Defining Black Women in Philanthropy

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Why Black Women’s Philanthropy?

“The coloured women have not been backward in promoting charities for their own race and sex.” – Frances E. W. Harper (Giddings, When and Where I Enter 1984, 73)

- Black women have always worked (Barnes 2008), but their philanthropic labor has not been fully examined or clearly articulated in scholarly discourse.

- Examining the early history of Black women’s philanthropic work promotes critical discourse—challenging race, gender, and class norms.

- Purpose: To move our understanding of philanthropy beyond its limited definition of white, elite, male and institutional in nature.

- And elevate Black women as equitable and effective socio-political change agents within the philanthropic sector.
Preliminary Research Questions:

**Ideological**

- How is philanthropy defined?
- How do notions of philanthropic work incorporate cultural values and traditions specific to the Black women’s experience?
- What made African American women’s philanthropic ideologies and labor unique?

**Historical**

- What role did Black women play in the philanthropic scene from the late 19th through the early 20th century?
- To what issues and causes did Black women primarily give during this period, and in what ways (i.e., individual support, collective giving, volunteerism)?
- What were the particular leadership styles and perspectives of Black female philanthropists during this period?
Defining Philanthropy:

- “Voluntary Action for the public good.” (6)
- “Moral action in response to a human problematic”
- Philanthropy is about ideas and values […] It is always an effort to blend the ideal with the practical”
Black Women’s Philanthropy: 
Building A Theoretical & Historical Framework

- National Association of Colored Women (NACW)

- Biographical profiles on NACW leadership

- Summer research at Smith College and Howard University
To the archives...
The National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (NACW) “Lifting as We Climb”

History of the Establishment of the NACW

- Public attack on the intelligence and respectability of Black women
  - Letter from James Jacks, President of the Missouri Press Association
  - Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin (Women’s Era Club) calls 1st National Conference of Club Women, Boston, MA (1895)
- 1895 - National Federation of Afro-American Women formed (NFAAW)
- Merging of National Black Women’s Club Organizations
  - 1896 - NFAAW merges with the National League of Colored Women (NLCLW) in Washington, DC - Headed by Mary Church Terrell

Membership
- United an estimate

Leadership
National Association of Colored Women’s Inaugural Meeting
19th Street Baptist Church, Washington, DC – July 21, 1896

Sophia Smith Collection - Smith College Archives
“We the Colored women of America, stand before the country today a united sisterhood, to promote the welfare of our race. As a unit we shall bend our energies to accomplish the ends for which we have banded together.”

- Women’s Era (1896): 3
Combing the Terrell Manuscripts
What’s Next?

- Defining research question(s):
  - In what ways did Black women employ an *activist* agenda in their philanthropic work? (Silver 1998)
  - How did Black women utilize their *community cultural wealth* to engage in philanthropic work? (Yosso 2005)

- Theoretical framework
  - Anzaldúa, Collins, Silver, Yosso

- Biographical Profiles
  - Maria Stewart (1803-1879)
  - Maggie Lena Walker (1864-1934)
  - Madam C. J. Walker (1867-1919)
Questions & Feedback