moral distinctions between working and middle-class Blacks. Since these stereotypes were based on racial and not class differences, middle-class Black Chicagoans were unworthy of living in white middle-class neighborhoods. White social reformers and settlement workers relied on the racist stereotypes of Black deviancy to exclude Blacks from white philanthropic and progressive institutions.⁵⁸ For example, the residential segregation of the Hull House and other mainstream settlement houses rested on their location in white residential areas.

Segregation in the Mainstream American Settlement House Movement

The origins of the American Settlement House Movement began in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, when a massive wave of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe settled in Chicago and other major cities across the United States. Two of the most prominent settlements, Jane Addams's Hull House and Graham Taylor's Chicago Commons were established in the 1890s on the West Side of Chicago.⁵⁹ For white settlement workers like Addams and Taylor, "reforms in education, recreation, industry, and government," served to assimilate Eastern and Southern European working-class immigrants by instilling middle-class Anglo-American values.⁶⁰ Furthermore, mainstream settlement houses placed emphasis on the patriarchal norm of white American middle-class families, which stressed the role of men as providers and protectors, and women as caretakers and educators of children. However, Addams promoted the multi-cultural heritage of Eastern and Southern European immigrants in the Hull House.⁶¹

In fact, Eastern and Southern European immigrants shared commonalities associated with middle-class American values that made the process of Americanizing easier for white foreign ethnic groups. One such similar trait Addams pointed out in a 1911 speech was that unlike Black fathers, “Italian fathers traditionally guarded the honor of their daughters, while the fathers of black girls seemed to be quite without those traditions.”⁶² Addams blamed the lack of a strong patriarchal presence in Black homes for failing to protect their daughters from sexual exploitation within illicit institutions. Furthermore, Addams added, “Residential segregation in the city exacerbated an already volatile situation. Since Blacks had to rent near the vice centers, the family in the community least equipped with social traditions is forced to expose its daughters to the most flagrantly immoral conditions the community permits.”⁶³

Rather than faulting middle-class whites for pushing illicit institutions into Black neighborhoods on Chicago’s South Side, white social reformers criticized poor and middle-class African Americans for the exploitation and allegedly immoral behavior of Black women. Although Addams showed sympathy to the plight of poor and working-class Black Chicagoans, her sympathies did not extend to integrating Blacks with European immigrants as residents of the Hull House Settlement. Instead, white and Black settlement workers in Chicago encouraged, and in some cases assisted, in establishing separate settlement homes for African Americans on Chicago’s South and West Sides.⁶⁴

The birth of Black settlements such houses as the Phyllis Wheatley Home stemmed from the experiences of residential segregation and inequality of housing conditions in the Black Belt, and the exclusion of Black youth in mainstream settlement homes. With the limited availability of housing and the overcharging of rent for Black Belt tenants, it was imperative for the Phyllis Wheatley Club to operate a home for young African-American women who migrated to Chicago

without any economic resources, employment, or kinship networks. Thus, the Phyllis Wheatley Club called for community support through charity, fundraising activities, and donations from middle-class African-American individuals and organizations toward the continual operation of the Phyllis Wheatley Home.⁶⁵

The establishment of the Phyllis Wheatley Home demonstrated Black clubwomen's leadership in public spheres through community activism in improving housing conditions for Black women who migrated to Chicago.⁶⁶ As I argue in the next chapter, these efforts demonstrated what sociologist Patricia Hill-Collins calls the "other mothering" tradition of Black women. The Phyllis Wheatley Club's activism in providing a home for poor and working-class Black migrant women and girls from the poverty and disease in the Black Belt of Chicago exemplified their role as othermothers to younger African-American migrant girls and women.⁶⁷ The Phyllis Wheatley Home formed the centerpiece of a gendered racial uplift project amongst Black middle-class women to promote the values of education and work, while providing shelter and protection for working-class migrant women who resided at the home.

Notes for Chapter 1

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² Pattillo-McCoy, Mary. *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) pg. 16.

³ Ibid, pgs. 88-90.

⁴ Frazier,pg. 88.

⁵ Frazier,pg. 88.

⁶ Pattillo-McCoy, pg. 16.

⁷ Ibid, pg. 16.

⁸ Gaines, Kevin K. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) pg. 2.

⁹ Ibid, pg. 2.

¹⁰ Ibid, pg. 227.

¹¹ Knupfer, Anne M. "If You Can't Push, Pull, If You Can't Pull, Please Get Out of the Way: The Phyllis Wheatley Club and Home in Chicago, 1896-1920." The Journal of Negro History, Vol. 82, No. 2 (Spring 1997), pg. 222.

¹² Ibid, pg. 221.

¹³ Frazier, chapter 7.

¹⁴ Ibid, pgs. 143-145.

¹⁵ Ibid, pgs. 137-143.

¹⁶ Jackson, Philip. *Black Charity in Progressive Era Chicago*. Social Services Review, Vol. 52, No.3 (Sept, 1978) pg. 402.

¹⁷ Gaines, pg. 16.

¹⁸ Frazier, pg. 127.

¹⁹ Philpott, pg. xiv.

²⁰ *Chicago Defender*, October 19, 1912.

²¹ Philpott, pg. 182; Spear, pg. 148.

²² Philpott, pg. 182.

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- ²³ *Chicago Defender*, October 19, 1912.
- ²⁴ *Ibid*, pg. 182.
- ²⁵ Hendricks, Wanda A. *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest: Black Club Women in Illinois*. (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1998) pg. 27.
- ²⁶ Knupfer, pg. 224.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 229.
- ²⁸ *Ibid*, pg. 225 & 226.
- ²⁹ *Chicago Defender*, June 6, 1914.
- ³⁰ Henri, pg. 111.
- ³¹ *Ibid*, pg.111.
- ³² *Ibid*, pgs, 112-113.
- ³³ *Chicago Defender*, October 19, 1912.
- ³⁴ Henri, pg. 85.
- ³⁵ Henri, pg. 102.
- ³⁶ *Chicago Defender*, April 18, 1925.
- ³⁷ *Chicago Defender*, February 26, 1921.
- ³⁸ Henri, pg. 102; Spear, pg. 149; Diner, Steven J. *Chicago Social Workers and Blacks in the Progressive Era. Social Service Review*, Vol. 44, No.4 (Dec, 1970) pp.393-410.
- ³⁹ Pattillo-McCoy, pg. 17.
- ⁴⁰ Knupfer, pg. 226.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*, pg. 227.
- ⁴² *Ibid*, pg. 225.
- ⁴³ Henri, pg. 105; Spear, pg, 150.
- ⁴⁴ *Chicago Defender*, September 27, 1919.
- ⁴⁵ *Chicago Defender*, September 1, 1923.
- ⁴⁶ *Chicago Defender*, November 12, 1927.
- ⁴⁷ Drake, St. Clair and Cayton, Horace R. *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* .(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945) pgs. 176-177.
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- ⁵¹ Drake and Cayton, pg. 179; Philpott, Chapter 8.
- ⁵² Spear, pg. 221.
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- ⁵⁷ Blair, Cynthia M. *I've Got To Make My Livin': Black Women's Sex Work in Turn of the Century Chicago*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010) Chapter 4; *Chicago Defender*, October 12, 1912.
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- ⁶⁵ Knupfer, pp. 221-231.
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Chapter 2- Home-Work: Black Motherhood and the Professionalization of Settlement Work in the Phyllis Wheatley Home

Introduction

In 1922, Adelbert Roberts wrote a brief biography on the life of Elizabeth Lindsay Davis. Though is little known of Davis's early childhood, Davis was born in Peoria, Illinois to Thomas and Sophia Jane Lindsay, "who were pioneers of Peoria, Illinois."¹ Upon graduating from Bureau County High School in Princeton, Illinois, Davis embarked on a career as a schoolteacher in Iowa, Kentucky, Illinois, and Indiana.² Davis worked as a professional schoolteacher until 1885, when she married Maryland-native, William Davis.³ In 1892, Davis and her husband relocated to Chicago, where in 1896 she founded the Phyllis Wheatley Club and served as president until 1924.⁴

Since the club's inception, the Phyllis Wheatley Club functioned as a neighborhood watch organization. One of the Phyllis Wheatley's primary objectives was to shut down illicit institutions, especially prostitution houses such as saloons that were located near schools.⁵ Along with the Phyllis Wheatley's Club's anti-prostitution campaign in the Black Belt, club members established educational programs, specifically geared toward domestic science. Under the leadership of club members Rosie Pritchard Gunn, Ophie Brown Wells, Ella Darling, Sadie Pritchard Hart, and Ada Brown Steward, the Phyllis Wheatley Club operated a sewing school where "all the boys and girls of the neighborhood, regardless of nationality, were heartily welcomed."⁶

It was not until 1906 however, when the Phyllis Wheatley Club shifted its focus toward building a settlement home for young African-American girls and women who had recently migrated to Chicago. Two years later in 1908, the Phyllis Wheatley Home opened as an orphanage settlement on the South side of Chicago for African-American working-class migrant

girls and women who “came into this great city seeking work, often without relatives, friends, or money.”⁷ The first group of Black women who resided the Phyllis Wheatley Home temporarily lived in the homes of several club members.⁸ Club members Lula Farmer, Anna Dunmore, Laura Manning, Naomi Fenwick, Anna Cooper, Annie Hunter, Ethel Caldwell, and Jennie Lawrence served as matrons and board members of the home.⁹ Thus, these were the club members, who likely provided shelter for younger Black migrant women and girls inside of their homes prior to the opening of the Phyllis Wheatley Home. Though their settlement work was based in Chicago, the Phyllis Wheatley Clubwomen were labeled as “adopted mothers” within African-American communities locally and nationally.¹⁰

The Phyllis Wheatley Home exemplified the communal, familial, and maternal aim of the Phyllis Wheatley Club to provide adequate housing for orphaned Black girls and women. Furthermore, as settlement workers, the Phyllis Wheatley Club professionalized the home as a domestic business, fusing the ideologies of motherhood into civic spaces.¹¹ Therefore, the Phyllis Wheatley Home was a woman’s sphere, both domestically and professionally, and it created an outlet for Black middle-class women’s leadership in settlement work to push their social agenda for adequate housing within Chicago’s African-American institutions. This chapter will examine the collective social and economic activities spearheaded by the Phyllis Wheatley Club to illustrate this professionalization of settlement work. Through its leadership in the Home, the Club simultaneously reinforced and challenged mainstream and African-American middle-class expectations of women’s confinement in their traditional family role as mothers in the domestic sphere.

I examine the Phyllis Wheatley Club’s efforts to solicit financial support and other donations from Black organizations and institutions for the home through the lens of Black

feminist theories in motherhood and Black economic nationalism. I will analyze how the Phyllis Wheatley Club's fundraising drives and parties fulfilled served three objectives. First monies raised from these events were used to conduct sanitary work in cleaning the home and the bodies of migrant girls and women residing at the home. Second, the proceeds from fundraising drives and parties were used to pay the mortgage for the home. Lastly, the Phyllis Wheatley Club sought to build a larger home to shelter additional migrant girls and women settling in Chicago.

Black Motherhood, Community and Domestic Feminism, and Economic Nationalism

The Phyllis Wheatley Club's activism in establishing a settlement home for young African-American migrant girls and women exemplified a model of "motherwork."¹² "Motherwork" is a Black feminist ideology used to "soften the existing dichotomies that posit rigid distinctions between private and public, family and work, the individual and the collective, identity as individual autonomy and identity growing from collective self-determination of one's group."¹³

The Phyllis Wheatley Home was more than a private space where club members were confined to the home to take on the maternal responsibility of looking after their younger Black female residents. Much of the Phyllis Wheatley Club's settlement work and activism around the home took place in Black public spaces, namely churches, and leisure institutions in the Black Belt. Thus, the Phyllis Wheatley Home became a feminized public space where clubwomen professionalized their maternal role through providing shelter for younger Black migrant women and girls. The Phyllis Wheatley Home was both a private and public space where the Club simultaneously fulfilled their expected domestic and professional roles as mothers and settlement workers. Yet, the Phyllis Wheatley Club relied on the collective efforts of various Black middle class organizations, namely churches, women's clubs, and professional businesses to financially

support the Phyllis Wheatley Home.

As a Black middle-class women's organization, the Phyllis Wheatley Club represented what historian Ula Taylor coins "community feminism."¹⁴ In discussing Amy Jacques Garvey's lengthy career in the Pan-African movements across the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa, Taylor defines community feminists as,

[Black] women who may or may not have a coverture relationship- either way, their activism is focused on assisting both the men and women in their lives... along with their initiating and participating in activities to uplift their communities. Despite this helpmate focus, community feminist are undeniably feminist in their activism discerns the configuration of oppressive power relations, shatters masculinist claims that women are intellectually inferior, and seeks to empower women by expanding their roles and options.¹⁵

Also, community feminist created institutional spaces that enabled them "to join feminism and nationalism in a single coherent framework."¹⁶ For the Phyllis Wheatley Club, the Home created a platform for its leadership in the Black settlement housing movement. As a community feminist organization, the Phyllis Wheatley Club held numerous social events to generate money toward improvements of the Home, to clear mortgage debts, and to house additional Black migrant women. Because the settlement work of the Phyllis Wheatley Club fulfilled the mainstream middle-class American expectations of women's domestic role as mothers, the Phyllis Wheatley Club received much needed economic support from the middle-class Black-Belt residents and organizations. Furthermore, the Phyllis Wheatley Home not only functioned as a domestic space, but also as a vocational school and employment agency.¹⁷ The Home was a community feminist institution where club members had taken on multiple leadership roles as "other mothers," educators, and settlement workers for the uplift of African-American migrant women and girls.

As leaders and owners of the Phyllis Wheatley Home, the Phyllis Wheatley Club's

activism in settlement work epitomized the harmonious infusion of Black Nationalism and feminism. As “community feminists,” African-American women emphasized its responsibility as mothers in mentally and physically nurturing the bodies and minds of Black children through passing down middle-class family values of education, cleanliness, and moral behavior.¹⁸ Yet Black women used these same values to assert their moral and intellectual influence in nationalist based Black civic institutions and organizations.¹⁹ Through her involvement in the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), Amy Jacques Garvey was criticized by Black male leaders in the UNIA because of her leadership position, her outspoken views against sexism, and support of women’s leadership in the Pan-African movement.²⁰ The UNIA exemplified a Black Nationalist organization where men in positions of leadership displayed sexist and hostile attitudes toward women who dared to step outside of their domestic role as mothers and challenge male authority. Therefore, Taylor warned that Black Nationalist and feminist ideologies often stood in conflict in African-American women’s community activism.²¹

However, this did not seem to be the case in the settlement activities of the Phyllis Wheatley Club. In fact, the professionalization of settlement work and the maternal aspects of operating a domesticated public space for sheltering Black migrant girls and women appealed to the Black Nationalist and feminist ideologies of motherhood. As such, both Black middle-class men and women strongly advocated clubwomen’s crusade of building settlement homes for migrant women and children. Therefore, the economic prowess Black clubwomen displayed through organizing fundraising drives, parties, and other social events fulfilled the nationalist and feminist ideologies of self-help and self-determination under the umbrella of racial uplift. Moreover, since settlement work was a woman’s sphere, Black male leaders in institutions such as the church did not view women’s leadership in settlement housing as a threat to their positions

of leadership.

In the previous chapter, I explained how women's roles as homemakers and caretakers were an essential aspect of domestic feminism. Clubwomen's domestic feminism in Black settlements emphasized Black Nationalist values of "collective effort, Black uplift, institutional separatism, uplift of Black peasant women, and the improvement of Negro family life."²² I argue that Black economic nationalism is central to understanding of role Black civic institutions and middle-class community members played in supporting the settlement work of the Phyllis Wheatley Club and Home. The Phyllis Wheatley Club relied heavily on the economic resources of Black churches, women's clubs, and leisure institutions through fundraising drives, house parties, and social events.

The significance of the Phyllis Wheatley Home is that the home was the "only [Black settlement] of its kind that has been managed entirely by race women and supported almost entirely by colored [middle-class] people."²³ With very little economic support from white elites, it was necessary for the Phyllis Wheatley Club to organize social events for the solicitation of funds from Black civic institutions, and for middle-class Blacks in general to keep the home in business. Had it not been for the club's hosting of fundraising drives, social events, and house parties at the home and in Black public spaces, the home would not have survived as a settlement for younger Black migrant women and girls. With rare financial assistance from white philanthropist, the survival of the Home largely depended on the communal economic resources from middle-class Black philanthropic institutions. Furthermore, the Home exemplified the desires of middle-class Black organizations to improve the sanitation of housing in the Black Belt.

“Municipal Housekeeping” of the Phyllis Wheatley Home

As “other mothers” to Black migrant girls and women, the Phyllis Wheatley Club took on the task of “municipal housekeeping” in the home.²⁴ Municipal housekeeping was a form of professional settlement work evolving out of the concern of the Phyllis Wheatley Club to improve sanitary conditions of homes in the Black Belt of Chicago.²⁵ For Davis and other Black clubwomen, the Phyllis Wheatley Home sought to provide for migrant girls and women what white landlords refused to offer for Black tenants: sanitary housing. As I explained in the previous chapter, the lack of ventilation, heat, overcrowding, and broken windows inside of homes rented to Black tenants led to the rapid and fatal spread of diseases such as bronchitis, pneumonia, and tuberculosis in the Black Belt. A major aspect of the club’s “motherwork” as “municipal housekeepers” included sanitizing the home for residents of the home.

Following the migration of southern Blacks to Chicago during the 1910s, housing conditions in the Black Belt rapidly deteriorated.²⁶ Thus, a major aspect of the club’s “motherwork” as “municipal housekeepers” included sanitizing the home for residents of the home. By doing so, the Phyllis Wheatley Club fought to dismantle the stereotypes of Blacks as dirty and diseased, and to protect the Home’s Black female residents from contracting such deadly diseases. The Phyllis Wheatley Club posted several articles in the *Chicago Defender*, soliciting funds from Black middle-class organizations to sanitize the Home. On the one hand, the Phyllis Wheatley Club’s motherwork as municipal housekeepers indicated their adherence to the gender roles and spatial arenas of women’s work as domestic laborers. Yet, the Phyllis Wheatley Home was also a civic institution where Black women’s professional occupation as settlement workers allowed them to establish themselves in the public arena as community leaders. Their activities generated money from various Black institutions and organization to

provide sanitary items for the home and their Black female migrant residents.

An article written by the Phyllis Wheatley Club in May of 1910 demonstrated the dire necessity of community involvement in the Home, proposing, “It [such sanitation] is much needed and we hope that our [Black middle-class] friends will help us as in the past. When the ladies come to you for a donation, find the largest coin you have, not the smallest.”²⁷ Despite that the majority of African-American clubwomen in early twentieth century Chicago were college educated and more financially stable than most African Americans, the Phyllis Wheatley Club’s declaration to their middle-class Black peers to “try to find the largest coin you have and not the smallest,” indicated that members of the club did not have the economic revenue to keep the home in good condition.²⁸

The following month, the Phyllis Wheatley Club advertised a second article in the Chicago Defender, writing, “A number of ladies are soliciting funds for the house cleaning. We hope that the public will feel interested in this work to help us beautify and put our home in sanitary condition. It will take fifty dollars to do the real necessary work about the home. Who will give us the first \$10?”²⁹ Lacking sufficient funds, the Club’s request for economic support from middle-class African-American individuals implied that the task of sanitizing the home was not exclusive responsibility of the club members, but one shared by African-American institutions and organizations. Notes from the club’s weekly meetings acknowledged individuals and organizations who donated money or household items to the Home.

For example, a written report from May of 1911 expressed the gratitude the Phyllis Wheatley Club showed for “receiving a pair of sheets from Mrs. Lyman of the [Frederick] Douglass Center... as all such things are always needed.”³⁰ In April 1912, the Phyllis Wheatley Club “received a package containing one dozen pillow cases and one dozen towels from the

Gaudemas Club.”³¹ Seven years later in November 1919, the Phyllis Wheatley Club recorded “a donation of \$6 was received on the electric lights, which the Phyllis Wheatley Club and the Clara Jessamine Club are installing in the home.”³² Additional household items and sanitation products donated to the home included, “soap, new beds, a kitchen floor, curtains, chairs, wash boilers, and couches.”³³

Household and sanitation supplies served two major purposes. First, bedding materials offered warmth for residents while they were sleeping at night. This was especially important during the winter seasons when temperatures were unusually cold, and illnesses like influenza and pneumonia were likely to occur. Second and more importantly, by sanitizing the home various African-American women’s clubs were instilling the principles of cleanliness in their Black female working-class migrant residents. Donations of soap, towels, and wash boilers meant that residents of the home were able to exercise personal hygiene by washing their hands, taking baths or showers, and drying off their bodies. The collaboration of various African-American middle-class women’s clubs to donate household and sanitation supplies for the Home reflected the values of self-help and self-determination to look after the physical well-being of Black migrant women. Cleanliness of the body was one essential aspect of racial uplift for middle-class Black clubwomen. Physical hygiene not only challenged the stereotype of Blacks as being dirty, but potentially decreased the likelihood of Black migrant women contracting diseases.

Aside from sanitizing the home, the Phyllis Wheatley Club’s emphasis on beautifying the home was significant because its awareness of the dilapidation of residential buildings, unsanitary housing, lack of working utilities, and household supplies inside the homes rented to Black Belt tenants. By calling on the economic assistance of the Black middle-class community

to beautify the home, the Phyllis Wheatley Club aimed to build and maintain the home around Victorian standards. For the Phyllis Wheatley Club, the beautification of the home rested on decorating the Home with new furniture, tables, bedroom and bathroom supplies, floor tiles, and curtains. However, not only did household supplies serve to beautify the home, they fulfilled the purpose of the home to provide a place where migrant Black women can rest comfortably in a spacious and sanitary environment, without the fear of contracting a disease.

The Phyllis Wheatley Club's push to beautify and sanitize the home as part of their "municipal housekeeping" was additionally important because middle-class Black guests often visited the home when the club held fundraisers and social events. By performing domestic labor at the home, the Phyllis Wheatley Club did more than establish the reputation of the settlement home as a respectable place of residence within the Black Belt. Domestic chores such as cooking, also generated funds toward the "municipal housekeeping" of the Phyllis Wheatley Home, and solidified their place as middle-class reformers.

Fundraising events hosted at the Phyllis Wheatley Home highlighted Black middle-class clubwomen's strategy to accumulate capital by professionalizing women's domestic labor. A dinner following a music and arts program at the home in September 1911 was described as "a success in every way to prove that a restaurant in that [Phyllis Wheatley Home] place would be an excellent thing."³⁴ This statement suggests two important functions of Black Clubwomen's "motherwork" in settlement homes. Cooking, often a feminized domestic chore, served to physically nurture the bodies of their guests and residents with food. In the next chapter, I discuss the overwhelming representation of Black women in Chicago's domestic labor force during the 1910s and 1920s.

Domestic work was not only the most readily available employment for Black women,

but a vital source of income for Black families because racism in the labor force made it difficult for Black men to secure work and economic stability. Seeking employment as domestic workers for elite white families, African-American women migrating to Chicago emphasized their skills as cooks. However, the Phyllis Wheatley Club did not view cooking as merely domestic work. The notion of the home operating as a restaurant reflected the middle-class status of the Phyllis Wheatley Club as business owners. The functioning of the home as a restaurant enabled Black female settlement workers to assume the role of breadwinner by providing food, household items, and shelter for migrant girls and women residing at the home.

Earlier on, I mentioned the “domestic feminism” of Black clubwomen’s settlement work. By providing food, money, and household supplies toward the home, the domestic feminist activism of the Phyllis Wheatley Club and other Black women’s clubs helped alleviate the rates of poverty, starvation, and disease among Black working women migrating to Chicago. Also, the economic aspect of Black Nationalism set the basis for providing affordable housing at the Phyllis Wheatley Home. As I explained in the last chapter, white landlords financially exploited Black tenants by raising the price of rent in homes and apartments in the South side of Chicago to be comparable to those of native white American and European immigrant tenants in neighborhoods outside of the Black Belt. African-American working-class migrant women and girls moving to Chicago without employment, family, or friends to help procure living arrangements were likely to become homeless and live on the streets. The Phyllis Wheatley Home helped alleviate homelessness among Black migrant women. However, to avoid going out of business, the Club paid enormous mortgage payments for the Home. Again, the Club turned to Black institutions and middle-class organizations for economic resources to cover mortgage expenses.

Fundraising Drives and Rent Parties to Pay the Mortgage of the Phyllis Wheatley Home

African-American religious and secular institutions in the South side of Chicago were important sites of fundraising activities for the Phyllis Wheatley Club to collect money from middle-class congregants and men's organizations. The participation of churches, theaters, dancehalls, women's clubs, and men's organizations in financing the Phyllis Wheatley Home fulfilled two aspirations of Black middle-class ideologies of racial and gender uplift: collective accumulation of wealth and communal home ownership.³⁵

Historian Wallace Best's study of Black denominational churches in Chicago during the Great Migration traces the origins of settlement work to various Black Baptist and A.M.E. Churches. In fact, "alliances between the Black business and religious community had existed since the nineteenth century."³⁶ For Black ministers in Chicago, social settlements were, "entrepreneurial and commercial enterprises... to support their programs and to encourage notions of self-help at the emergence of an independent parallel economy on the South side."³⁷ The massive migration of poor and working-class Black women to Chicago created job opportunities in settlement work for the Phyllis Wheatley Club to assert their leadership as "domestic feminist" and "other mothers." However, the club's maternal "domestic feminism" did not strictly confine them to perform domestic labor at the home. Rather, lectures, fundraising drives, and parties hosted by the Phyllis Wheatley Club were civic forms of paid employment that represented the nationalist and feminist ideologies of Black clubwomen who asserted their economic independence in operating the home as a domestic business. African-American club and churchwomen in the in Black Baptist and A.M.E. Churches conducted the bulk of settlement work through establishing nursery centers, mother's clubs, and kindergartens.³⁸

Historically, the Black Church acted as an independent institution within Black

communities that served a variety of secular functions within sacred spaces. Settlement work was among one of many secular activities led by African-American churchwomen, one shaped by Christian principles of reaching out and helping those who were poor.³⁹ Although men constituted the ministerial leadership in the Black Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal Churches, women constituted the leadership in settlement work and the majority of members of the Black Baptist and A.M.E. Churches.⁴⁰ Consequently, Black denominational churches and settlement work were women's spheres, giving Black clubwomen power to wield influence in both the religious and secular community in fighting against the oppressive forces of poverty and homelessness. As caretakers, nurturers, and religious instructors, Black clubwomen garnered much economic support from the Black church.⁴¹

In January 1911, the Phyllis Wheatley Club organized a "mass meeting of all the [Black middle-class] women in the city to be held at Bethel A.M.E. Church on Sunday January 29, 1911 at 3 p.m. Many good speakers will be present to tell us why we should lend our aid to this home, it being the only one of its kind in Chicago."⁴² Two weeks later, the club reported the combined sum of twenty-four dollars received from various Black women's clubs such as the "Volunteer workers, Cornell Charity Club, and members of the Phyllis Wheatley Club."⁴³ Even though this meeting did not generate a large sum of money, religious gatherings of African-American women exemplified skill in community organizing and their ability to create an economic support system using the social and religious uplift services of Black clubwomen.

By operating a professionalized domestic business, Black clubwomen assumed economic responsibility for the physical well-being of migrant girls and women in need of housing. This was an essential aspect of Black middle-class club women's domestic feminism. Black clubwomen also extended their domestic feminism outside of the Black Baptist and A.M.E.

Churches. For example, the Phyllis Wheatley Club ventured into male spheres of Black secular business institutions to enlist the economic assistance of Black managers and business owners through fundraising drives.

In December 1914, the Phyllis Wheatley Club announced a Christmas Matinee “given by the Advisory Board and Astra Club, at Dreamland Hall...for the benefit of the mortgage fund for the Phyllis Wheatley Home, Admission is 25 cents.”⁴⁴ Incentives for those who attended the Christmas matinee dance were the possibility of receiving “prizes given out during the intermission at 4:30 p.m.”⁴⁵ Two months later in February 1915, the Phyllis Wheatley Club totaled the sum of money collected from fundraising events in 1913 and 1914 to be \$500, which went toward the mortgage payment of the home. Out of this amount, nearly half of the proceeds came from the Christmas Matinee Dance at the Dreamland Hall (\$240).⁴⁶ The Phyllis Wheatley Club also extended their gratitude to “Mr. Robert Motts, [African-American] owner of the Pekin Theater,” for “showing us his favor by giving us... his beautiful theater for a benefit matinee. The entire proceeds will go toward the [Phyllis Wheatley Home] mortgage fund.”⁴⁷

Historian Davarian Baldwin highlights the nationalist sentiments of the Pekin Theater and Dreamland Hall as a Black owned leisure, cultural, economic, and political hotbed for gamblers, musicians, and community activists.⁴⁸ Gambling, as a means to accumulate wealth stood in opposition to the principles of middle-class respectability and racial uplift. However, the Phyllis Wheatley Club respected the Dreamland Hall and Pekin Theater as institutions owned by Black men. Black men such as Motts advocated Black Nationalist and feminist political and economic ideologies of self-help, self-determination, and self-sufficiency among Black clubwomen who performed their expected maternal responsibilities in providing a decent home for migrant Black girls and women.

A benefit baseball game between the Chicago American Giants and the Indianapolis A.B.C.s in August 1917 netted “\$450, for which the ladies thank the public very much.”⁴⁹ A member of the Phyllis Wheatley Club later adds, “Young girls in their teens sold all kinds of goodies, and there were programs to be had for only five cents.”⁵⁰ African-American clubwomen’s profession in settlement work as fundraisers allowed them to tap into the commercial enterprises of middle-class Black men’s spheres of leisure and athletic institutions. Therefore, the Phyllis Wheatley Club’s domestic feminism wielded influence among Black middle-class men to financially and morally support Black women’s settlement work.

However, the Phyllis Wheatley Club did not always hold fundraising activities in male public spaces. Rather, parties thrown for the purpose of collecting mortgage funds were aspects of “motherwork” that were conducted inside of the Phyllis Wheatley Home. For example, in April 1915, the Phyllis Wheatley Club announced an upcoming Apron bazaar to be held at the home, stating, “The aprons will be sold at reasonable prices, and the money taken from both the supper and the sale of aprons will go toward the home... The home serves as a shelter for many girls who are out of employment and the heads find places for them until they can find steady work.”⁵¹ Two years later in February 1917, the Phyllis Wheatley Club organized a pre-Lenten Ball at the home “for the sole purpose of lifting the six thousand dollar mortgage which is on the Phyllis Wheatley Home for self-supporting women of our race.”⁵²

Another fundraising drive the Phyllis Wheatley Club hosted that generated large sums of money was an event known as “tag day.” In June 1920, the Phyllis Wheatley Club reported in the Chicago Defender that the home “received \$950 from the tag day receipts of May 24.”⁵³ A year later in July 1921, secretary of the Phyllis Wheatley Club, Fannie Barrier Williams totaled the proceeds of the tag day event to “\$925 cash from the drive and a number of pledges still

out... the drive would go on until the entire debt of \$1900 is wiped out.”⁵⁴

For the Phyllis Wheatley Club, these parties were not for leisure or fun. Rather, the apron bazaar and pre-Lenten Ball revealed a dire economic necessity for middle-class Black clubwomen to continue operating the Phyllis Wheatley Home. The participation of middle-class Black organizations in attending these events was crucial to collectively paying the mortgage of the home. The apron bazaar pre-Lenten Ball, and tag day events predate the rent parties hosted by working-class Black women in New York during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s. Performance studies scholar James Wilson highlights the significance of women’s rent parties in the working-class neighborhood of Harlem as a collective business enterprise of self-help and self-determination to foster “a sense of community among Harlem residents and helping to establish cultural solidarity along socioeconomic lines.”⁵⁵ Rent parties hosted by middle-class Black clubwomen at the Phyllis Wheatley Home in Chicago were similarly business oriented. Furthermore, rent parties in Chicago and New York displayed the Black Nationalist sentiments of economic independence from elite whites. In the case of African-American clubwomen employed in settlement work in Chicago, rent parties at the Phyllis Wheatley Home were economically supported by the Black middle-class because the home adhered to the domestic and maternal expectations of women in the African-American community.

More importantly, since relatively few African Americans of working and middle-class stature owned homes during the 1910s and 1920s, settlement houses like the Phyllis Wheatley Home offered an opportunity for Black middle-class clubwomen to claim ownership in communal property.⁵⁶ However, the Club’s solicitation of funds from Black middle-class organizations and institutions served another purpose: to purchase a larger home for sheltering additional Black migrant women.⁵⁷

Expanding the Size of the Phyllis Wheatley Home

Beginning in 1920, the Phyllis Wheatley Club launched a campaign “to make the great drive of \$10,000 a howling success... One hundred more girls could be accommodated if the Phyllis Wheatley Home was larger.”⁵⁸ With the mass migration of African-American southerners to Chicago, expanding the size of the home became an urgent matter for the Phyllis Wheatley Club. The motives of the Phyllis Wheatley Club to expand the size of the home and the number of Black migrant women and girls were more than simply offering sanitary housing for an increasing number of potential residents. The domestic feminism and “motherwork” of the Phyllis Wheatley Club fulfilled another function of the Phyllis Wheatley Home: to provide refuge for some Black female migrants against the sexually exploitative brothels located in the Black Belt that housed Black prostitutes. As I will analyze in the next chapter, the campaign to eliminate prostitution in the Black Belt’s illicit institutions like brothels was a significant aspect of the Phyllis Wheatley Club’s settlement work.

Notes for Chapter 2

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³ Davis, Elizabeth L. *Lifting As They Climb*. (Washington D.C. National Association of Colored Women, 1933) pg. 205.

⁴ Ibid, pg. 205.

⁵ Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs*, pg. 16.

⁶ Ibid, pg. 16.

⁷ *Chicago Defender*, June 22, 1918; Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs*, pg. 96.

⁸ Ibid, pg. 17.

⁹ Ibid, pg. 17.

¹⁰ Davis, *Lifting As They Climb*, pg. 205.

¹¹ Knupfer, Anne M. *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood: African-American Women's Clubs in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago*. (New York: New York University Press, 1996) pg. 37; See also, O'Donnell, Sandra. *The Care of Independent African-American Children in Chicago: The Struggle Between Self-Help and Professionalism*. *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Summer 1994) pg. 763.

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¹⁴ Taylor, Ula Y. *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) pg. 2.

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¹⁸ Taylor, pg.77.

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- ²⁴ Knupfer, pg. 11.
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- ³⁰ *Chicago Defender*, May 20, 1911.
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- ³² *Chicago Defender*, November 29, 1919.
- ³³ Knupfer, *If You Can't Push, Pull, If You Can't Pull, Please Get Out of the Way*, pg. 229.
- ³⁴ *Chicago Defender*, September 30, 1911.
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- ⁴⁰ Higginbotham, pg. 2.
- ⁴¹ Ibid, pg. 76.
- ⁴² *Chicago Defender*, January 21, 1911.
- ⁴³ *Chicago Defender*, February 4, 1911.
- ⁴⁴ *Chicago Defender*, December 19, 1914.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid, December 19, 1914.
- ⁴⁶ *Chicago Defender*, February 13, 1915.
- ⁴⁷ *Chicago Defender*, February 4, 1911.

⁴⁸ Baldwin, Davarian L. *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, The Great Migration, and Black Urban Life*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007) pg. 47.

⁴⁹ *Chicago Defender*, August 18, 1917.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, August 18, 1917.

⁵¹ *Chicago Defender*, April 17, 1915.

⁵² *Chicago Defender*, February 10, 1917.

⁵³ *Chicago Defender*, June 12, 1920.

⁵⁴ *Chicago Defender*, July 2, 1921.

⁵⁵ Wilson, James. *Bulldaggers, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies: Performance, Race, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010) pg. 12.

⁵⁶ Frazier, E. Franklin. *The Negro Family in Black Chicago*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932) pg. 73.

⁵⁷ Knupfer, pg. 82.

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Chapter 3- From the Red-Light District to the Black Belt: The Phyllis Wheatley Club, the Chicago Defender, and the Struggle to Eliminate Prostitution on Chicago's South Side

Introduction

In 1910, the Phyllis Wheatley Club published an article in the *Chicago Defender*, poetically describing the effects of gambling, alcoholism, and prostitution taking place in the illicit venues of the red-light district as follows:

The gay and gilded saloon, with the clinking of glass and rattling of dice; its bright shining lights, its warmth and the cup that at last biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder, is luring out young men to death and destruction. The follies and gayeties of life are leading out young girls far on the downward road.¹

For the Phyllis Wheatley Club, the leisure and sexual pleasures that saloons and brothels offered posed a dangerous threat to the lives, safety, and health of poor and working-class Black men and women. Unlike drinking and gambling, which were leisure activities and vices mostly committed by men, prostitution was a vice primarily committed by women. Middle-class Black clubwomen and community activists argued that vices such as drinking, gambling, and prostitution undermined the efforts to dispel racial stereotypes of Black behavior. Such vices stirred intra-racial conflicts between working and middle-class Blacks.

Most middle-class Black clubwomen ostracized working-class Black women who engaged in the illicit sex economy. However, the Phyllis Wheatley Club distinguished themselves by opening a settlement home to alleviate the vice of prostitution among Black women in Chicago. The rise of prostitution in the Black Belt produced in part by the Great Migration pushed the Phyllis Wheatley Club to open a place of residence to dissuade working-class Black migrant women from prostitution. The anti-prostitution campaign of the Phyllis Wheatley Club was another aspect of their domestic and community feminism in acting as “other mothers”. As the Phyllis Wheatley Club stated, the home opened its door to working-class Black

migrant women “who seek shelter there, throwing around them the protection so necessary for the stranger in our midst, and the friendless girl seeking a livelihood in this vast city.”² However, the Club only sheltered “girls who respected themselves and the home” from the exploits of illicit institutions.³ The Phyllis Wheatley Club saw it as their responsibility to protect younger migrant women from the sexual exploits of men from all racial backgrounds. Despite their concern with prostitution in the Black Belt, the Phyllis Wheatley Club published only a few articles on the subject matter in the *Defender*. A possible explanation for this is that the majority of those in the Black middle-class community who spoke against prostitution were men.⁴

Among the most outspoken Black middle-class male figures against prostitution were ministers, attorneys, and newspaper publishers, as exemplified in the *Chicago Defender*. Black middle-class male activists and leaders were primarily concerned with protecting Black women from the sexual exploits of white men inside of prostitution houses. Also, Black men in positions of leadership spoke to the injustices of the Mann Act of 1910, which imprisoned Black men for allegedly soliciting sex from white female prostitutes or trafficking white women across the states for purposes of prostitution, while white men received little to no punishment from law enforcement officials for soliciting sex or engaging in the trafficking of Black female prostitutes.

Unlike middle-class Black male activists, the Phyllis Wheatley Club did not focus on eliminating a specific racial or gender group involved in the Black Belt sex economy. Rather, the Phyllis Wheatley Club sought to shutdown illicit institutions that sexually exploited poor Black women. By doing so, the Phyllis Wheatley Club fought to expel men and women from all racial backgrounds who participated in the sex trade as prostitutes, pimps, saloon and brothel keepers, and clients from the Black Belt. Therefore, the Phyllis Wheatley Club’s objective was to restore the respectability of the Black Belt community as a whole, particularly middle-class Black

women. Moreover, the Club identified any man who purchased the sexual services of prostitutes a threat to the culture of respectability and personal safety they sought to establish in the Home.

This chapter will focus on articles written by *the Defender*, including the few articles that the Phyllis Wheatley Club members published that explore the rise of prostitution in the Black Belt, and the struggle for middle-class Blacks to eliminate sexual vice on Chicago's South Side. In order to understand the causes of the rise in prostitution in the Black Belt, I will first address the limited job opportunities for Black women outside of the domestic labor force. Second, I will examine the removal of both Black and white clients, prostitutes, and sex entrepreneurs from the red light district by white vice syndicates, law enforcement officials, and middle-class property owners. Third, I will discuss the presence of white men who frequently visited houses of prostitution in the Black Belt to engage in illicit sexual activity with Black women. And fourth, with the few sources written by or about the Phyllis Wheatley Club, I will analyze the extent to which the Club and the Home protected African-American female migrants from prostitution.

Limited Job Opportunities for Black Women in Early Twentieth Century Chicago

In 1928, a Black minister in Chicago explained one primary reason why Black women engaged in the sex trade. According to the minister, "50 percent of the prostitutes found on the streets are there because of economic conditions. This condition was caused by not being able to secure decent work."⁵ Furthermore, the minister argued that racism and discrimination in the hiring of "trained [Black] youths" in the workforce played a significant role in the limited job opportunities available for Black men and women. Expressing outrage over the inability of educated and skilled Black men and women to "secure decent work," the minister writes, "it is deplorable to find graduates of the leading schools of the nation seeking the most menial work."⁶

Because of the racial and gender discrimination in the labor force, namely in the

industrial, professional, retail, and clerical occupations, the overwhelming majority of African-American women during the migration period worked as domestic and personal servants in wealthy white households. The percentages of Black women in the aforementioned occupations from the 1920 United States Census show that Black women comprised of twenty-two percent (about 13,000) of the approximately 60,000 female employees working as domestic and personal servants in the city of Chicago. However, out of the approximately 20,000 Black women in Chicago's labor force, sixty-four percent were employed in domestic and personal service, mostly as servants and laundresses.⁷

The high percentages of Black women working in Chicago's domestic labor force suggest that domestic service was the most readily available form of employment for Black women. Such statistics explain why potential Black migrant women to Chicago often sought employment in the homes of elite white families before arriving in the city. Letters collected by Emmitt Scott from potential African-American migrant women to the *Chicago Defender* in 1917 indicated that nearly every southern Black woman writing to *the Defender* sought assistance in finding employment as domestic and personal servants to white families upon arrival in Chicago.

For example, on May 22, 1917, a twenty-seven year old single Black woman from Jacksonville, Florida writes, "I wish to go North, [but] haven't got money enuff to come. I can do any kind of housework, laundress, nurse, good cook has cook for northern people."⁸ Furthermore, the writer asks for assistance from *the Defender* to "kindly interseed for me a job with some rich white people who would send me a ticket and I pay them back."⁹ Two weeks earlier, a mother of three teenaged daughters from Moss Point, Mississippi asks *the Defender* to "please send me information toward a first class cooking job or washing job"¹⁰ for herself and three daughters. Letters written by teenaged Black girls requesting assistance in finding domestic

work also appeared in *the Defender*. A seventeen year old eighth grade student from Selma, Alabama makes a plea to *the Defender* “to see if you will please get me a job... I can wash dishes, wash, iron, nursing, work in groceries and dry good stores.”¹¹ Moreover, the teenager relied on *the Defender* to “tell them [the white employers] to send me a ticket and I will repay them... on the account of not having enough money I had to stop school.”¹²

It is not certain that these three women already worked as domestic and personal servants for white southern families. However, each of their letters illustrates two possible explanations for seeking employment as domestic workers upon moving to Chicago. Either these women had prior experience as domestic workers in the south, or the wages for domestic work were significantly higher for Black women in northern and Midwestern cities. In the case of the first letter, the preference to work for “some rich white people” suggest her belief that wages for domestic work in northern white homes were higher in comparison to those on southern white homes. In fact, single Black women in the north earned \$8.00 a week for domestic service in white homes versus earning only \$4.00 a week for working in white southern homes.¹³

Higher wages for domestic work in Chicago’s white homes encouraged a widowed twenty-eight year old Black woman from New Orleans, Louisiana to consider “coming to Chicago about the first of June... [to] do first-class work as a house maid and dining room or care for invalid [white middle-class] ladies.”¹⁴ Similarly, a single Black woman, also from New Orleans, expressed her complaints about the meager wages of Black female domestic workers in Louisiana, and her desire to migrate to Chicago in June 1917:

Everything is gone up but the poor colored people’s wages. I have very pore learning although it would not make much difference if I would be thoroughly educates for I could not get any better work to do, such as housework, washing, and ironing and all such work... and they pay so little for so hard work that it is just enough to pay room, rent, and a little something to eat.¹⁵

Here, the response of the last migrant woman illustrates the important relationship

between race, socio-economic class status, education, and occupation. Regardless of educational attainment, racial discrimination prevented middle and working-class Blacks in the South from entering professional, clerical, manufacturing, and trade professions with decent wages equivalent to those of whites. Therefore, the only jobs open to Black women of all socio-economic backgrounds were the meager wages of domestic service work.

Even educated Black women who worked as teachers in the rural south, as reflected in the experience of one Black woman from Jacksonville, Florida in 1917, “[were] paid so poor we could not continue to teach.”¹⁶ Eager to migrate to Chicago, the former Black school teacher from Florida adds, “We have watched your wanted ads regularly and we are anxious for location with good families (white) where we can be cared for and do domestic work. We want to engage as cook, nurse, and maid.”¹⁷ Such testimonies highlight the struggle for middle-class Black southerners to improve their socioeconomic status.

It is uncertain if the former Florida schoolteacher considered seeking employment as a teacher upon arrival to Chicago. Perhaps, the poor wages she was already receiving as a school teacher in Florida compelled her to look for domestic work upon relocating to Chicago. In fact, the yearly salaries of Black and white school teachers in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, the Carolinas, and Virginia, concluded that Black school teachers were paid \$200 a year, while white school teachers were paid \$400 a year “for teaching half as many students.”¹⁸ This means Black school teachers in Florida were paid \$17 a month, which if divided by four weeks is equivalent to \$4.25 a week. Black school teachers in Florida and other southern states were paid nearly the same wages as Black domestic workers who earned \$4.00 a week for southern white families. Regardless of educational attainment and occupation, middle and working-class Blacks in the south lived on the fringes of poverty and desperately searched for better working

conditions and economic wages in urban Midwestern and northern cities.

Racial and gender discrimination in hiring practices for teaching positions in schools compelled educated Black women to work in the homes of elite white families.¹⁹ Black women only constituted one percent of all school teachers in Chicago.²⁰ Black women's low representation as teachers in Chicago's public schools likely played a significant factor in explaining why the former Black school teacher from Florida sought work as a domestic servant rather than a school teacher.

Lured by the increase in wages to perform domestic and personal service work in the homes of "good and wealthy" white families in Chicago, Black migrant women overlooked the possibility of becoming victims of sexual violence at the hands of white men. Black women working in domestic and personal service in the early twentieth century engaged in a struggle for autonomy over their bodies against white female employers who dictated the long lists of tasks and hours of Black women's physical labor, and against the unwanted sexual advances of white men.²¹ Between 1921 and 1926, the *Chicago Defender* reported three major cases of sexual assault of Black female domestic workers at the hands of white men in Chicago. Two of these three cases occurred while at working at the home of their employers. Also, the perpetrators of sexual assault in two of the three cases were not related to white female employers of Black domestic workers. Therefore, Black female domestic workers were vulnerable to becoming victims of sexual assault either en route to their workplace or on the work site. Nevertheless, these three cases demonstrated that migrant Black women seeking employment as domestic and personal servants in Chicago were no safer from sexual violence than remaining in their southern hometowns working for white families. Moreover, historian Robin Kelley's analysis of Black working class women working in the industrial labor force during the early twentieth century

highlights the unwanted sexual advances white male employers made toward Black women. Thus, Black working-class women experienced sexual violence at the hands of white men in both the domestic and industrial labor force.

On July 30, 1921, twenty-one year old Emma Stewart, “a maid employed by Mrs. R. Ball,” fought against an attempted rape by a white Yellow Cab Driver named William Diener. During one of several trips to “send packages to a newly rented apartment,” Diener forcefully “lured Stewart into his cab and attempted to criminally assault her.”²² Although Stewart successfully fended off the attack by screaming for assistance, “she was left with her wrist swollen and bruised and her dress torn to shreds.”²³ Unfortunately, of the three cases reported in the *Defender*, Stewart was the only maid who avoided the completion of a rape attack at the hands of a white man.

Nearly three years later on June 3, 1924, twenty-one year old Belle Lewis was “lured into a garage” on her way to work and gang raped by four white men identified as “Joseph Dezell, 27; Roy Hawkins, 20; Leo Buhenstein; 23; and Thomas Wilson, 17.”²⁴ Sharing her testimony in court on the incident a month later, *the Defender* writes,

One at a time they struggled with her and threatened violence if she screamed and would not permit her to leave until all four had assaulted her. Then in dazed condition she left the garage, made her way to her place of employment at 4657 W. Harriston St. and told her employer of the attack.²⁵

The *Defender* does not specify whether or not Lewis worked as a domestic. Unlike Stewart, Lewis was not sexually assaulted in or near the home of a white employer. Lewis was attacked on her way to work by Dezell, Hawkins, Buhenstein, and Wilson, who all delivered newspapers. However, the address of her employment listed as “4657 W. Harriston St.” indicates her possible residence with a white family.

In both the cases of Stewart and Lewis, the perpetrators of sexual assault were white men.

who were not related to the female employers. The suspects in both cases were arrested and charged with attempted rape (Diener) and rape (Dezell, Hawkins, Buhenstein, and Wilson). The outcome of the first trial was that Diener lost his job as a taxi driver, and the second case involving the gang rape of Belle Lewis remained under further investigation (*the Defender* does not offer further information on the outcome of the trial). However, it is the third case documented in *the Defender* that speaks to the lack of protection Black women who were raped received from the court.

In July 1926, *the Defender* highlighted the rape of Valerie Robinson, “a fifteen year-old maid for the Olson (white) family a year earlier.”²⁶ Unlike the two earlier cases I mentioned, the attacker was identified as sixteen year-old Joseph Olson. After a three month trial, “Judge Herbert Immenhausen,” *the Defender* reports, “asserted that because of the boy’s age the law would not permit him to be held on the rape charge, but since he was the father of the victim’s child, he could be held on the charge of bastardy. The boy’s bond was set at \$2500.”²⁷ Valerie Robinson’s case illustrates the long history of sexual violence Black women and teenaged girls endured at the hands of white men and boys. Furthermore, Olson’s sexual assault on Robinson caused her unwanted pregnancy of a mixed-race child left to singlehandedly raise with little to no assistance from Olson.

As domestic and personal service workers in Chicago, Black women’s bodies were often subjected to the physical control and mercy of white men. The physical aspects of white men’s control over Black women’s bodies came in the form of coercing sexual intercourse. As in the case of Robinson, this led to the unwanted reproduction of mixed-race babies that white men did not acknowledge as their children. Even worse, Robinson’s story exemplifies the stigma of the “moral inferiority” of Black female domestic workers who were sexually victimized, gave birth.

to mixed-raced children out of wedlock, and were forced to raise their children as single mothers. The domestic workplace inside of white homes in Chicago proved to be a site for physical, sexual, and economic exploitation for Black migrant women employed in this occupation during the early twentieth century. Rather than working in white households under such exploitative and violent conditions, Black women turned to prostitution as a source of additional income and physical autonomy over their bodies.

Though middle-class Blacks saw domestic work as degrading for Black women, prostitution posed a worse threat to the respectability of Black women. Unlike domestic work, the sinful act of prostituting urged middle-class Black leaders to save young Black women from exposure to houses of ill-repute. Middle-class Blacks called on religious and civic leaders to speak out against the prostitution of young Black women's bodies.

For example, in 1910 the *Chicago Defender* issued a disturbing article on the employment of Black teenaged girls as pianist inside the red light district's houses of prostitution:

In the homes of 500 or more, there are colored girls ranging from ages 14 to 19 years, counting out money made overnight for playing piano in houses of ill-fame in the entire red-light district of Chicago. There is not one word to be spoken against this great evil... Let anyone who is interested in the welfare of our women stand at 22nd and State, or 21st and State, or at Armour Avenue any evening from 6:30 to 8:00 and see depraved mothers offering their daughters up on the altar of Baal for Gold.²⁸

The *Defender* sharply criticized middle-class Black Christians and community leaders for ignoring the subject of prostitution, namely the purported failure of Black mothers to protect their daughters from the sexual exploits of prostitution houses. To the *Defender*, the Black church and civic organizations had a moral and religious obligation to "save" innocent young Black women from houses of ill-repute before it was too late. Studies of Black prostitutes in early twentieth century Chicago and New York have shown that Black women employed as

waitresses and dances inside of dancehalls, saloons, and speakeasies earned extra money by escorting white men. Although Black mothers most likely sent their daughters to houses of prostitution to earn additional money, it is likely that these teenaged Black girls also engaged in sex work as prostitutes.

The comparable wages for Black and white prostitutes in Chicago and New York during the 1920s indicated that white prostitutes working in brothels, cabarets, speakeasies, or as streetwalkers earned higher wages than Black prostitutes in the same institutions. Pointing out the racial and color hierarchies as a determining factor in charging clients for sexual intercourse inside New York's interracial brothels, white madams charged male clients three dollars for sex with darker skinned Black prostitutes, four dollars for sex with lighter skinned Black prostitutes, and seven dollars for sex with white prostitutes.²⁹ In Chicago, Black streetwalkers earned as little as one to two dollars from each client for sexual intercourse.³⁰

At the same time, Black prostitutes working independent of brothel and saloonkeepers exerted autonomy over their sexual labor by charging clients for their services. A 1920s interview between a white investigator and a Black dancer/prostitute named Harriet entailed that "Harriet charged white men \$5, but colored men only \$3" for sexual intercourse.³¹ Given the number of clients Black prostitutes serviced in a daily basis, it is safe to say that Black sex workers made more money in one day than domestic workers made in a week.

Aside from earning higher wages, Black prostitutes sought physical autonomy over their bodies. For instance, Black prostitutes who engaged in streetwalking enjoyed more autonomy over their labor than sex workers in brothels and saloons. As streetwalkers, Black female sex workers chose which clients to solicit sexual intercourse from. Contrarily, inside of brothels and saloons, prostitutes were chosen by clients for sexual intercourse, while streetwalkers chose

which clients to solicit sexual intercourse from.³² Unlike brothels and saloons, where madams set the prices of Black women's sexual service based on skin complexion, Black women who engaged in streetwalking set up the prices for their sexual services. The amount of autonomy exerted in choosing sexual partners, and setting prices represented a degree of sexual liberation Black working-class female prostitutes enjoyed, something that domestic and personal service workers or prostitutes working for brothel and saloonkeepers did not.

However, streetwalkers who worked for pimps did not have control over their sexual services or the economic wages for their labor.³³ Although leisure institutions served as places where Black men, and to a lesser extent women exerted physical and sexual autonomy over their bodies, for Black prostitutes, leisure institutions were also places of employment in male dominated spaces.³⁴ For Black men in the illicit sex economy, the streets became a leisure venue for pleasure, and for economic and sexual exploitation of Black prostitutes on the street. Thus, the street became a workplace for Black prostitutes whose relationship with their pimps was that of employer-employee.

Despite the economic exploitation, sexual exploitation, and physical violence against Black prostitutes, Black powerbrokers involved in the sex trade did not dominate the illicit sex economies of Chicago's red-light district and the Black Belt during the 1910s and 1920s. Instead, white mobs and corrupt law enforcement officials controlled the business enterprise of prostitution. White vice syndicates, policemen, and politicians extorted money from Black and white prostitutes, clients, and madams operating brothels in the red-light district. Yet, prior to 1912, rather than indicting white mobs, white reformers, vice syndicates, and law enforcement officials primarily targeted Black prostitutes, clients, and madams for expulsion from the red-light district. This was due to the desires of white middle-class property owners to restore

respectability to their neighborhoods, and to restore the Victorian image of white women's sexual respectability. Moreover, middle-class whites living in near the red-light district sought to halt interracial sexual relations between Black men and white women.

Expulsion of Black Sex Workers, Entrepreneurs, and Clients from the Red-Light District

There were two reasons for the significant decline of brothels operated by Black women in Chicago from 1900 to 1910, and the ultimate removal of Black men and women from Chicago's red light district. First, Black men and women who ran houses of prostitution or engaged in illicit sexual relations did not have the financial backing to pay white syndicates to help them avoid the raids of law enforcement officials.³⁵ As Blair explains, "between 1900 and 1910, white male leisure entrepreneurs established a severe footing within the sex economy."³⁶ It was during this ten year period that the shift of economic power in houses of prostitution went from being dominated by Black and white madams to white men who were members of vice syndicates.

Yet, the outcome for Black and white brothel keepers in the red light district differed in one major respect. Law enforcement officials did not frequently raid brothels owned by white madams. In fact, white madams were connected to "[white male] saloonkeepers whose wives or lovers ran houses of prostitution attached to their saloons, as partners with paramours, as sole managers, and even as employees of houses of prostitution."³⁷ As such, marital, business, and work relations with white vice syndicate members allowed white madams to avoid prosecution from law enforcement agents. Therefore, their businesses escaped police raids prior to 1912. Moreover, before the official closing of the red light district, white brothel keepers benefitted from the vice syndicates' connections to corrupt police officers and politicians, whom they paid to keep their illicit prostitution houses from being closed down.

Unfortunately, Black brothels keepers in the red light district did not benefit from business and familial connections to white vice syndicates. Black madams “eschewed the protection provided by syndicates, perhaps bristling at the duties and obligations expected from them in such an arrangement.”³⁸ Despite the emergence of white male control over illicit sex institutions in Chicago’s red light district, Black female brothel keepers such as Vina Fields, Maggie Douglas, and Hattie Jackson were determined to independently operate a lucrative business and refused to give up control to white vice syndicates. Consequently, Black brothel keepers and prostitutes faced constant raids and arrests from law enforcement officials.³⁹ But there was a second and more serious reason why corrupt law enforcement officials, vice syndicates, and property owners pushed for Black removal from the red light district: to eliminate interracial sexual relations between Black men and white women.

The efforts of middle-class whites to shut down Black participation in Chicago’s red light district were linked to the national fear of “white slavery.”⁴⁰ Also known as the Mann Act of 1910, white slavery was the domestic and international trafficking of foreign born European and native white American women across the state for purposes of prostitution. Although Eastern and Southern European immigrant men were involved in coercing their female counterparts into prostitution, law enforcers of the Mann Act primarily targeted Black men who had sexual relations with or attempted to marry white women.⁴¹ Thus, the supposed purpose of the 1910 Mann Act was for white men to preserve the virtue and sexual morality of white womanhood.

However, in reality white vice syndicates and corrupt politicians and law enforcement officials showed a half-hearted interest in the morality of white womanhood. As Blair demonstrates, the issue of white slavery in houses of prostitution only became a real concern for vice syndicates, politicians, and policemen when it involved illicit sexual transactions between

Black male clients and white prostitutes. At the same time, brothels operated by white madams with white prostitutes who served an exclusive white male clientele were tolerated, not perceived as a threat to the morale of white womanhood.⁴² Therefore, the expulsion of Black men from the red light district was motivated by the fear of white men losing control over the bodies of white women. However, white vice syndicates were more motivated to keep Black men out of the red light district in order to continue the operations of their illicit business, rather than to preserve the sexual purity of white women.

Nevertheless, middle-class reformers and property owners were concerned that prostitution and white slavery would tarnish the respectability of white womanhood and neighborhoods. Ultimately, this led to the shutdown of the Black and white houses of prostitution in the red light district. Restoring the respectability of middle-class white womanhood and white communities came at the expense of the moral deterioration of “respectable [Black] neighborhoods on the South Side.”⁴³ Driven out of the red-light district, working-class Blacks involved in the red light district sex economy carried over their illicit sexual activities into the Black Belt. With the closing of the red light district, middle-class white reformers and property owners successfully re-established what Blair refers to as the “moral geography” of Black and white neighborhoods.⁴⁴

Yet, Black women were not the only prostitutes settling and working in the Black Belt sex economy. Consequently, the closing of the red-light district gave way to the proliferation of prostitution houses operated by both Blacks and whites in this part of town, as well as an influx of Black and white prostitutes in the Black Belt.⁴⁵ The migration of working-class Black southerners, along with the establishment of saloons, black-and tans, buffet flats, and speakeasies increased middle-class Black fears of Black migrant women’s involvement in the growing illicit

sex economy.⁴⁶ Despite the involvement of white women in the Black Belt's illicit sex economy, the crime of prostitution remained associated with Black women.

White Slummers in the Black Belt

Nonetheless, the *Defender* depicted young Black women involved in prostitution as victims of white male sexual exploitation, arguing that white male pleasure seekers who ventured into the Black Belt's illicit establishments were the real criminals. An article from the 1912 *Chicago Defender*, for example expressed fears of "red lighters" invading middle-class Black neighborhoods on Chicago's South Side. These red lighters referred to Black and white prostitutes, madams, and clients who worked in, and frequently visited, the numerous houses of prostitution in the red light district.⁴⁷ *The Defender* warned "[Black] real estate agents, ministers, and women's clubs" in the Black Belt to remove red lighters and illicit venues from their neighborhoods or else "they will awaken some morning to find that their next door neighbor, Miss X, who formerly ran a pretentious establishment... will occupy an apartment in the same building."⁴⁸

As a result of the red light district closing, the Black Belt's infamous State Street, also known as the Stroll, became an integrated sex district. With its flourishing buffet flats, dancehalls, black-and-tan cabarets, saloons, and speakeasies, the Black Belt gained a notorious reputation for illicit and often interracial sexual relations between Black and white men and women.⁴⁹ White prostitutes, male and female entrepreneurs of prostitution houses, and wealthy whites who poured into the South Side to seek work, leisure, and sexual pleasure in the Black Belt's illicit sex houses were identified as "slummers."

Slumming in Chicago and New York's working-class Black and immigrant communities in the early twentieth century reveal the racial, class, sexual, gender, and spatial dimensions

behind the practices of slumming. The first generation of slummers in the mid to late nineteenth century were middle-class white reformers who established reform programs in European immigrant communities, and successfully eliminated vice in the red light districts surrounding white neighborhoods.⁵⁰ White Protestant organizations, social settlement workers, college professors, and graduate students ventured into immigrant and working-class communities in Chicago and New York to examine the conditions of poverty, “teach proper methods of housekeeping and childrearing, convert local [white] prostitutes to their particular brand of Christianity, and provide refuge in newly founded missionary and safe houses for women whom they were able to coax away from prostitution.”⁵¹

White reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century showed concern for the rise of prostitution and other vices taking place among African Americans in the Black Belt. However, subsequent generations of white slummers showed no interest in reforming Blacks or the Black Belt community from such vices.⁵² Rather, the new generation of white slummers ventured into Chicago’s South Side to seek work as prostitutes, establish houses of prostitution, to seek leisure entertainment in the form of jazz and blues, and to engage in commercial sex with Black men and women. Like middle-class white reformers of the mid to late nineteenth century, early twentieth century white slummers visiting the Black Belt believed the neighborhood and its residents to be morally inferior and sexually promiscuous. At the same time, white slummers engaged in sexual and non-sexual activity (i.e. dancing) with Black men and women.⁵³

By doing so, white slummers, especially those involved in sexual relations with Black people violated Victorian codes of “sexual restraint” as a basis for maintaining white middle-class respectability.⁵⁴ Specifically, the most flagrant of offenses against Victorian principles of sexual respectability involved illicit sexual activity between Black men and white women. This

is because Victorian principles of respectability relied on patriarchal control of white women's sexual purity. Engaging in sexual relations with "immoral" Black men challenged the alleged moral superiority of white women over Black women.⁵⁵

However, unlimited sexual access to Black women confirmed white men's sense of racial superiority over Black people.⁵⁶ Through engaging in commercial sex with Black prostitutes, white-male slummers contributed to the prevailing stereotypes of Black women as sexually promiscuous. Unfortunately, middle-class Black leaders were either unable or refused to protect working-class Black prostitutes from the sexual exploits of white male slummers in the Black Belt. Also, middle-class Black Belt residents lacked enough support from law enforcement officials to criminally prosecute white men for engaging in illicit sexual activity with Black prostitutes.⁵⁷ Ultimately, the failure of middle-class Black leaders to eliminate the sexual exploitation of Black prostitutes in the Black Belt is largely due to their inability in keeping white male slummers out of the Black Belt.

Middle-class Black male leaders argued that white male slummers committed the majority of sex crimes in the Black Belt.⁵⁸ In March 1923, the *Defender* published a statistical report from the Chicago Tribune, indicating that "only 30 percent of the [prostitution] vice was contributed by over 90 percent of the [Black] residents of the [Black Belt] district. 70 percent being of the [white male] imported variety."⁵⁹ Thus, middle-Class Black Belt leaders, particularly men, viewed the presence of white male slummers on Chicago's South Side as a threat to the morale of Black womanhood.

The presence of white male slummers hindered the struggle for Black middle-class community activists to dispel the hypersexual and criminalizing image of Black women as prostitutes. Several articles from the *Defender* demanded law enforcement officials to prosecute

white men for engaging in illicit sexual intercourse with Black prostitutes. Their efforts toward law enforcement intervention paid off in September 1913, when police officers raided a buffet flat on Wabash Ave and “arrested sixteen white men and sixteen colored girls, the men being charged of raping these innocent girls between the ages of fourteen and sixteen years.”⁶⁰

Although *the Defender* portrayed the teenaged Black girls as victims of sexual assault, police officers arrested the sixteen girls for prostitution. However, only five of the sixteen white men, ranging from “ages 25 to 45” were “held over to the grand jury” for the sexual assault of minors.⁶¹ The *Defender* later praised a white judge “who believed in law and justice-said crime is crime in the eyes of the law, white and black alike.”⁶² Unfortunately, the *Defender* did not provide any further information on the trials of the five white men charged with raping sixteen Black girls.

Fifteen years later, in December 1928, *the Defender* covered the case of a “white North Side businessman named David Farmer,” who was charged with soliciting sex from two Black prostitutes, “Mariah Green, 21 years old, and Bernice Johnson, 24 years old.”⁶³ Farmer, who “admitted to coming to the South Side to seek [Black] girls,” testified against Green and Johnson, accusing them of soliciting him for sex and stealing thirty-five dollars from his wallet.⁶⁴ Based on Farmer’s testimony, the judge rendered a guilty verdict and possible imprisonment of Green and Johnson for prostitution. But Green and Johnson’s attorney, Wendell Green, argued that Farmer’s admission of soliciting sex from Black prostitutes made him equally as guilty as Green and Johnson.⁶⁵

Attorney Green further criticized the racist and sexist system for “allowing [white men] who confessed their prostitution to go scot free, while the [Black] women are sent to Lawndale [prison] and fined” for prostitution.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, of all women criminally prosecuted for

prostitution in Chicago during the 1920s, seventy-five percent of the cases involved Black women.⁶⁷ However, white male slummers, as exemplified in the Farmer case were lightly penalized for their involvement in prostitution. Nevertheless, Green argued that white male slummers soliciting sex from Black prostitutes were mostly responsible for the sexual criminalization of the Black Belt. Green asks the judge, “Why should this man leave his respectable North Side home, wife, and family, and come over here to our community to satisfy his lust and thus tighten the grip of vice we are trying to break? This man by his actions thereby keeps his neighborhood free from vice, and I demand the he be fined and ordered examined.”⁶⁸ Ultimately, the judge ruled in Green’s favor and “fined farmer \$5 and ordered him sent to the health department for an examination.”⁶⁹

Green’s statement speaks to the nature of white supremacist politics behind the practice of slumming, highlighting racial, sexual, and spatial segregation. With rare exceptions, white men frequently visited leisure and sexual venues in the South Side to solicit sex from Black women without facing criminal prosecution from law enforcement. Even when white men were tried and found guilty for soliciting sex from Black prostitutes, the majority did not receive jail sentences, as the case of Farmer demonstrates. Also, Green’s remarks suggest that law enforcement officials either ignored or minimized the role of white male slummers in engaging in illicit sexual intercourse with Black prostitutes. By contrast, the *Defender* writes in 1924, “they [police] struck through the near South Side to end exploitation of white girls by Negro resort keepers... Jailing colored men who may be loved of or love fair ladies of the white tribe.”⁷⁰ Unlike the relationship between Black prostitutes and white male clients, law enforcement officials depicted white prostitutes as unwilling participants in sexual bondage at the hands of predatory Black men, who sought economic profit and sexual gratification from

exploiting white women. Regardless of whether sexual relations between Black men and white women were commercial or non-commercial, consensual or coerced, Black men risked imprisonment for any range of sexual or romantic relationships with white women.

However, a letter written by M.L. Powell to the *Chicago Defender* in 1928 states, “Women, licensed by men, make a business of prostitution, selling their bodies that demand this necessity-of the male shall be supplied. The only business in my race, I am sorry to say, is patronized by males of the white race.”⁷¹ For Black prostitutes, their bodies were not only an asset to white male pleasure seekers visiting the Black Belt’s houses of prostitution, they also became an economic asset to corrupt white politicians who exploited such criminal enterprises.

Not only did middle-class white male slummers contribute to the moral deterioration of Black women and the Black Belt, but corrupt law enforcement officials and politicians did little to crackdown on white male participation in the Black Belt’s illicit sex economy. This is because corrupt politicians were directly connected to the prostitution rings on Chicago’s South Side. Of the 2,200 houses of prostitution in the Black Belt in 1928, the *Defender* notes, “more than 60 percent are said to be connected with the vice ring controlled by politicians.”⁷² Vice lords, both Black and white, the *Defender* adds, “are forced to pay protection and graft money from \$50 up. The maximum sum is as high as \$300 a week.”⁷³ Although the *Defender* blamed white male slummers for the proliferation of prostitution and sexual victimization of Black women, the *Defender* also criticized middle-class Black women’s clubs and Black mothers for failing to protect young Black girls from exposure to houses of prostitution.

The Phyllis Wheatley Club and the Fight Against Prostitution

In the same 1910 article on teenage Black girls who played the piano inside of prostitution houses, the *Defender* indicted Black mothers for taking their teenage daughters ‘to

the homes of harlots to be lowered to the lowest depths of degradation.”⁷⁴ Although in fact many of these mothers had taken their daughters to brothels to earn extra money for the household by playing the piano, the *Defender* claimed that Black mothers lured their daughters to participate in the illicit sex economy as prostitutes. The *Defender* warned that Black mothers exposing their daughters to houses of prostitution would lead to “the spread of disease among thousands of innocent girls and boys whom they come into contact.”⁷⁵

For the *Defender*, houses of prostitution had taken over as the early twentieth century form of institutionalized slavery where young Black women were held in bondage, unprotected by their mother’s and women’s clubs. In this analysis, mothers continued to leave their daughters vulnerable to becoming victims of sexual and economic exploitation. The *Defender* asked, “Are our societies, like the Phyllis Wheatley Club going to sit idly by and let [Black] womanhood be trampled foot, or are they going to join hands in the holy war of the protection of the unknown black slave?”⁷⁶ Community leaders in the Black Belt saw clubwomen as role models of respectable Black womanhood and motherhood to young Black women, and therefore believed the responsibility of protecting and freeing Black women from the houses of prostitution lay with Black clubwomen.

In defense of the Phyllis Wheatley Club, its president, Elizabeth Davis acknowledged that some migrant Black women were coerced into working inside houses of prostitution. Despite coming “from the best [Black] families in other states,” Davis writes, “many of these girls were going astray by being led unawares into disreputable homes, entertainment and employment because of the lack of protection that strange girls of other races enjoy.”⁷⁷ Middle-class Black leaders, such as the Phyllis Wheatley Club understood the limited job opportunities for working and middle-class Blacks in Chicago during the 1910s and 1920s. However, the Phyllis Wheatley

Club also believed limited job opportunities to be an inexcusable reason for Black working-class women's employment as prostitutes inside of brothels, saloons, buffet flats, cabarets, and speakeasies in the red-light district and the Black Belt. Upon opening the Phyllis Wheatley Home in 1908, the Club only admitted young Black women who were unwilling participants in the sex trade. Rather than finding fault in otherwise respectable young Black women, the Phyllis Wheatley Club blamed white law enforcement officials for not protecting Black migrant women from being lured into prostitution in Chicago.

The Phyllis Wheatley Club served as a community watch organization that policed prostitution houses as part of their "motherwork" to protect Black women from being sexually victimized inside of illicit institutions. For their efforts to close saloons in the Black Belt, Davis credits the Club for "succeeding in closing one that was particularly disreputable."⁷⁸ The Phyllis Wheatley Club did not limit their "motherwork" to policing and closing down saloons in the Black Belt. As part of the selective process of admitting migrant Black women into the Phyllis Wheatley Home, the Club wrote in a 1911 *Defender* article, "the matron will certainly hunt your record, and where you were living before coming here. This is done to avoid future trouble for every person going from this home either brings us the respect of the person they go to or the reverse."⁷⁹ Out of fear of the home's loss of reputation as a respectable community institution in the Black Belt, the Phyllis Wheatley Club conducted background checks on applicants to keep women who were arrested and prosecuted for prostitution their bodies out of the home. Also, as "other mothers," the Phyllis Wheatley Club's objective was to protect respectable Black girls and women who were admitted in the home from Black women who actively engaged in prostitution.

It is not certain how the Phyllis Wheatley Club drew the distinction between admitting migrant women from good families who were forced into prostitution against their will, and

those who voluntarily engaged prostitution. Perhaps, the Phyllis Wheatley Club made this distinction through the backgrounds checks they conducted to determine which applicants had a criminal record for prostitution. Prostitutes from the latter category who were found guilty for engaging in illicit sexual activity did not qualify for residency at the Phyllis Wheatley Home. However, what is not specified is whether or not Black women criminally prosecuted for prostitution actually were actually *coerced* into the illicit Black Belt sex economy. It is likely that some of the applicants who were forced into sex work against their will were turned down from residing the home because of their criminal history for prostitution.

Unlike the *Defender* articles, which emphasized that all Black prostitutes were victims of white men's sexual exploits, the Phyllis Wheatley Club only classified unwilling Black female sex workers from respectable families as victims. Moreover, as seen earlier on, the Phyllis Wheatley Club did not target a particular racial or gender group of people for expulsion from the Black Belt or criminal indictment for prostitution. Rather, the Phyllis Wheatley Club's anti-prostitution activism targeted individuals across the racial and gender line who contributed to the moral and sexual deterioration of the Black Belt.

To factors shaped the proliferation of prostitution in the Black Belt during the Great Migration period of the 1910s and 1920s. First, the limitation of job opportunities for African-American women relegated them to domestic service work. Unfortunately, domestic labor not only paid meager wages for long hours of work, but also exposed Black female domestic workers to sexual violence at the hands of white men. Rather than accepting the degrading treatment received as domestic workers, some working-class Black women turned to prostitution for better wages, and to an extent, physical and sexual autonomy over their bodies.

Second, middle-class white people living in areas surrounding the red-light district

succeeded in closing down the illicit institutions operating in the red-light district. Not only did white middle-class reformers and residents managed to restore the respectability of white womanhood and their community, but they also contributed to the proliferation of prostitution in the Black Belt. It was Black sex workers, brothel keepers, and clients who were initially targeted for expulsion from the red-light district. However, the growing concern over white slavery eventually led to the expulsion of white people involved in the sex trade from the red-light district. Thus, white prostitutes, male clients, and brothel and saloon keepers ventured into the Black Belt and participated in the growing sex economy on Chicago's South side.

Black middle-class male leaders specifically fought to expel white men from the Black Belt because of their contribution to the rise of prostitution by engaging in the sexual and commercial exploitation of Black prostitutes. By contrast, the Phyllis Wheatley Club's anti-prostitution campaign battled to bar men and women from all racial backgrounds from the Black Belt's illicit sex economy. As "other mothers" in the Black Belt, the Phyllis Wheatley Club selectively admitted young Black women into the home based on their respectability of their backgrounds. It is uncertain as to how the club differentiated Black women who willingly or unwillingly engaged in prostitution. The Phyllis Wheatley Club likely assumed that Black women who were arrested and prosecuted for prostitution voluntarily participated in Black Belt sex trade as sex workers. Thus, while the Phyllis Wheatley Club took on the responsibility of "other mothering" young Black migrant women who were deemed worthy of protection from the sex trade, the club did not extend their maternal role to Black women who possessed criminal records of prostitution, whether or not they voluntarily sold their bodies.

Notes for Chapter 3

¹*Chicago Defender*, October 29, 1910.

²*Chicago Defender*, October 29, 1910.

³*Chicago Defender*, April 8, 1911.

⁴Mumford, Kevin J. *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) pg. 46.

⁵*Chicago Defender*, November 10, 1928.

⁶*Ibid*, November 10, 1928.

⁷Jones, Jacqueline. *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present*, Rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2010) pg. 142; Spear, Allan H. *Black Chicago: The Making of a New Ghetto*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) pgs. 151& 154.

⁸Scott, Emmett J. *Letters of Negro Migrants of 1916-1918*. The Journal of Negro History, Vol. 4, No. 3 (July, 1919) pg. 315.

⁹*Ibid*, pg. 315.

¹⁰*Ibid*, pg. 316.

¹¹*Ibid*, pg. 317.

¹²*Ibid*, pg. 317.

¹³Henri, Florette. *Black Migration Movement North, 1900-1920: The Road from Myth to Man*. (New York: Anchor Press, 1976) pg. 139; Jones, pg. 111.

¹⁴Scott, pg. 317.

¹⁵*Ibid*, pg. 426.

¹⁶*Ibid*, pgs. 318-319.

¹⁷*Ibid*, pgs. 318-319.

¹⁸Henri, pgs. 178-179.

¹⁹*Ibid*, pg. 155.

²⁰Spear, pg. 154.

²¹Jones, pg. 143.

²²*Chicago Defender*, July 30, 1921.

²³*Ibid*, July 30, 1921.

²⁴*Chicago Defender*, July 12, 1924.

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- ²⁵Ibid, July 12, 1924.
- ²⁶*Chicago Defender*, July 24, 1926.
- ²⁷Ibid, July 24, 1926.
- ²⁸*Chicago Defender*, March 26, 1910.
- ²⁹Mumford, pg. 105.
- ³⁰Mumford, pg. 103.
- ³¹Mumford, pg. 106.
- ³²Blair, pgs. 71-79. Mumford, pg. 102.
- ³³Blair, pg.165.
- ³⁴ Kelley, Robin D. *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. (New York: Free Press, 1994) pg. 48.
- ³⁵Blair, pgs 137-138, 140.
- ³⁶Ibid, pg 137.
- ³⁷Ibid, pg 136.
- ³⁸Ibid, pg 145.
- ³⁹Ibid, pg 146.
- ⁴⁰Blair, pgs. 140-141; Heap, Chad. *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) pg. 127; Mumford, pgs. 10-12.
- ⁴¹Heap, pgs.127-128; Mumford, pgs. 12-13.
- ⁴²Blair, pg141.
- ⁴³*Chicago Defender*, October 12, 1912.
- ⁴⁴Blair, pg 120.
- ⁴⁵ Heap, pg. 210; Mumford, 100-101.
- ⁴⁶*Chicago Defender*, June 10, 1922.
- ⁴⁷*Chicago Defender*, October 12, 1912.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid, October 12, 1912.
- ⁴⁹Baldwin, Davarian L. *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, The Great Migration, and Black Urban Life*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007) pg. 45; Blair, pg160.
- ⁵⁰Heap, pg.11; Mumford, pgs. 42-44.

⁵¹ Heap, pg. 4

⁵²Mumford, pgs. 41& 44-47.

⁵³Heap, pgs. 190-199.

⁵⁴Ibid, pg. 102.

⁵⁵Ibid, pg. 204.

⁵⁶Ibid, pg. 204.

⁵⁷Ibid, pg. 206.

⁵⁸Ibid, pg. 207.

⁵⁹*Chicago Defender*, March 17, 1923.

⁶⁰*Chicago Defender*, September 6, 1913.

⁶¹ Ibid, September 6, 1913.

⁶² Ibid, September 6, 1913.

⁶³*Chicago Defender*, December 8, 1928.

⁶⁴ Ibid, December 8, 1928.

⁶⁵ Ibid, December 8, 1928.

⁶⁶ Ibid, December 8, 1928.

⁶⁷*Chicago Defender*, December 1, 1928.

⁶⁸*Chicago Defender*, December 8, 1928.

⁶⁹ Ibid, December 8, 1928.

⁷⁰*Chicago Defender*, February 9, 1924.

⁷¹*Chicago Defender*, January 21, 1928.

⁷²*Chicago Defender*, September 15, 1928.

⁷³ Ibid, September 15, 1928.

⁷⁴*Chicago Defender*, March 26, 1910.

⁷⁵ Ibid, March 26, 1910.

⁷⁶ Ibid, March 26, 1910.

⁷⁷ Davis, Elizabeth L. *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs*, Introduction by Shelia Smith McCoy. (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1997) pg. 16.

⁷⁸Ibid, pg. 16.

⁷⁹*Chicago Defender*, April 8, 1911.

Conclusion

With the mass migration of Black working-class southerners to Chicago, the formation of Black settlements like the Phyllis Wheatley Home were much needed in early twentieth century because of the residential segregation and deterioration of housing conditions African-American Chicagoans experienced. Also, sexual violence and exploitation of Black women's bodies proliferated with the migration of Black southerners to Chicago. With the expulsion of Black and white prostitutes, clients and proprietors from the red-light district, prostitution rapidly and increasingly was pushed into the Black Belt. Thus, the presence of white prostitutes, male clients, and proprietors undermined the efforts of middle-class Black leaders to keep the Black Belt free from houses of prostitution and those involved in the illicit sex trade.

However, racial discrimination in the labor force offered limited job opportunities for Black women in Chicago. As a result, both working and middle-class Black women often accepted employment as domestic workers. Sadly, Black female domestic workers were vulnerable to becoming victims of rape committed by white men. For many Black working-class women, prostitution became an alternative source of employment to earn higher wages and avoid the degradation of domestic work. Yet, Black female prostitutes risked possible arrest, incarceration, and sexual violence at the hands of white and Black men.

Moreover, the purpose of mainstream settlements operated by white social reformers was to provide a home for Eastern and Southern European working-class immigrants as a refuge from poverty, unsanitary housing conditions, and sexual exploitation. Unfortunately, mainstream settlements did not shelter African-American migrants from facing such conditions. The Phyllis Wheatley Club was aware that many Black southern women severed ties to their families and communities in making their solo journey to Chicago. The club's concern over the lack of

protection and resources for Black migrant women led to their project to establish the Phyllis Wheatley Home. From the time the home opened in 1908, the Phyllis Wheatley Club actively campaigned to alleviate the deterioration of housing, the spread of disease, the vice of prostitution, and the sexual exploitation of Black women.

As “othermothers” to Black migrant women residing at the home built a communal family structure that called for Black civic organizations and institutions to financially support the home. By hosting fundraising and charity drives, parties, and social events, the Phyllis Wheatley solicited enough funds to provide proper sanitation and household supplies for the home. Also, the Phyllis Wheatley Club was able to pay the mortgage for the home. The Phyllis Wheatley Club’s ability to intersect feminist ideologies of motherwork, and community and domestic feminism with Black economic nationalism was successful for one reason. This is because the Phyllis Wheatley Home was a private space. As such, the Phyllis Wheatley Club fulfilled the expectations of mainstream and Black middle-class values of women’s role as mothers and caretakers of the home. At the same time, the Phyllis Wheatley Home was a public space that served as a platform for the club to assert their leadership through infusing the domestic ideologies of motherhood into their professional employment as settlement workers. Consequently, the clubwomen’s leadership in the settlement housing movement, and their community activism for improving housing conditions, and protecting Black women from sexual exploitation was a crucial aspect of their motherwork, community feminism, and domestic feminism that garnered support from African-American civic organizations, and institutions.

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