BLACK CLUB WOMEN AND CHILD WELFARE: LESSONS FOR MODERN REFORM

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I. INTRODUCTION

Last year I discovered a chapter in the history of U.S. child welfare policy that is overlooked in most accounts of the child welfare system. An editor for Darlene Clark Hine's *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia* asked me to write the entry about child welfare.[1] As I began the project, I realized that I had written an entire book and several articles about mainstream child welfare agencies' treatment of African-American children,[2] but I knew too little about the history of African-American women's own approach to child welfare issues.

In prior research, I learned that Black women were excluded from elite white women's campaigns in the early twentieth century to rescue poor children from parental abuse and indigence[3] and that Black children were ignored by the institutions these white women founded.[4] But how had African-American women responded to the needs of Black children? As I probed this question, I discovered an amazing, though rather obscure, record of organizing by Black

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1. BLACK WOMEN IN AMERICA: AN HISTORICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA (Darlene Clark Hine et al. eds., 2d ed. 2005).

2. *See, e.g.*, DOROTHY ROBERTS, SHATTERED BONDS: THE COLOR OF CHILD WELFARE (2002) [hereinafter SHATTERED BONDS]; Dorothy E. Roberts, *Kinship Care and the Price of State Support for Children*, 76 CHI.-KENT L. REV. 1619 (2001).

3. *See* LINDA GORDON, PITIED BUT NOT ENTITLED: SINGLE MOTHERS AND THE HISTORY OF WELFARE, 1890-1935, at 111-43 (1994).

4. *See* ANDREW BILLINGSLEY & JEANNE M. GIOVANNONI, CHILDREN OF THE STORM: BLACK CHILDREN AND AMERICAN CHILD WELFARE 34-38, 76-80 (1972). I capitalize Black and not white because people of African descent living in the United States identified themselves as an ethnic group, whereas being "white" constituted a privileged racial status accorded to members of certain ethnic groups. *See generally* IAN F. HANEY LÓPEZ, WHITE BY LAW: THE LEGAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACE (1996) (exploring the legal origins of white racial identity); NOEL IGNATIEV, HOW THE IRISH BECAME WHITE (1995) (discussing how Irish immigrants were assimilated as "white" after the Civil War).

women for the welfare of children. As a result of exclusion from white organizations, Black women created a movement at the turn of the twentieth century, through their participation in hundreds of clubs and church groups, to provide services to Black children.[5] This child service movement incorporated Black women's own philosophy, which tied child welfare to racial advancement and justice.

Sadly, Black club women's remarkable achievements have been left out of the official history of the women's movement in the United States, and their vision of child welfare has been omitted from the development of the public child welfare system. Their perspective differed drastically from the punitive approach of the modern child welfare system, in which African-American children are now overrepresented, and offers important lessons for reform efforts today. Although these elite Black women were motivated by paternalistic self-interest along with altruism, they nevertheless implemented a philosophy about child welfare that is superior to the dominant approach of current child protective services. This Essay highlights three key aspects of Black club women's child welfare vision that we should incorporate in contemporary child welfare policy and practice: these women understood the relationship between the well-being of individual children and their group identity and social surroundings; they focused on improving the general welfare of children rather than responding to particular cases of child maltreatment; and they promoted children's welfare by supporting, rather than punishing, mothers.

II. BLACK CLUB WOMEN'S SOCIAL VIEW OF CHILD WELFARE

After slavery ended, Black communities had to look to their own internal resources to meet children's needs. Black children in the early 1900s were more likely to be labeled "delinquent" and sent to prison than to be admitted to the asylums and orphanages established by whites for destitute children.[6] Just as Black children were ignored by white charities, Black women were barred from membership in the emerging movement for women's emancipation led by upper-class white women.[7] In 1895, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, president of the Women's Era Club, boldly responded to this exclusion in her opening address to one hundred delegates from ten states who

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5. On Black club women's organizing at the turn of the twentieth century, see generally PAULA GIDDINGS, WHEN AND WHERE I ENTER: THE IMPACT OF BLACK WOMEN ON RACE AND SEX IN AMERICA (1984); DARLENE CLARK HINE, HINE SIGHT: BLACK WOMEN AND THE RE-CONSTRUCTION OF AMERICAN HISTORY (1994); and DOROTHY SALEM, TO BETTER OUR WORLD: BLACK WOMEN IN ORGANIZED REFORM, 1890-1920 (1990).

6. BILLINGSLEY & GIOVANNONI, *supra* note 4, at 80 ("[A] major child-caring institution for Black and other nonwhite children was the prison.").

7. *See* GORDON, *supra* note 3, at 111-43 (1994).

attended the first national conference of Black women, held in Boston: "Year after year, Southern [white] women have protested against the admission of colored women into any organization on the ground of the immorality of our women and because our reputation has only been tried by individual work, the charge has never been crushed."[8] She then admonished the audience to join together to "teach an ignorant suspicious world that our aims and interests are identical with those of all aspiring women."[9]

Ruffin was referring to the multifaceted campaign, occurring in the decades after Emancipation, led by Black women to improve the status of Black families.[10] The women's clubs and church groups essentially established a separate child welfare system for their race. Their activities were focused primarily on creating institutions and programs that rendered assistance to mothers and children in local Black communities, and they held a philosophy about child welfare that radically contested the mainstream views of their time. Black women believed that resisting racial injustice, advancing the race, and reforming society entailed properly educating and caring for the next generation. They emphasized preventive social work that improved mothers' skills and children's opportunities, an emphasis which was in stark contrast to the white-dominated child welfare system's reliance on punishing mothers and removing children from their homes—a focus that guides child welfare practice to this day.

Black club women recognized the uniqueness of their movement, which derived from their own experiences and not from the precepts of either Black men or white women. In a paragraph headed "Women Deserve the Praise," Fannie Barrier Williams, an outspoken Chicago writer and reformer, celebrated the exceptional contribution of Black

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8. BEVERLY WASHINGTON JONES, QUEST FOR EQUALITY: THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF MARY ELIZA CHURCH TERRELL, 1863-1954, at 19 (Darlene Clark Hine et al. eds., 1990) (alteration in original). Black club women held white women accountable not only for their exclusionary practices but also for raising racist children. Mary Church Terrell, president of the National Association of Colored Women, called upon white women to "train their children to be broad and just enough to judge men and women by their intrinsic merit rather than by the adventitious circumstances of race or color or creed." Mary Church Terrell, *What Role Is the Educated Negro Woman to Play in the Uplifting of Her Race?*, *in* TWENTIETH CENTURY NEGRO LITERATURE; OR, A CYCLOPEDIA OF THOUGHT ON THE VITAL TOPICS RELATING TO THE AMERICAN NEGRO 172, 176 (D.W. Culp ed., 1902), *reprinted in* JONES, *supra*, at 155.

Terrell also advised white mothers on how to deliver this instruction:

> Colored women are asking the white mothers of the land to teach their children that when they grow to be men and women, if they deliberately prevent their fellow creatures from earning an honest living by closing their doors of trade against them, the Father of all men will hold them responsible for the crimes which are the result of their injustice and for the human wrecks which the ruthless crushing of hope and ambition always makes.

Id. at 176, *reprinted in* JONES, *supra*, at 155.

9. JONES, *supra* note 8, at 19.

10. *See* sources cited *supra* note 5.

women, noting that "they did not need to be told what was to be done or what to do."[11]

> The conscience-call for kindergartens, day nurseries, reading rooms, etc., was not man-made. The white women's clubs, as large, numerous and generous as they sometimes are, sent no missionaries among their darker sisters to show them the way out of social darkness and despair. On the contrary the colored women began their club work in the same independent spirit with which they have taught themselves, and then began to teach others, even in the dark days before they became free.[12]

Black club women's activism and philanthropy reached national dimensions when a group of well-educated, middle-class women, including Mary Church Terrell, Ida Wells-Barnett, Janie Porter Barrett, and Margaret Murray Washington, founded The National Association of Colored Women (NACW) in Washington, D.C., in 1896, uniting the three largest federations and more than one hundred local women's clubs.[13] The NACW represented a shift in Black women's collective efforts away from traditional groups, such as sewing circles, church clubs, and sisterly orders, toward associations dedicated to social reform.[14]

With the motto "Lifting As We Climb," the NACW held national conferences in a number of northern cities and became a powerful advocate for racial uplift, which prominently included improving Black children's welfare.[15] Mary Church Terrell, a graduate of Oberlin College and the first president of the NACW, exhorted educated Negro women in her numerous speeches and writings to "listen to the cry of the children."[16] "Nothing lies nearer the heart of colored women than the children," Terrell wrote in an essay entitled *What Role Is the Educated Negro Woman to Play in the Uplifting of Her Race?*[17]

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11. Fannie Barrier Williams, *Club Movement Among Negro Women*, *in* PROGRESS OF A RACE; OR, THE REMARKABLE ADVANCEMENT OF THE COLORED AMERICAN 197, 204 (J.W. Gibson & W.H. Crogman eds., J.L. Nichols & Co. 1912) (1902), *partially reprinted in* THE NEW WOMAN OF COLOR: THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF FANNIE BARRIER WILLIAMS, 1893-1918, at 28, 32 (Mary Jo Deegan ed., 2002).

12. *Id.* at 204-05, *partially reprinted in* THE NEW WOMAN OF COLOR: THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF FANNIE BARRIER WILLIAMS, 1893-1918, at 32-33 (Mary Jo Deegan ed., 2002).

13. Eileen Boris, *The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefine the "Political,"* 2 YALE J.L. & FEMINISM 25, 31 (1989); HINE, *supra* note 5, at 120-21; *see also* GIDDINGS, *supra* note 5, at 95 ("[I]n less than twenty years after its founding, the NACW represented 50,000 women in 28 federations and over 1,000 clubs."); GORDON, *supra* note 3, at 118 ("By 1913 Chicago alone had forty-one NACW-affiliated clubs with 1,200 members, by 1921 sixty clubs and 2,000 members.").

14. JONES, *supra* note 8, at 17.

15. Boris, *supra* note 13, at 35; GIDDINGS, *supra* note 5, at 97-98.

16. Mary Church Terrell, Address Before The National American Women's Suffrage Association (Feb. 18, 1898), *available at* http://gos.sbc.edu/t/terrellmary.html; *see also* Terrell, *supra* note 8, *reprinted in* JONES, *supra* note 8.

17. Terrell, *supra* note 8, at 174, *reprinted in* JONES, *supra* note 8, at 154.

Having experienced the deaths of her three children shortly after their births,[18] Terrell treated the NACW as a surrogate child:

> So tenderly has this child of the organized womanhood of the race been nurtured, and so wisely ministered unto by all who have watched prayerfully and waited patiently for its development, that it comes before you to-day a child hale, hearty and strong, of which its fond mothers have every reason to be proud.[19]

Terrell's portrayal of women's organizing as a child reflects her view of motherhood as a political enterprise.

Black club women understood that the well-being of individual Black children was inextricably linked to the status of their entire race. First, they traced children's welfare not only to parents' behavior but to social context. They framed their child welfare work as a social reform movement. Thus, Fannie Barrier Williams described Black club women's activities as a sociological project in which "colored women began a more or less systematic study of social conditions."[20]

Second, Black club women explicitly tied their child welfare work to the future of Blacks as a group. Indeed, Mary Church Terrell believed that child welfare was the key to ending America's racial inequities. "[T]he real solution of the race problem, both so far as we, who are oppressed and those who oppress us are concerned, lies in the children," she wrote in an essay about the NACW's mission.[21] Terrell believed that NACW's children's programs helped to "build the foundation of the next generation upon such a rock of integrity, morality, and strength, both of body and mind, that the floods of proscription, prejudice, and persecution may descend upon it in torrents, and yet it will not be moved."[22] Child welfare work was integrated into an agenda that encompassed a broad range of antiracist activities, including agitation "[a]gainst lynching, the convict lease system, the Jim Crow car laws, and all other barbarities and abuses which degrade and dishearten us," as well as advocacy for employing workers and patronizing businesses within the Black community.[23]

Although Black women's organizations, like their white counterparts, were often led by relatively prosperous and educated women,

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18. JONES, *supra* note 8, at 21.

19. Mary Church Terrell, *The Duty of the National Association of Colored Women to the Race*, AME CHURCH REV., Jan. 1900, at 340, 340, *reprinted in* JONES, *supra* note 8, at 139.

20. Williams, *supra* note 11, at 205, *partially reprinted in* THE NEW WOMAN OF COLOR: THE COLLECTED WRITINGS OF FANNIE BARRIER WILLIAMS, 1893-1918, at 33 (Mary Jo Deegan ed., 2002).

21. Terrell, *supra* note 19, at 346, *reprinted in* JONES, *supra* note 8, at 143.

22. *Id.*

23. *Id.* at 353, *reprinted in* JONES, *supra* note 8, at 149.

they focused their activism on the concerns of poor and working mothers and their children. They saw the fate of all Black women as linked and understood that racial betterment necessitated universal programs for the benefit of entire communities. As NACW President Terrell noted about the organization's motto, "Lifting As We Climb," "In no way could we live up to such a sentiment better than by coming into closer touch with the masses of our women."[24] In Terrell's candid view, the most fortunate Black women had both a moral obligation and selfish interest to help improve the status of the most disadvantaged:

> Even though we wish to shun them, and hold ourselves entirely aloof from them, we cannot escape the consequences of their acts. So, that, if the call of duty were disregarded altogether, policy and self-preservation would demand that we go down among the lowly, the illiterate, and even the vicious to whom we are bound by the ties of race and sex, and put forth every possible effort to uplift and reclaim them.[25]

Terrell reasoned that white Americans judged Black people on the basis of the "most illiterate and vicious representatives rather than by the more intelligent and worthy classes."[26] It behooved educated Negro women, then, to work toward reforms that would elevate the morality and intellect of their most disadvantaged sisters.

This racial mission involved challenging racist stereotypes as well as improving poor women's character. Terrell recognized that whites' judgments about Black immorality were biased. According to Terrell, images of Black women's sexual depravity proliferated because "[f]alse accusations and malicious slanders [were] circulated against them constantly, both by the press and by the direct descendants of those who in years past were responsible for the moral degradation of their female slaves."[27] One of her aims for the NACW was to uncover "the enormity of the double standard of morals, which teaches that we should turn the cold shoulder upon a fallen sister, but greet her destroyer with open arms and a gracious smile."[28] Black club women concentrated on the status of Black motherhood and the quality of home life to defend mothers and children from the prevailing stereotypes of sexual wantonness.[29] They waged a campaign of respectability intended both to train poor and working-class Black women in

24. *Id.* at 347, *reprinted in* JONES, *supra* note 8, at 144.
25. *Id.*
26. Terrell, *supra* note 8, at 175, *reprinted in* JONES, *supra* note 8, at 154.
27. *Id.* at 176, *reprinted in* JONES, *supra* note 8, at 155-56.
28. *Id.*, *reprinted in* JONES, *supra* note 8, at 155.
29. Boris, *supra* note 13, at 29, 37-40.

bourgeois culture and to show whites that Black women were capable of this civility.[30]

Thus, Black club women were motivated both by a concern for racial justice and by paternalistic self-interest. On one hand, these elite club women saw the fate of all Black women as linked and understood that racial betterment necessitated universal programs for the benefit of entire communities. On the other hand, club women's interest in less privileged Black women promoted paternalistic efforts to regulate their dangerous sexual behavior that centered too much on white people's approval.[31] With little power to influence white behavior in the Jim Crow era, Black club women relied on Black women's moral improvement as the most feasible weapon for challenging sexual exploitation and vilification.

III. RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN

Child welfare activities within the Black community then developed as part of Black club women's broader social welfare vision born of both selfish and altruistic motives. Some activities directed toward orphaned, abandoned, and neglected children—such as establishing orphanages—correspond with modern concepts of child welfare programs.[32] But most services were aimed at improving the lives of all Black children by giving them better access to education or by assisting their mothers to become better caregivers. These included establishing schools and training teachers, holding mothers' meetings, running day nurseries and kindergartens, and opening homes for working girls.[33]

African-American women responded to the needs of parentless or neglected Black children, who were largely denied entrance to orphanages established by whites, by organizing informal as well as institutionalized services. Individual women founded and operated many orphanages, resembling large boarding houses, that relied entirely on their fundraising and leadership abilities.[34]

Unlike white child-savers of the time, who sought to rescue poor immigrant children from what they perceived as a corrupting environment, Black women were motivated to rescue Black children from the punitive institutions created by whites. In her 1895 editorial in *The Woman's Era*, *The Need of Co-operation of Men and Women in*

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30. DEBORAH GRAY WHITE, TOO HEAVY A LOAD: BLACK WOMEN IN DEFENSE OF THEMSELVES, 1894-1994, at 35 (1999).

31. *Id.* at 36-37. My understanding of Black club women's dual motives benefited from conversations with Andy Lowry about her archival research on the Atlanta Neighborhood Union.

32. *See* SALEM, *supra* note 5, at 82-84.

33. HINE, *supra* note 5, at 109-28.

34. SALEM, *supra* note 5, at 82-84.

Correctional Work, Fannie Barrier Williams highlighted "woman's desire to share in the responsibility of making a proper use of the humane forces that would rather save than condemn the waifs of society."[35] She called on women to make their homes available to dependent children to avoid their placement behind bars: "I have faith enough in human kindness to believe that there is somewhere a home for every homeless child. It is possible to make every incorrigible child corrigible by a parental spirit of discipline."[36]

On October 3, 1907, Elizabeth McDonald established, in her Chicago home, the Louis Juvenile Home for dependent and neglected children.[37] She taught the fifty-six children and two mothers who resided there domestic tasks such as washing, cooking, sewing, and embroidering.[38] McDonald failed to attract sufficient charitable donations and supported her home by lecturing and evangelizing, along with collecting small fees from parents.[39] She traced her motivation to the disproportionate numbers of Blacks in prison and saw her home as saving children from future imprisonment.[40]

Other orphanages established by Black women grew into more formal institutions, with boards of trustees, hired directors, and more stable sources of funding.[41] Carrie Steele, a former slave, sold her autobiography to raise enough money to purchase four acres of land in Atlanta so that she was able, in 1890, to start an orphanage that cared for five children.[42] By 1900, the Carrie Steele Orphanage had sufficient support from club and church groups to expand to a three-story building, which would eventually house 225 children, a hospital, and a school.[43]

Similarly, Amanda Berry Smith, an internationally renowned evangelist and missionary, when more than sixty years of age, raised money by selling her autobiography to found the Amanda Smith Industrial Home for Abandoned and Destitute Colored Children in Harvey, Illinois, in 1899.[44] With financial assistance both from clubs and from the State of Illinois, the orphanage was able to continue

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35. Fannie Barrier Williams, *Need of Co-operation of Men and Women in Correctional Work*, WOMAN'S ERA, May 1895, at 4.

36. *Id.*

37. BILLINGSLEY & GIOVANNONI, *supra* note 4, at 53-54.

38. *Id.* at 54.

39. *Id.*

40. *Id.* at 53-54.

41. *See* HINE, *supra* note 5, at 109-28.

42. CYNTHIA NEVERDON-MORTON, AFRO-AMERICAN WOMEN OF THE SOUTH AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE RACE, 1895-1925, at 143-44 (1989).

43. *Id.* at 144.

44. SALEM, *supra* note 5, at 83.

caring for more than sixty children after Smith retired in 1912 at age seventy-six, until it was destroyed by fire in 1918.[45]

One of the principal ways Black club women worked to change Black children's social circumstances was by improving their educational opportunities. Public education in the South, especially at the high school level, was segregated and largely for white children only.[46] Distribution of educational funding was blatantly inequitable, and the few public schools available for Black students were plagued with dilapidated and overcrowded facilities, insufficient equipment, reduced school terms, and underqualified and poorly paid teachers.[47]

African-American women filled the gap left by the public school system by establishing private schools and industrial training centers for Black children.[48] In 1910, half of Southern Black high school students attended private schools financed mainly by Black contributors.[49] Mary McLeod Bethune, who served as NACW president from 1924 to 1928, founded the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls in Daytona, Florida, on October 3, 1904.[50] The school merged with Cookman Institute, a men's college, in 1923, and Bethune served as president of Bethune-Cookman College for many years.[51] Another important educational institution was the National Training School for Women and Girls in Washington, D.C., opened October 19, 1909, by Nannie Helen Burroughs, the corresponding secretary and future president of the Women's Auxiliary of the National Colored Baptist Convention.[52] Seeking the highest development of Christian womanhood, Burroughs designed the curriculum to emphasize industrial skills, such as housekeeping, household administration, home nursing, interior decorating and laundering, as well as classical education.[53] Burroughs summed up the school's mission as "the three 'B's'—the Bible, the Bath, and the Broom."[54] From a pool of Black donors, Burroughs was able to raise almost all the funds needed to maintain the school. Among those donors was Maggie L. Walker, a banker from Richmond, Virginia, who

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45. *Id.* Other examples of orphanages supported by Black women's organizations include the Home for Destitute Negro Children in New Castle, Pennsylvania, sponsored by the State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, BILLINGSLEY & GIOVANNONI, *supra* note 4, at 54, and Efland Home for Wayward Girls, operated by the North Carolina State Federation of Negro Women's Clubs, under the direction of Charlotte Hawkins Brown, who served as the federation's president from 1915 to 1936, HINE, *supra* note 5, at 114.

46. NEVERDON-MORTON, *supra* note 42, at 78.

47. *Id.* at 78-79.

48. *Id.* at 78; GIDDINGS, *supra* note 5, at 76.

49. NEVERDON-MORTON, *supra* note 42, at 78.

50. GIDDINGS, *supra* note 5, at 200-01.

51. *Id.*; NEVERDON-MORTON, *supra* note 42, at 196.

52. HINE, *supra* note 5, at 114-15.

53. *Id.* at 115.

54. *Id.*

contributed five hundred dollars when the school was in its planning stages.[55]

Black schools typically served important child welfare functions beyond teaching children academic subjects. They were often the site of social work, public addresses, conferences, teachers' training institutes, and other activities related to fostering the education of Black children.[56] Mothers' Clubs and Home Makers' Clubs, which raised money for school improvements such as playgrounds and offered after-school and summer programs, formed as extensions of public schools in many cities in the early 1900s.[57]

In addition to establishing their own schools, Black women agitated for improvements in the quality of public education for Black children, including raising private funds for Black public schools. Mothers in New York City boycotted schools in the 1890s to demand increased employment of Black teachers, who were thought to best instill racial pride and provide the education needed for racial advancement.[58] Ida Wells-Barnett, a newspaper journalist and publisher and leader in the anti-lynching crusade, organized women in Chicago, with the assistance of Jane Addams and other prominent white reformers, to preserve integrated education in the face of calls to segregate the city's schools.[59]

Especially effective was the Women's Civic and Social Improvement Committee, which was formed by the Atlanta Neighborhood Union in 1913 to address the deplorable condition of the city's colored schools.[60] After inspecting every Black school in Atlanta, committee members met with the mayor and members of the city council to gain support for their cause and persuaded white religious leaders and prominent citizens to visit some of the schools.[61] In its charter, the Atlanta Neighborhood Union, which relied more on grassroots organizing than most clubs, stated among its purposes, "to develop a spirit of helpfulness among the neighbors and to cooperate with oje [sic] another in their respective neighborhoods for the best interests of the community, city and race" and "to develop group consciousness and mass movements."[62] The committee held public meetings com-

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55. *Id.*

56. *See, e.g.*, NEVERDON-MORTON, *supra* note 42, at 104-05.

57. *Id.* at 93-94.

58. SALEM, *supra* note 5, at 85.

59. *Id.*

60. Gerda Lerner, *Early Community Work of Black Club Women*, 59 J. NEGRO HIST. 158, 163 (1974).

61. *Id.* at 163-64.

62. Neighborhood Union's Aim Granted by the Laws of Georgia Under the Charter of the State of Georgia (undated document, on file with author). I thank Andy Lowry for retrieving the charter from the Atlanta Neighborhood Union archives at the Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, and sending it to me.

plete with slide shows displaying inferior school conditions and circulated petitions to mobilize community and government action for change.[63]

The Atlanta Board of Education responded by adding a school, raising Black teachers' salaries, and increasing expenditures on school facilities, though it continued to discriminate against Black students.[64] The Atlanta Neighborhood Union also established a health center in 1915 with a medical clinic that examined and treated thousands of children over three decades; the health center also dispensed milk, cod liver oil, and health-related information.[65] Other Black women's clubs similarly offered health programs in an effort to reduce mortality, malnutrition, and tuberculosis among children.[66]

African-American women worked to improve the quality of schools in other Black communities as well. Laura J. Wheatley organized Black women in Baltimore to protest the unsanitary and hazardous conditions she discovered at a local school.[67] They formed the Civic Aid Association, with Wheatley as president, and joined ranks with the city's African Methodist Episcopal ministers and the Colored Citizens' Equitable Improvement Association of East Baltimore in order to pressure the school board to request funds from the Board of Estimates for a new high school for Black children.[68] The Paul Lawrence Dunbar School opened in September 1916, equipped with twenty-four classrooms, teachers' rooms, industrial training rooms, and an assembly hall.[69]

IV. CONNECTING CHILDREN'S AND WOMEN'S INTERESTS

Black women's clubs also sought to improve children's welfare by supporting and training mothers. "These organizations became both institutions for providing social services for black women and children, and laboratories for training women for leadership roles in a society traditionally dominated by males."[70]

Kindergartens and day nurseries were the earliest and most common services provided by Black women's clubs and church groups. They reflected the Black women organizers' philosophy that education of children and mothers was the best means for racial uplift and social reform. They also reflected awareness of the toll ex-

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63. Lerner, *supra* note 60, at 164.
64. *Id.*
65. *Id.*
66. *Id.*
67. NEVERDON-MORTON, *supra* note 42, at 87-88.
68. *Id.* at 88.
69. *Id.*
70. JONES, *supra* note 8, at 18.

acted on children of working mothers who lacked the resources to provide adequate childcare during their working hours.

Mary Church Terrell explained the need for child care as a response to "the slaughter of the innocents which is occurring with pitiless persistency every day" and as a benefit to those many who "are maimed for life through neglect, [and those many] whose intellects are clouded because of the treatment received during their helpless infancy."[71] Terrell was well aware of the difficult choices Black working mothers had to make to provide for their children, a predicament many low-income mothers face today: "Thousands of our wage-earning mothers with large families dependent upon them for support are obliged to leave their infants all day to be cared for either by young brothers and sisters, who know nothing about it, or by some good-natured neighbor, who promises much, but who does little."[72] Black club women's acceptance and facilitation of mothers' paid labor differed starkly from white women reformers' support of the "family wage," which assumed female dependence on a male breadwinner.[73]

Terrell explicitly linked the NACW's work to the importance of Black women's wages to families and the need to improve Black women's inferior position in the labor market.[74] "Through the clubs we are studying the labor question, and are calling the attention of our women to the alarming rapidity with which the Negro is losing ground in the world of labor."[75] Concern about employment discrimination against Black workers, along with inadequate training for better jobs, led Black club women to include schools for domestic service in their agenda.

Kindergartens and day nurseries provided critical assistance to Black mothers who were far more likely than white mothers to work outside the home. For example, the Women's Union Day Nursery in Philadelphia, established in 1898, operated from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.[76] The Colored Women's Kindergarten Association developed out of an 1899 meeting of Black women in Montgomery, Alabama, and was presided over by Margaret Murray Washington,[77] a principal at Tuskegee Institute and wife of its prominent founder, Booker T. Washington.[78] Black women in Atlanta opened several kindergartens

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71. Terrell, *supra* note 19, at 344, *reprinted in* JONES, *supra* note 8, at 142.
72. *Id.* at 343, *reprinted in* JONES, *supra* note 8, at 141.
73. GORDON, *supra* note 3, at 51-54.
74. Terrell, *supra* at 347-48, *reprinted in* JONES, *supra* note 8, at 145.
75. Terrell, *supra* note 8, at 176, *reprinted in* JONES, *supra* note 8, at 155.
76. BILLINGSLEY & GIOVANNONI, *supra* note 4, at 56.
77. SALEM, *supra* note 5, at 81.
78. NEVERDON-MORTON, *supra* note 42, at 134-35.

in poor parts of the city, doing so under the auspices of the Gate City Free Kindergarten Association, formed in 1905.[79]

Black women's groups often combined other services with their kindergarten and day nursery programs. The Colored Women's League of Washington, D.C., which opened a model kindergarten in 1896, trained kindergarten teachers.[80] The league's seven free kindergartens were eventually incorporated into the public school system and employed primarily graduates of the league's teacher training center.[81] One of the league's leading members, Sara I. Fleetwood, also led Mothers' Meetings where working mothers received advice about childcare and home economics in the evenings.[82]

As NACW president, Mary Church Terrell similarly developed a program of mothers' clubs that "functioned as depositories and disseminators of information on the best methods for rearing children and conducting homes."[83] Terrell later extended the aim of mothers' clubs to address social and economic concerns, including increasing Black employment.[84] The day nursery run by the women of the Baptist Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, offered residential care for Black children under the supervision of the juvenile court.[85]

Mary Church Terrell also believed that establishing kindergartens throughout Black communities could ameliorate the negative consequences of poverty for children.

> We feel keenly the need of kindergartens and are putting forth earnest efforts to honeycomb this country with them from one extremity to the other. The more unfavorable the environments of children the more necessary it is that steps be taken to counteract baleful influences upon innocent victims. How imperative is it then that as colored women we inculcate correct principles and set good examples for our own youth whose little feet will have so many thorny paths of temptation, injustice and prejudice to tread.[86]

In this passage, Terrell displays the same paternalism that elite white reformers showed toward the poor immigrant children they sought to rescue from city slums. But Terrell acknowledged the role of racial injustice and prejudice, rather than mothers' incapacity alone, as a cause for children's unfortunate condition.

Black club women also relied more on providing services to both children and their mothers to improve their circumstances, rather

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79. *Id.* at 142.
80. SALEM, *supra* note 5, at 79.
81. *Id.*
82. *Id.*
83. JONES, *supra* note 8, at 25.
84. *Id.* at 26-27.
85. BILLINGSLEY & GIOVANNONI, *supra* note 4, at 56-57.
86. Terrell, *supra* note 8, at 174-75, *reprinted in* JONES, *supra* note 8, at 154.

than separating children from their mothers by removing them from their homes. Thus, Terrell believed that establishing kindergartens and day nurseries

> would not only save the life, and preserve the health of many a poor little one, but it would speak eloquently of our interest in our sisters, whose lot is harder than our own, but to whom we should give unmistakable proof of our regard, our sympathy, and our willingness to render any assistance in our power.[87]

Another service that reflected the club women's dual mission to aid women and children was providing homes for working girls.[88] These homes may be considered child welfare work because they often sheltered working girls who were still teenagers, as well as the children of working mothers who lived there.[89] African-American women responded to the needs of their younger and less fortunate sisters who migrated from the South to northern cities in search of better lives working as domestic servants.[90] Poverty wages and racial discrimination often made these young women vulnerable to being prostituted in order to survive.[91] Black women established homes not only to rescue these girls but also to subvert negative stereotypes of Black women as sexually licentious and to replace those stereotypes with an image of moral womanhood.[92] Homes for working girls filled the need for housing, employment, and training in domestic service for thousands of impoverished Black girls who might otherwise have perished in the harsh urban slums.[93]

A prominent example of a home for working girls is the Phyllis Wheatley Association in Cleveland, Ohio, founded by Jane Edna Hunter in 1912, which eventually served as a model for boarding houses for Black girls across the country.[94] Hunter, who had moved from South Carolina to Cleveland in 1905 to work as a nurse in white homes, organized other Black domestic servants to establish the association and open a home with financial aid from the local white-only Young Women's Christian Association.[95] Hunter secured the home's financial stability by soliciting sizeable contributions from white elites in Cleveland, whom she also invited to serve on the association's board of directors.[96] By the 1930s, the Phyllis Wheatley Home offered a variety of services, including an employment agency,

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87. Terrell, *supra* note 19, at 344, *reprinted in* JONES, *supra* note 8, at 142.
88. HINE, *supra* note 5, at 45.
89. GORDON, *supra* note 3, at 131-32; *see supra* notes 27-31 and accompanying text.
90. GORDON, *supra* note 3, at 131-32.
91. HINE, *supra* note 5, at 45-46.
92. GORDON, *supra* note 3, at 130-31.
93. *Id.* at 131-32.
94. HINE, *supra* note 5, at 118-20.
95. *Id.* at 116-18.
96. *Id.* at 119-20.

summer camp, and housing for an average of 150 girls each year.[97] As a prominent member of the NACW, Hunter directed the establishment of Phyllis Wheatley Homes in cities throughout the United States.[98]

V. LESSONS FOR MODERN REFORM

The intellectual, political, and practical achievements of Black club women in the wake of Emancipation are astounding, especially considering that many of these women had been born before slavery was abolished and some had been enslaved. Ironically, because of racial segregation and neglect, these women had the opportunity to implement their vision within Black communities, perhaps with a freedom unparalleled in subsequent eras. The child welfare programs that Black women put in place, though limited by traditional gender roles, class elitism, and inadequate resources, were more progressive than today's child welfare system. These women had a better understanding of the social context of child maltreatment and more effective strategies for improving children's welfare than do most policymakers today.

The U.S. child welfare system has experienced radical changes since the Black club women worked independently on behalf of mothers and children. While they once overlooked Black children, public child welfare agencies now serve Black children in hugely disproportionate numbers.[99] As the child welfare system began to serve fewer white children and more Black children, state and federal governments spent more money on out-of-home care and less on in-home services.[100] In the past several decades, the number of children receiving child welfare services has declined dramatically, while the foster care population has skyrocketed.[101] It is no accident that child welfare philosophy became increasingly punitive as Black children made up a greater and greater share of the caseloads.[102] Thus, the child welfare system departed more from Black club women's vision as the share of Black families in the system increased.

By the 1970s, the conception of child maltreatment as a social problem had all but disappeared.[103] Policymakers have accepted a medical and individualistic model of child abuse that erases the social reasons for poor families' hardships by attributing them to pa-

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97. *Id.* at 120.
98. *Id.*
99. SHATTERED BONDS, *supra* note 2, at 8-10.
100. *Id.* at 15.
101. *Id.*
102. *Id.* at 19.
103. *See* BARBARA J. NELSON, MAKING AN ISSUE OF CHILD ABUSE: POLITICAL AGENDA SETTING FOR SOCIAL PROBLEMS (1984).

rental deficits and pathologies that require therapeutic remedies rather than social change.[104] Today, public child welfare departments see their mission as protecting children against maltreatment inflicted by pathological parents primarily by punishing parents rather than ensuring the welfare of families to prevent child maltreatment.[105]

Child welfare policy could use a heavy dose of Black club women's approach to child welfare. Instead of placing all the blame for child maltreatment on bad parents, we should address its social causes. Our remedies, like theirs, should meet families' concrete needs and emphasize family support to prevent child maltreatment rather than resorting to punitive measures after families are already in crisis. We should recognize, as they did, the common interests of mothers and children instead of pitting child protection against parents' rights. Finally, we should adopt Black club women's view of Black child welfare as a racial justice issue. We could not then shrug off the present apartheid system that exists in many cities, with African-American children making up the bulk of those removed from their families to foster care and with entire communities under the threatening shadow of child welfare agencies.[106] Many clubs were hindered by an elitist paternalism toward the poorer mothers and children they sought to help in an effort to redeem Black female respectability, while others, such as the Atlanta Neighborhood Union, successfully employed grassroots strategies to achieve social justice. By adopting the best aspects of Black club women's view, we should tackle the racial disparity by transforming our punitive child welfare system into one that generously supports families.

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104. *Id.* at 13-15.

105. *See* DUNCAN LINDSEY, THE WELFARE OF CHILDREN 96-100 (1994).

106. I elaborate a claim of group-based harm caused by the child welfare system's racial disparity in SHATTERED BONDS, *supra* note 2, at 236-54.