

Tonya D. Blair

Ph.D. Dissertation Outline

Department of History

University of Southern Mississippi

Tonya D. Blair, “Building Within Our Borders: African-American Women Reformers in the South from 1890 to 1920”, Ph.D. University of Southern Mississippi, 2012 .

Abstract: This dissertation examines the reform work of three unsung African-American women reformers in Virginia from the postbellum period into the early twentieth century. The subjects all spearheaded institutions and organizations such as industrial training schools, settlement houses, orphanages, homes for the elderly, a girl’s reform/industrial school and a state federation of Black women’s clubs. The selected subjects include Jennie Dean, a former slave from northern Virginia, who founded an industrial training school for African-Americans in post Civil War Manassas, Virginia. Ms. Dean’s industrial school resulted from her tenacious drive to imbue former slaves with literacy and vocational skills; both of these empowering tools would serve as foundations for Black socioeconomic mobility in the postbellum era. Another subject is Amelia Perry Pride. Pride, a native of Lynchburg, Virginia and an 1885 graduate of Hampton Institute (now University), established a Dorchester Home for the Elderly, as well as an orphanage for African-American children in Lynchburg. Pride was also instrumental in lobbying for and designing a domestic education curriculum, which was utilized within Lynchburg’s public schools for African-American students (as this happened during the age of segregated public schools). A third subject is Janie Porter Barrett. Barrett, an 1884 graduate of Hampton, was inspired by the Hampton Model as designed and instructed by Hampton’s founder, Samuel Chapman. While students at Hampton, both Pride and Barrett were inspired and encouraged to feel a sense of responsibility in uplifting and empowering the “less fortunate” Black masses. Just like Pride, Barrett also established invaluable institutions within Virginia’s Black community. Barrett’s first endeavor was the Locust Street Settlement House in Hampton, Virginia. The Locust Street facility was a multipurpose facility, which was like a YMCA. Locust Street provided recreational activities, domestic/vocational training classes, day care services and horticulture classes. Barrett’s second project was the establishment of a state federation of Black Women’s clubs, which became a part of the national association of Black Women’s Clubs. While serving as president of the state federation, Barrett was instrumental in founding the Virginia Industrial Training School for Colored Girls. This training school for wayward young girls was one of the first institution’s in the nation for African-American girls. This school, which was located in Hanover County, Virginia, would serve as a paradigm for other correctional schools in the nation. Barrett’s tenure as principal of this institution, which was founded on the Hampton Model, impressively spanned from 1915 to the late 1940s.

Purpose: By examining the backgrounds, words and works (social programs/ organizations) of the featured women, the dissertation supports the following thesis: African-American women reformers in the south from 1890 to 1920 navigated around the stagnations of racial prejudice and White paternalistic condescension in order to independently orchestrate a reform tradition. This rich tradition included the founding of organizations and institutions based upon the virtues of self-sufficiency, industry, Christian morality, thrift, civic benevolence and interracial cooperation. Constructed amid the backdrop of an era of overt and institutionalized racial segregation, these organizations and institutions designed by Black women, invaluable served and sustained segments of Virginia’s local African-American communities by providing them with outlets for vocational, cultural, moral, leadership and social enrichment.

## Chapter Outline:

I. “Bonds of Building” – This first chapter is an introductory chapter, which presents the scholarship of African-American women’s reform efforts during the postbellum and early twentieth century. This chapter will also establish a “period” backdrop for the subjects’ activism. Given the postbellum time window in which my subjects were active, it is imperative to briefly discuss the South from Reconstruction to the early twentieth century Black Nadir.

II. “The Basis for Building: The Nature of Late Nineteenth Century Progressivism and the American South”- This second chapter sets an historical contextual stage, chronicling various sociopolitical dynamics, which facilitated southern Black women’s progressivism.

III. “From Bondage to Building”- This chapter chronicles the background of former slave, Jennie Dean and the motives, which led her to establish the Manassas Industrial Training School. This chapter will also examine the nature of this school and the impact that it had on Manassas’ Black community. Dean’s school, which was endorsed by Frederick Douglass, was also aided by interracial cooperation.

IV. “From Classroom to Community” – This chapter examines the reform endeavors of Amelia Perry Pride and Janie Porter Barrett. Since both of these women were early graduates of Hampton Institute ( now University), this chapter will also include a discussion of how Samuel Armstrong’s “Hampton Model” impacted the work of two of its early graduates. Amelia Perry Pride’s Dorchester Home for the elderly and her domestic arts curriculum, which became the paradigm for Lynchburg’s segregated public Black schools will be discussed. Barrett will figure very prominently within this chapter. Barrett’s discussion will include her Locust Street Settlement House initiative, her establishment of the Virginia Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs and the federation’s establishment of the Virginia Industrial School for Colored Girls. Exceptionally, this was the first instructional reformatory school for girls of any ethnicity in the South. In fact, the school garnered so much acclaim for its organization and discipline, that it served as a model for predominately Caucasian juvenile correctional facilities. Barrett served as the institution’s superintendent from 1915 to the late 1940s.

V. “Bound by Building”- This concluding chapter parallels the efforts, motivators, and objectives of the three subjects. As a result of this parallel, the author cites a number of similarities, which motivated these women to build within their borders.

## VI. Bibliography