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The Artistry and Activism of Shirley Graham Du Bois: A Twentieth Century African American Torchbearer

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**THE ARTISTRY AND ACTIVISM OF SHIRLEY GRAHAM DU BOIS:
A TWENTIETH CENTURY AFRICAN AMERICAN TORCHBEARER**

A Dissertation Presented

by

ALESIA E. MCFADDEN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2009

W. E. B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies

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DEDICATION

To my supportive family and friends who have been long suffering with me on this
odyssey.

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I would like to thank my advisor, Esther M. A. Terry and my committee members for their patience with me on this project. Special thanks to John H. Bracey Jr. who engaged me in conversation early on in the process and always recounted different conversations he had with the person featured in this work. Thanks is also due to Robert Paul Wolff, Femi Richards, Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, Tricia Loveland and all departmental members of the W. E. B. Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies at large who in different ways informed my thinking and expanded my knowledge.

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There are many people who assisted me along the way, and to all of those people I say thank you.

ABSTRACT

THE ARTISTRY AND ACTIVISM OF SHIRLEY GRAHAM DU BOIS: A TWENTIETH CENTURY AFRICAN AMERICAN TORCHBEARER

MAY 2009

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This dissertation traces the early origins of Shirley Graham Du Bois, a well known Negro achiever in the 1930s and 1940s, from the decades preceding her birth in 1896 up through the mid-twentieth century when she has reached mid life and achieved a number of successes. It attempts to reclaim from obscurity the significant cultural production that Shirley Graham contributed to American society.

Her artistry and activism were manifested in many ways. As a very young woman she conducted, throughout the northern and eastern parts of the U. S., musical concerts extolling the beauty and significance of spirituals. While attending school at Oberlin College, she wrote a musical opera that was regarded during its time as the world's first race opera. In 1936 she assumed the role of Director for the Chicago Black Unit of the Federal Theatre Project (FTP). After the FTP phased out, she attended Yale School of Drama to learn the craft of playwriting, and proceeded to write several plays that were staged and viewed by interracial audiences. As the country prepared for WWII, she was selected to head USO activities in Fort Huachuca, Arizona where the largest aggregation of Negro soldiers were stationed before being sent off to battle. She subsequently became a field secretary for the NAACP during this period of

tumultuous change in the nation and the world. The early 1940s would see Graham reach the pinnacle of success during this phase of her life by writing biographies for a national children's audience. This success was short lived due to the political climate of red-baiting that became fashionable during the political reign of Senator Joseph McCarthy. Graham's progressive politics, communist affiliation and marriage to W. E. B. Du Bois placed her on the wrong side of the establishment.

Each chapter develops the varying forms her activism took shape in each given situation. Following the example of fore-parents who were politically and socially engaged during their lifetimes, Graham follows suit. Her efforts reveal a woman who educated, inspired and empowered others while demonstrating the different ways one could use her abilities to confront racism.

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CHAPTER 1

A LEGACY OF ACTIVISM:

THE GRAHAMS AND BELLS: 1795-1880

Andy, Washington, Lucy, Phillip and Mary – are the names of Shirley Graham’s ancestors who have been passed down through printed family history. They were pioneers living in the mid-west during the nineteenth century. Andy, Washington and Lucy -- the Grahams, remained for many years in the southwestern part of Indiana in Gibson County. Phillip and Mary – the Bells, however traversed the western landscape moving from Illinois to Minnesota. Both families migrated to this area seeking better living conditions, for “The Northwest Ordinance of 1787.... predating the Constitution, forbade the extension of slavery into the territory that would give rise first to Ohio and then Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin” (Griffler 14-15). However living in this territory did not make one free of the hazards associated with slavery. Slave hunters regularly crossed the Kentucky border seeking runaways and on many occasions stealing free persons of color and carrying them into bondage. The closer one lived to the frontline, that territory closest to the Ohio River that separated slave territory from free territory, the more danger one was likely to experience, especially if one were black or openly expressed anti-slavery sentiments. The area where it is suspected that the Graham family had its farm was not far from the Ohio River. It is in this space that Shirley Graham’s paternal Great Grandparent risked being stolen and carried back down south into bondage.

Keith Griffler in Front Line of Freedom: African Americans and the Forging of the Underground Railroad in the Ohio Valley illuminates how black settlements, under

siege from the south by slave hunters supported by the institution of slavery and surrounded on its other borders by white resentment, remained in locations they had carved out for themselves under constant threat of molestation from outside forces. In spite of the harassment, these communities remained rooted and served as vital sources in the assistance of helping bondsmen forge freedom (xiii). This was the case with Shirley Graham's paternal family. Because of their role in assisting runaways to freedom, they can be viewed as operatives facilitating in the success of the Underground Railroad. Because of their efforts, they served as some of the earliest examples of activists in Shirley Graham's family.

Griffler makes it clear that blacks living in these areas that were designated as "free soil" states did not live free from harassment. Early in the 1820s whites inhabiting areas north of the Ohio River sought to limit the existence of black residents by imposing black laws. As greater numbers of blacks settled in the area, the laws increased and slowly began to be enforced. A godsend for some of these black communities was the uneven enforcement of laws. In the areas where the laws were not applied, blacks took a firmer hold and became more determined to stake their claim to life, land and liberty.

The myth that territory north of the Mason Dixon line was a place where people of color could live freely is pervasive and false. Many of the white settlers traveling and establishing roots in this untamed frontier brought with them the folkways and social mores of the regions from which they came, and although many wanted to get away from the institution of slavery, they wanted to put as much distance between them and "others" -- Native Americans and people of African descent -- as possible. With

little or no regard that these lands were rightfully the possession of various Native American tribes, many whites conceived that this land admitted to the union would be totally theirs to inhabit as they pleased. With the passage of time, the laws of the newly created states would reflect the racist pathology of the governing bodies within them. Alexis de Tocqueville commented on the prejudicial attitudes of white Americans in Democracy in America (1835) by saying, "...the prejudice of race appears to be stronger in the states which have abolished slavery than in those where it still exists; and nowhere is it so important as in those states where servitude never has been known" (qtd. in Katz 36).

In spite of the recalcitrance of many white settlers in these territories during the antebellum period, Shirley Graham's Great Grandfather, Andy inhabited land in Indiana using it as a place of refuge and protection for slaves attempting to gain their freedom (Sch. 9.23). How he did this, attitudes being what they were, is amazing. Laws were legislated early on in the statehood of Indiana to curb the flow of black residents to the state, and whereas all white residents did not share the racist ideas of many of their white cohorts, a majority of whites did not want to share the territory with blacks.

Indiana imposed all sorts of Black laws even before official statehood to restrict the freedom of Blacks living within the state, but these laws were mere obstacles to be overcome for people intent on exercising their humanity. One of the laws prohibited black testimony from being used against whites. Another law denied blacks the right to serve in the militia, yet another disenfranchised them from the political process. "Between 1813 and 1815 the state's lower legislative house three times passed measures to exclude all blacks from entering the state. These were rejected in favor of a

law compelling black males to pay a yearly three-dollar poll tax” (Katz 54).

Nonetheless, in the face of this evolving picture of a landscape made more bitter by the ugly face of bigotry, Andy struck out to make a life in Indiana.

Conflicting accounts of Graham family history appear to suggest that Shirley Graham may have taken liberties with the facts. One version says her Great Grandfather Andy purchased his freedom. In this version she states that he was a blacksmith who “bought his freedom and made his way out to Indiana” a new settlement where a good blacksmith could find plenty of work (Sch. 1.1). Another version says Andy’s father “secured” his freedom. In this version she states that Andy’s father, her “great, great grandfather secured his freedom from slavery, traveled westward and took up farm land near the Wabash River. This farm became one of the underground railway stations through which runaway slaves were passed on to Canada and freedom” (Sch. 1.1). It likely was a mistake in her adding one “great” too many in this account since in all other accounts she refers to Andy as her great grandfather. Two other versions say that he escaped slavery. One of these versions simply states, “Our paternal grandfather was the son of an escaped slave who had settled in the mid-west” the other account adds more details by saying: “My paternal grandfather’s father was an African slave, who revolted against his master, ran away to the free territory in Indiana” (Sch. 1.1). This account suggests that Andy was African with no admixture.

Many inconsistencies make a clear historical picture of her lineage daunting; however, when one compares the family history with federal census records, a picture emerges that offers glimpses into the lives of her early ancestors. The inconsistencies found in Graham’s historical account might not be so much her attempt to obfuscate

facts as those facts of her great grandfather's life already being ambiguous by the circumstances of enslavement during his early life. In his attempt to wrestle his freedom from the institution of slavery and maintain his free status, he had to use subterfuge as a tool of empowerment. Fugitives settling in the North assumed new identities to protect themselves, and if the "escape" narrative version of his life is to be believed, then this would have required Andy assuming a new identity. More than likely he had to change his name and perhaps in some way alter his appearance.

A description of Andy is indiscernible until a document about his son is discovered, then a vague picture of him emerges. Shirley Graham's great grandfather comes down through history only as "Andy," not Andy Graham, nor Andrew Graham. Census records yield no clues to the existence of a black Andy Graham living in southwest Indiana that can be identified as her great grandfather. State law required black residents to be registered. When Washington Graham, the son of Andy, is located around the 1860s in the Gibson County Register of Negroes and Mulattoes, he is listed as being a 39 years old Negro with a dark complexion, a stout build and standing about 5'10". Lucy Ann, Washington's wife is described as a light complexioned mulatto of slight build standing at 5'2 1/2" (Ahlemann). From the description of Washington it can be deduced that Andy more than likely was of similar complexion and height. If he were native African his build might have been slightly leaner. Through the 1880 census information on Washington, Andy's birthplace is established as Virginia. The birthplace of the nameless mother of Washington Graham is established as Maryland and Washington Graham's birthplace is established as Clairborne, Tennessee which supports a fact Graham has provided in her account (Roll T9_279). Clairborne County

is located on the northeastern side of Tennessee. Moving from this section of Tennessee would require a north westerly migration for the Grahams to situate themselves in the south western part of Indiana.

Knowing that Andy was a blacksmith would speak to his having well developed and powerful hands, wrists, forearms triceps and biceps. His hearing might have been adversely affected due to the constant striking of metal. However there is no record of specifically what type of blacksmith work he performed. Did he fashion working tools such as plows, or did he repair broken axles on wagons? He might have specialized in attaching shoes to the hoofs of horses or was he versatile demonstrating an ability to tackle any number of tasks a blacksmith would need to address. Just what specifically he did is as elusive as the man.

In terms of character Andy had to possess a constellation of admirable attributes to stand in the gap for so many fugitives passing through. He had to be discreet, disciplined, single-minded, and there were many occasions when he had to summon up courage during the times he concealed runaways. At a time when pioneers had to contend with living in the wilderness and fending off wolves, bears and snakes, Andy had the additional job of fending off slave catchers.

It is unclear whether Shirley's Great Grandfather Andy was married to his son's mother in their state of servitude, married her later after securing his freedom, or not at all. But Graham's account suggest that he was still in bondage when Washington was born and at some point in time soon after Washington's birth, Andy purchased his freedom or escaped. If his freedom were purchased, he likely purchased the freedom of his son Washington as well, for Graham states that Washington moved to Indiana and

“settled in the early days of that state” (Sch. 9.4). It is possible that Washington’s mother’s freedom was effected at the same time as Andy and Washington’s freedom, but a strong possibility exist that it would have been too expensive to purchase the freedom of the entire family at once. This gives credence to Graham’s account that Andy escaped. There are many reasons on both sides of the issue that would make both the “purchase” and / or “escape” narrative questionable.

One would think that escaping from slavery would have been too dangerous since the family lived and remained in such close proximity to slavery during the antebellum period. However, Bettie Ahlemann, librarian in the genealogical division of the Princeton Public Library says not necessarily so. She notes that in some areas of Indiana like Evansville, there was trouble between blacks and whites, but relations between blacks and whites in Princeton were not antagonistic.¹ So it is possible for Andy to have moved into this area, changed his name, gone before the County clerk and registered as a free person using a false name. It could be that the name we associate with the Graham family reflects the changed identity. He would have had to have a white person vouch for him, and it was possible for him to find such a person. It is likely that a morally centered band of white community members helped protect Andy during these early years of the nineteenth century. It is well documented how many Quaker communities located throughout the state of Indiana helped in assisting fugitives.

Years later when Washington registers as a Negro for the Gibson County Register of Negroes and Mulattoes, a white man by the name of John McCoy testified on his behalf (Ahlemann). In 1860 John McCoy is listed as a sixty-one year old

“gentleman” in Princeton (Roll: M653_260). McCoy’s social positioning is such that he does not have to identify himself with any specific profession. He is a man of means and therefore carries enough authority to serve as a protector for Washington. The profession Wash Graham (the way his name appears in 1860 records) follows in 1860 is that of a barber (M653_260), so this is probably how Wash came to Mr. McCoy’s notice.

When evaluating census records a timeline can be established for Washington’s birth. He was born in 1815 (Roll T9_279), so it can safely be assumed that his father was born in the eighteenth century. Andy and Washington Graham made it to Indiana after Washington’s birth and Shirley Graham says that they located to Indiana in the early days of the state which would suggest that they made it to Indiana around the third or fourth decades in the nineteenth century. Keeping in mind that Indiana received official statehood status in 1816 this detail seems to fit. Arriving in the fifth decade would have been more hazardous, because of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. This law made it a crime to assist runaways and the act of assisting runaways was too detrimental to one’s welfare if caught.

An example of the precarious living situation of blacks in Indiana during this time can be observed in the experience of Arthur Barkshire, a contemporary of Washington Graham. In 1854 Arthur Barkshire, a black resident of Rising Sun, Indiana traveled to Ohio to bring his fiancée, Elizabeth Keith, back with him. After they married Barkshire was charged with “bringing a black person into the state and ‘harboring’ her. His marriage was nullified and he was fined ten dollars.” He lost his appeal to the Indiana Supreme Court. It was noted that “The policy of the state is

clearly involved. It is to exclude any further ingress of negroes, and to remove those among us as speedily as possible” (Katz 35-36).

Far too many details are left out of Shirley Graham’s biographical sketch that might give one a closer insight into the lives of these early activists, but based on the little information that can be pieced together much can be surmised. In spite of being forced to register as a Black or Mulatto, in spite of the passage of the Exclusion Act in 1851 that made it no longer legal for Blacks to enter the state as new residents, in spite of the Fugitive Slave law and mounting legislation limiting the freedoms of blacks, the Grahams “stayed put” and continued to inhabit land in Gibson County Indiana.

Knowing that he was a blacksmith is significant for it offers clues into how he was able to possibly purchase his freedom and that of a wife and family. Although Shirley Graham referenced “escape” as the mode of freedom in at least three accounts, two for Andy and one for Andy’s father, and “purchase” as the means in at least one account (Sch. 1.1), it is wise to explore both possibilities of how Andy maneuvered -- whether through escape or purchase -- to ultimately wrest his liberty and maintain it.²

It seems more plausible to believe Shirley Graham’s “purchase” narrative because of the dangers inherent in an “escaped” slave living in a location so close to slave territory. If Andy’s purchase narrative is to be believed, one can deduce that Andy accomplished buying his freedom in the following way. During slavery blacksmiths were valued above other slaves for their skill and held an elite status because of their power to earn money from overwork. Thomas Henry, a contemporary of Andy was one such blacksmith. Although Henry lived in Maryland and Andy in Tennessee, they were both similarly situated in that they lived during the same

historical time, were both enslaved blacksmiths who effected their freedom in large part because their skill in blacksmithing, an occupation which gave them a slight edge.

Jean Libby notes in a historical essay accompanying the autobiographical narrative of Thomas Henry who affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church between 1835 to 1837 that blacksmiths figured dominantly in the AME church. She, as well as, AME historians, has observed that blacksmiths were “at the foundation of African Methodist history. The first building for the congregation led by Richard Allen, who withdrew from the Methodist Episcopal Church over the issues of segregation and abolition, was a blacksmith’s shop.” That shop was located on the very grounds where Mother Bethel now stands in Philadelphia. It is the blacksmith’s anvil that is located at the base of the contemporary insignia of the African Methodist Episcopal church (73). It is probable that Andy who lived during the dawning years of the nineteenth century as Rev. Thomas Henry may have fused his abolitionist fervor, occupational skill and religious beliefs like so many blacks of the day. It is likely that African Methodism appealed to him because of its dominance in northern black communities of that time. It is also likely that the religious ideals and occupational skills of the father were passed down from generation to generation. One might assume that Washington Graham probably followed his father’s lead and learned some aspects of the blacksmith trade or engaged in a vocation that complimented his father’s work. In doing so he continues the tradition of fighting for freedom through whatever means were available to him. Shirley Graham does not mention her Great Grandfather’s religious affiliation. But it can be deduced that David Graham’s gravitation to AME might have resulted from his family’s early involvement in the AME denomination.

They understood that the church offered the black community an apparatus through which they could galvanize their efforts to combat issues negatively impacting the black community.

There is no black person named Andy in the 1850 census records in Princeton, but there is a black man named David Graham. He is the head of one of a few black families living in the community. Although there are several white blacksmiths in the town, this David is not listed as one (Roll M432_147). Is it possible that this is the father of Washington Graham? Is it likely that Washington's father was named David "Andrew" Graham, and that this David Graham is the same person that Shirley Graham refers to as Andy? If so, this black man is listed not as a blacksmith but as a Laborer. He owns land and values his real estate as being worth 200 dollars. In 1850 he is 56 years old which would place him at an appropriate age to have fathered Washington. David Graham's place of birth is listed as Tennessee whereas Shirley Graham's Grandfather Andy's birthplace is listed as Virginia (Rolls M 432_ 147; T9_279); however, if David Graham had years earlier tried to obscure his identity he would have purposefully given inaccurate information. The people making up David Graham's family at this time are Rachel who is 43 years old and two young females: twelve year old Martha A. and six year old Aramenta (Roll M 432_147). Could this be Washington's father with another family? It very possibly could be, especially when one recognizes the similarity of names occurring in both families. This David Graham has a daughter named Martha A., the same name that Washington Graham has named one of his daughters. Washington has also named his son David Andrew Graham. When scrolling down the 1860 census list, a "Wash Graham" is located in Princeton

living not too far from David Graham and his family (M653_260). It appears almost certain that this is Shirley Graham's grandfather.

By 1870 the town of Princeton is a sprawling community comprised of approximately 4,400 members with people of African heritage comprising 7% of the population and people of foreign born extraction making up 9%. The occupations reveal a community growing in complexity, for there are dentists, clothing merchants, tanners, bricklayers, produce dealers, blacksmiths, barbers, physicians and druggist. There are close to 808 dwellings. In 1870 the family is still living in Gibson County in the township of Patoka, Indiana. When James Patterson, the census enumerator, stops by the Graham household on June 13th, 1870, Washington, fifty-five and his wife, Lucy A. forty-two are raising a family of six children: four boys and two girls. Marvin R. is seventeen and works as a porter in a hotel. Charles A., is thirteen, Sarah J. is eleven, David A. is nine, Martha A. is four and James M. is one (Roll M593_316).

Certainly one of the most interesting pieces of information provided from this census is the revelation that Washington's occupation has changed from being a barber. He is now listed as a "drayman" which means he drove a dray, a low heavy cart without sides used for hauling heavy loads (Roll M593_316). Both, being a barber and a drayman were occupations that would assist the workings of the Underground Railroad. Barbers were in a position to channel information; nevertheless serving as a drayman would better facilitate in transporting fugitives on the lines of the Underground Railroad. No doubt this occupation was pursued because it served as the perfect cover to facilitate Andy in his role as Underground Railroad conductor. There could not have been better professions for both father and son to work in concert together.

It can be assumed that at the Graham's UR depot Andy provided the hiding place and no doubt food that would replenish the physical body and Washington provided the means of getting runaways from one point to the next. Andy was also in a position to keep the equipment on the dray in good working condition and also able with his blacksmithing skills to create an iron frame with a compartment designed to conceal. A hiding compartment was probably built to fit right into the dray so as not to arouse suspicion. Washington, a young man in his early thirties in 1845 would have been in top shape to travel long distances with cargo and fugitives. It is also highly probable that Andy had more male help than Washington, for they lived in close proximity to the black settlement of Lyles Station. It has even been suggested by current day preservationist of Lyle Station, Stanley Madison, that the Grahams probably lived in Lyles Station and later moved to the outskirts of Princeton after a flood.

Lucy is listed as a housekeeper (Roll M 595_316), and her work around the home would have been vital to this enterprise. She likely carried on the behind the scenes work that is often overlooked, or perhaps she might have taken the lead in assisting these fugitives, but her involvement has been less recorded than that of her husband, Washington, and father-in-law, Andy. One can speculate however, that she worked along with her husband and father-in-law and perhaps her step-mother-in-law, Rachel Graham. However, the record does not give voice or recognition to Washington's birth mother who passes down through history nameless.

Andy and Washington didn't have time to do certain domestic chores as they struggled to earn a living and keep the family afloat. No doubt Andy and Washington's wives kept the domestic realm in order by doing laundry, cooking, farming, and fishing

at the nearby Patoka and Wabash Rivers. The act of fishing could supply the family with a nutritious meal. The women could have caught crabs and various kinds of fish. Mussels were known to grow in this area. Farming could supply the family with vegetables, fruits and nuts. When Washington was out performing his daily duties carting goods from one place to another, the countryside could provide him with bountiful blessings that could be taken home to feed the family in the form of wild game: pheasants, rabbits, squirrels, and raccoons.

The census records provide other interesting details. Lucy and all the children are listed as mulatto whereas Washington is the only family member designated as black (Roll M595_316). This detail seems to give credence to Shirley Graham's account that Andy was an African (Sch 1.1). This census also suggest that they did not own any land for under the heading that asks about the value of real estate, no amount is given, unlike Washington Graham's white neighbors who give an estimate of their land value. Is it possible that the land containing the barn that Andy had established in Indiana with a "cellar underneath" used to shelter runaways trying to escape slavery during the height of the antebellum period was not passed down to Washington because of a law prohibiting blacks to pass land to their children (Sch. 1.1)? One such black law sought to prevent black land owners upon their deaths from leaving land to their families (Griffler 27). The effects of such a law would have severely hampered the black family's efforts of improving its economic stability and growth. Is this what happened to Washington Graham?

Although Ephraim Waterford was not a relative of the Graham family, and they probably did not know each other, his decision to leave Indiana serves as an alternate

example of the choice Andy Graham could have chosen. Waterford was born free in Virginia, but went to Indiana where he lived for two years in the mid-1840s. This would have been within the time frame that Andy Graham had settled in Indiana. The last straw for Ephraim Waterford was “a new addition to the Black Laws that sought to prevent him from leaving his forty acres to his family on his death. ‘I told them, ‘if that was a republican government, I would try a monarchical one.’” Waterford left Indiana and led an emigration of “some three dozen” African Americans to Canada (Griffler 26). Andy Graham remained in Indiana and by doing so served as a vital link in the operation of the Underground Railroad. If all blacks would have uprooted as Waterford, little progress would have been made in establishing black communities.

The black law that encouraged Ephraim Waterford to leave the territory was just one of several imposed against the black community living in “free” territory that would cause many to flee the environs of the United States. When the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 became law many fugitives who had taken root and settled in some of the black communities scattered across the north, uprooted themselves and their families and headed to Canada. “The prospect of the new Fugitive Slave Law’s enforcement propelled as many as 3,000 ex-slaves out of their northern homes into Canada within ninety days” (Clinton 55). Against this historical backdrop Keith Griffler analyzes the implications inherent in the actions of those free blacks deciding to remain in these spaces. He states the following:

the historical significance of the Underground Railroad lies not in its success in spiriting away of thousands of fugitives to Canada. Rather, its importance centers on those who remained in the United States, and most especially those who settled in the river port cities and communities that constituted the front lines of the struggle against slavery, carving out the

political and social space to wage a war for their own liberation (30-31).

During this historical phase, Andy Graham's resolve to "stay put" was a revolutionary act, and his residence in Gibson County, Indiana situated on the borders of Kentucky and Illinois and along the waterways of the Patoka and Wabash Rivers was a vital link in Underground Railroad activity. Exercising the decision to remain in a locale where his actions were scrutinized and his efforts in assisting runaway slaves put his and his family lives in danger.

Another interesting component of Graham family history goes a step further in layering the Graham lineage with historical significance. It is said that Frederick Douglass visited the farm. Shirley Graham states in an unpublished family narrative the following: "There are no documents to prove that Fredrick Douglass was ever in this barn. 'But he did come out this way even before the War,' my father explained. It cannot be doubted that my grandfather met him." In this narrative she states that when her father was in his teens "the great Douglass stopped at our house. He had with him the sword of Toussaint L'Ouverture" (Sch. 1.1). She writes that Douglass told her father, "Toussaint L'Ouvature [Ouverture] was forced to lead his people through blood to find freedom. You were born free...Promise you will be worthy" (Sch. 1.1). Whether this is true or not is unclear, but the symbolism of such an event could only carry a powerful import to David Graham and his children. This history contributed to Rev. Graham's sense of purpose which he instilled in his children. As Shirley Graham the writer comes to the fore, this heritage endowed her with a certain authority in bringing forth the messages that she would carry to the American public. She emerges

from her background with a mission to carry forth the work of helping to free her people through whatever means are at her disposal.

Based on where the Grahams lived, possible escape routes in the western part of the state become visible when understanding the topography of the state and the distribution of black settlements in the state. By 1860 Indiana had more than twenty separate settlements of free blacks. In terms of black settlements close to Andy and Washington Graham there were three that were in very close proximity to Princeton: Lyles Station, Roundtree and Sandhill communities in Gibson County (Cord 100). The 1870 census reports for the township of Patoka do not indicate that the Washington Grahams lived in a black settlement because the majority of their neighbors are white, and most of them are whites with established roots in America. There are however, a few immigrants who are from Ireland, England and Prussia. A family of Welers, Vansandts, McColloughs and Nightengales lived near the Grahams (Roll M593_316). How did they feel about this black family living amongst them? Were some of these whites sympathetic to the fugitive cause? These questions can not be answered conclusively, but evidence of Andy and Washington's ability to remain in the area suggests that some of their white neighbors in Princeton had no problem with them and perhaps valued them as good neighbors. If they had any grievance against the family they certainly could have caused trouble for them and made it very uncomfortable for them to remain in the area.

Stanley Madison preservationist of Lyles Station notes that Lyles Station is closely situated near the Patoka and Wabash Rivers and the close proximity of these rivers to this settlement would oftentimes flood the area near Lyles Station forcing

many of the residents to relocate closer to the town of Princeton. He notes that probably at some time the Grahams were community members of Lyle Station but after one of the major floods they quite possibly moved closer to the city of Princeton. He says, some of the black victims of the floods settled on the north east side of Princeton. Others moved a few miles northwest across state lines and relocated to Lawrenceville, IL. It is important to note that the 1870 census records lists Patoka as the city where Washington resided (Roll M593_316), a distance of approximately twelve miles north of Princeton. The 1880 census indicates that he resides in Princeton (Roll T9_279).

The black settlements nearby almost certainly were sympathetic to fugitives passing through because they could identify so closely with the plight of others similarly situated. From among these communities Andy and Washington would have had a network of people working with them in spiriting people away to freedom. Researcher and historian Xenia Cord notes in “Black Rural Settlements in Indiana Before 1860” that families moving into Indiana “often did so in extended interfamilial groups, reestablishing communities that had existed elsewhere” (100). Such is the case with Lyles Station, a black community five miles from Princeton where there are several groupings of Lyle family members dating back to the 1860s, one headed by Joshua Lyles constituting a family of ten (Roll: M653_260, P 1080), and one headed by Alex King Lyles with eight family members with the last name of Lyles and six family members with the last name of Bruner (Roll: M653_260, P 1078). There were other families like the Halls, the Alcorns and the Daniels who made up this community. Their jobs were primarily listed as farmers and laborers (Roll: M653_260).

It can be deduced that Andy and Washington found ready assistance from men and women in these other black settlements. South of Gibson County were Posey, Vanderburg and Warrick Counties. Vanderburg County is the place where Lucy Ann was born, so Washington likely had a familiarity with the county and some of its people. In this county lived a Negro guide by the name of George Sturges (Glenn 276). Also in Vanderburgh County lived Calvin Fairbanks, a white Oberlin educated minister whose Underground Railroad activities in Vanderburgh County got him imprisoned twice for a total of seventeen years and four months during the 1850s and the early 1860s (Creel 279). Andy's birth in the eighteenth century would have made him a man well past his prime during the Civil War. If he were still living, he would have been a man ready to pass the torch to a younger generation in their quest to aid fugitives. But during the prime of his life in the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s, he would have found ready assistance from community members at Lyle Station, Sandhill and Roundtree.

A possible western line to freedom from Gibson County might follow this course. From the area of Patoka and Princeton, Indiana, fugitives could enter the waterways, travel a few miles west to the Wabash River and then travel in a northerly direction.³ In many areas along the flow of this river a corridor of trees along the coastline provided coverage for those traveling the waterways from those on land. Andy could have known George Sturges or other water pilots, who were men familiar with traversing the waterways undetected. Whether this mode of travel would have been safe at certain periods of time is unknown, but traveling the waterways could have been a timelier option than traveling on foot. If they traveled as far as Terre Haute, they could then travel by land to what is today known as Indianapolis or to Fountain City

(formerly Newport, IN), a distance of approximately eighty miles. In this area there were a number of places friendly toward the runaway.

Just outside of what was formerly known as Newport, Indiana is a city called Lancaster which is where Eleutherin College resides. This college built between the years of 1854-1856 was used as a stop for the operation of the Underground Railroad. By the time one made it to Newport he could connect with the Indianapolis Underground station operated by Quaker abolitionist Levi Coffin and his wife Catherine (“Take a” par 2, 4). Levi Coffin’s home in Newport became “a center at which three distinct lines of Underground Railroad converged” (Blockson 214). In recounting his experiences with slavery, Coffin states how he was known to friends of the slaves, “at different points on the Ohio River, where fugitives generally crossed, on to those northward” (Blockson 215). If any institution was going to recognize human rights, it would have been religious organizations committed to its mission to serve the needs of man. This religious institution functioned as a social agency and Andy would have been familiar with it in assisting runaways. In terms of AME churches Libby writes, “These independent black congregations served as principal points of refuge and guidance for fugitives from captivity in slave states” (Libby xix). These institutions served the same purpose even more so in free territory.

The late Francis Stout, former church historian of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Indianapolis, Indiana noted the significance of Bethel as a station in the operation of the Underground Railroad. In the church history she noted that the church was organized in 1836 in the log cabin home of a barber named Augustus Turner. Turner had obtained an AME Book of Discipline which instructed him on how

to organize his group. “After meeting for a time, the little society petitioned to be annexed to the western Circuit of the church. The appeal was accepted by the Philadelphia Conference and Rev. Paul Quinn was sent as the first ‘Circuit Rider’ to visit and preach for the group.” Stout further states that this little society was known back during those days as the “Indianapolis Station” (screen 1).

The size of communities being what they were in the early to mid nineteenth century and the Graham’s involvement with Underground Railroad activity almost ensures that Andy and Washington Graham had heard of Augustus Turner and perhaps indirectly worked with him. By 1848 Bethel AME Church had “100 members and became active in the underground antislavery movement, often harboring fugitive slaves en route to Canada.” The church was burned down in 1867 by, it is believed, supporters of slavery, but it was rebuilt soon after and the same church stands today (“Bethel” screen 1). It is this church that David Graham would begin shepherding in 1895, and although a direct connection cannot at this point be made between Andy and Washington Graham and Bethel AME, it is not a leap to surmise about an indirect connection between the Grahams and Bethel during the years of Underground Railroad activity, the main reason being the manner in which circuit ministers within the AME Church operated. These ministers traveled long distances and serviced different communities. In this way networks were established. Ministers would inform congregations of the people working with the fugitive slave movement in other areas of the state. Those active in the movement would learn what people to avoid in certain communities and what people were friendly to their cause. From Indianapolis fugitives

could travel northward on known and established Underground lines on up to Kalamazoo, Michigan on up to Canada.

If they chose not to stop in Terre Haute and continued their course up the Wabash River, they would eventually make it to Huntington, Indiana in the northern part of the state. Treking a few miles on the ground in a north easterly direction would get fugitives to the Maumee River where they could enter Lake Erie and make it on to Canada. If waterways were too closely scrutinized, the mode of escape would have been by land. Since Washington operated a dray, he could travel long distances without arousing suspicion, and it might have been that on more occasions than not fugitives traveled by land to Indianapolis, making several stops at stations along the way between Princeton and Indianapolis. Washington probably would not go the entire distance for this would have been a journey of 155 miles.

By 1880 Washington Graham is sixty-five years old and his two older sons have moved away. Washington's profession is now listed as that of a minister (Roll T9_279). Here again we find father and son -- this time Washington and David -- if not working in concert with one another, certainly sharing an affinity for the same calling. In 1882, at the age of twenty-one, David unites with the Indiana AME Conference in New Albany, Indiana under Bishop James A Shorter (Sch. 9.4). The depth of interaction Washington had with the A. M. E. Church and its teachings is unknown, but his political activities would have motivated him to gravitate to this institution for assistance. By 1882 the AME church had 402,636 members (Seraile 84). Henry Harper, was the circuit minister for the AME Church for the township of Princeton. Minutes from the 38th Annual Session of the Indiana Conference of the African

Methodist Episcopal Church held at Bethel Church in Indianapolis in 1877 assign him this appointment (Cooper 25). It is not clear what ministry Washington was connected to, but in all probability he gravitated to AME because of its strong emphasis in education, and belief in a social gospel, fusing the religious with the social.

On Graham's maternal side of the family, an activism is observable as well, but perhaps not as noteworthy as that on her paternal side, for their living environs were far from the frontline. The turbulent unrest during antebellum years compelled many to be activists whether they were so inclined or not. The desire to direct the activities of one's life is genetically encoded, so thoughts of escaping bondage often crossed the minds of bondsmen. In the case of Native Americans, who had a historical memory of inhabiting the land without intrusion from white men, they doubtless found it, to say the least, troubling to discover their possession of the land shrinking. Shirley Graham's maternal side was racially mixed with Native American, African, French and Scotch blood. Graham says her mother's maternal grandfather was a French Louisiana trader who traveled up and down the Mississippi (Sch. 1.1).

Of her maternal side she has written that her "grandfather's Native American tribe had been pushed westward from that fertile Wabash valley about 1800. His forebears were presumably Potawatomes, though "after crossing the Mississippi his people mingled and merged with the Cheyennes."⁴ Graham says the slaughter of the Cheyenne is well documented and her maternal grandfather, Phillip Bell, was one of the few of his tribe who escaped annihilation. He was born in Missouri but "made his way back to the shores of Lake Michigan where he settled and made fine saddles which he sold in nearby Chicago." Phillip Bell was said to have stolen his "bride Mary from a

plantation south of the Missouri River and carried her away on horseback into the freedom of the prairies” (Sch. 11.2). This act of spirited away his wife to freedom and settling on land not far removed from where Mary was in bondage, serves as an example of Phillip Bell’s activism, for the act of engineering a bondswoman from the clutches of slavery was not comprised of a single act, but an involved process that oftentimes required all involved to demonstrate acts of courage at every turn. Bell had to navigate through dangerous territory in order accomplish this feat and risked his own freedom in his attempt to bring Mary out of slavery. Once on free soil, the Bells had to be on constant alert for slave hunters searching for fugitives.

This act of defiance by Philip Bell, oftentimes referred to as Big Bell, likely occurred very close to the time when the Civil War would settle the matter of slavery. Census records indicate that their first child, Susan Rachael was born around 1858 (Roll: M593_763). Census records are inconclusive in determining an exact age for Phillip or Mary, for 1880 census records indicate “1840” as being the year they were born and 1900 census records give their birth year as 1836 (Roll T9_677; Roll T623 785). Whatever year is correct would still make Big Bell and Mary in their twenties around the time of the Civil War.

Even with census records, it is difficult to ascertain the accurate number of children Philip and Mary had, but it appears that the children were stairsteps. Susan Rachael Bell, the oldest child was born around 1858, followed in two year increments by George, Jackson and Fannie (Roll: M593_763). A “Missouri” Bell is listed on 1880 census records, but there is no Lizetta, Etta or Elizabeth Bell recorded. It is highly probable that this Missouri Bell is Etta Bell (Roll: T9_677). Shirley Graham’s papers

note that Etta Bell, sometimes called Lizetta, made her arrival in the world near the town of Kidder, Missouri, on April 30, 1873 (Sch. 9.24). The youngest child Cora is born around 1874.

A few years beyond Lizetta's birth, Big Bell performed another significant act. Graham says in her account of Bell family history that there were no "colored schools" for Etta and her siblings to attend, so Big Bell moved his family from Missouri to the "outskirts of Chicago" in a place called Glencoe because of his determination to have his children receive an education (Sch. 11.2). Even though Shirley Graham doesn't attribute the family's move during the black reconstruction era to prejudicial attitudes, it is possible to deduce that the family's move further north was effected not just because of educational opportunities or because Bell wanted his family to have some distance from the encroachment of urbanization and the concomitant urban social pathologies associated with rapid and unchecked urban development resulting from it, but from a need to get as far away from the various strains of racism that infected so many communities around the end of the nineteenth century (Sch. 11.2). Because there were no black schools for the young Bell children, the church was an institution that offered them an educational experience and it socialized them. It is within the church that Philip Bell's daughters would discover their calling. Susan, Etta and Cora would engage in activities committed to missionary work.

Shirley Graham's recounting of family history passed down to her from her parents along with census records expands the narrative of the Underground Railroad in western Indiana during the antebellum period. Historical documents of the time allow periodic glimpses into the lives of people who would have otherwise been names with

little else attributed to them. The lives of the David and Etta Graham's children would be strongly influenced by the childhood stories they were told by their parents of ancestors who struggled for humanity and prevailed. These stories were entertaining, but also served as powerful examples of courageous behavior. The Graham children made their arrival into a family steeped in a rich cultural heritage that could be traced back on both sides of the family to ancestors who defied social conditions of the time. Family folklore on both sides of the family liberally recounted by both David and Etta Graham told of ancestors strong in their convictions to fight for their humanity.

Ancestors from both sides of Graham's family envisioned a world where all people would live in their full humanity. Their progeny would embrace the same vision and do their part in bringing this world into existence. The Great Grandchild of Andy and Grandchild of Washington and Lucy Graham and Phillip and Mary Bell, would be one of the fertile seeds nurtured through the dreams of these ancestors, and upon her birth she began to fall in step with the pattern of so many freedom fighters before her.

Notes

¹ Ahlemann notes that much research has been done on the Underground Railroad in the central and eastern part of the state, but not the western part. Attempts now are being made to develop a clearer picture of the workings of the Underground Railroad in the western part of the state. Phone interview with Bettie Ahlemann Jan. 2, 2008.

² It appears that these biographical sketches in Shirley Graham's papers were written on different occasions to suit her designs on what she wanted to present to an audience. So if she were speaking at an event where the escape narrative created the effect she desired, she might have that narrative presented to the audience. Perhaps the best example that demonstrates her use of crafting a story to fit her purpose can be seen in one biographical sketch where her purpose is to drive home the point that she has as much right to this country as any other American. Throughout this sketch she refers to her "sense of belonging to the past and present," and "her sense of responsibility for the future of our country." After detailing her lineage she ends her first paragraph by saying, "Like Sinclair Lewis' hero I can boast that I am one hundred percent All-American: Indian-Negro-French-Scotch." She never elaborates on where this strain of Scotch comes into her lineage.

³ The Wabash River, Indiana's most famous river, is the longest free flowing river east of the Mississippi River, flowing 475 miles long. Over 400 miles of this River has an obstructed flow.

⁴ Sch. B 1 F 1. One cannot escape noticing the similarities between Shirley Graham's fur trading ancestor and that of Jean Baptiste Pointe Du Sable, a fur trader of French/African descent who married a Potawatomi Indian woman and is credited for founding Eschikagou. Did Graham possess many of the particulars she provided in her biography of her maternal ancestry before or after she wrote her book on Du Sable? Was she able to shade in some of the contours of her biographical history after she performed research on her Du Sable biography. Being aware of the different versions of her biographical sketches found in her papers and knowing her knack for embellishing stories, one can only question this. Her biographical sketches were written at different times for different purposes and this sketch that provides the detail of the Indian tribe from which one of her ancestors originated states this particular tentatively by saying, "they were probably Potawatomes, though after crossing the Mississippi river his people mingled and merged with the Cheyennes."

CHAPTER 2

MODELS OF ACTIVISM IN THE STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY:

THE GRAHAMS: DAVID, LORENA AND ETTA: 1881-1899

David Andrew Graham, born January 11, 1861 before the Emancipation Proclamation, escaped the stain of being born a slave; notwithstanding, the badge of slavery marked him as it did all black men. The living conditions of his people compelled him to strike out against the legacy of his birthright. He fought to improve his community through teaching, preaching and developing social and religious organizations that would lift up his race, but upon his death, in April of 1936 he would die having seen only small gains made toward righting some of the ills of American society.

David Graham was raised in the community of his birth and the socialization process to which he was exposed influenced his approach in tackling issues that affected the lives of his people. He grew up in a home with two parents, three brothers and two sisters. He attended school in the community which was comprised largely of whites, but grew up with black and white peers. In 1870 when David was nine, he could have attended school with white neighborhood children like George, John and Mary Weler, ages nine, ten and twelve respectively. Nine year old Rosa Nightengale is also an age mate living near him (Roll: 593_316). Or David could have gone to the black schoolhouse a few miles away that served the communities of Lyle Station, Sandhill and Roundtree.

By the 1880s other black families have moved to Princeton and make up a small black community. Some of the larger families having at least four children and

upwards were the Wiggins, Parkers, Popes and Woodruffs. Thirty-seven year old Eliza Wiggins was the matriarch of her household of five children. Joseph and Mary Parker also had five children at home like their neighbors Agnes and Steven Pope who had four children in the home. John and Ann Woodruff were a blended family with three small children they have together and two older children born to Ann prior to her relationship with John (Roll: T9_297).

Other large groupings of black people living together in households were thirty-eight year old Ms. Phoeby Artist, who lived in Princeton with her two small grandchildren, nine year old John Ross and his infant brother Birdy and twenty-two year old Eliza J. Ross. It appears that forty-nine year old Henry Fox and thirty year old Joseph Johnson lived in the home with Ms. Phoeby and the Rosses as boarders (Roll: T9_297). Fox and Johnson could have been relatives, or possibly one of them could have been an intimate friend to Ms. Phoeby. The possibility exists that Fox and Johnson may have been people emerging out of slavery with kinship bonds tying them to Phoeby not resulting from a common blood strain, but from a bond established within the belly of the demon – the confines of the institution of slavery.

Smaller family groups now made up this black community that had been on the front line during the antebellum period. Thirty-six year old James Barfield and his twenty four year old wife Sarah are just beginning to make a life together. Forty-five year old Jermiah Lewis lived with his twenty-nine year old wife America. Rev. Alfred Mason and his wife Lucinda also make their home in Princeton and are the parents of two teenagers, eighteen year old Lorena and sixteen year old John (Roll: T9_279).

As Washington and Lucy's children mature they have heard countless stories of how life was for their parents and grandparents. No doubt Washington and Lucy in their uneducated state could impart to their children the far reaching implications of John Brown's raid on their day to day activities. Their limited educational development in no way limited their ability to analyze. More specifically, they likely shared their own personal involvement and knowledge of runaways fleeing oppression. The children probably consciously and unconsciously formulate ideas about the ways that they will strike back at a system that actively limits the freedoms of blacks. By census time in 1880 the two older boys, R. W. and Monie are away from home. Sarah is a twenty-one year old young woman still living at home. David at nineteen is listed as being in school. He is probably not in high school, but is studying under the direction of the church. The two youngest children, Martha and James are fourteen and eleven, respectively (Roll: T9_279). Young David has grown up to be a serious minded young man who has a fondness for learning. He especially enjoys reading and has a great capacity to read and digest large quantities of reading material. He is more inclined to scurry off to a corner and fuel his energies in complex reading passages and engage in reflective thought rather than going out to the field to turn over earth in preparation for planting.

Washington is a wise man. He has survived during his lifetime not by looks but by using wisdom, being attuned to an inner voice that has kept him on track. He has remained true to his calling – ministering to those in need, the poor in spirit. It might be that Washington encourages David's behavior because he sees in David the potential to

become the kind of minister that he was never able to become because of the times in which he lived and the circumstances of his life.

Studying schoolwork is most important to David, but it is not the only business occupying his mind. In school his ability to analyze has made him a student of notice. His aptitude for writing and speaking make his stand out, but the specifics of how this was demonstrated have all but evaporated from the record with the exception of one specific detail that notes that in 1880 he is the first colored graduate from the high school in Princeton where he earns second honors in his class (Sch. 9.29). He has secretly been admiring a young age mate in his community. Miss Lorena Mason has been the apple of his eye for a while, and after he graduates in 1880, he has become bolder in making his affections known. He and Lorena began dating at some point while he begins his professional journey of becoming a minister within the AME church. After graduating from high school, he begins studying for the ministry at night and approximately a year after graduation David Andrew Graham and Lorena Mason marry in Gibson County, Indiana on July 13th, 1881 (IN Marriage Collection Book 6 OS P 116).

At the beginning of his professional life his development as a teacher and his ministerial preparation evolve simultaneously. “He first followed teaching for six years in Princeton, Washington and Bloomington, Ind., in the last two places attending to the pastoral work of the church w[h]ile serving as principal of the school” (Sch 9.4). Because he taught at the school that he had attended, his teaching in Princeton suggests that practically all of his students were white, and this is likely where he developed skill in teaching children. During this time teachers were to be masters in all subjects and

students ranged in ages from young to old. David spends approximately a year teaching in Princeton.

The same year that he married he affiliated with the third Episcopal District of the AME Church which covered the regions of Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, North Ohio and Pittsburgh Conferences. He underwent a series of courses preparing him for the ministry. At the forty-third session of the Indiana Annual Conference of the AME Church in 1882, he is listed as a licentiate, someone licensed to minister, along with six other men: I. M. Wheeler, Benjamin Roberts, William Townsend, Z. Roberts, Cyrus Hill and J. A. Davis (Townsend and Bass). H. Harper, who quite possibly is Henry Harper, the AME minister who services the Princeton community, is being superannuated this year, which meant that he was stepping down from active ministry. During the conference David, however, is not assigned to Princeton, but rather to Washington, a city which is approximately forty-four miles from his hometown of Princeton. G. B. Pope is assigned instead to be circuit minister for the town of Princeton. Although David is licensed, he is still in training for a life of ministry. During this same year while he is at his post in Washington, he builds a brick church (Wright Jr. 96); he also builds up the AME Church from within.

David Graham had become familiar with the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor. Out of a desire to educate and train up black children in the ministry he incorporates a Christian Endeavor society within his ministry while in Washington, Indiana. The Christian Endeavor Society was organized by Dr. Francis E. Clark in Portland, Maine in 1881 for the purpose of promoting Christian life among its youth and increasing their mutual acquaintanceship. This society started as a youth

movement designed to strengthen the spiritual life of youth by promoting Christian activities among them (“History of C. E.” screen 1). He organizes the first Young People’s Society of Christian Endeavor within the AME Church; it is not officially adopted into the church until 1904 (Sch. 9.29). The Christian Endeavor Society was a precursor to the modern day youth ministry movement.

The year of 1883 is marked with a number of achievements for David. By April of this year, he and Lorena are blessed with a son, Roy M. Graham (Roll T623 1272). During the summer when he travels to Indianapolis to attend the Forty-fourth Indiana Annual Conference on August 27, 1883, he is twenty-two years old and is elevated to the office of traveling Deacon within the African Methodist Episcopal Church under Bishop J. A. Shorter (Sch. 9.9). The office of traveling Deacon is a two year time period where the minister finding himself having prepared for this job through disciplined study, now puts into application that which he has learned. He is in his second year of spiritual study. He and his fellow initiates are continuing to undergo a series of studies in such courses as systematic theology, physical geography, botany, sacred geography, moral science and history of the Apostolic church. In these studies, David’s scores are higher than his classmates, for the scores of their work are included in the minutes of that year. In addition to being evaluated on their studies, they are being evaluated on their character and their commitment to their studies. During the conference he is reassigned to mission work in Washington (Bass 21).

The following year he is assigned to the station in Bloomington where he will remain until 1887. It is during this time that he begins sending articles to The Christian Recorder. Although it had come into existence in September of 1841 beginning as the

A. M. E. Magazine, it ended its operation for a while, only to re-emerge in 1848 when the church “purchased Martin Delany’s Mystery in Pittsburgh and renamed it the Christian Herald. Four years later the Herald was published in Philadelphia under a new title, the Christian Recorder (Seraile 21). By the time Rev. Graham began sending articles to the Christian Recorder, Rev. Tanner has raised the level of scholarship, and it is clear that participation from the clergy is desired, but only thoughtful, well written discourse is desired. This emphasis on education and scholarship, attention to documenting the proceedings and activities of the church not only compelled AME ministers to stretch themselves, but it made this denomination stand above others in terms of the rigorous educational program instituted within the organization. By the standards of a literate population, the educational program might not have been viewed as rigorous, but when one considers that members of AME were mostly a group of people coming out the the institution of slavery, the educational program was indeed challenging.

During the mid-nineteenth century, the black church was the primary institution in black life that offered Black Americans a space where they could “worship freely” and “speak to the needs for expanding freedoms.” Catherine Clinton in her work Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom acknowledges the prominence of the AME church above other black churches during this historical phase immediately following emancipation by saying it was “the most powerful early black church in America” (Clinton 50). AME religiosity melded a pride in African ancestry with Christian dogma, and for AME congregants, knowledge that the organization was founded, financed and controlled by blacks was a great source of pride. This visible

demonstration of black men and women operating a constantly expanding organization modeled an example of racial uplift that congregants and community members found motivating and inspiring.

There were probably many reasons for David Graham gravitating to the AME ministry, but perhaps two major reasons for his attraction were because of its emphasis on education and its efforts to dispel the myth of black inferiority. Lawrence S. Little in his work Disciples of Liberty: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Age of Imperialism, 1884-1916 notes that “Influenced by politics, racism, and religion, leaders within the A. M. E. hierarchy developed an intellectual activism that sought to expose and counter many of the prevalent racial assumptions that characterized people of color as inferior and incapable of self-determination” (59).

As the AME Church is expanding westward, David Graham is one of the ministers facilitating in this process. On August 24th, 1887 Battle Creek, Michigan holds the first session of the Michigan Annual Conference of the AME Church. Bishop Shorter has died the month before the conference in Wilberforce, Ohio, but Bishop J. P. Campbell has sent David to this conference where he is one of the charter members. His gift for being a scribe has been detected, and he plays an important role in this conference. He is largely responsible for documenting the proceedings of this occasion. He serves as assistant secretary, aiding secretary James M. Henderson in transcribing the minutes of the conference. He also delivers the education sermon and closes out the morning session with the benediction. During this conference he is appointed to stations in Flint and Pontiac (Henderson 9, 24). While at Flint, he built and paid for a six room parsonage (Wright Jr. 96).

Conferences were an opportunity to meet, greet, interact and network with fellow ministers. States observed conferences each year, and the General Conference was held every four years. Through the years many would become great admirers and arch enemies of each other, for the manner of climbing up the hierarchial ladder was very political. The process of getting perks required knowing the right people. The electoral process for becoming a bishop required campaigning for the position years before delegates came to the conference to cast their votes. Just one of the many ministers that David Graham met at the Battle Creek Conference was Dr. Benjamin Tucker Tanner, (a year later he would be elected to the bishopric) father of painter Henry Ossawa Tanner. Rev. Tanner had been editor of the Christian Recorder for sixteen years from 1868 to 1884. This news organ was of vital importance to the AME Church, representing what Tanner felt was the salvation of his race and African Methodism. Mention of support of the publication at this Conference would have been standard fare, for ministers were encouraged to get members of their church to become subscribers. With his interest in writing, David probably looked up to Benjamin Tanner, and felt something of a kindred spirit, for he was familiar with the Christian Recorder. “Under church law, ministers who did not subscribe to the Recorder could be removed from their jobs by the bishops. However, few took the law seriously and it was not enforced” (Seraile 59). It can be assumed that this is one of the papers that could be found in Rev. Graham’s study at this time.

As the decade of the nineties opens David is living in the state of Michigan, and just as he has travesed the state of Indiana, he is now discovering various cities in Michigan: Battle Creek, Kalamazoo, Flint, Pontiac and Benton Harbor. When he

publishes two articles through the Christian Recorder, he is writing from his post in Kalamazoo, Michigan. One article is a reply to another minister, C. W. Mossell about the correct day for the Sabbath. Rev. Graham argues that the Jewish Sabbath was one of sadness and after the dispensation of grace, the Christian was “freed from the letter of the law and consequently from that Sabbath” (Christian Recorder March 13, 1890). A few months later Rev. Graham critiques a book put out by Seventh Day Adventists, and he accuses this religious group of dispensing false religious teachings. Rev. Graham suggests that this is where Rev. Mossell has gotten some of his false teachings and entreats Rev. Mossell to come among men with criticism and talk through The Christian Recorder (May 1, 1890). This talking back through the pages of the Christian Recorder should have stimulated interest and subscribership, but for many years this AME organ struggled to stay afloat and collect the funds due by its subscribers.

Rev. Graham’s time spent in Michigan was characterized as “a brilliant success.” One article states, “it is the common verdict that he was the most popular Afro-American preacher ever located in Michigan.” This particular article further states that Lucy Thurman, the famous temperance leader, “several times stated this fact publicly, during her work in Chicago.” The article further notes that his popularity was not limited to black audience but extended to white audiences as well (Sch. 9.4 Afro-American Progress Illustrated).

It is because of this popularity that many years after Rev. Graham had first preached in various churches in the state he became the featured speaker at the August 1st “big celebration” where “one thousand colored folks celebrated Emancipation Day.” This celebration was held in Benton Harbor, Michigan, near the town of Cassopolis in a

place called “Thresher’s Grove.” This location put it in close proximity with Chicago, which was just across Lake Michigan. The news account states that people came from “Chicago, from southern Michigan and northern Indiana” to attend this affair (Sch. 9.29 “A Big Celebration”). Rev. Graham’s participation in Emancipation Day Celebrations occurred regularly. In his position as an AME minister, he would have spearhead events of this type and would have been a sought after speaker. Since these observances were happening at different times throughout the year in different parts of the country, they fostered a cultural milieu in black communities across the United States during the turn of the century that kept them connected by the practices that were standard features at these observances.

These celebrations varied throughout the United States with several dates taking prominence -- January 1st, February 1st, June 19th, May 28th, several dates in early August and September 22nd. So whereas celebrants near Jackson, Georgia, might observe the occasion in January, celebrants in Eufaula, Clayton, Hatsboro, Melville, and Pittsfield, Alabama might observe this day on May 28th (Wiggins 14-18). The importance of these observances rested not in when they occurred but in the knowledge and values imparted to audience members.

William H. Wiggins, Jr. in his work Oh Freedom! Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations notes the importance of these celebrations to the political and cultural lives of African Americans. He states that Emancipation Day Celebrations were important “grass-roots political forums” for African Americans in their struggle against second-class citizenship. This was expressed in a number of ways: “....through an unrelenting barrage of resolutions, proclamations, petitions, NAACP membership

drives, militant speeches, civic committee reports, parades, voter-registration campaigns, boycotts and numerous other political stratagems.” Wiggins attributes these celebrations with creating a political climate that spawned much of the twentieth century’s political activity among Afro-Americans (109). On this occasion at Benton Harbor, after the base ball game, a political meeting at Yore’s opera house was held. Rev. Graham spoke on “the tariff and silver issues, with especial reference to the duty of the colored people in the current campaign.” The schedule of events provided for celebrants to be entertained while being educated on ways to improve the economic life of blacks. After the prayer, the address of welcome by the mayor, a reading of “Lincoln’s proclamation” and the oration, other community members gave speeches. Oftentimes, those members of the community who had experienced slavery first hand spoke at these events (Sch. 9.29).

Living so close to the time when blacks were emerging from slavery, did not afford black people the psychological nor physical distance to take any small freedoms for granted. They had to keep up the struggle for more freedoms, for the promise of true democracy was yet to be realized. These emancipation day celebrations were times of fun and games with parades, water excursions, and various sports activities being played. Also they were times of remembrance, and they were cultural affairs that allowed participants to not just engage in fun activities and revisit the past, but they offered participants the opportunity to become educated in the political realities of their lives. These celebrations also helped develop the spiritual man by keeping the saga of the Afro-American’s struggle alive by using various methods. Through recitations of the Emancipation Proclamation, sermons, pageants, plays, and a number of other activities,

Emancipation Day activities reminded celebrants of the steady progress the race had made since 1865 (Wiggins 127).

Speakers for these occasions were usually selected for their oratorical ability, high profile in local and or national affairs, and their commitment to racial progress. While pastoring Bethel AME of Chicago, a church boasting nine hundred members strong, Rev. Graham was selected to give the oration at the celebration because of his past accomplishment. He had “electrified the people who heard him with a brilliant address” (Sch. 9.29). An article detailing the “Emancipation Day” celebration at Benton Harbor discusses points made by Rev. Graham.

He made an excellent effort. He pictured the condition of his race thirty-three years ago as illiterate and with no knowledge of business. He contrasted that condition with the one today. He said the colored people today had many refined homes and at the time of the last census they had accumulated over 200,000,000. Over 3,000 colored soldiers fought in the war of the rebellion, more than that number fought in 1812, but they fought not for liberty for themselves but for others (Sch. 9.29 “A Big Celebration”).

The significance of locating this article in Shirley Graham’s collection is monumental for it links what would eventually become her debut work Tom Tom to the exposure she had received early in her life while growing up in the AME church and attending these types of celebrations in the various communities where she lived. Historical pageants were written especially for these observances (Wiggins 50), and her dramatic musical would evolve from the influence of these observances to the many events that made up these celebrations. Rev. Graham incorporated in his speech the following figurative language that anticipated by three decades his daughter’s musical opera Tom Tom. While speaking of freedom, he told his audience “Columbia’s fair

daughter, sang ‘America the land of the free and the home of the brave.’ While her dusky sisters beat the accompaniment with their chains of bondage” (Sch. 9.29 “A Big Celebration”).

After leaving Kalamazoo, Michigan David Graham’s next post was in Minneapolis, Minnesota. While serving as pastor of St. Peter AME in Minneapolis, Lorena dies. Apparently, she is too ill to accompany him to Minneapolis or before her death she leaves Minneapolis for Chicago, for reports of her death say she died in Chicago. One account gives the year of 1891, another report states that she died in Chicago June 19, 1893 (Sch. 9.29 “Rev. D. A. Graham Passes”). Whenever the actual death took place, it certainly brought much sorrow to Rev. Graham. This sorrow possibly was accompanied by some degree of guilt since by this time David is familiar with the routine of constant travel for AME ministers and is an active participant in it. Lorena’s death left him with a void, but he continues his grueling work pace for he has responsibilities and a young son. He continues to serve at this post until 1894, and at some point he meets Etta Bell.

Nearing the time when Etta would have been graduating from Englewood High School in Chicago, her “silent, restless father decided he could no longer endure the smoke and grime of Chicago. He was ag[e]ing rapidly and so he moved his family to a newer city more open to the praries ---St. Paul, Minnesota” (Sch. 11.2). Before leaving the Chicago area however, Etta had established a reputation as being a “zealous Sunday School worker” who at the age of seventeen was “elected the district superintendent of the Chicago District” (Sch. 9.21). Doubtless, it was difficult leaving familiar surroundings and close friends, but this move was one of many that Etta would

undergo. In 1894, a year after leaving Chicago, she graduates from Central High School in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she was recognized as “the only colored student in the class and accredited with the greatest number of sciences of any one in the class (Sch. 9.24). While keeping up with her school studies, Lizetta, the name she was called by close relatives, continued her commitment to church work.

Etta Bell met David Graham in association with church work. David Graham Du Bois in an article about his Grandparents describes their meeting in the twin cities of Minneapolis / St. Paul, Minnesota. He characterizes his Grandmother Etta as being somewhat reluctant about marrying his Grandfather David whom he characterizes as “ramrod straight, dark skinned, handsome, and [a] deeply religious young pastor” who had “relocated to St. Peter A. M. E. church in Minneapolis, Minnesota” (David G. Du Bois 43). His account does not mention his Grandfather’s son Roy who would have been a boy around the age of ten. Just what happened to Roy after his mother’s death is not recorded, but when Rev. David Graham married Etta Bell in 1895 Rev. Graham is a thirty-four year old widower with a child.¹

One year after her graduation from high school, Etta married Rev. Graham. His selection of Etta and her selection of him seemed a likely pairing for a number of reasons. Their conversations helped them discover that they shared many common interests that would wed them together. Their meeting in connection with the church suggests that they shared similar values and morals. They discussed their plans for the future – their lofty aspirations – lives committed to letting others know what Negroes could accomplish. But time told the story. Based on the long history of their marriage and accounts from their children on how affairs were conducted within the home, David

and Etta Graham agreed about the role of each partner within the marriage and shared a similar philosophy about child rearing. Conditioning from their childhoods made them well suited for lives as missionaries and working in a ministry requiring a life of itinerancy. Phillip Bell had moved his family several times stimulated by his desire for freedom, and although David's family was primarily stationary while he was growing up, after his connection with the AME Church he was moving not just from church to church every four years or so, but there was much traveling that he had to do within the interim of being assigned to a post. The thirteen years of itinerant ministry that was a part of his life before he met Etta had conditioned him.

Etta Graham tended to be of like mind and was equipped with the right mixture of calmness and fury to make their union fruitful and successful. Of their relationship David G. Du Bois says, "Their relationship was so completely without rancor, tension, regret, competition, or resentment of any kind. We [David and brother Robert] never heard either one of them raise their voice at each other. They also showed the other consideration, as if it was the most natural of circumstance for them" (43). Their union seemed destined to happen, for both had been prepared to journey through life using their convictions to support their activism. Both were well suited to accelerate the pattern of movement that they had experienced prior to their meeting.

The attention of Etta Bell's marriage to David Graham did not escape the notice of one of her former Sunday school teachers. While Etta was a member of the Congregationalist Church in Glencoe, Ill., Miss. O. D. Howard, sister of General Oliver O. Howard, former Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau² sent Lizzie a congratulatory letter where she expressed her elation at hearing the news of her union to

David Graham. She told Elizabeth that she had followed with much interest her successful pursuit of education and Christian character, and upon hearing of her engagement she tells Etta the following: “Now that your life is united with that of a man of high purpose and ability it gives me much pleasure to congratulate you both. There is nothing more earnest than the Christian love and no power more effective for bringing in the Kingdom of Christ on earth” (Sch. 9.21).

By 1895 David is Pastor of “the largest and finest colored church of the windy city” (Sch 9.21). The young Rev. David Graham and his new bride, Mrs. Etta B. Graham are leaders of a vitally important Black institution in their local community of Chicago - Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Rev. Graham’s congregation received his new bride with open arms. The Stewards and Stewardess of the church tender their pastor with a wedding reception on Thursday, November the 21st in the parlor of the church (Sch. 9.22), but he is only at this post for a short time, for by the next year, he is ministering at a new location, Bethel AME in Indianapolis, Indiana on the corners of Vermont and Toledo Streets. It is in the parsonage at 416 W. Vermont St. that Shirley Graham is born on November 11, 1896. When she enters the world her father is a well established minister within the AME Church which is still struggling to expand its influence in the world. By this time he is admired as an eloquent orator, and is accumulating a following of people who admired him at each stop on his itinerant journey.

In keeping with AME traditional practices, Lawrence Little notes in his work Disciples of Liberty: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Age of Imperialism, 1884-1916 that many leaders within the organization “established

newspapers and published essays and books to sway public opinion to their cause” (38). Many of the practices David Graham incorporated in his ministry were actions that had been implemented by his spiritual predecessor. Richard Allen had set a stellar example for future AME ministers to follow. His engagement in the community afforded him a great degree of respect that paved the way for people to hear his message. His door was always open to those in need. When the yellow fever epidemic of 1793 killed great numbers of community people he along with Absalom Jones and others buried the dead without looking for consideration. Charles H. Wesley, biographer of Richard Allen: Apostle of Freedom delineates how Allen “parlayed his influence as a Methodist churchman to leadership roles as a publicist, who in pamphlets, sermons, and newspapers defended the interest of African Americans” (Dickerson 72). His effectiveness as a leader correlated with his involvement in the community. Graham like Allen would use his gift of conveying ideas with clarity through the medium of writing and in like fashion as Allen, utilized the pulpit, newspapers and pamphlets to put forth his ideas.

Rev. Graham, following the example of his mentor and so many other AME disciples, established a news paper called the Bethel Recorder when he took the helm of Bethel AME in Indianapolis in 1895 (Sch. 9.29). He states that the membership of Bethel AME Church in Indianapolis, had “about a thousand enrolled members and as many more followers” (Sch. 9.29). In an attempt to keep the membership aware of church events he established the Bethel Recorder.³ It was necessary because the church had many functions that went on during the week and the membership needed to be aware of the times and dates of church activities. On some Monday nights a business

meeting might be held, on Wednesday nights a prayer meeting, and oftentimes Rev. Graham would be out of town for a day or two, sometimes a week. During these times guest ministers would preside over the service and bring the Sunday morning message or the Sunday night message (Sch. 9.29).

It is after Bethel Recorder merges with other papers that a clear picture of black life in Indiana during the last few years of the nineteenth century comes to the fore. The Bethel Recorder fused with other small papers to become comprehensive in its coverage of various types of newsworthy events covering news affecting the black citizenry in the state of Indiana. In 1897, the newly merged papers become The Recorder, “a Negro newspaper devoted to the best interest of the Colored people of Indiana.” The Recorder was published weekly coming out each Saturday, and boasted a readership of 20,000. It consisted of four sheets of paper with six columns per page. Each sheet, approximately 12 X 14, was crammed with information that related to various black communities within the state and hot issues that were regional and national in scope.

The local printer, Mr. George Stewart, a friend of Rev. Graham’s (Rev. Graham officiated his wedding.) was the medium through which the paper expanded. Rev. Graham tells of Bethel Recorder’s growth and fusion in “Evolution of the Indianapolis Recorder,” and attributes George P. Stewart, as being founder of the The Recorder but indirectly credits himself as being one of the creative minds behind the Indiana news organ. Graham states that the Bethel Recorder became so popular that “other churches desired to avail themselves of the same idea” (Sch. 9.29). Ministers A. I. Murray, pastor of Allen Chapel AME and Rev. G. A. Sissle of Simpson Chapel joined him in

“bringing out The Church Recorder.” Rev. Graham says that Stewart was the printer who published the Bethel Recorder, and he continued to print the paper as it expanded. With Rev. Graham’s church duties and the expansion of the paper, he was unable to properly edit the paper. In “Evolution of the Indianapolis Recorder” he further details the development of the paper:

At that time The Freeman, owned by Mr. George Knox enjoyed the largest circulation of any paper owned by our group in the country, but while published in Indianapolis, gave little attention to local affairs. Also there was the World founded by I. E. Christy, trying hard to build a colored democracy in the city, but also failing to concern itself about the churches, fraternities and society (Sch. 9.29).

The merger of Bethel Recorder , The Freeman, and The World resulted in a captivating newspaper with the right mixture of serious articles alongside interesting and entertaining news articles. The paper went through a number of name changes, but ultimately settled on simply being called The Recorder. After beginning as Bethel Recorder, it later fused with other church papers, and became The Church Recorder, following this it had another name change and became, The Recorder. Ultimately, The Recorder emerged as the comprehensive paper that Rev. Graham considered “one of the leading papers of the race” (Sch. 9.29). The cost was just .2 cents, or one could get a yearly subscription for a grand total of 1.00. It was published in Indianapolis, Indiana, and is not to be confused with The Christian Recorder, the official news organ of the AME Church that began in the 1840s under the editorship of Rev. J. P. Campbell and covered news from AME connection members from all across the United States and its foreign missions.

The paper ranged the gamut from the sacred to the secular and presented news not just from local churches in the city but news from black communities throughout Indiana. Page one usually focused on news from around the state with catchy headings representing the different communities in the state like “Franklin News Notes” and “Bloomington Pick-Ups” and “Shelbyville Personals.” These communities would supply the paper with a synopsis of important happenings in their regions. Page one also advertised books, as it did in the April 1st issue of 1899 when Rev. Graham’s The True Christian Sabbath came out for .15cents. Rev. Graham’s theological dispute with Rev. Mossell found expression in a book where he extended the conversation. Advertisements for his book remained on page one for five weeks.

News worthy events were always placed on this page as well. Josephine Beal Willson Bruce, wife of the late black senator, Blanche Kelso Bruce came to Indianapolis to visit her family. Her parents, Dr. Joseph and Elizabeth Willson were prominent members in the black community. Dr. Willson practiced dentistry, and his two unmarried daughters, Mary and Victoria Willson taught grammar school in Indianapolis (Graham xix). A few months after the death of Blanche K. Bruce, Josephine and son, Roscoe Conkling Bruce visited the city to be with family; Josephine’s father was ill at the time (188-193). On this particular visit the newspaper took the occasion to recognize Roscoe for his great oratory and analytical skills while serving on Harvard’s debate team against Princeton. This was news for page one. On another occasion Dr. Sumner A. Furniss, a twenty-six year old black physician was featured because he embodied the possibilities of the Negro (Vol. 4 No. 34).

Page four of each issue was reserved for “Church Notes” which allowed black churches in the local community to share news of their weekly activities. Denominational differences posed no conflicts for the community. AME’s fellowshipped with Baptist as well as AME Zions. Bethel AME, Wayman Chapel AME, Allen Chapel AME, St. Paul AME Chapel, Olivet Baptist, Second Baptist, Corinthian Baptist and Jones Tabernacle AME Zion regularly issued news in the paper, and in this way made it easy for researchers to reconstruct the flow and rhythm of life for the black community during that time. Deaths and funeral notifications were usually a part of the churches’ announcements. A “Personal Mention” column allowed community members to share information of a personal nature such as updating the community on the health of some of its members. In February of 1899 readers discover that Miss Daneva Darnell is recovering from “an attack of the grip” (Vol. 3 No. 26). In the July 1, issue readers are informed that “Willie, son of Mr. and Mrs. Thos. Floyd [o]in West Pratt Street has recovered from diphtheria” (Vol. 3 No. 47). It appears that listing one’s travel plans was fashionable. When Miss Letta Troutman decided that she was spending the summer in St. Louis, Missouri she informs the community through The Recorder. When Major Taylor, “champion bicyclist” was in the city, community folks are notified in the paper (Vol. 3 No. 47).

Marriages and entertainments were also listed on this page. The June 10th issue notes the marriage of Robert Moody to Miss Rhoda Nance. It was a private affair occurring Tuesday evening at 8:00 with Rev. A. I. Murray officiating. This same issue notes that the ladies of Bethel entertained in the parsonage from 4 to 6 p. m. Mrs. S. R. Brooks and Mrs. Mary Lewis. Mrs. Susan Rachel Brooks was Etta’s older sister who

was married to AME minister, and later Bishop, William Sampson Brooks. Mrs. Brooks was visiting from Minneapolis (Vol. 3 No. 46). Other miscellaneous information is included, such as when readers learn that the Honorable John A. Puryear is appointed assistant doorkeeper in the House of Representatives and will report to duty at the State House on February 6th 1899 (Vol. 3 No. 26). News providing the community with a gossipy sensation was finding out about marital breakups through the pages of the paper. When “Anna Goins brought suit for divorce from her husband William, in the circuit Court,” and Mrs. Cora Woods sought “legal separation from her husband Frank in the Superior Court,” it must have brought much consternation to both Mr. Goins and Mr. Woods for community members to be informed of their marital woes through a statewide newspaper; thereby providing salacious conversation for all to attune their ears (Vol. 4 No. 19). But all of this “news” was part and parcel of why The Recorder was a very marketable paper. It had serious articles about the state of black America, and it had playful and humorous news.

Perhaps among the most significant contributions emerging from this paper was the display of community, the manner in which the people in the community pooled their resources for the common good of those in need of uplift and support. The sense of community also found expression when members of the church wanted to honor those they revered. A touching example of community was demonstrated when members of the Young People Association (YPA) at Bethel decided that they would thoroughly renovate the pastor’s study. The floor of the study was covered with Brussels carpet, Brother Coleman Williams had the room papered at his own expense and he raised money and purchased a set of chairs. Sis. Mary Williams purchased

shades for the windows and Mother Hall presented a “fine crayon” portrait of the pastor. All of this was done before the next quarterly meeting (Vol. 3 No. 28). These special acts of kindness were frequent occurrences in the lives of the Grahams, during David Graham’s time of active ministry.

Advertisements also help reveal the cultural life of the community. A range of professionals advertised through the paper, from doctors, tailors and grocers to bicycle instructors. Prof. Allan Jackson, a trustee at Bethel, and his business partner Mr. Fowler rendered as a service to the community instructions on how to ride a bicycle. A single lesson could be purchased for .50 cents. If one desired to take the full course, the fee would be 2.00. Over 100 used bicycles were in stock at the company (Vol. 3 No. 28).

From the weekly appearances of “Church Notes” the grueling schedule of David Graham is discerned. After eulogizing Sis. Mary E. Thomas of Middle Street on Tuesday afternoon, Rev. Graham leaves Wednesday morning, January 4, 1899 for Baltimore to attend a Bishop’s Council meeting. He will be gone for a week, so during his absence Dr. Elbert will occupy the pulpit and the choir and orchestra will give a song service at 7:30 on Sunday evening. While away, he stops in Washington D. C., Baltimore and Philadelphia. He returns on the 11th and prepared to preach the morning and evening services on the 15th. On Monday January 16th, the week after he returns, the church will hold the election of trustees. On Tuesday the 17th revival services begin and continue throughout the week (Vol. 3 No. 1-3). In February when a smallpox scare keeps members from attending some church services, some revival services were cancelled.

What is clear is that Rev. Graham's activities are not limited to sitting in his study preparing sermons, but his job kept him busy with other church responsibilities such as marrying and burying members, visiting the sick, traveling the city, state and country on business associated with the church, attending ministerial meetings, and always strategizing about ways to collect monies required by the AME Church. Rev. Graham constantly made calls for "dollar money." Olivia McGee Lockhart, apprentice to the late Francis Stout, historian of Bethel Indianapolis stated that the dollar money was the means by which every member of the AME church contributed to the working capitol of the entire organization. It was a source of pride for members; it was their way of saying, "I'm a part of this whole thing" (interview). There were also calls for the Missionary Mite Fund. Rallies were held throughout the year to raise funds.

Rev. Graham's passion is working with young people, and this is displayed in his engagement with activities developing youth. In 1899 Rev. Graham becomes the State Superintendent of the Indiana Young People Society of Christian Endeavor within the AME Church. This position requires him to travel so that he can be in contact with Christian Endeavor branches within the various AME churches throughout the state. Used within the church, he felt this organization could bidge the gap between black and white Christian youth. During his tenure as State Superintendent he encouraged leaders of each society to send in their records to him so that when he sends in his report to the national Christian Endeavor office accurate statistics of what Indiana AME's and more specifically the national AME denomination was doing (Vol 4 No. 13).

The paper was the most important organizational structure that Rev. Graham instituted within the church; however, his organization of the Christian Endeavor

Society within the AME church is another example of his significance as an institution builder. In an article titled, “When Was the Allen C. E. League Organized?”, Rev. Graham delineates how he came to this assignment. He states that in 1899 when he was pastoring Bethel, Indianapolis, Bishop Arnett requested that he “prepare a plan and constitution for the operation of a Christian Endeavor Society in full fellowship with the United Society of Christian Endeavor, but under the con[t]rol” of the AME church. He went forth with this plan but the Bishops felt the time was not right for a new department, but in 1904 at the General Conference in Chicago the Allen Christian Endeavor Society came into formal existence, with Rev. Graham having prepared the constitution for this society (Sch. 9.29). This is just one of several auxillary organizations that helped enrich the institutional climate of the church.

On April 6th Rev. Graham travels to “Muncie to address a class of 300 converts of Rev. T. E. Wilson’s revival” (Recorder Vol. 3 No. 35). In late April he is away from the congregation for a week lecturing to Christian Endeavor societies in Chicago and Springfield, Illinois and South Bend, Indiana (Recorder Vol. 3 No. 37). While away Etta is becoming more engaged in being the wife of an AME minister, for she fills in for him while he is away, sometimes by presiding over functions that target the other women of the church at other times giving a tea for visiting ministers and their wives.

In the April 15th issue of The Recorder, an interesting tid-bit appears in the notes for Bethel that sheds light on the type of cultural context into which Shirley Graham emerges. It reads, “By a wonderful stroke of good fortune Bethel has succeeded in securing the great “Passion Play” which was given in Tomlinson Hall recently for a return engagement May 1-2. To see this is the opportunity of a life time, and nothing

like it has ever been presented in a colored church in this country before” (Recorder Vol. 3 No. 36). Shirley Graham is a toddler, but she grows up in churches that are invested in being vanguards in the black community. These churches are interested in plays, they have established choirs and orchestras, the most popular pastors, evangelists and missionaries visit their pulpits. Guests are from all over the country. On March 12th, 1899 Evangelist Amanda Smith, “the most noted colored evangelist in the world” preaches from Bethel’s pulpit. Bethel notes say, “Sister Smith is no ordinary woman preacher, but ranks with Moody, Harrison, Chapman and others as a world wide evangelist. Her labors have been principally among the white people by whom she is held in great reverence.” On the occasion that she preached at Bethel, more whites than ever attended the church. There was standing room only (Recorder Vol. 3 No. 31). Two months prior to Smith’s visit, South African missionaries J. J. Van Blunk and his wife occupied the pulpit at Bethel and the congregation found them to be informative and enthusiastic (Vol. 3 No. 27). This environment is culturally rich and simulating for the Grahams and all who are a part of Bethel.

On Monday, June 12th Rev. Graham journeys to Wilberforce to attend commencement services (Vol. 3 No. 45). No doubt he chats with Reverdy Cassius Ransom, a fellow minister in the gospel who has come into the charge at Bethel in Chicago upon Graham’s departure (The Sage 52). Both are in attendance for this graduation. Reverdy and David have much in common. They are age mates both being born in January of 1861 a few days apart, Reverdy on the 4th and David the 11th. Both were born in the northwest, Reverdy in Flushing Ohio and David in Princeton, Indiana. They entered the ministry around the same time, but follow different paths in getting

into the ministry. Ransom's educational background is more formal than Rev. Graham's, for he attends Wilberforce then transfers a year later to Oberlin where he is awarded an Avery scholarship. It is at Wilberforce however where he completes his degree (The Sage 14). Ransom is one of many ministers that Graham could call on for help in the time of need. It could be that Ransom was someone that Graham would years later call upon to assist his daughter in getting into Oberlin.

Graham's business at Wilberforce is more than what appears on the surface. Negotiations have been in the making with the powers that be concerning a job for him at the college. After keeping the substance of these talks under wraps for a time, he divulges the contents of the meetings with the editor of The Recorder and announces through its pages that he will be leaving Indianapolis and in August will preach his farewell sermon at Bethel (Vol. 4 No.1). This has been a strong supportive flock. His new wife has probably enjoyed the help and attention that members have bestowed upon her and her family. The members give them an impressive farewell reception.

By September of 1899 Rev. Graham is on the job in Xenia, Ohio, the headquarters of African Methodist learning, where his job as General Financial Agent for Payne Theological Seminary at Wilberforce takes him away from home just as much as his ministerial duties at Bethel have in the past. Although he's at Wilberforce, he will remain a member of the Indiana Conference. This move is viewed as a promotion. The Recorder reports "the position is one of responsibility and honor while the opportunities of doing good for his church and race are very great" (Vol. 4 No. 1). Graham visits different AME districts raising funds for the seminary. During the month of November he is traveling down south to West Kentucky, Tennessee and Hot Springs,

Arkansas. This trip keeps him away from home for close to a month which leaves Etta alone with a young teenage step-son, and a three year old daughter, all the while she is pregnant and weeks away from delivering another baby. In this unfamiliar environment, she feels a bit uncomfortable as she tries to turn living quarters into a home.

Attending the AME church in the community puts her more at ease, for it allows her to get to know her neighbors better. This is not her first time meeting some people, for during her marriage to Rev. Graham she has been meeting people in the AME connection during intervals when church activities have brought them into the company of each other. The church in Xenia is a “handsome two story brick church with a large pipe organ and one of the best choirs in the state” (Vol. 4 No. 32). The membership is much smaller than what the Grahams have become accustomed, for the church membership in Xenia is a little over 300 members. The black population in the city is approximately 3,000 (Recorder Vol. 4 No. 32), a significant number of these are associated with the church and school.

In this highly literate black community, the Grahams came in contact with many successful and high ranking members within the AME church. They are neighbors with the first family of Wilberforce, Rev. and Mrs. Samuel Mitchell, and their children: nineteen year old Charles, sixteen year old Lottie, fifteen year old Elizabeth, ten year old Samuel and seven year old Lonzie. Bishop Benjamin W. Arnett, the former Ohio State legislator who in 1885 “helped pass the Civil Rights Acts that did away with the Black Laws in Ohio,” (The Sage 21), is living there with his large extended family. Former graduate and former President of Wilberforce Bishop Benjamin F. Lee and his

wife Mary and their five children: twenty-four year old Frances, Sarah, Benjamin Jr. Mary and Consuelo were still living in Xenia (9). High ranking United States soldier Charles Young and his mother also lived in the neighborhood. David and Etta's close proximity and interaction with people of such high ideals and aspirations gave them experiences that not just made interesting conversation around the dinner table, but instilled notions of greatness into the minds of their children. Shirley Graham's desire to capture Young's life through the biography in the 1940s, probably resulted from hearing her parents discuss knowing him while they were living in Xenia.

While David is settling into life at Xenia, Rev. Charles William Newton is easing into a comfortable appointment at Bethel and boasts in The Recorder about the membership that has been turned over to his authority.

Go to Bethel, Vermont St, and you will see church trusteeship done in its excellency. This Board is a power, an ornament and a credit to a great church. Go to Bethel and learn the secret of the pastor's strength in the executive ability—fidelity, and industry of the best class leaders and stewards in the A. M. E. connection. To this well earned credit I challenge a contradiction. Go to Bethel and you will see the largest, the most orderly and the most generous congregation of color in the city (Vol. 4 No. 13).

This church that Graham has helped build up is no longer a source of immediate support for him, but through the years, the bonds that have been established here will continue to unite members of this congregation to the Graham family. For years to come some members will wonder what became of little "Lola," the name family members used to refer to Shirley. They will be surprised to discover other little Grahams that come along, but the pages of The Recorder will keep the Grahams connected to different communities within the state of Indiana. Rev. and Mrs. Graham continued to be

devoted subscribers to the paper years beyond their time in the state, having the paper to “follow [them] all over the United States and into far away Africa” (Sch. 9.29).

Primarily in Indiana, but communities in the states of Michigan, Minnesota and to a much lesser degree Ohio are familiar with Rev. David A. Graham. AME State Conferences and General Conferences have him regularly coming in contact with others.

Something curious happens after Rev. Graham’s departure from Indiana which adds credence to his centrality in facilitating the birth of this paper. When he leaves there are several issues when the only church represented in the paper is Bethel. The news from Bethel that once took up several lines in a column is now so extensive that it takes up more than one column. It uses up all the space that the other churches had used. In the December 16th issue of The Recorder, the editor/publisher writes an article titled “The Recorder’s Controversy.” In it he accuses “several ministers” of “circulating reports” with the intention of hampering the circulation of the newspaper.

It further states the following:

From its initial number up to the issue of November 18th, the Recorder has published the advertisements of the city churches, regardless of size or denomination, without cost to the churches; in return for which the several ministers promised their moral and financial support in the matter of circulation and the printing of Job work, etc. With but one two exceptions this was not done – we secured no subscribers through their individual efforts and got very little printing, unless the job was wanted on credit. On November 10th, notification was sent to the ministers, That the free use of the space would be discontinued and that the space would have to be paid for (Vol. 4 No. 19).

Could it be that David Graham was the one of the two ministers who secured subscriptions for the newspaper and that his departure from Indianapolis compelled the

publisher to pursue a stricter policy in regards to subscriptions and payments? The publisher ends his announcement in the paper by saying that “The marked progress made by the churches in this city in the past three or four years, we believe is due, partly to the efforts of The Recorder, and for our work whether large or small we have received no recompense” (Vol. 4 No. 19). Gradually, the churches’ announcements resumed in the pages of The Recorder.

The culturally rich and stimulating contacts of David and Etta serve as a foundation for their children. Shirley is born into this context. Whatever ministerial post her parents were assigned, in their position as ministerial leaders within the AME Church, they are ensured a certain degree of respect and by extension little Shirley receives special attention. Certainly Bethel in Indianapolis provided the toddler Shirley with a large, vibrant educational community and a musical context that early on fostered her development. She was quickly learning to articulate words and understanding what was being imparted to her. Her parents early on noticed how she attentively listened whenever music was played. Reacting to the beautiful chordal arrangements played by the organist in church, her body would sway along with the music. At home after church services she could be heard humming tunes from church service when alone in a room. When visiting the church with one of her parents, she would often have to be pulled away from the piano. Her gravitation to it was unmistakable. At this parsonage, she was exposed to a finely developed musical operation, complete with an orchestra. At some of her father’s other ministerial assignments that followed, she would not be so fortunate.

Although political, economic and social gains were being reversed across the nation, the Indianapolis black community fought back, seemingly unconsciously, by uniting and forging cultural practices and organizations that enabled them to live with integrity and don the lifestyle that had been forbidden to them in the past. Many members of the community knew the importance of publicizing their actions and took much delight in doing so. Rev. Graham's efforts in bring into existence a comprehensive black weekly for his church ultimately turned into the creation of a formidable black newspaper for the state of Indiana. This paper was a considerable contribution to churches in the various communities across the state and to the black community at large. His development of the Christian Endeavor Society within the AME church helped channel the energy and activities of the youth of the church in constructive ways that prepared them for entry into civil society.

Although David and Etta were moving away from Indiana, this state would remain their home base. The newspaper would serve as a vital link connecting the Graham to a vitally rich black cultural life in the state for many of the years that they were away. When they were in places like Colorado Springs, Colorado, their connection to black life in Indiana served as an oasis in the desert. Rev. Graham's last years in the ministry would be spent back in his home state of Indiana in the cities of Richmond and Kokomo, only a few miles from Indianapolis.

Notes

¹ Etta Graham's obituary in 1952 states that "Rev. Graham was a widower with three children" (Sch 11.2), but these children remain nameless in Graham family history. It is only through census information that one son from Rev. Graham's previous marriage is identified. It seems entirely improbably that Rev. Graham abandoned his children from his earlier union.

² On the sheet where this information appears, Mrs. Graham writes "Mrs. O. D. Howard," but the "Mrs." is likely a mistake. Du Bois writes about Major General Oliver O. Howard in Souls of Black Folk. He states that Gen. Howard was called to serve as Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau and was appointed on May 12, 1865. Du Bois characterized him as "an honest man with too much faith in human nature, little aptitude for business and intricated detail." On a letter that Ms. Howard has written to "Lizzie," Ms. Howard signs her name in an almost illegible manner. It is clear that the middle initial and last name are L. Howard, but the first name can't be deciphered clearly. However it appears that it is "Grace". This same General Howard was the founder of Howard University.

³ It does not appear that any of the original Bethel Recorder papers survived, but once Bethel Recorder merges with other papers in the region a record is kept.

CHAPTER 3

GROWING UP IN PASONAGES ACROSS THE NATION: 1900-1916

Moving to Xenia was exciting because it offered Rev. Graham opportunities for advancement. This new living environment placed him right in the center of AME happenings. Bishops and ministers alike crisscrossed this space endlessly attending Bishops Council meetings and various other meetings and school functions at Wilberforce. His assignment here though was unlike all other assignments of the past. Here he had to adjust to not leading a church. His job would engage him in fund raising activities for the seminary. William Seraile states that in 1900 Payne Theological Seminary “faced a deficit of fourteen thousand dollars and was in imminent danger of closing unless funds could be raised” (158).

Just as Rev. Graham was eager to tackle this new job, Etta welcomed this change as an opportunity to have freedom from the constant surveillance of a congregation and the officiousness of some members, but little Shirley had fewer opportunities to amble up to pianos and satisfy her desire of touching the smooth keys; nevertheless, she is still able to be satisfied on those occasions when she attends church and hears the melodic music playing in the sanctuary. Church attendance is not as often as it has been in the past because Etta is in the last stages of pregnancy. She delivers a son to David, her first and his second on January 9, 1900. This son becomes his father’s namesake, David Andrew Graham Jr. Rev. Graham’s oldest son Roy is living with the family while they are in Ohio.

The first couple of months on the job have Rev. Graham traveling south which exposes him to black communities in that region and allows him to dispel some of his

preconceived notions about southern black life. His previous work with the church has taken him to numerous states like Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Maryland, but he has never traveled to the deep south. After traveling to various congregations in Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Texas and Mississippi and garnering up support for Payne Seminary and other schools affiliated with the AME church, he shares with The Recorder readership his views on the trip by saying, “My trip to the south is a revelation to me. We have as refined congregations in Little Rock and Hot Springs as we have in Indianapolis or anywhere else” (Vol. 4 No. 15). This knowledge along with realizing that a reasonable number of black people are “...engaged in many lines of work from which they are debarred in the North” (Vol. 4 No. 15) perhaps opens his mind to the potential of preaching at a southern post.

When not traveling for funds for the school, there are periods of time when the lull in activities causes him to fuel his energies into other endeavors. On one such occasion he informs other ministers back in Indiana of his availability to preach. In February of 1900, an ad through The Recorder in Indianapolis states that for the “next six weeks, he [Rev. Graham] will be at leisure to assist any of the ministers of the State, in revival work” (Vol. 4 No. 32). On other occasions he responds to current events through the paper. The Philippine-American War that is being waged compels him to channel his energies into voicing his distaste for the methods the American government is using abroad. He busies himself writing an article on this subject, and his angst concerning the United States’ invasion and occupation of the Philippines finds expression in the paper where it stirs up a response from a reader whose opinion is at variance with his.

On the issue of U.S. occupation in the Philippines, Marvin Malloy, a reader of the Recorder retorts back at Rev. Graham for criticizing the U.S. government's occupation of the Philippines. Rev. Graham had stated in a Memorial Day Sermon that "this nation, which has sacrificed so much blood to make men free is now using its forces to crush the spirit of liberty among an oppressed and defenseless people." Malloy countered that American occupation was better than the absolute monarchy of Aguinaldo, the leader in contention for Philippine leadership. Malloy stated, "American occupation is the best thing that ever happened to the Filipinos" (Sch. 9.25). Malloy's attitude reflected an arrogance that many Americans, even some AME missionaries, demonstrated when it came to interacting with people in other countries, especially when it involved people in African and Asian countries.

The family's stay in Xenia is short lived, but Rev. Graham has been in the community long enough to make dear friends and enemies. Some of his associations traveling down south have gained him favor. While at his post at Payne, Paul Quinn College in Waco, Texas conferred upon him an unsolicited honorary Degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1901 (Sch. 9.29). It is not clear if the assignment with Payne Seminary was designed to be a position like other ministerial post where the tenure was just for a year, or if it could have been that the position followed the tenure of positions like the editorship and managerial positions at the Christian Recorder where it was assumed that the person would be in the position for at least four years until the next general conference. Whether angst got the better of Rev. Graham in not presiding over a congregation or whether the Bishop Benjamin W. Arnett determined that another's abilities could be better utilized in this position cannot be determined; however, it is

clear that in less than two years David is at another post, but this time the ministerial post is noticeably smaller than his previous appointments like Chicago's Bethel and Indianapolis' Bethel where there were well established congregations in excess of nine hundred members.

This is the first time one begins to notice what could be considered a downward turn in Graham's assignments, this occurring at a time when Rev. Graham can little afford it. His family is expanding. Lorenz Graham in an interview with Louis Massiah in 1993 intimated that the reason behind his father's star, that early on appeared to be taking a meteoric rise at the the beginning of the century suddenly began taking a downward trajectory was because he "offended the bishops....by his exposing the rascality of some of them" (qtd. in Horne 39). Several clergymen and two bishops lived in the neighborhood of the Grahams. At this point in the history of the church, there were only nine bishops. Bishops Arnett and Lee lived in the Xenia community and the Reverends George F. Woodson, George David, John Coleman and Charles S. Gel were some of the many ministers living in close proximity to the Grahams. If it is true that Graham offended a bishop, it is likely that his demotion would have resulted from the bishop whose district he was in, and Bishop Arnett presided over David Graham's district, and was responsible for his having come to the post at Payne, a position viewed favorably. But which bishop or bishops that David Graham might have offended is shrouded in mystery although reports of scandalous behavior of some of them have been documented.

Letters sent to the editor of the Christian Recorder prior to the 1904 General Conference in Chicago requested that new bishops be elected. Many members felt that

there were not enough bishops to competently carry out the work of the church, and that some bishops had become too old to keep up with the demanding traveling schedule and work load. These letters called for the retirement of Bishops Tanner, Turner and B. W. Arnett. “Others felt that Arnett should be retained but that Handy was incompetent and that Turner, who had given so much to the church, should die in office.” Turner had suffered temporary paralysis in 1900 (Seraile 170) which limited his effectiveness to a small degree, but he continued to travel and serve in spite of being slowed down. Handy was extended less sympathy. He suffered from poor health and had missed the General Conference due to age and affliction (170-171). During this conference there were complaints of raucous behavior. There were “charges of bishops openly carrying whiskey bottles while cavorting with prostitutes” (171). Rev. Graham certainly would not have been able to overlook such blatant immoral behavior. He assuredly spoke out against it. Retaliation would not have been a deterrent.

Ministers brought with them to their position of bishop the same foibles they struggled with as laymen, and were not about reproach and vindictiveness. When Rev. Graham spoke out, the ire of bishops was raised. Would Bishop Arnett be inclined to move Rev. Graham to a small appointment because he criticized one of the other bishops? Is it possible that Arnett was one of those guilty of the offense? Shirley Graham, like her brother suggested that her father’s protest “over the doings of a certain drunken and immoral Bishop” was a turning point in her father’s career in the ministry (Horne Race Woman 39), but the name of that bishop remains illusive.

There is another “drunken” occurrence happening around the same time frame that caused a storm of controversy within the church. It centered on Rev. Reverdy C.

Ransom, a fellow minister in David Graham's district. Bishop Arnett appeared to like Rev. Graham but it appears that he had a special fondness for Reverdy C. Ransom. In the summer of 1896 Bishop Arnett visited the Ransoms in Cleveland and told them of his wish to move them to Chicago to "either Quinn Chapel or Bethel." Reverdy preached at both and "chose Bethel" (Gomez-Jefferson 52), the Bethel from which David and Etta were being moved. Did David Graham wish to remain at Bethel Chicago for a longer time back in 1896 after he and his new bride were just beginning life together there, or was he anxious to go to Indianapolis because of his ties in Indiana?

Annetta Gomez-Jefferson discusses the 1906 scandal that Rev. Reverdy Ransom was embroiled in. Ransom had grown up, for a time, in the home of his paternal grandparents who were staunch AME members and equally faithful drinkers of strong drink. This exposure in early life to liquor had forever placed him on the path of having to fight against this habit that would become a vice for him. On his way to a speaking engagement to Huntsville, Alabama, Ransom was accused by a white woman of being drunk on public transportation. It became a big issue nationally among the AME church membership, and a meeting had to be held to address the issue. Gomez-Jefferson notes that "Reverdy's strongest support came from fellow ministers in his district. She notes that "A Dr. D. A. Graham wrote to the House of Bishops stating that Ransom had been drunk and the church should do something about it" (The Sage 88). Gomez-Jefferson uses this quote in a way that suggests that Rev. Graham felt compassion for Rev. Ransom; however, this quote doesn't suggest whether he's intimating that Ransom should be expelled or forgiven. Rev. Graham was rigid in the

standards that he held for himself. Was he as forgiving of others? At the meeting, Ransom spoke eloquently and pleaded his cause. Those who heard him speak were so moved that Ransom was exonerated by his peers.

When this incident occurred, Ransom was not then a Bishop, but the timing between Rev. Graham's change in posts and Rev. Ransom's "drunken" episode arouse suspicion that this might have been the event to which the Graham children were referring. For the most part, Ransom moves on to preaching at prestigious churches like Charles St. Church in Boston and Bethel in New York City (Gomez-Jefferson The Sage 94). It is Reverdy Ransom who, on the second meeting of the Niagra Movement, gave the momentous speech on August 17, 1906 at Harper's Ferry titled "John Brown's Body" (89-90), a speech that W. E. B. Du Bois would praise years later in 1935 by saying:

That speech more than any single other event stirred the great meeting. It led through its inspiration and eloquence to the eventual founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (qtd. in Gomez-Jefferson The Sage 91).

Meanwhile, Rev. Graham's posts become smaller and oftentimes are in the south, a region of the country that four decades removed from slavery still evoked, all too accurately, images of hardship and repression. However, there is an alternate way of viewing his ministerial journey. Although Lorenze felt his father was being punished when he reflected, "they sent him away to the smallest parishes in the South they could find" (qtd. in Horne 39), Richard R. Wright Jr., AME historian and author of Centennial Encyclopedia of African Methodist Episcopal Church appears to access Rev. Graham's assignments in another light. Instead of the smaller churches being viewed as

retaliation against a minister that the Bishop now disliked, it could have been that David Graham was good at building up congregations and was selected for these posts because of his ability. Wright Jr. notes the following of Graham in his publication of AME builders: “While holding up the interests of the church, his forte is along spiritual lines and great revivals are most sure to accompany his pastorate. More than twelve hundred were received into the church during his four years at Bethel, Chicago” (96). Shirley Graham often said of her father that he was “sent from place to place to ‘mend broken fences’ ‘to establish better race relations’ in a community, to rebuild churches” (Sch. 1.1).

When Rev. Graham and Etta leave Ohio, D. A. Jr. is still a baby just learning how to walk and Etta is carrying another child. This is her predicament as the family settles into life at St. James AME Church in New Orleans, Louisiana, a church tracing its history back to the mid-nineteenth century when a group of free Negroes established it. But she does not complain about the move, nor the stress involved with keeping her attention focused on three children, nor the sleep deprivation that she has endured for the past two years. Junior is older and sleeping through the night now. She finds satisfaction in this small act and prepares for the upcoming birth of a new life.

With all of these events that could be considered if not negative certainly troubling, Etta’s attitude is upbeat, for the anticipation of moving to a new city is exciting. She finds New Orleans charming with its old world architectural structures. The temperatures are inviting during the winter months for they contrast greatly from the frigid cold she remembers from her winters in the north. The warm humid air in this port city enables the delicious smells cooking in kitchens to waft through the air.

Gumbo, jambalaya and any number of dishes laced with spices set the tone for a theme that is dominant in this cultural milieu. Fusion, blending, and mixing are the order of the day --- mixture of foods, sounds and people. Because Etta enjoys cooking, she finds it intriguing learning the culinary secrets indigenous to this area and begins incorporating them in her dishes.

This southern ministerial post if intended to be punishment for an obstinate pastor falls short of being such, for this space made a vital contribution to the musical expression that Shirley Graham would later develop. Although he would endure bitter battles at some of these southern posts, the pressure resulting from these altercations forged in Rev. Graham a stronger activist and his children's exposure to his battles prepared them for the fight that lay ahead for them. He did not see at the time how the sounds of this environment would prefigure in his daughter's life. Years later Rev. Graham would be able to boast as his biblical brother Joseph, whose brothers sold him into bondage, "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (Gen. 50:20).

In New Orleans Shirley's ears are introduced to new sounds. The music of the city presented an array of musical styles. The stratification of all American cities made it such that black living quarters and businesses were restricted to the same area, so that when the Graham's went out to attend business at the grocer or the bank they might easily pass any number of businesses. Walking down the street with one of her parents she likely heard the cacophonous blaring of trumpets piercing out the entryway of a club. A few feet away bellowing out the open doors of an eating establishment was the heavily syncopated dance music that typified this region of the county. It made her little body jump with the beat. The sound is catchy and fanciful. Men and boys

performing some of these songs scrape a metal object across an apparatus similar to a washboard, all the while humping their bodies to the beat, their feet moving in break fast motion. Not only is Shirley's body compelled to move, her mind now entertains new ideas about the tunes that can be played on the piano and different ways to alter the expression of music. Because she is a young child, the impressions are strong. Years from now certain smells, sounds and tastes trigger specific images dating back to her childhood experience during this time. She soaks up this new experience and carefully takes notice of the bass sounds, drum beats, riffs and rhythms.

Quite possibly, it could have been in Louisiana that she heard the church musician, in the middle of a song, wailing out a mournful melody while waiting on choir members to arrive to practice. This song stirred young Shirley's soul, although she wouldn't have described it as such at this time in her childhood. The first words reaching Graham's ears were, "my home is o ver Jor dan." She remembered her father preaching about the Jordan River. The church musician continued singing with the rise and fall of the melody. "D e ee e ee p... .R iv e r, L o r d, I want to cross o ver in to camp ground." The slow moving dirge-like tune conveyed a deep sadness. It would play a constant refrain in her head for years to come. She would recognize that tune years later as the song "Deep River." The music she is exposed to during these years prefigures dominantly in her later musical work, as she presses to make people gain an appreciation for Negro music.

A festive atmosphere that reigns in the city conceals at times a more sinister aspect to life. The racial divide that has been noticeable in the north is more complicated in this region for segments of the population do not consider themselves

black nor white. Some refer to themselves as Cajuns and others call themselves Creoles. Many of the people attend church services, listen to the sermons and recite the scriptures, yet beyond the church walls another belief system is in operation, one that involves deeply entrenched ideas about superstition and mysticism. This is the world into which Lorenz Graham is born on January 27th 1902.

Little Shirley is influenced in this environment in varying ways by a number of occurrences, but it is an incident that threatens her father's safety and the family's well-being that traumatizes her and becomes an experience that historian Leon Latwick would consider her racial baptism. It is at this pastoral assignment down south that Rev. Graham found it imperative to brandish a gun. Using Ruth Morris Graham's unpublished manuscript, "Shirley Graham Du Bois: Writer, Composer – World Citizen," Robert Dee Thompson, Jr.'s dissertation, "A Socio-Biography of Shirley Graham-Du Bois: A Life in the Struggle" recounts a time from Shirley Graham's childhood that demonstrates Rev. Graham's courage in the face of hostility. Ruth Morris Graham's recounts her father-in-law's act of heroism.

Morris's accounting places this event around 1903 when Shirley Graham was six years old. "One day a black boy was killed on the street by a white policeman. Word of the boy's death spread quickly through the black section of town. Many black people were very upset about this killing and some had had enough and said they were going to riot." When Rev. Graham heard that some of the blacks in town were planning to riot he tried to come up with a way to channel the anger in a way that would bring about positive and productive changes. He quickly printed handbills and had young boys pass them out announcing a meeting. "Mass protest meeting tomorrow, Tuesday 8

P. M., at St. James A. M. E. Church. Everyone is welcome” (qtd. from Morris Graham, n.d. 12 in Thompson 14). Thompson notes that when whites discovered that blacks were attending a protest meeting at the church, they banded together and threatened to burn the church down (14). The atmosphere was tense with worry about the outcome of the night’s meeting. Quoting from Ruth Morris Graham’s manuscript, Thompson states that Rev. Graham told his wife, “I have asked the men of the church to come tonight with their guns ready in case we are attacked” (Thomspens 15).

On the night of the meeting Rev. Graham spoke to a nearly packed church. After opening with a prayer, Graham asked women and children to quietly return home. He announced the following to the men who had remained:

Any man here in this room who feels that he cannot face what might be a battle with death tonight will please leave quietly at this time. Some men here have families that would suffer too much if they were hurt or killed. I ask that those men leave quietly at this time. You are just as brave as those who stay (qtd. from Morris Graham 13 in Thompson 16).

Morris-Graham states that twenty-one men with loaded guns remained. Rev. Graham ordered that “all the lights be doused except one” (16). It is said that he went outside and stood in front of the church door (16). He told those men who stood with him that night that “if blood is shed this night in New Orleans it will be mingled blood – ours and theirs (16). The events of the night transpired without incident. Morris Graham’s retelling of the incident paints Rev. Graham as a heroic black goodfellow brandishing a gun and exemplifying courage on the front steps of the black church. This picture of Rev. Graham seems to differ from the gentle, passive picture of him that Shirley Graham often painted. When one considers the racial mores of the day and

considers how the act of self-actualization – the belief that your “self” – “black self” in this case, was worthy of equal footing with a white man – was cause for retaliation, possibly a lynching, the act that Rev. Graham performed that night was noteworthy and would reveal another side of his personality that emerged to the fore when confronted. Rev. Graham was fortunate in keeping his life, after all this is the state that just a few years before in 1896 gave rise to the lawsuit of Adolph Plessy vs. Ferguson resulting in the Supreme court decision that stated that “‘separate but equal’ accommodations for blacks were a ‘reasonable’ use of state police powers” (Bennett 267), thus setting the precedence of rolling back constitutional freedoms blacks were beginning to enjoy and utilize as they emerged from slavery.

Even in the most repressive times, there are individuals who will stand and fight for what they perceive is theirs, and Rev. Graham and the men who remained with him on this day were acting to protect their community from further harm. A terrible backlash could have resulted from their attempts to mobilize. The mob could have fired on them or burned down the church, but Morris-Graham does not say that this happened, but considering the times it would be foolhardy to think that this act of courage would not be followed up by some other act. Richard Wright states that during Rev. Graham’s tenure in New Orleans, he “rebuilt the old historic St. James” Church, making it a beautiful, modern sanctuary of which the AME connection could be proud (96). There is no mention of the former sanctuary being destroyed, so the rebuilding of this church appears to have been an occurrence resulting from the normal progression of an aged building needing to be torn down and then rebuilt, and not a rebuilding resulting from destruction.

It was probably on occasions like this, after an accumulation of racist occurrences, that even prayers were not a palliative strong enough to satisfy the soul. Rev. Graham no doubt, the Sunday morning after the series of incidents leading up to the night when guns had to be carried was at a loss for words to explain the lack of humanity exercised by their white brothers. A white policeman had killed a black child with impunity. No doubt such angst burned his soul as he thought about the dead child and how this child could just as easily have been one of his own children. He knew that his children had sensed something terrible. He had seen the terror in little Shirley's eyes. How would this affect her? It could have been that standing in the pulpit the following Sunday morning, as he tried to make sense of the inexplicable actions of the past week words escaped him as he tried to sermonize, and he -- being moved by some unexplainable agony slowly began singing the words of an old Negro spiritual. "Steal away.....Steal away.....steal away.....to Jesus." The congregation, familiar with the song, but more importantly attuned to the agony they felt because of the weight of Jim Crow encounters in their daily lives, added their voices and agonies with his and continued. "Steal away....steal away..... home. I ain't... got long....to stay.... here." Just over thirty-five years removed from slavery, they still felt the stinging slap of racial hatred.

Shirley begins taking music lessons when she is in elementary school. She has good motor skills. Her fingers are agile enough to glide effortlessly over keys as she plays the various scales and musical pieces. Her parents recognize that she has a natural gift for music, and the beginning images of a musician in the making are quickly

appearing. Nevertheless, the family's frequent uprooting makes lessons irregular until a few years later when the family is living in Clarksville, Tennessee (Thompson 20).

By November of 1905 Rev. Graham is assigned to Bethel in Detroit and the family returns north, but this proves to be a difficult membership and Rev. Graham has no interest in being reappointed to this post. He writes Bishop James A. Handy a letter of resignation from this charge in April of 1906 citing the reasons for his decision (Sch. 9.9). At the time of this request, Etta is pregnant again with her fourth child. Graham's dispute with a certain faction within this church came at an inconvenient time for her. She needed to be settled into a home before and after the birth of the child, but there is no record of her complaining about the constant movement. Two months after this letter is written to Bishop Handy, Aurelius, who would often be referred to as Bill, is delivered in June of this year in Johnson County, Indiana.

Rev. Graham tells Bishop Handy that he felt that a certain segment of the membership did not appreciate his "warfare upon corruption in every rank of the church," so it was better for all parties concerned for him to leave (Sch. 9.9 "Bishop Handy"). The letter gives few clues into the specific actions that cause this rupture in Graham's relationship with part of the congregation. In September of this year while attending the nineteenth session of the Michigan Conference in Ypsilanti, he is elected trustee to represent the conference on the State Board of the Anti-Saloon League (Wright 318). This might hint at the area of warfare that he was fighting against in the church, members whose predilection for strong drink and unscrupulous behavior adversely affected the Christian morale within the church, but this is only supposition.

Rev. Graham tries to find a replacement in the person of his brother-in-law. He contacted Dr. William Sampson Brooks, who was then in Chicago, to see if he would be willing to come to this charge, if Bishop Handy requested him to do so, and Brooks response was affirmative. Rev. Graham tells Bishop Handy that “Dr. Brooks is educated, refined, sociable and of good repute. He is enthusiastic and ambitious for success, and therefore can be counted upon to bend every energy to carry the work to the highest point” (Sch. 9.9). This overture would help an ailing bishop, and it might have been a post that Dr. Brooks coveted. Ultimately it was Bishop Handy’s decision to appoint ministers within his district.

For Christmas in 1907 Rev. and Mrs. Graham “gave an entertainment in honor to the custom of their daughter at their home” at 3523 Vernon Avenue. It appears that the Grahams are now living in Salem, Tennessee. Shirley is just ten years old, but she conducts a concert at home. Rev. Graham gives a talk on “Christmas,” recitations are given solos are sung and Shirley plays a piano solo (Sch. 9. 22). At this young age, she is already practicing leading groups before small audiences. Her musical skills are sharpening as her intellectual powers are developing. The regularity of church services gives her ample opportunities to play the piano. Classes at school and church, in addition to reading sessions with her father open up worlds to her that are beyond her local community.

By 1910 Shirley’s activism is further shaped by her living environment which exposes her to both positive and negative currents. In Tennessee Rev. Graham will minister in three communities in two year intervals. Thompson states that the first charge is Salem, then Nashville, followed by Clarksville, Tennessee (18-22). However,

it is at Rev. Graham's ministerial post in Nashville, where Shirley gets her second shocking induction in race relations when her eight year old brother Lorenz is struck in the head with a stone thrown by eighteen year old Tom Bennett, a white community bully who disliked blacks. Seeking help, for Lorenz was bleeding profusely, she entered a nearby yard (Thompson 18). "A white woman came to the screen door, yelling through it, 'Don't bring him here, I don't want nigger blood in yard'" (qtd. from Morris Graham 16 in Thompson 18). Lorenz received stitches, and Rev. Graham filed a complaint to the police, to no avail. Tom Bennett was the son of a "respected and prominent family in Nashville" (Thompson 19). Shirley is outraged at the brutality dispensed by Tom Bennett toward her and her brother but dismayed at the response from the white woman who, instead of making an outcry against the injustice committed against them, spews her venom against those being abused.

Again, Rev. Graham's act of going to the police department and complaining in the first decade of the twentieth century was dangerous. Here he was a black man from the north, speaking in a different manner from the other black people of that region and having the audacity to think that he had rights that white men were expected to recognize. The psychology of white men, especially in the south dictated that blacks were to always be deferential and should never consider challenging white authority. Graham knew that her father went to the authorities seeking justice, but none was found. Shirley was beginning to see that justice was rarely found in the American judicial system for Negroes.

The positive current flowing into her life is her exposure to African American culture of this city where the Jubilee Singers of Fisk a few years before garnered an

international reputation by bringing the beauty of black musical expression to the world. It was a boon for the family because now they were situated where they could learn first hand about the history of this musical troupe who were precursors of the type of work Shirley would be engaged in during her early adult life. Much of what Graham knew about spirituals had come down to her through her father, but now she has opportunity of learn about spirituals in a different way.

Rev. Graham, born in 1861 was personally familiar with spirituals and had incorporated them in his worship service. He no doubt as a baby had been lulled to sleep by his mother's singing or humming of spirituals. After coming to Nashville he learned more about this group partly because of the community talk that floats around freely at barber shops, tea parties and other community gatherings when there is a lull in conversation. Some of the former members of the Jubilee troupe still lived in the community. Ella Sheppard, one of the original members of the troupe had purchased a home right near Fisk with her earnings from the first tour (Ward 266) and would live there by turns until she died in 1914 (402). Those not living in the community would make appearances at Fisk for special occasions.

Also, while at Wilberforce, Rev. Graham had come in contact with a number of Oberlin graduates who were teaching at the college. When he made it to Nashville, he could only be struck by the number of Oberlin graduates who were teachers at this school for black students. This connection between Fisk, Wilberforce and Oberlin was intriguing to him as he pondered ideas about the educational direction of his children. Andrew Ward, author of Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story of the Jubilee Singers Who Introduced the World to The Music of Black America, states that many

congregations would not hire Oberlin graduates because they feared the graduates would bring their politics to the pulpit. This he reasons “partly explain[s] why thirty-eight of Fisk University’s faculty [in the 1860s] would be former Oberlinians and fully a third of the faculty who taught the black student body at nearby Wilberforce University would be Oberlin alumni” (77).

Rev. Graham also probably learned more about the Jubilee Singers from a natural curiosity and desire to share this information with his daughter because of her musical interest. In the 1860s there were several black churches in the Nashville community, but two AME Churches were closely situated near the Fisk campus, one being so close that one could stand on the chapel steps and “hear the minister preach, the people pray and the choir sing” (103). Rev. Graham might have been appointed to one of these churches. During their travels, the singers wrote back home telling family and friends about different aspects of their travels: their treatment abroad, the people they met, the places they were able to see and the grueling schedule they had to keep – sometimes traveling several miles to perform then having to turn around and travel several miles in a different direction. On most occasions they were well received abroad, often times treated like royalty once word of their acclaim had spread to the outer regions of Europe. While invited to the home of the Duke and Duchess of Argyll, George John Douglas Campbell and his wife, in-laws to Queen Victoria, they were surprised by a visit from Queen Victoria who was accompanied by her youngest daughter Princess Beatrice (213). Later in their tour they sang before her eldest daughter Princess Victoria, Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, son of heir of the Prussian Throne (351).

Also out in publication was a book on the troupe, The Singing Campaign of Ten Thousand Pounds, (1893) detailing their quest to raise funds for their school (271). The history of the singing Jubilees campaign must have made interesting conversation for community folk. Meeting and singing before Frederick Douglass, Samuel Langhorne Clemens and many high ranking clergymen in the U. S. and abroad was no small matter. Their celebrity and that of many prominent clergymen opened doors and the pockets of many people.

In recognizing the cultural importance of the Jubilee Singers to the nation, Ward states the following:

I have come to believe that they deserve to be included with Douglass and Du Bois and Martin Luther King, Jr., in the pantheon of great African American champions of civil rights; that the impression they made, their uncompromising artistry and faith, the dignity and outspoken courage they showed as representative of American freedmen were like a constellation in the dark midnight from which they rose (xiv).

Shirley Graham would grow up and follow in many ways the path of the Jubilees. Her voice and probably the choirs she organized could not duplicate the distinct sound the Jubilee singers mastered, but through touring and making audiences appreciate the beauty of the spiritual, she would advance this gift from the black race to a new generation. Tom Bennett's stone throwing antics were not enough to trump the positive influences in Tennessee, specifically in Nashville and nearby Clarksville, for this environment would beckon her back over two decades later when she would return to Nashville to teach.

After leaving Nashville, they move approximately fifty miles away to Clarksville, Tennessee where Shirley's musical talents take a leap. Piano lessons have

become a regular feature of her life because the family now has a piano in the home. Shirley takes advantage of this opportunity and practices for hours daily (Thompson 20). The church acquired an organ and “Graham soon got a chance to play it. Though her legs, sitting down, were too short to reach the pedals to pump them she stood instead, playing the keys of the organ with one hand and letting her tiny feet dance across the pedals” (Thompson 21). When the family leaves Clarksville, Tennessee, for the west coast they take with them the latest member of the family, Orville, born December 10, 1910.

A number of significant events distinguish the Graham’s time in the state of Colorado. Orville fondly remembers the freedom of frolicking on the courthouse lawn and the time the preacher’s kids got lost on Pike’s Peak. The general beauty of the place, the breathtaking scenes, etche indelible memories that make this ministerial post a special one for him. In an autobiographical sketch he stated, “Colorado Springs sets like a jewel in the gold and silver chain of the Rockies, and the surrounding area is filled with indescribable scenes of nature’s beauty and grandeur” (Sch. 12.1). It is against this picturesque backdrop that the family began the process of settling into life in this new community on the western horizon.

Rev. Graham’s integrationist’s viewpoint is again challenged in this space. Believing that all God’s children were created equal and that the gospel could appeal to the moral uprightness in man was not enough to counter the effects of racism. The family attempted to commingle with whites on a basis of equality whenever there was opportunity, and Rev. Graham found opportunity and became a part of the city’s Ministerial Alliance. He also served as chairman for one of the prayer meeting districts.

It was this body that extended an invitation to the Billy Sunday Ministry to come and run a revival in the city (Sch. 9.22).

When the Billy Sunday ministry came to Colorado Springs, Colorado, Rev. Graham's church participated in supporting the revival. Before the revival begins Rev. Graham is asked to get a "double quartet for singing" one of the nights (Sch. 9.22). It is likely that he volunteered the services of his daughter and church members. How else would they know that they could render this service? Whatever the case, Shirley had an opportunity to showcase her artistic abilities before a large audience. At this interracial gathering comprised mostly of whites, Rev. Graham sat on the platform with the other ministers. The missionary society from his church attended as a body, and Shirley, who is quite accomplished musically now, and her group of "eight colored men and women sang from the Sunday platform" before an audience of "ten thousand people" (Sch. 9.22).

Perhaps it was because blacks made up a small percentage of people living in Colorado Springs that the feeling of racial harmony laced the surface of interaction between the races; nonetheless, appearances aside, Colorado Springs would become the sight of perhaps the most stinging racial baptism Graham had encountered during her young life. She has now matured to the point where her level of consciousness concerning race relations has grown so that the culmulative effects of racial insults are becoming more difficult to bear. She was the only African American in her high-school class in Colorado Springs (Thompson 22), and as such was not a threatening presence to the rest of her classmates. It was when Mary Adams from the local YWCA came to the

school and invited the young women to come and join the association that the true character of the Colorado Springs YWCA organization was shown (Thompson 22).

Black women in other parts of the country had taken up the charge to challenge the YWCA to live up to its intended purpose. Three years earlier in 1907 in New York, Emma Ransom, wife of AME minister Reverdy C. Ransom challenged the Metropolitan Board to at least move toward some semblance of equality in the distribution of funds for the expansion of the organization in the New York area. Initially she was offered 10,000. toward the Negro branch of the YWCA in the city, Emma Ransom told Grace Dodge, chairman of the board that she “would not consider accepting any amount less than 100,000” (The Sage 107).

The same year Shirley waged her personal war for inclusion against the immoral practices of the YWCA in Colorado Springs, Colorado, Lugenia Burns Hope, along with other southern black women in Atlanta, Georgia waged a war of self-determination of black branches in the south. Their fight was for black autonomy; they resisted white women presiding over the affairs of black branches. Shirley’s fight against the YWCA could have been the stimulus for W. E. B. Du Bois coming to Colorado to establish an NAACP branch although she states in her memoir on him that his visit occurred before her unpleasant engagement with the YWCA. However, when one considers the activist proclivities of AME members to agitate for justice, what appears to have been a rather innocent occurrence at the YWCA might have been an interaction that was a bit more calculating.

The Graham household was, if not full of books, certainly sufficiently stocked with newspapers and magazines, and more books than the norm for black families.

Reading material in the Graham home would have contained information pertinent to black life in the country. Shirley Graham stated many times that her father subscribed to The Crisis, but the paper in the state where he had pastored so many congregations likely eclipsed news in The Crisis, certainly not in the literary quality of the writing, but in terms of the amount of news in the paper and the regularity with which the paper appeared.

Because Indiana was Rev. Graham's home base and where he had pastored so many congregations, the black newspaper from the state that he had a part in beginning, was critical for him staying up to date with information not just in the state but elsewhere. The Indianapolis Recorder was in many ways the gateway to the world of black news. By 1912 The Recorder of Indianapolis, had undergone a name change to The Indianapolis Recorder, and it is almost certain that Rev. Graham and his family were subscribers to this three cent weekly. It kept them in touch with AME news, regional news specific to the various black communities in Indiana, national news and international events. When Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois gave a lecture at the Women's Civic club in Indianapolis (Vol. XV No. 38) an account of it was in the pages of the paper. When Nannie H. Burroughs, "corresponding secretary of the Woman's Convention Auxillary to the Baptist National convention and President of the National Training School of Women and Girls" spoke at New Bethel church in the city, the paper covered it (Vol. XV No. 48) and in almost every issue there was news about events happening at the black YMCA in the city of Indianapolis. The actions of black movers and shakers affected the lives of black Americans elsewhere and influenced how they would tackle problems in the regions where they lived.

Within its pages news from all parts of the United States could be gleaned. From Yonkers, New York, John E. Bruce sends the paper a report about the meeting of the Negro Research Society along with a boyish picture of Alain Locke. The article states that the young graduate student at Oxford who “bears the distinction of being the only member of the race to win one of the Rhodes scholarships” will speak to his group. From Wilcox County, Alabama, Professor W. J. Edwards writes about the growth of his school, Snow Hill Normal and Industrial Institute, and the need for funds. Another article “Religious Controversy in City of Cincinnati” discussed the turmoil created as a result of whether blacks would be allowed representation at the upcoming missionary exposition (Vol. XV No. 28). When Mary Church Terrell spoke in Muskogee, Oklahoma a write-up of her visit was noted in the paper (XV No. 47).

On the international front, when London born Samuel Coleridge-Taylor passed away in his native country in September of 1912, a lengthy article covers his life and notes his accomplishments. When Henry Osawa Tanner came from Paris to exhibit some of his paintings in the city in April of 1913, the Indianapolis Recorder took note, adding that his works were in galleries all across America. While in the city he visited with fellow Indiana artist, W. E. Scott (Vol XVI No. 39). Black history was taught through the pages of the Indianapolis Recorder.

The Grahams were very aware of what blacks were doing in other parts of the country to advance the liberties of blacks. This knowledge is very much a part of Shirley Graham’s psyche. The thrust behind the Christian doctrine within the AME Church was to push for one’s God given rights, especially as it related to members of their group. The sermons she heard preached by her father and other ministers within

the connection concerning affairs in regional and national affairs stimulated her to do her best, to achieve, and to be groundbreaking in her efforts. Perhaps she felt that since she was the only black in the class, it would be acceptable for her to be the only black at the YWCA with her fellow classmates, but the thought had to occur to her that she might not be welcomed; she was not a naïve teenager.

It is because Shirley took Ms. Adams up on her offer to take swimming lessons at the YMCA that the clash between de facto and de jure segregation came into play. When Graham met up with the rest of her female classmates at the YWCA, she excitedly stood in line. Using Morris Graham's story, Thompson describes the scene that followed:

The line moved swiftly as the girls moved forward and filled out their cards, and soon Graham was standing at the table facing the woman with the pleasant face and voice. As the woman looked up and saw Graham's brown face, her pleasant smile faded. Looking straight at Graham the woman asked her in an angry tone, 'What do you want?' Frightened by the tone of the woman's voice, Graham stammered, 'I came to sign up for swimming lessons.' Looking around, the woman noticed that her words had caused commotion among the girls. She tried to speak to Graham with a softer voice. 'We don't have classes for —er—colored girls as yet' (24).

Shirley turned this situation into an opportunity to confront, on one level, this specific organization in Colorado Springs which was supposedly Christian in orientation, on another level, she was tackling the larger institution of Jim Crow. Encouraged by her father, she was learning how to fight back against injustice. An editorial written for a class assignment was ultimately published in the Evening Star, upon the suggestion of her father who was teaching her how to agitate for justice.

Thompson states that this paper was selected because of the sensational nature of its articles and its slant toward the Democratic party (27). Her disagreement with the Colorado Springs YWCA would not be her last, for this organization would prefigure dominantly in her career throughout her life. It would be under the auspices of the YWCA that she would put on plays in Indianapolis and later serve as a USO Director under the control of the YWCA.

Dr. Du Bois' visit to the city could have resulted from ministers being encouraged during an AME General Conference to push for the organization of NAACP branches in cities where AME churches were represented. Again, in her public writing Graham places the time of his visit before her altercation with the YWCA representative, but this might not accurately portray the real facts. Mark R. Schneider in his discussion of the growth and success of newly established NAACP branches states the following:

..successful branches usually appeared where there was something to fight about...The civil rights battles of the 1920s were fought along an undefined racial border, neither Deep South nor Yankee. This border ran from Texas north to Minnesota, and from Philadelphia west to Los Angeles. This elusive borderline extended far into the North as new black communities developed in cities that previously had few African American residents, especially in the Midwest (49).

On many occasions activism resulted from altercations naturally arising from situations, but oftentimes there was a method to the activism, well thought out plans for events that seemingly happened without forethought. Graham's banishment from the local YWCA would have been the right kind of trigger to galvanize the black community.

To understand the sophistication that Shirley Graham was developing, one only needs to look at another article that she wrote. An editor of the Christian Recorder either took note of the Graham's presence at the Billy Sunday revival or criticized the actions of black people who in general supported revivals run by whites. The editor queried to the Christian Recorder readership, "Why are our people always swinging on the coat-tails of whites where they are not wanted" (Sch. 9.26). This stinging criticism which might have been aimed directly at Rev. Graham elicited a response from Shirley Graham and reveals a sophisticated young writer who has by now learned well how to return fire through the AME new organ.

Graham's response appeared in a later edition of the Christian Recorder where she informed the editor and readership of the Christian Recorder that she was well acquainted with the Billy Sunday Ministry, and that all ministers and people of the city were at liberty to help develop and organize for the revival. She characterized Mr. Sunday as a "great man" and tells the Christian Recorder readership that Mr. Sunday's religious organization is "one thoroughly organized." Perhaps this "thoroughly organized" is an attack against the AME church. She places the blame for a lack of black participation in the revival on the black ministers and suggests that the Billy Sunday campaign demonstrated no racism when inviting the public to participate in the revival. Graham stated, "When a general invitation was extended by the Ministerial Alliance to all churches to join in this union revival only one of the colored preachers responded" (Sch. 9.26). She does not state that this minister was her father, but one can safely deduce from a number of specifics that she relates in the article that she is talking about her father and her family. Her familiarity with this revival campaign, the obvious

angst that compelled her to respond back to this charge and the passion which flows from her pen all speak of an accused person responding back to what they perceive as an unjustified charge (Sch. 9. 26).

After serving as pastor in Spokane for two years, Rev. Graham is transferred by Bishop H. B. Parks to Seattle. When the family moves to Seattle around 1916, it is a busy city with the clamorous clanging of street cars that move up and down Jackson Street, the road running in front of the train station. The Smith building, a few steps from the train station towers above other structures (Sch. 12.1 “Autobiography” 35). By the time Shirley presents a “Piano and Elocution Recital” at First AME Church in Seattle, Washington on November 13th, 1916 she has matured musically and presents for the audience Chopin’s “Polonaise A major Op 40, No. 1,” and Kolling’s “Der Lerche Morgensang.” During the second portion of the program she presents contemporary music. Will Marion Cook’s “The Bleeding Moon” is dramatized and the program ends with Graham playing Buck’s “Sleigh Bells” (Sch. 9.21). Her interest in playing music closer to her cultural context would always be a vital part of her music repertoire, but in arenas where whites hear her music, such as some of the recitals that she participated in, this side was not revealed. She had ample opportunity in church to play spirituals, but her father’s strict interpretation of what constituted the sacred and secular probably does not permit her to play the blues and music that he perceives as worldly. Nevertheless, Rev. Graham is not too pious that he finds offense years later when her work transmutes into something more secular and is performed in an open theatre venue. Perhaps the need to champion black culture out-ranked piety.

She now has the sophistication to play songs ranging from the simple to the difficult. It is probably at this point that music she seeks out is music by black composers. She has been compelled to validate her abilities by playing music by European and white American composers, but now that proof of her abilities has been validated by audiences, she can now pursue music that connects with her passion. Some of her favorite black composers are Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Harry T. Burleigh and James Weldon Johnson. Her parents have probably gifted her with a music book containing a collection of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's 1905 piano arrangements of African and Afro-American Melodies titled, Twenty-four Melodies Transcribed for Piano, and she probably has sheet music for his "Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child."

An encounter with a white manager at a movie theatre demonstrates her interest and versatility in playing a range of musical pieces. While living in Seattle, Graham played the piano for a movie theatre during the showing of silent films. One day, the white manager questioned her concerning why she did not play music by black musicians. In response she told him that she would play a tune by Harry T. Burleigh and proceeded to do so. Being familiar with the tune, the manager had wrongly assumed that the writer of that song was white. Unwilling to acquiesce, the manager challenged her by disputing Harry T. Burleigh's race (Thompson 34). Nevertheless, he discovered that day Graham's aptitude and skill as a musician.

William Montgomery in his work on Black churches in the South between the years 1865-1915 analyzed the general character of many men who became AME ministers. He noted that "on issues of race and economic development they represented

a range of ideologies, from radical to conservative, as well as the opposing strategies of militant confrontation to cautious accommodation” (179). Rev. Graham’s response to injustices ranged the gamut from organizing members of the community to bearing weapons to facilitating the NAACP in enrolling members. The stands that Rev. Graham made at post like New Orleans and Nashville demonstrate his bent toward being radical, his stand in Colorado Springs where he sponsored Dr. Du Bois visit to begin an NAACP branch demonstrates his bent toward agitation. Montgomery further noted that “On balance, these men were independent thinkers, moderate in their cultural philosophy, but outspoken advocates and even agitators for political and social equality” (47). Being an AME minister required one to “struggle to save souls, build churches, and achieve equality in a hostile atmosphere” even if it required them to go to court (Williams 36). Rev. Graham might not have gone to court, but his sermons, speeches, and actions flirted with stirring anger and arousing the ire of many.

In the prime of his life, Rev. Graham struck an imposing figure, not as a physical stalwart, for he was not a tall or robust man, but in terms of character he stood taller than most men. If stature were measured by character, he would have been regarded as a giant for in many cases his will to do right or good overrode that side of his will to give in to selfish desires and self-serving motives. His determination to utilize Christian-like conduct and operate in the realm of the spiritual oftentimes placed him in precarious situations and made him vulnerable for those worldly minded men who would practice stealth, deception and other questionable methods to navigate through the world. Because of his principled life, his children admired him. The admiration that Shirley Graham possessed for him was also shared by her brothers as

well. Rev. Graham's youngest son Orville noted that "No one, judging from his appearance in the street or the pulpit could doubt that the king Whom Papa served owned and controlled all the wealth of the universe" (Sch. 12.1 "Autobiography" 29). Orville continues, "Pretensive flash was repulsive to my father, but to see him was to see a fine example of quiet elegance. From his hat and the hair on his head and on his face (Papa wore sid[e]whiskers, a mustache and a small goatee) to the soles of his shoes my father was always well groomed and correctly garbed" (29).

From numerous accounts Rev. Graham was a man of integrity who modeled this standard of behavior before his children. His youngest son Orville remembers that his father didn't play the political games that could be played inside the AME church to advance his position, but functioned as a humble servant receiving orders from on high with little regard for material riches of this world. Orville states the following concerning his father and the AME church:

His denomination, like all other religious, and social movements, was to a degree infected by a game of power politics, in which my father would have no part. Still he accepted the authority of those placed over him even when it was evident that the vested authority had been purchased and placed in the hands of men unworthy and incompetent to rightfully use it (Sch. 12.1 "Autobiography" 8).

Because Rev. Graham didn't push to advance his position, some family members felt they missed out on economic benefits they could have enjoyed. Orville makes the point that during his father's "fifty years of untiring service ..[he].. remained incorruptible... and poor." He continues by theorizing that there was a hidden benefit to their lack of material wealth. He states that the family did "without many things that money could have and would have bought for us had not Papa placed so high a price on

his integrity. And as a result we inherited from him an immense accumulation of real values which no amount of money could have ever purchased (Sch. 12.1

“Autobiography” 29).

However much his children loved, respected and admired him, they found his strict adherence to his principles and beliefs at times a bit disconcerting. A few years before his father’s death, Lorenz wrote him a warm letter of praise for Father’s Day saying, “You have set such an aboundingly good example of fatherhood and manhood. I have witnessed, not understanding often, you[r] mighty struggle toward God --- and as I grow older I am coming to realize that all th[at’s] good in life is the struggle God-ward” (Sch. 9.7). Even with this acknowledgement of admiration, Lorenz admits being puzzled by his father’s actions at times.

Although the family didn’t accumulate monetary wealth, their education and intellectual development were of prime importance. At home a learning environment was created through the library that Rev. Graham started building to prepare himself and his children. Before they could read themselves, he read to them. Once they were able to read, there were books and other reading materials in Rev. Graham’s library. There was an emphasis on education in school and at church. The Graham children were brought up learning about other cultures, reciting biblical passages and most of them learned how to play a number of musical instruments. Shirley became proficient playing the piano and organ, D.A. played a violin and a cello, and Lorenzo played a mandolin and a banjo (Sch. 12.1 “Autobiography” 29).

Many a parsonage was called home, but growing up in a loving environment where structure was established no matter what city or part of the country where the

family lived was vital in contributing to wholesome, well adjusted adults. Shirley and Lorenz both would become popular black writers of children's books. William became a successful businessman, D. A. enjoy nominal success in the different jobs he tackled; it is Orville who appeared to flounder in terms of following in the path of his older siblings. His life would be marked by long periods of time when he was out of touch with them.

The movement distinguishing this AME family allowed them to affect the lives of many people living across the United States. AME ministers "developed an extensive communication network to discuss and influence many of the critical domestic and international issues of the times" (Little 38). AME ministers were closely connected to fellow ministers in their district and maintained a connection with members of former congregations they shepherded by seeing them at annual state conferences. If a minister were moved from one district to another, he could come in contact with former friends – ministers and laymen alike - at the general conference held every four years. This connectional nature of the AME church served as a conduit through which friendships, alliances, and coalitions were built. Thus when a member of the network was in need of assistance there was an ample supply of assistors, made ready by years of brotherhood and sisterhood. Friendships established in one region of the country continued to be useful beyond that region.

Members of Rev. Graham's former ministerial posts would remain behind in those spaces long after the Graham's had moved on to other locales. The news organ Rev. Graham established in the many churches he led, along with the growing number of community people that the Grahams' came in contact with as they dotted across the

country in the capacity of an AME ministerial family was developing an audience that would later follow with interest the accomplishments and failures of Graham family members. Rev. Graham and his prestige as an AME minister should be viewed as a foundation in preparing the way for Shirley Graham to make an entrance into civil society. The AME church fostered the intellectual development and race consciousness in Graham family members. This organization was the vehicle through which they were able to travel nationally and internationally conducting missionary work within the states and international outreach to missions in Africa, specifically Liberia. The church gave them a status they likely would not have enjoyed otherwise.

From Shirley Graham's grandparents down to her siblings, each generation manifested an activism that influenced the next generation. And each generation made the necessary adjustments for that activism to be appropriate for their situation. They tweaked their methodology according to what worked best in the time in which they lived. The roots of Shirley Graham's success as an artist and activist reside in her exposure to multiple versions of living experiences in the United States and the social consciousness cultivated in her during her childhood.

Armed with a rich family history of activism and observing the daily actions of parents invested in building communal networks, Graham fell in step. The type of artistic and activist work she would perform would utilize mind, hands, voice, ears and heart. Her musical and theatrical productions created transformative spaces where communal values predominated and nurtured wounded souls that had been rejected and dehumanized by oppositional forces outside of Black spaces. When community members entered church environments as was the case when Graham presented a

music-lecture at Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York under the pastorate of Adam Clayton Powell Sr., or at Shiloh Baptist Church in Hartford, Ct. under the pastorate of Rev. Robert A. Moody, her messages invoked a reverence for the past struggles of her people, they inspired an appreciation for the gift of music that her people gave utterance to in the midst of their despair, grief, sorrows and joys. Community members were able to temporarily suspend the thoughts of the day to day problems they encountered in white spaces.

The messages that she planted in her biographies were only seeds in the early twentieth century, but they would germinate and contribute to producing changes that would manifest themselves decades later, thereby altering the ways in which young white Americans would begin to see non-white peoples and in the way young black children would feel about themselves and members of their race. Her heritage equipped her with the armament necessary to wage war against a racist ideology that was inextricably woven into the fabric of an American society unrelenting in maintaining a stratified system where whites were on top and blacks on the bottom. Stories from her childhood made her aware at a young age of her sense of mission. As her foreparents before her worked to free people, she too was born to carry on this mission. She would constantly be reminded and encouraged by her father that she would fill her “proper place in the universal scheme of the Almighty” (Sch. 9.7).

CHAPTER 4

EMBARKING ON HER PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY: CHOIR DIRECTOR, SOLOIST, LECTURER 1916-1931

In 1916 her father had written a book on courtship, marriage and divorce.

Shirley was twenty and entertaining the idea of sharing her life with someone. Her high academic achievement and artistic abilities would have gone far in making her a young woman who was highly prized and likely sought after. Photographs taken of her during this time reveal a young black woman of a pleasing appearance. She possessed a fair, smooth complexion she inherited from her mother's Indian side, attractive features, a small frame and an innocent gaze. Many who met her often referred to her charming personality. She was smart, talented, self-assured and enthusiastic. Her status as a minister's daughter added esteem to her position in black culture, and her ability to bring music to a setting gave her a certain visibility and attention that other young women might not have received. All of this suggests that Shirley likely had suitors standing in line.

Rev. Graham's book shared with readers pointers on selecting a mate. A girl should not marry under eighteen years of age. When she felt that she was prepared to marry, she should be able to keep house and willing to forsake all men. Young men should be gentlemen, industrious, believe in taking care of a wife and family. A key for young women to look at in selecting this man would be to look at how he treats his mother. And most important, the man should be the woman's intellectual equal (Sch. 9.17).

Robert Thompson notes in his dissertation that Shirley Graham met her first husband through church activities. When living in Seattle, Washington First AME Church reached out to the community through its Christian Endeavor program. The church was located in a section of the community called “Uptown” where middle class and working class blacks lived. The other part of town called “Yester Way” or “Below the line” was predominantly working class. It is this part of town where she met Shadrack McCants through her involvement with the outreach program which “provided youth in the church religious expression and exposed them to young people living in ‘Yester way’” (33). This is the same program that Rev. Graham initiated many years ago while living in Indiana. Thompson notes that Shadrack was a tailor by trade and “owner of a men’s clothing store” (33). This could have been the appeal, a man of pleasing appearance, and industrious. A marriage certificate in Graham’s collection documents that on July sixteenth 1918, the two were married by Rev. M. C. Knight at First AME Church in Seattle, Washington (Sch. 1.23). Thompson states, “It was a very large wedding, with Graham’s father officiating the wedding and other ministers assisting him” (35).

Other official documents give more insight into Grahams’s marriage to Shadrack Thomas McCants. 1920 Federal Census records reveal that Shadrack McCants was sixteen years her senior (Roll T625_1929). Her parents might not have taken issue with this since their age difference was similar. David was twelve years older than Etta. At this time in history a man being notably older than his wife was not uncommon. A woman wanted a man who was established and could take care of a wife and family. McCants’ World War I Draft Registration Card gives the general

characterization that he has black hair, dark brown eyes and is of medium height with a medium build. This card also reveals that he is a self-employed tailor, a very respectful and useful skill. He lists his permanent residence as the Alki Hotel in Seattle. The area where the hotel was located near Alki Beach, was a resort area which might suggest that he was just passing through or possibly was living in this hotel like it was a rooming house, a place where he could stay for an extended period of time. People engaged in personal service occupations sometime lived on the premises of their work.

By 1921 Shirley Graham is a married woman, twenty-four years old and yet to receive an education beyond high school. One can imagine that this high achiever found ways to challenge herself, after all, this was the young woman who could “fill the house or church with the music of a piano or an organ with no effort at all and she could sing solos in a nice full soprano voice; she could declaim or orate in such a way as held audiences spellbound” (Sch. 12.1 “Autobiography” 18). She knew that the way to advance economically was through education. Perhaps initially she was content being a young wife, for her brother Orville tells us that on top of being great at playing the piano and singing, “she could cook, too” (18), but this was not enough. She needed more.

She earned a living playing for churches, a movie theatre and teaching piano lessons. In doing so she was getting practice honing her musical skills and developing her passion. For a space of four years into the marriage, no children arrive, or at least there is no record of pregnancies or miscarriages. But in 1923 their first son is born and in 1925, her second son entered the world. She probably supplemented the family’s income by continuing playing for churches and giving lessons. The possibility exist

that she was their main source of income. With their births, Shirley McCants' concern for her children gave her the needed impetus to push forth and carve out a space where her sons could be nurtured and grow up in a world made better by the actions she put forth. Her parents had done this for her and her siblings, and she knew that she must do the same for her children.

This lack of educational advancement into her late twenties was nothing odd for the average woman during her time, especially a black woman, but Shirley Graham McCants was not destined to be an ordinary black woman, nor an ordinary woman. During the decade of the early twenties, instead of her heading toward the literary Mecca in New York, she was on the opposite end of the U. S. continental coast starting a family. However, being such an avid reader, it is safe to assume that Graham was keeping abreast of the happenings on the east coast, by reading black publications like the Indianapolis Recorder, The Crisis, Opportunity and The Messenger. She was making her mark in music rather than literature at this time, but the pull of the east coast beckoned her.

Just what went awry in Graham McCants marriage is unclear, but it does not appear that Shadrach McCants was ever concerned enough to force the point of seeing his children beyond their marriage. It doesn't appear that he ever contributed to their upbringing after the divorce. What could have happened that would provoke Shirley Graham to so completely wipe away all traces of him from her life? His profession as a tailor does not suggest that he lacked motivation. Was he abusive, negligent, a womanizer? Or less dramatically, did they simply fall out of love? If this were the case, the break would not have been so severe where complete communication is lost.

Evidently some profound hurt occurred for her to wipe all traces of him from her life. Her oldest son was his father's namesake, but shortly after the divorce, while Shadrack Jr. was a young boy – a boy old enough to know his name – it is changed.

Robert becomes Junior's new name and with this change, the obscurity surrounding the marriage grows. This name changing ritual that might have been a part of her great grandfather Andy's life would continue generations later, becoming a minor theme in Shirley Graham's family with her sons, for she undergoes a metamorphic last name change from McCants to McCanns then back to Graham again. She would explain this name change to New York State authorities in 1956 in the following way.

I am the mother of David Graham McCanns, who was born in Seattle, Washington, March 9, 1925. His birth certificate recites name name as being 'Graham McCants' rather than 'McCanns.' The reason for alteration in spelling is that after my divorce from Graham's father, Shadrach T. McCants, I used the name 'Shirley McCanns' professionally. My son at that time was two years old and in order to avoid confusion he became known as Graham McCanns" (Sch. 13.10).

When she went east, she started using McCanns. The writing of this letter is prompted because her younger son, David, would get his last name changed from McCanns to Du Bois after his mother's marriage. The name change was in partial fulfillment of trying to establish a familial bond with a male father figure. His Grandfather, Rev. Graham had served in that capacity until his death when David was a young boy of eleven, but this name change reflects in some way young David's desire to be a part of a traditional family. At twenty-six David understood the impact the Du Bois name carried, this fact also had to carry some weight in his decision to change his last name. But the type of relationship David Graham shared with Du Bois was not of a filial nature. David

Graham's name change was not appear to have been done as an attempt at recreation, but Shirley McCanns' trip overseas and move to the east coast can be viewed as attempts at metamorphosis, the recreation of a new life for herself and reconstructing a socially acceptable identity.

Before going east she goes on a tour to cities in the west coast with the choirs and quartettes that she directed. Although these musical engagements were limited to various cities on the west coast, these musical tours were noised abroad far beyond the environs of the west. The musical groups that she directed immediately prior to leaving the west were the Mount Olivet Baptist Church Choir, boasting "eighty trained voices strong" and the Olivet Jubilee Singers, a much smaller group (Sch. 9.24). This latter group had toured Oregon, Washington and Idaho, and it was after a tour in the late spring of 1928 that she would travel first abroad and then back to the East coast for musical study (Sch. 9.23).

On the east coast she was noted for her lecture topic, "The Message of the Spiritual" and her interpretation of it. She would recreate in her time what the Fisk Jubilee Singers contributed during their era immediately following the Civil War. Graham's advocacy for an appreciation of this music evolving out of the misery of the formerly enslaved was not limited to only singing the songs but teaching audiences through a lecture. Parts of this lecture would no doubt explain the double meanings of the spirituals. Maybe she would narrate circumstances in the life of a slave giving rise to some of the songs and give examples of how her father used these songs to illustrate some of his sermons. Large audiences mixed with worshippers of different religious denominations and different races came to hear the Mount Olivet Baptist Church Choir

under the direction of Shirley McCanns who was fully equipped with a baton in hand. A typical concert followed a certain form. Mellow voices produced a rich harmony for songs like “Go Down Moses,” “Keep Inchin’ Along,” and “I Gotta Robe” (Sch. 9.29). Interspersed between these songs would be McCanns’ narration. When her group, the Roland Hayes Quartette, performed audience members were treated to a night of delightful entertainment and transported to a peaceful, hopeful place. Graham McCanns sang soprano while her aunt Clara Bell sang Contralto, George Payne, tenor and James McArthur, baritone. Interspersed between “Steal Away” and “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” was a talk by McCanns titled “The Negro’s Contribution to Music” (Sch. 9.29).

Having spent approximately thirty years apprenticing for her life’s work under the tutelage of her parents and the church and some of its attendant organizations, Shirley Graham was poised to implement many of the skills that had been developed and cultivated in her. Around 1927 her professional career began to take off, and she experienced a number of fortuitous educational experiences and professional situations that pointed her in the direction that would give her personal satisfaction and enable her to financially make small gains toward economic mobility, and effect change in the lives of countless of Americans.

The changing currents of life brought in a tide that would carry Shirley McCanns thousands of miles from home. Most of her adult life had been spent living in the mid-west and most recently out west, but in 1927 she ventured far from the west coast, ending up on the opposite continental rim in the Washington D. C. and Maryland area. Her connection with Maryland might have resulted from her Uncle’s involvement

with the state. Rev. William Sampson Brooks was born and raised in Prince Frederick Town, Maryland, not too far from the nation's capitol. Her father was, to a much lesser degree somewhat familiar with the region having gone to Baltimore on occasion with AME business. Shirley's growing artistic recognition along with her AME connectional relationship probably opened doors for her position as a Music librarian at Howard.

There are a number of factors that likely influenced her to enter higher education. It was clear that she needed an increase in her finances raising two young boys, but returning to school would delay immediate results. Her recent divorce had placed her in a vulnerable financial situation, so a trip abroad would appear to be the last decision a young mother would make. Was it possible that her parents' travel itinerary to Africa on missionary work made conditions so advantageous for her to accompany them part of the way that it would have been foolish for her not to go? From examining an interview that Graham Du Bois had with Ann Allen Shockley near the end of her life, it appears that her studying music in France was a step toward making herself marketable professionally and in paving the way for entry into college (Sch. 1.1).

Roland Hayes had made encouraging remarks about her artistic abilities. On one of his visits to Portland he had "urged her to continue her studies at Howard with a view to being of wider service in the modern development of negro art and music" (Sch. 9.23 "May Be Gone For A Year") The words from this Negro singer and his powerful example played a significant role in making her reach out to her destiny. Hayes now enjoyed international acclaim in his chosen profession, but only after throwing off the

American shackles of racism and going abroad. It would be wise to surmise that multiple currents converged to give rise to Graham's departure from the west. A likely scenario seems to be the following. Hayes' encouragement of her gifts – an ear for music and an ability to sing and play, buttressed by his example of leaving the familiar in search of a better station in life, ignited the flame that had burned within her breast for likely the nine years of her marriage. Somewhere in her being Shirley Graham must have felt a gentle nudging, a prescient whisper -- coaxing her ever so lightly to take the step that would lead her to a liberation from poverty or a fate of mediocrity. Her future was destined for greatness, but she had to make a leap for this next phase of her journey, and that she did! Probably looming large in her mind was the weighty responsibility of supporting two young boys after a failed marriage. But this fact only pressed her closer to what lay ahead, and once she began her acquisition of formal higher education in 1927, she would continue this course most of her life. Years removed from this time she told her brother D. A. that she had wanted an education. "I wanted to be able to support my sons decently and t[o] give them somekind of decent start I was willing to pay the price" (Sch. 11.13 June 16, 1952).

Once she stepped out to acquire her education, she found her academic life to be exciting. In 1928 she traveled on her first international trip to Paris, France. The River Seine winding through the city, cobble stone streets and vaulted architectural structures stretching back to an antiquity that she had heard of from some of the stories her father read to her as a child could not help but enchant her. She had left the United States a mature young woman, thirty-two years of age, mature enough and having experienced enough of life's ups and downs to fully appreciate this different setting. She stepped

into an ancient world, one vastly different from where she had come. The atmosphere around her hummed with excitement as people hurried to work while others scurried to the market to purchase fresh flowers and food for their dinner tables for the evening meal. No doubt she saw young lovers strolling to the park; whatever the case, Paris presented a relaxed milieu where she could live without the veil and temporarily suspend the stresses of life back home.

The lilted romantic whisperings of the native Frenchmen, the French flowing out of the mouths of Africans previously living in areas colonized by the French but now living in France, had to intrigue this young woman who was so accustomed to meeting new people and embracing different cultures. Whatever confused thinking or marital woes that might have burdened her spirit prior to the trip, no doubt, quickly fell by the wayside once she stepped onto this foreign land. Here, free from the social mores of American culture, the scrutiny of church members, and the ever prevailing racism of the United States, she could be whoever she wanted to be.

While on this trip away from home, with her parents being in Africa, it is unclear who had the responsibility of caring for her small children. By 1927 Shirley Graham's marriage to Shadrach McCants had officially ended (Sch. 9.17). Her sons would have been nearing the ages of five and three. Knowing that a better education would facilitate her in providing her sons with better opportunities and financially secure lives, she abandoned her fears and plunged headlong into work. These years would mark a time of intense academic study where she would become fluent in French, write her master thesis, and learn the theory behind musical composition and orchestration. This knowledge prepared her with impressive credentials.

It is not clear of the total impact of this trip on her, but it is certain that leaving the American context offered Graham McCanns a different way of seeing, feeling and experiencing the world. Being away from the scrutinizing eye of racism, throwing off the veil of double vision, leaving behind the religious mores of the church and distancing herself from a divorce, no doubt, liberated her in a way that she had never encountered before. In typical fashion, she busied herself with her schoolwork at the Sorbonne and also concerned herself with learning about this new and foreign culture. France offered so much to stimulate her creative sensibilities. She was intrigued by the colored people who lived there and “couldn’t speak a word of English” (Sch. 9.23). It is likely that her encounters with Africans in France and hearing the stories of her brother who was serving as a missionary in Africa provided her with additional stimuli to give birth to her musical play, Tom Tom.

While walking down the street one day, she had a fortuitous meeting with the writer Eric Walrond which proved to be beneficial to both of them. He would reflect back a couple of years after their meeting in France and tell her, “I’m sure there was some Grand Design back of our meeting” (Sch. 15.8 Jan. 9, 1931). And there was indeed, for this relationship would prove beneficial to both in many ways. Walrond at the time of their chance encounter was a frequent contributor to the African American literary journals, Opportunity and The Messenger. He had authored a novel, Tropic Death (1926) and a number of short stories. At this early date, Graham’s literary contributions were none existent. However she had received notice for her accomplishments in music. She had directed a number of choirs, presented musical recitals and her name had appeared in a number of news articles. Exactly when or

under what circumstances McCanns and Walrond had initially met is unclear, but it is highly probable that she was at one of the three affairs Charles Johnson had sponsored between black artists and patrons of the arts. She probably came into the purview of Charles Johnson first via local publicity for her musical dramatizations of spirituals while she toured the Northwest. David Levering Lewis states that “On Johnson’s orders, Ethel Nance kept up-to-date dossiers on any Afro-American whose talent won a newspaper squib” (Lewis When Harlem 126). The “suave” Walrond must have been introduced to her in association with Johnson (127). Whatever way this acquaintance came into being is less significant than the relationship they developed, for Walrond helped groom Graham and prepared her to make new contacts and connections that could help advance her career.

The friendship between Walrond and McCanns was intellectually stimulating for both writers. His letters reveal that during the span of time after their 1928 summer in France, they shared a mutually satisfying friendship up to 1931. Born just two years apart, McCanns (1896) and Walrond (1898) shared a mutual interest in the arts and black achievement. They encouraged each other as each in his/her own way breezed and sometimes plodded along to produce materials that would show the accomplishments of the black race in the best possible light. Walrond encouraged her in her writing, and on a number of occasions he would serve as a go-between. On one occasion he sent Opportunity editor, Elmer A. Carter, an article she had written, but the article wasn’t published. Carter informs Walrond that it was not published because the 1930 August issue had “gone to press” (Sch. 15.7 July 18, 1930). He then coaxes Walrond to please submit some of his own writing to the magazine. Carter had no idea

of the illustrious career this novice writer would later enjoy. Had he known, he likely would have published her article in the next issue.

At other times he coached her on how to successfully prepare fellowship applications. Once when she applied for a Guggenheim, he critiqued her application, offering candid feedback. He had gone through the process successfully a few years before and had received both the Zona Gale and Guggenheim fellowships. He told her that her application “possesses, I think, all the ingredients required in a Guggenheim ‘plan of study’ – scope, originality, definitiveness. You display a grasp of the possibilities and the achievements in the field you propose to work in, which at the very outset ought to impress the Committee of Selection” (Sch. 15.9 March 22, 1931). Convinced of its merits he told her, “Personally I fail to see how they can escape appointing you. Your project is good, you are undeniably qualified to execute it” (Sch. 15.9 March 22, 1931). Being a part of the Harlem literary circle, Walrond was privy to an application Jessie Fauset had submitted. He tells McCanns, “I had the opportunity of glancing at the project Jessie Fauset submitted to the Guggenheim. It was vague, barren and crabbed --- just like Jessie” (Sch. 15.9 March 22, 1931)! Fauset did not get the Guggenheim, nor did Shirley McCanns in 1931.

But her exposure to new literary personalities and her efforts in applying for the Guggenheim was bringing her into notice of people who could help advance her career. Walter White was listed as a sponsor, and he writes “Mrs. McCanns” consoling her about not receiving the Guggenheim. “If it is any comfort to you I could tell you the names of a great many distinguished people who were turned down as well by the Guggenheim Foundation because the funds at their disposal could not cover all the

fields in which they wish to assist” (Sch. 15.8 March 26, 1931). Walrond had given McCanns a lists of names of sponsors whose names he felt carried weight with the Guggenheim Selection Committee. Of White he said, “let us hope Walter White’s avidity or lack of discrimination in the sponsoring of Guggenheim nominees wont operate to your disadvantage” (Sch. 15.9 March 22, 1931). Those persons he listed as carrying weight and having authority were Alain Locke, Dr. Spencer, Kelly Miller, A. Clayton Powell, Oscar De Priest and Mary White Ovington (ibid.). Of these people she had fostered a relationship with three: Locke, Powell and Ovington. It was just a matter of time before she would be presenting a recital at Powell’s church in New York and visiting Ovington at her home in Connecticut.

While their correspondence was often intellectually stimulating, their conversations were gossipy, or at least on the part of Walrond. On occasion he would share with Graham McCanns, the Paris “dirt” on Black Americans living there. He tells her, “Augusta has given up her studio and according to Bill is spending ‘Rosenwald’s fellowship money on clothes.’” He tells her that Lillian Smith, the ex-secretary to James Hurbert of the New York Urban League, “has given birth to a baby, the paternal mystery of whom has become the subject of conjecture among the Paris niggeratti” (Sch. 15.8 Jan. 9, 1931). And although Graham McCanns read this salacious gossip, it appears that her letters to him concentrated on her work and aspirations. She kept him abreast of what was going on in her life and his responses back to her seem to suggest that she was always about the business of preparing her school work or working on applications. His responses to her don’t suggest that she engaged in gossip.

Walrond encourages her to expand her reach and not limit herself by sending off materials only to black journals. He coaxes her:

Go to it, kid, and don't stop at the Negro journals either as soon as you've got a good idea well executed from the viewpoint of style and construction sho[o]t it into a white magazine editor's office. Let it be on Negro music or something you know equally well. It'll bring you money and a deserved fame outside of the 'black belt' (Sch. 15.9 Feb. 18, 1931).

Walrond was convinced of a positive artistic future for Shirley McCanns. He told her, "I think of you often and marvel at your courage and high ideals. One of these days you are going to arrive in a very big way and then unless I'm all wrong you'll have a perfectly wonderful 'Up from Obscurity' story to tell" (Sch. 15.9). Walrond could see in her something special and knew it was a matter of time before she was discovered by a larger audience of people. He could not have known the accuracy of his prescient statement.

It was just a little more than a year later that Shirley McCanns made a smashing debut on the world's stage when Tom Tom, the musical opera which she authored became the talk of the city of Cleveland. Tom Tom followed the same formula as Emancipation Day Pageants. These pageants told the saga of the African American in four epochs: 1.) the African past 2.) slavery 3.) Emancipation and 4.) the ongoing struggle for freedom (Wiggins 49). Graham McCanns twist to the formula was her emphasis on the evolution of African American music rather than the evolution of African American life. William Wiggins states that of all the dramas written for these occasions "*The Star of Ethiopia* and *Ethiopia at the Bar of Justice* do the best job of dramatizing the saga's themes" (51). In October of 1915 *The Star of Ethopia* was

produced before a crowd of six thousand Washingtonians who experienced this pageant from the “bleachers in the American League ball park as trumpets blared” and a stentorian voice proclaimed the gifts of the race. The Bishops of AME invited W. E. B. Du Bois, author of *The Star of Ethiopia*, “to mount” a production of the pageant in Philadelphia at the AME centennial celebration in 1916 (Wiggins 49-51; Lewis Biography of 459-460). Graham was nearing twenty and was familiar with Du Bois and some of his work. If her insatiable reading appetite had not made her privy to the pageant which Du Bois wrote about in the pages of Crisis, her awareness of the goings on at the AME centennial would have made her knowledgeable of this pageant’s existence. It is relatively certain that she was aware of it at this stage in her life. “*Ethiopia at the Bar of Justice*,” written by James McCoo “was first produced at the 1924 General Conference of the AME Church, held in Louisville” (51). So the cultural context from which Graham McCanns emerges would have made these pageants a common cultural occurrence for her.

For Walrond, becoming acquainted with Shirley McCanns in a deeper way was psychologically a mainstay for him while shut off from many in his literary circle back in the United States while writing in Europe. As her star was ascending, it seems as if his was descending, for gossip back in the states said that “Walrond had squandered the stipends and written nothing” (When Harlem 233-234). From their time in Paris, McCanns’ records reveal that Walrond and she kept up frequent correspondence for close to three years from the time she left France in 1928 until April of 1931 and these letters reveal that he wrote and completed the book he was working on while in Europe.

Baltimore had been the home base for Bishop Brooks and his wife Susan as far back as 1920 before they went to Liberia as missionaries. Their passports were sent to 1745 Druid Hill in Baltimore, a main street running alongside the Morgan campus. So it is highly likely that since Bishop Brooks was a bishop in this community, he in some way intervened in helping Shirley get a job at Morgan College. On July 25, 1928 she gets a contract hiring her as Director of the Music Department at Morgan at an annual salary of 900.00 (Sch. 15.6). Nevertheless, when President John O. Spencer announced faculty appointments, Shirley must have been pained by her lack of credentials alongside those of the other newcomers rounding off the faculty. Emile Trebelle Holley, a graduate of the University of Vermont had earned a bachelor and Master of Arts degree in English. He was then a Ph. D. candidate in English at Columbia. He had worked at Morehouse and Wilberforce before coming to Morgan. Rebecca B. Jordan had earned her degree in French from Howard University. William Taylor, hired as coach, earned his degree from Lincoln University, and Shirley McCanns as yet did not have any graduate degree (Sch. 9.29 "Morgan Faculty").

McCanns, now positioned in Baltimore at Morgan College was able to expose another aspect of her character, her generous nature in giving of herself and in giving of her finances. While Walrond, resided in Bandol, Var, France there were many tasks he needed to perform but was unable to because of his distance from the states. There were sources he needed either tucked away in archives or embedded in newspapers in the United States. Without reservation, he solicited McCanns to perform these tasks, sometimes being excessive in his requests.

I forgot to ask you to send me the Guggenheim report.... I may be in need of it shortly. Also, any stray copies of "The Crisis," "Opportunity," "The Afro," "The Nation," or the "New Republic," that may come your way. (I don't want much, do I?) Don't forget this is a service which I should like to make reciprocal --- if there is anything over here that you would like to get [if] it is within my power to get it for you don't hesitate to command me (Sch. 15.7 Oct. 18, 1930).

When able to fulfill these requests, she obliged, but it appears that this arrangement was more beneficial to Walrond than McCanns.

The bucolic setting of Bandol with its acres of rolling vineyards on one side and the beautiful Mediterranean Sea on the other was a fitting locale for an artist to create and not have a worry in the world. But Walrond's letters to Shirley McCanns intimated something far different from this. It appears that he was living the life of the classic starving artist. The rumor mill among the African American literati community whispered that this might have been likely because he had mismanaged monies entrusted to him from the two fellowships of which he was the recipient, and the monies sent to him by a patron and from his publishers. At times the weight of financial woes filled Walrond with anxiety resulting in his asking McCanns for monies to tie him over. This is a dominant theme in many of his letters to her.

His publisher, Liveright advanced him monies while he worked on a novel, The Big Ditch, yet the amount of the advance and infrequency of monies sent by the publisher seemed inadequate in keeping Walrond financially afloat. On this point McCanns served as a Godsend, sending ten dollars here, twenty dollars there and different amounts on other occasions. It seems that each time she corresponded with him she sent money, for his letters almost always include some form of thank-you for monies sent. On Nov. 1, 1930 he tells her, "Thanks Multitudinously!" In March of

1931 “Thanks Infinitely” (Sch. 15.9). Whether her studies interfered with her letter writing campaign to him, whether she sensed that he was using her to receive monies, or whether he discontinued the correspondence is unknown, but the correspondence between the two ends sometime in 1931 when Walrond returns to the United States for what would be a brief stay. By this time McCanns, who no longer had her job at Morgan and was now a full time student, was in no position to continue her goodwill gestures. Her primary responsibility was earning good grades at school and trying to support two growing boys. He writes her at Oberlin in October of 1931 questioning the possibility of a possible meeting, but there is no evidence that indicates that this meeting ever took place. The three years they corresponded served both artists in vitally important ways.

This association between an established star of the Harlem Renaissance Movement and this minor and mostly unknown personality in black artistic circles in the late 1920s did much to enhance her career. She tightened her proposal writing skills implementing the advice he had given her. She became aware of important personalities through him and gained an insight into how they prefigured into the money granting institutions. This is not to say that the introductions always proved beneficial, but more times than not, Walrond’s advice assisted her in improving her career prospects.

The medium of music was the initial vehicle through which her artistic talent found expression. This artistic medium endowed her with a great power to move audiences and impart knowledge. While a young girl in her father’s church she had used music to illuminate his messages with music. She received training in piano, voice and

pipe-organ (Sch. 1.1). While still in grammar school she would organize choruses and “singing plays among her playmates. This spread in the community and led her into high school dramatics” (Sch. 1.1). The church had been the main venue where she used her musical abilities; however with growth, development, and the passage of time, the church building gave way to the school auditorium, the library hall and the college classroom. As word of her gifted abilities spread, the college classroom gave way to larger places like the Cleveland Stadium and the Art Institute of Chicago (Sch. 9.22).

She was so effective in the musical arena because music had the power to not just compel people to listen, but to compel them at times to undergo transformative powers by moving them to action, moving them through moods that took them from despair to hope --- from disbelief to faith. Through the conduit of music Graham’s activism, namely her desire to foster black pride in black people and to educate members of her race comes to the fore. She felt the black race had contributed a special type of music to the country and her tours across the country were attempts at facilitating an appreciation for Black music. Touring expanded her audience base which ranged from the Northwest coast to the Northeast coast of the United States.

Working at Morgan College from the fall of 1928 to the spring of 1931 provided Graham a environment conducive to being productive. Back in the twenties, there were daily chapel programs, and McCanns’ position as music instructor would have likely made her responsible for playing for some of these programs. Alice Warner Parham in her autobiography, I Remember Morgan in the Twenties, states that students were very involved in helping the school shoulder responsibilities and Frances Berry Hill, a student in the twenties, volunteered her musical talent “by playing the piano for the

daily chapel program, during all of her four years as a student for Morgan” (28). No doubt Hill performed these duties prior to Shirley McCanns joining the faculty, for Parham’s memories of her time there ends by 1928. McCanns’ life at Morgan was pretty regimented with a bell in front of Cummings Hall summoning “faculty, staff and students to classes, meals, meetings, special lectures in the Chapel, morning wake-up calls, and lights-out times” (22).

The pangs accompanying a mother’s separation from her children did not escape Shirley McCanns, for while being far away from her children at Morgan and other locations, she tried to keep contact with them as best she could by faithfully writing them letters that spoke of her dreams of the three of them being together and her commitment to work to better their lives. She tells Robert, “I am thinking, thinking, thinking how I can fix it so that you will be here with me (Sch. 12.16 April 25, 1929). She writes six year old Robert in childlike fashion repeating certain words, almost as if she’s trying to teach him while simultaneously co-opting him to be adultlike in her plan to reunite them as a family. She shares with Robert the following concerning little David: “He’s too little to understand about the work and all the things we are planning to do” (Sch. 12.13 Dec. 14, 1930). Educating herself came at a great expense to Shirley and her children, but this move to Morgan was a move in the direction that would help her acquire the credentials she needed to move forward with her life.

It is in this environment that her playwriting muse emerges and her direction in pursuit of becoming a dramatist congeals. The shift from serving as a choir director to directing plays was relatively smooth since she had been doing something very similar to this since childhood, but it would take years of training and practice to perfect the art

of playwriting. Hard work did not frighten her; it was something she welcomed. So she tackled the job of becoming a playwright at full force. Morgan College provided her with the perfect environment to make her transition from musician to playwright. At Morgan she worked closely with Randolph Edmonds, head of the drama department and a playwright of stature who during his lifetime authored forty-nine plays. It is likely that working closely with Edmonds and the social and cultural milieu of the Baltimore and the Washington D. C. area did much to nurture her in the direction of playwriting. In addition to Edmonds there were many more playwrights in the area that McCanns could have been influenced by. It would not be farfetched to assume that with the recognition that she garnered as a musician and her accompaniment of Edmonds on a number of plays presented in her capacity as Head of the Department of Music at Morgan College that she was came into contact with a number of regional playwrights.

The black literary renaissance in the Baltimore and Washington D. C. area was comprised of numerous intellectuals and artists. Approximately thirty-five miles south of Baltimore was another hotbed of artistic flowering. In the parlor of Georgia Douglas Johnson's M Street Salon artists of all types would congregate. Some would travel to the area from far away places just to enjoy the cultural atmosphere of Mrs. Johnson's home. Du Bois, whose family home was in Baltimore, principally resided in New York, but he was a regular visitor to Johnson's M Street Salon. Christine Rauchfuss Gray in her work Willis Richardson: Forgotten Pioneer of African-American Drama shares that many of them knew each other.

Weekly several playwrights gathered with Richardson at Johnson's home –Marita Bonner, Eulalie Spence, Georgia

Johnson, May Miller, who later played in The Broken Banjo, Randolph Edmonds, Carrie Clifford, and E. C. Williams. These playwrights were all involved to some extent with The Krigwa Player, a little-theatre organization created and encouraged by Du Bois” (19).

It would not be a leap to think that Shirley Graham might have accompanied Edmonds on one of his visits to Johnson’s home knowing her interest in playwriting and the crucial part she played in helping him present plays for the drama department of the school. If she did not meet Richardson at one of these gatherings, it is possible that she met him when she directed the Morgan College Dramatic Club in the production of one of his plays, “The House of Sham” (Sch. 1.9).

Richardson who resided in Washington D.C. had a number of plays being performed in schools, churches and on college campuses far beyond the Baltimore, D. C. area. During this time in the late 1920s Richardson was not an obscure playwright, but considered a black playwright at the height of his career. He had published essays on playwriting, several of which appeared in Opportunity and Messenger. His play “Mortgaged” appeared in The New Negro. He won a prize in Crisis for his play “The Broken Banjo,” and another one of his plays, The Chip Woman’s Fortune was produced on Broadway for a two week run in 1923.

In the literary social milieu of the Washington, D. C. and Baltimore area of the late 1920s in her capacity of musical director at Morgan College she would have likely come in contact with other notable personalities: Montgomery Gregory, head of the Drama Department at Howard University; and scholars Carter G. Woodson and Alain Locke. If she did not come in contact with them, she certainly knew of them. She had already met Dr. Du Bois, but their sustained correspondence was yet to develop at this

point in time. It is highly likely that she met Mrs. Harriet Gibbs Marshall, founder of the Washington Conservatory of Music in Washington D. C. the year before when she served as music librarian at Howard University (Sch. 15.16). Mrs. Marshall was an Oberlin alumna who would assist Shirley McCanns and Bernard Lee Mason, an Oberlin violinist in presenting musical programs in the Washington D. C. area during their college days and a few years beyond. Mrs. Gibb was probably a valuable link in McCanns being accepted into Oberlin's Conservatory of Music because she was the first black woman to graduate from Oberlin Conservatory of Music in 1889 (Washington Conservatory Papers).

After Graham had left this area and was studying in Oberlin, she would return during the summer months for employment. The summer of 1934 she wrote back home to her family telling them "Washington does offer rich opportunities if one knows how to go after them." Although this comment wasn't in reference to brown noising with the black literati, she was specifically referring to her visit to the Congressional Library after closing hours and other "various governmental buildings" including a visit to a Franciscan Monastery (Sch. 13.13). However, the point to be made was that Washington D. C. offered a range of activities and possibilities for this black woman who was talented, full of aspirations and unafraid of the challenges that were before her.

Contrarywise, the environs of the Washington D. C. and the Baltimore area had its disadvantages. One of the disadvantages was the black middle class' reception to black literary art that looked to its African source with pride. In his essay of 1927 titled, "Our Wonderful Society: Washington," Langston Hughes criticizes the black middle class society of Washington for their stuffy and pompous disposition, especially

in matters related to black culture. Instead of embracing blackness, they gravitated to Eurocentric values and taste. Hughes says, “The cultured doctors and lawyers and caterers and butlers and government messengers had little concern for poets and playwrights” (367). Based on this attitude, it is understandable why many black playwrights found it difficult to flourish in this area of the arts during this period of time.

Unlike the reaction from some members of the black middle class in Washington, many black playwrights living in this area during the early twentieth century looked to black folk culture for their material. They wrote plays with an African American audience in mind. Being guided by an inner pulse and not by the taste of the white America, black playwrights unencumbered by white patronage “affirmed the African American community by acknowledging it” (Gray 41). Letters don’t reveal that Graham McCanns ever had discussions with fellow black female playwrights like May Miller, Eulalie Spence or Marita Bonner, but this group of playwrights were geographically situated in close proximity to each other, so that meeting occasionally would have been possible. May Miller lived in Baltimore and found “a platform for her plays in the high school where she taught, (Frederick Douglass High School in Baltimore, Maryland)” (Gray 43). If they didn’t meet, they were influenced by the dictates of the scholars in the field, so much so that their art mirrored their reality. Christine Rauchfuss Gray says, “By staying within the black community and by writing for it, black dramatist relinquished the fame or popularity that their works might have had if they had been written for white producers and publishers and, by extension white audiences and readers” (43). Black playwrights who

tailored their plays to a black audience knew that because of the social and economic climate in the U. S. that their works would likely never receive recognition from mainstream culture. Oftentimes they would offer up scripts that would indicate that the plays were to be read and not performed. Many church and school groups would present these works at pageants and during social hours. Playwrights would not receive any monetary consideration for their works. This embittered some, yet others were honored by the exposure. Willis Richardson is an example of an embittered playwright. With over forty-seven plays credited to his authorship, and his playwriting spanning several decades, he went to his grave feeling cheated because many of his plays were produced in high schools, churches and colleges, and he only rarely received royalties for them.

Living in this geographical space, away from the white patronage that many Black artists benefited from in the New York area had positive effects as far as the trajectory of Shirley G. McCanns art was concerned. While some of the artists associated with the Harlem Renaissance scene were sometimes unduly influenced in the content of their work by white patrons, like Hughes and Hurston, McCanns was not subjected to this. She would demonstrate a predilection for circulating in interracial circles, would have close friendships with white Americans, but would not sway away from her conception of what her art was suppose to look like.

To some degree, music, the art form that she initially worked in precluded the kind of white encroachment that black writers were sometimes subjected to. Although, she did have white well wishers who cautioned her about being too eager “to impress the world with the greatness of Negro art” she did not let this sway her from her goal

(Sch. 15.12 Oct. 18, 1933). Sociology Professor Herbert Miller of Bryn Mawr College by all accounts appeared to have a genuine affection for McCanns as a student, but that did not stop his prejudices from coming to the fore or stop him from overstepping boundaries, for he tells her on Nov. 6, 1933, "I perceive that you need another lecture." Then he proceeds to compare the musical work that she was endeavoring to do to a racist action like that of Hitler! He tells her that he feels Wagner is "more responsible for this racial monstrosity that has come into Germany than any other person." He continues:

He did it with exactly the same animus that has underlain much of your frantic struggle to prove the greatness of the Negro in Music. It would be a dreadful thing, if, a century hence, it could be shown that you were to blame for precipitating race suppression and cruelty. Anything which tries to demonstrate that any group is superior to another is weighted with dire possibilities. It is another thing to show that they are equal, but with different emphases. The social process should not be accelerated too much or it burns out bearings (Sch. 15.12 Nov. 6, 1933).

What actions had Shirley McCanns done to merit such an extreme comparison? Was this an attempt to temper her aspirations or deflate her enthusiasm? This correspondence from Professor Miller demonstrates how her work that was different because of its emphasis on the black race was perceived as challenging. It was perceived as such not just because of its emphasis on Negro musical contributions but because of this Negro artist's proposition of its preeminent role in the American musical arena. Shirley McCanns' endeavor to champion the musical contributions of African Americans could be perceived by some as threatening to the status quo. The stage, whether it was through the medium of music or plays was a space where Negroes could contest through their art, the distorted perceptions and/ or images of them.

But other influences that kept her from diluting her art to fit into a white conception of what was desired and acceptable were the cultural riggings that were like moorings, keeping her vessel attached to the source. Steeped in an AME religiosity that embraced an Afrocentric Christian world view, precluded her from abandoning some core set of beliefs that shaped her vision. Her Afrocentric Christian ideology caused her to identify with Ethiopia over Italy when Italy was poised to invade it. Her father had preached against this imperialist expansion. Her world view caused her to identify with Nasser and the Middle East in their struggle to protect its borders territorial holdings against Israel with its support from the west to spread its control and influence. Had not she visited through books the deserts in Africa decades before she ever stepped foot on the continent (Sch. 1.2)? Shirley Graham McCanns could not see people of African descent as inferior and she worked to demonstrate this point in the way she crafted her art and used her life.

CHAPTER 5

ETTA BELL GRAHAM: THE SILENT PARTNER

AND POWERFUL ROLE MODEL

Much has been said of Rev. Graham's actions and role in developing the intellect and consciousness of his children, but much of the role of Etta Bell Graham has been shielded by her service behind the scenes. It is important to note however that she serves as a connecting link uniting what Darlene Clark Hines would call a "generation[s] of black women active between the collapse of Reconstruction and the outbreak of World War II" (Hine 110). Born in 1873 and coming of age in the 1890s, placed Etta Bell in a historical position where she could look back into her past as a teenager and see significant changes in the social interaction between whites and blacks, for she was living during a time when the gains blacks had realized during Reconstruction were now being taken away. Living a generation ahead of her daughter, naturally facilitated her in helping lay a foundation upon which her daughter could walk. Etta's parents had lived during slavery times and had managed to ensure that she receive a high school education and a strong religious upbringing. Her close religious affiliation would continue throughout her life and would ultimately provide her with further educational and economic opportunities throughout her life. It is through the church that she, in concert with her husband, would further develop community networks that would provide a safety web for black people as they established home sites dotting across the United States. When Shirley Graham and her siblings came along, their parents had forged a path that their children would follow.

Etta Bell Graham can be viewed as just one of the many giants upon whose shoulders Shirley Graham climbed. However, her daughter seemingly did not regard her mother's accomplishments as important as those of her father, yet the actions and direction of Shirley Graham's life can easily be seen by any critical observer as following the same trajectory of her mother. Etta Bell Graham's self assuredness, ambition and daring spirit were, in many ways, obscured by her early marriage and her husband's position as the male head of household and leader of the AME churches he pastored over the years. She served faithfully alongside her husband, and it is in this capacity that she donned many roles within her home, church and community. In the ancillary roles she served in, scholars like Darlene Clark Hine would acknowledge that she "ensur[ed] survival and progress of families, institutions, and communities" within Black America (242). In a number of ways, Etta Bell was as forcefully a shaping presence in her daughter's life as her husband, regardless of her daughter's perception of this or reticence in acknowledging it.

The lifestyle and actions of Etta Bell, like a number of African American female pioneers, remained out of the purview of mainstream culture, but with the publication of Shirley Graham's papers, it has become possible to reconstruct, in some ways, many of the activities that dominated her life and to examine how her life's work influenced and aided her daughter in ways the daughter might not have recognized or acknowledged as being central in shaping her life or helping her achieve greatness. Upon close scrutiny, one can only be impressed by Etta Graham's possession of characteristics and interests that were later readily recognizable in her daughter. Etta was a ceaseless worker with a charming personality, a daring and adventurous spirit whose commitment to social

justice and black upward mobility opened up avenues that she could follow to ensure income. She knew who she was and what was expected of her in her role as a minister's wife. The knowledge of her duties did not change her unspoken and perhaps secret aspirations for more education, but finding herself a married woman and stepmother shortly after her high school graduation, and then a mother of a new born baby approximately a year or so afterward, did not allow her the opportunity of getting more formal education. She would fulfill this desire, but it would take time for her to achieve this dream.

During the early years of her married life, she worked alongside her husband, but as her children matured, more of her activism is revealed. After the death of her husband, she engages in more lecturing activities, primarily to support herself, and in doing so serves as a role model for her daughter. She demonstrates how productive an older Black woman could be without the aid of a spouse. During this phase of her life, free of her child rearing responsibilities (only occasionally, for now she had to oversee her daughter's children periodically) and her duties as a minister's wife, she could attend to the affairs of her heart. Her obituary reveals the extent of activity Etta engaged in during the last years of her life. It states, "She traveled and talked on Africa for the Home Missionary Society, she took courses in nursing with the Red Cross and conducted classes in her own home." Her obituary further states that "she took a lively interest in civic affairs, especially those affecting the Negro community; she realized a long ambition and for two summers matriculated at the University of Indiana in Bloomington" (Sch. 11.2).

For the most part, it appears that Etta and David Graham viewed their roles in similar fashion as the general dictates of the day, with the woman performing activities within the home and the male performing activities primarily outside the home, however, this was not carried out in all aspects. For on some occasions the two crossed over into roles not typically viewed as appropriate for males and females living in American society. Rev. Graham would spend time nurturing his children's intellectual development and Mrs. Graham would spend time in the public sphere traveling by train to speaking engagements once her children were older.

Mrs. Graham's early years of marriage were spent taking care of the responsibilities involved in raising a growing family. She presided over the domain of domesticity within the Graham household, and as such, had the job of overseeing a range of responsibilities that ensured a comfortable home life for her family. She gave birth to six children and invested several years in the role of caring for their basic needs. Certainly this wasn't an easy task at the turn of the century when washing clothes could easily be a two day task, beginning with soaking stained and soiled white clothes in a huge black pot outside the home, then washing each piece, followed by hanging them up to dry. In addition to attending to the children, a number of other tasks had to be performed. Preparing meals, washing dishes and cleaning the house were basic duties that she had to perform daily. Years beyond his youth, Orville fondly remembered the routine in the house: "there were floors to be scrubbed, likely enough a little ironing left to be knocked out, bread to be baked and that included some pies too, or perhaps just one big fruit cobbler" (Sch. 12.1 "Autobiography" 12). Preserving fruits and vegetables for winter, dusting, ironing and organizing were other duties she had to oversee. When her

children grew up and were away from home, she would send them gift packages containing goodies from home, namely plum pudding and preserves. Etta sent Shirley plum pudding and preserves when she was away from home (Sch. 13.1). When her grandson David was away in service, she sent him plum pudding. His mother sent him a fruit cake for Christmas when he was in service at March Field, California (Sch. 13.6).

As her children grew, her role expanded, and she interacted with the church membership in various capacities. Because the family lived in parsonages, on a number of occasions, Mrs. Graham came was in constant contact with church members. Shirley Graham's play, Elijah's Raven, is based upon the life of a lowly minister whose economic stability is precarious because he is duty bound to take orders from on high even when it negatively impacts him. This fictional household is insightful in giving clues into the responsibilities of an AME minister's wife. In this household, the mother has to perform a balancing act. In spite of the heavy load that she has mothering her children, she has to remain in the position of ever being ready to entertain visiting ministers, dignitaries and even church members who feel like the parsonage is partly their home too. One can deduce from this play that the lives of Graham family members had to be open to some degree to accommodate Rev. Graham's calling.

It appears that Shirley Graham learned well from her mother, for after she reached adulthood people would often compliment her on her ability to be the perfect hostess. A. G. Shields Jr., publisher of The Arkansas World expressed his appreciation for her hospitality and thanked her for the "Waffle Breakfast" she prepared. It appears the food and the visit were comforting not only to his stomach, but his spirit as well (Sch. 16.10 July 5, 1944). When Christian Science Monitor writer June Dillion drops by

to interview Graham, she is charming and friendly. Dillion sends her a note back saying, “The food was delicious and it was kind of you to cook such grand things for our luncheon” (Sch. 16.9). Shirley Graham had observed her mother through the years serve as hostess to people who would come and visit their home. The dignitaries visiting their homes ranged from well know people like, W. E. B. Du Bois to lesser known personalities, like presiding elders, missionaries and evangelists. Shirley’s ability to play the role of charming hostess was a tool in her arsenal of weapons for forging freedoms, making headway into the white publishing world of mainstream culture. She could win people over with her charm. Dillon continues, “But more than the food, was the stimulating and interesting visit. You are delightful! Thanks once again for your charming hospitality” (Sch. 16.9). This “charm” is a trait that Mrs. Etta Graham likely modeled over the years as she received guest within her home.

The way Shirley Graham was socialized in the home empowered her to achieve her goals. She learned from her mother how to create a comfortable home environment so that when guest were invited over, they were made to feel special. Engaging conversations and delicious meals made guest so relaxed that by the time they left, Shirley Graham was almost always assured of a favorable newspaper write-up following an interview, or a favorable recommendation for an application when the occasion presented itself. It would be inaccurate to say that she fained pleasantness for the sake of achieving some desired goal, for it appears that she was being her natural self and her warmth emanated from a sincere heart.

Etta Graham utilized organizational strategies and had to teach and impress these strategies upon her children so that a degree of orderliness flowed within the home.

The children knew the times when certain chores were going to be performed. Saturdays were devoted to cooking and cleaning (Thompson 22). Meals were served in a timely fashion. Orville remembers from his childhood how the routine of life was so constant that wherever they lived the rhythm of life was not interrupted. He states, “The manner in which the Sabbath Day began in our family varied little whether we were living in Colorado Springs or Spokane or Seattle” (Sch. 12.1 “Autobiography” 16). Just as the Sabbath, the weekly activities followed an established routine. After Rev. Graham’s death this orderliness remained a feature of Etta Graham’s life. In letters to her daughter she discusses how she “arranged” her dinner so that her schedule comes off smoothly (Sch. 11.11).

Oftentimes when Rev. Graham was typing a letter to his daughter, Mrs. Graham is somewhere in the background performing some task. From her working area in the room, she would tell him something to tell their daughter as she worked in the background. After he passed, Grandson David Graham took on the role of typing the letters while Mrs. Graham ironed clothes, made preparations for the next meal or performed some other chore that was a part of her daily routine. These letter writing activities were necessary in staying in communication with the family, and they were little communal moments where warmth, fun and laughter took place. As David typed out the letter, his Grandmother was in the background commenting on what he was to include in the letter. When he was fourteen he begins a letter to his mother saying, “Dear Mother, I am a trifling son. (Grandma told me to say that.) But I am for not writing to you sooner. I suppose Grandma has told you that I wrote a girl in New York before I wrote you...” (Sch. 13.1 Jan. 20, 1940).

As Etta's children grew, they were able to take on some responsibilities, but it was Etta Graham who presided over this aspect of Graham family life. These duties would take up considerable time, and the drudgery of such work lacked glamour and appeal, but these tasks were vitally important to family life. It doesn't appear that she complained about these duties, but tackled them and managed to have a good degree of control over the flow and rhythm in the household.

In Shirley Graham's autobiographical accounts of her childhood, she credits her father as being the parent who developed her mind by reading her works of art much too complicated for a young child to read. This act of reading to his children demonstrated that Rev. Graham was not only the bread winner of the family, but performed the role of what some would classify as woman's work. Some of the works she remembers him reading to her aloud were Ben Hur, Quo Vadis, A Tale of Two Cities, and Uncle Tom's Cabin (Sch. 1.1). Through these readings he exposed her to other worlds and enabled her imagination to flourish. It would be remiss however, to discount her mother's contribution in shaping, perhaps not as directly as her father, her world view. For her mother oversaw many of the important details necessary for the family to function smoothly, and by taking care of the essential daily affairs of the household, Mrs. Graham freed Rev. Graham's schedule so that he could use his time in nurturing his young daughter's mind.

In a number of articles and interviews that Shirley Graham agreed to, she almost exclusively credits her father with directing her life. The picture of Mrs. Graham that develops is one of a mother who performed little in directing the life of her daughter. However, from a closer observation of Etta B. Graham's role, this picture is distorted

and one that minimizes a certain power that Etta possessed and modeled in the home. Graham's attitude concerning her mother's influence on her life in some ways might have resulted from family alliances formed early in life. Her brother Orville gave an enlightening observation into a family pattern that appeared to shape family loyalties.

He reveals the following:

In our home the welfare of each child was the responsibility of one older member of the family. Everyone was expected to look after everyone else, but we had a system of wardship that elemented [eliminated] all "buck passing." Lola was given to Papa; D. A. was turned over to Mama. Lorenzo landed in Lola's capable care....Aurelius was presented to D. A. who went right to work trying to make a man of him.. Poor Lorenzo had to take what was left. He got the prune-- the enigma, me (Sch. 12.1 "Autobiography" 32).

In a number of ways these pairings seemed to continue throughout their lives. Maybe Graham's emphasis on her father's influence more than her mother's, results in part because of this. Until Lorenz married and started raising a family of his own, Shirley and Lorenz shared a very close bond. When he married, it seemed the position of favorite brother was passed on to Aurelius, often called William. Lorenz appears to have continued in his role as ward of Orville, for he is family member who remained in close contact with Orville when he grew into adulthood and seemed to distance himself from other family members. This hypothesis continues to break down when one looks at Mrs. Graham. Although D. A. the eldest son was her ward, she appears to have had a special fondness for her second son Lorenz.

As Shirley Graham matured into a young woman her mother guided her in what historian Darlene Clarke Hine calls the culture of dissemblance. Dissemblance refers to "the behavior and attitudes of black women that created the appearance of openness and

disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors” (Hine 37). It appears that the interior of Shirley Graham’s life was well guarded throughout life. She had to be this way as she navigated through the many perils that could so easily befall a young black woman during her time. Yet, even though she was open and was often characterized as charming by many people who interviewed her and interacted with her, there were still areas of her person or aspects of her life that were never revealed. They remained in a nether realm, never to be disclosed. She was likely groomed in this way of life for it did not seem a struggle nor a moral dilemma for her to lie about her age, the number of children she had, or the death of her first husband. Stephanie Shaw in her work, What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era discusses how young black women had to be “extremely circumspect” and not give “the slightest hint of impropriety” since actions considered negative could “raise doubts about their abilities and fitness to serve in professional, educational, or other public settings” (Shaw 14). Mindful of how society viewed divorce, Shirley McCanns made a decision to cut her ex-husband completely out of her life by her repeated, carefully crafted and embellished story of her being a widow. This likely elicited some sympathy for her as well. Because her story is deliberate, she was well aware of the impact it might have on others.

Evidence suggests that Etta Bell in her role of mother, instructed her daughter on how to construct an acceptable image for a young black woman in the early twentieth century, one that would make it easier for her to navigate through life. At the end of her college career in September of 1933, her mother postscripted McCanns a cryptic note at the end of one of her father’s informative letters. After informing

McCanns that her boys were fine Mrs. Graham quickly moves to the purpose of her postscript. The barely decipherable scribbling written at the bottom and around the margins of Rev. Graham's neatly typed letter are coded instructions. The manner in which the message is written would lead one to believe that Mrs. Graham was unable to communicate effectively in written form. However, this might not have been the case at all. It could have been that the disjointed and confusing writing was a deliberate attempt at obscuring the message in the event the letter was seen by someone's eyes besides the right recipient. The language which seems to be coded says the following:

Where there is no children would be far better for you. Do not handicap your self a bit, even if the last place you stopped the way you throw around your letters. Adjust that arrangements as soon as you can. I hope you understand me. Even your social offenses would handicap you can not afford to do that. Destroy this letter at once. I do not think it well to stop there at all. Everything you have mentioned is against you (Sch. 9.7 Sept. 19, 1933).

The confusing nature of the message is a continuation from a previous conversation, and provokes curiosity. Was Mrs. Graham too busy to convey her message clearly? Or how likely was it that the only colored graduate of the 1894 class of Central High School credited with the greatest number of sciences of any one in her class would have a pronounced weakness in writing? How likely is it that this woman who later became a missionary lecturer, who enraptured audiences with her lectures, lacked the ability to communicate her ideas clearly in written form. It is plausible that the letter was purposefully distorted because a number of letters from Etta Bell in Shirley Graham's collection demonstrate Bell's ability to communicate intelligently and effectively. Just what arrangements Etta Bell was referring to are unclear. It is possible that McCanns had arranged a number of recital sites to visit for the purpose of earning money, or since she had recently graduated, perhaps she was

interviewing for jobs. What is evident from this coded language is that Etta Graham, well aware of the constraints on black women during the early decades of the twentieth century, was passing on to Shirley McCanns a lesson in survival. She was teaching Shirley how to deal with the world in order to make it. By not disclosing the whole truth of her situation, McCanns increases her chances of acquiring a job and making a good impression. Mrs. Etta Graham warns her young daughter who is a mother primarily responsible for providing financial support for her two children during the depression era, how to navigate wisely through the world. Although it is not clear where McCanns got the idea to kill off her ex-husband, it would not be a stretch to think that maybe her mother had some input into this decision. Whether she did or not, she and the rest of the Graham family members became accomplices with this scheme when McCanns assumed her new identity as a widow.

Even after Shirley G. McCanns enjoyed success as a playwright, her mother continued to encourage and admonish her. In a letter dated September 24, 1941 she told her, “You are a wonderful girl in a new field and new environments [environments]. I just hope and pray you will have good health and be able to adjust yourself to your new work. Do be careful for you have so much at stake [stake]” (Sch. 13.1 Sept. 24, 1941).

During the time she was trying to make it to Broadway, she developed a close friendship with George Kondolf, a white Broadway producer she had met during her Federal Theatre Project days. Some of her correspondence hints at her relationship with Kondolf being a bit more than a causal relationship, for he plans a trip out to Indianapolis, but does not make it in the end. Around this time, Graham McCanns would hint to one of her female acquaintances that she has three suitors. It is not clear if her mother is responding to this situation or some other situation, but catching whiff of something that could possibly be

dangerous for her daughter advises her, in yet again another one of her margin end scripts that curved around the letter to watch her step, “The Geo. Affair weigh very carefully” (Sch. 13.1).

Shirley McCanns mother would continue to be a surrogate mother to her children until they were old enough to enter college. During those times when it was necessary to correct deviant or unsettling behavior of the boys, Etta Graham would send a letter to her daughter suggesting ways to approach and handle the situation. She would talk to the boys to correct behaviors such as slothfulness, tardiness and keeping late hours, but she would never engage in physically punishing them.

As her children were maturing, Etta Graham became more involved in church activities. She was often selected to serve as a delegate at AME General Church Conferences. On more than one occasion she was elected to lead the Indiana delegation based on receiving “the highest number of votes” (Sch. 11.2 May 18, 1935). With each passing year it appears from news accounts that her reputation increased at these conferences. Lawrence Little notes the following concerning an egalitarian ethos within the AME Church:

The AME Church ...provided a political and social structure in which women participated and offered a more egalitarian atmosphere than many other segments of American society. During the age of imperialism, women conducted much of the fund raising, planning, and execution of AME overseas missionary activities and their words and actions influenced the denomination’s emerging foreign agenda (11).

This egalitarian attitude facilitated Mrs. Graham in tapping into, what some might call, a gift of hers, using charm in swaying audiences. After attending a number of conferences and learning how the organization operated, she begins branching out and

becoming a more visible presence in the church community. By the time the older children reached adulthood in mid 1920s, the Graham's were entreated by Bishop Sampson Brooks to come and aid him with the overseas ministry. After accepting his offer, Rev. Graham became President of Monrovia College in Liberia and Mrs. Graham moves into the public domain, serving as Matron of the school (Sch. 11.2). She simultaneously began to serve in the role of lecturer in the states in an attempt to secure funds for the mission work in Africa.

It is important to note how the Graham's came into going overseas. The AME church made this opportunity possible, but other factors were at work. Shirley Graham's maternal aunt and uncle were also AME missionaries and had been serving in Liberia for years before her parents went abroad. Susan Bell, the older sister of Etta, married Rev. Sampson Brooks who later became a Bishop within the organization and presided over the building of the missionary school in Monrovia, Liberia. It is this missionary school in Liberia where Rev. Graham and Etta would later labor. In 1926 after the Brooks had devoted many years to erecting and developing this mission school overseas, Bishop Brooks asked Rev. and Mrs. Graham for assistance and they agreed (Sch. 9.29). All of these family members served as powerful examples of activism. They felt they were striking a blow at ignorance in Africa, building bridges of goodwill that might perhaps foster closer relations between Africans and Negroes in America by carrying the gospel of redemption to the unsaved Africans. Is it not probable that the service of Etta Bell Graham and Susan Bell Brooks' work in Liberia paved the way for Shirley Graham to much later in life embrace the idea of living abroad in Africa?

The hazards of living in Africa were numerous. The foreigner's susceptibility to diseases, particularly malaria, was a constant threat. It was in Liberia that Lorenz contracted malaria, and was sent back to the states to recover (Sch. 11.11 March 6, 1928). In addition to disease, the diet was insufficient. Mrs. Graham during one of her lectures shared with the audience the adverse effects of inadequate nutrition on one's body. The lack of conveniences and lack of financial support from stateside were all factors that made the lives of missionaries difficult. By the time Sarah Bell Brooks returned to the states she was ailing. Etta Bell Graham and Sarah Bell Brooks modeled a working pattern that was not normative for the average black female of that time. They traveled internationally, and traveled widely within the U.S. national borders. They endured limited diet in Africa, meager financial resources, and loss of an active social life. Traveling abroad and remaining in Africa for an extended time revealed the daring and courageous spirit of these women.

The countervailing corollary of inadequate financial support thrust Mrs. Graham into a new role, that of missionary lecturer. From accounts of numerous speaking engagements where Mrs. Graham was featured, it does not appear that she was a shrinking violet. After 1926 she was often traveling the country speaking at different churches and on different forums about interracial relations and missionary work, especially mission work in Africa (Sch. 11.2). Her goal was to raise funds for the mission work in Africa. Support from mission departments from churches in the U. S. was often sparse. Rev. Graham was disturbed about the indecent support of black missionaries and in an attempt to perhaps shame members into doing better in this area, he publishes his report, "Missionary Work in Eastern Liberia" in The Christian

Recorder. To illuminate the lack of monetary sustenance, Rev. Graham names a specific missionary whose financial support from the states demonstrated an appalling example of how missionaries found themselves in a near destitute state. Rev. Graham mentioned that Bro. Jinlach, who maintained a school in East Liberia, received only 6.66 per month from the W. M. M. Society. He suggests that there were some occasions when Bro. Jinlach didn't even receive this amount (Sch. 9.21). This example demonstrates not just the sacrificial living conditions of missionaries, but why there was need for Mrs. Graham to go on a speaking circuit while Rev. Graham was still in Africa. Her speaking engagements would raise funds for the work that was being accomplished in Africa.

Her missionary career and her role as matron at Monrovia College in Liberia were intertwined with her husband's ministry and outgrowths of it, and it is in this capacity that her role as a public figure arises. When she lectured at various venues, she discussed the school in Monrovia and the work that the A. M. E. church was doing for the indigenous people of Liberia (Sch. 9.29). Newspaper articles of the day comment on her lectures and characterize her as an engaging speaker. An article dated Dec. 5, 1935 stated that she "electrified the meeting with an address setting forth the purposes of the meeting." Although commonly referred to as the "wife of the Rev. D. A. Graham," papers touted that Mrs. Graham "ha[d] won considerable reputation as a lecturer," and was "popular among white and colored as a lecturer" (Sch. 11.2). One article characterizes her as having a "pleasing personality" and being a "gifted speaker" (Sch. 9.21 "Wife of Pres.>"). Other articles characterize her as being "a fascinating woman with great personal charm" (Sch. 9.21 "Mrs. D.A.>"). Typical of this time, Mrs. Graham

stood in the shadow of her husband, but as she continued to lecture, she gained a reputation based on her own merit, and emerges out of his shadow.

Her position as school matron/missionary lecturer required her to travel distant places often alone. Once when preparing to travel overseas alone, the shipping authorities told her that “they were sold out.” To this response she tells her daughter,

Rev. went at them in earnest, reminding them that he spoke for my cabin more than a month before. They then cabeled and secured promise that they could take me, but not sure what it would be. So Sunday morning we were down there before 7 o'clock. Minister Frances and a Miss Moll (white) an international newspaper correspondent, were among the crowd to see me off and there too with Rev. went aboard (Sch. 11.7).

No doubt this incident of the ship being “sold out” was a case of racism. Mrs. Graham was the only black passenger aboard. With all the commotion that took place before the trip, it could have set a tone that would have made the trip very distasteful; nonetheless, this is not what happened. When she wrote her daughter about the trip, she didn't write about it as something to be endured, rather a trip she enjoyed, and would have enjoyed more if her talkative Lola had shared it with her. She tells her, “Well I am the only colored passenger on board and I surely miss my old Girl to jaw with me and these white women don't make up very fast, although they simile sweetly” (Sch. 11.7). She appears to have had no apprehensions about traveling alone. This letter also demonstrates how both the Grahams were aware that partnering with whites provided them leverage in getting their agenda through. Miss Moll's whiteness and her status as an international news correspondent make her doubly helpful as a witness to the boat officials' treatment of the Grahams.

There was conjecture after her time in Africa that Mrs. Graham would write a book about her experiences there. “Mrs. Graham will... no doubt write or engage in writing a book on some phase of African life which her friends both here and in Africa are urging her to do. However, she feels that she will not undertake writing until she has had some rest and her plans for the future have been completed” (Sch. 9.21 “Mrs. D.). Mrs. Graham never wrote an article or book of any kind, but she would continue to use her time in Africa as a reference point during her long career as a lecturer.

Years beyond her stay in Africa, she continued to be in demand as a lecturer. A letter Rev. Graham sent to Shirley who was teaching at Tennessee A. & I. State College gives an insight into Mrs. Graham’s busy schedule. Even though Etta would be visiting the same city as her daughter, her busy schedule precluded her from spending much time with Shirley. Rev. Graham writes the following:

A wire yesterday, guaranteed her expenses and said they were expecting her. Therefore, she will be in your great city sometime Wednesday. She has an engagement here for Tuesday afternoon at the First Baptist Church, white and therefore will leave here Wednesday morning at 1 o’clock, reaching Louisville about 6:30 a. m. Then take the L& N train out to Nashville. You need not plan to meet her, as she may have to first report for business and then come out to the College. She plans on spending at least one night with you (Sch. 9.7 Jan. 6, 1936).

A distinguishing characteristic of Shirley Graham was her relentless working pace. She was constantly working and was often scolded by her parents and later her children about working too much. But when one observes the life of her mother, it becomes apparent how she could so easily fall into this pattern. She had observed a busy work pace demonstrated by both of her parents. Etta would live sixteen years

beyond Rev. Graham's death, and primarily her need for income compelled her to continue working at a hectic pace.

As their days in Africa became a distant memory, the Grahams settled into life in Richmond, Indiana in the early 30s and began adding to the cultural life there. Certainly within the church where they served as leaders and teachers, the Grahams created a site where there was spiritual nurturing, intellectual development, and a growing political development resulting from the race conscious sermons and discussions that were a part of this space. But beyond the church walls, the Grahams would contribute to the cultural life of the community in other ways. On one occasion they contributed to the cultural life of the Kokomo community by donating various articles they brought from Africa to be displayed during Negro History Week. They shared for public viewing such items as "beadwork of the women there [Liberia] cloth made from native cotton, the thread dyed and woven there, a Liberian flag and other articles." Also during this exhibit, they included current Black History such as the following:

A collection of books by or about black [s. T] the Negro race is an impressive one and includes a scrap-book made locally, that covers outstanding events for the people in the past year. Of no small interest in the collection is the picture of Miss Shirley Graham, daughter of the Rev. and Mrs. D. A. Graham, student at Oberlin College and recognized as a composer of merit, particularly [particularly] for her Negro opera "Tom Tom." Copies of the magazine 'Parade,' published in Cleveland, tell the opera, commending it as a notable work both from the point of music and drama. It is an exhibit in which sponsors may well take satisfaction (Sch. 11.2).

The Graham's inclusion of books by blacks and about black life demonstrates their ability to see the historical importance of contributions from black culture during

the time in which they lived. Their inclusion of their daughter's work demonstrates their efforts to forge recognition of her and her work at this early stage in her career.

Many times when interviewed, McCanns attributed much to her father's influence while there is little mention of her mother's contribution to the shaping of her life. It is understandable that Shirley Graham would embrace patriarchal notions of the day, and it is clear that she had a predilection for gravitating to male figures more than females, but in view of the tremendous work load her mother labored under, one wonders why there are so few positive words spoken in regard to her mother's nurturing ability and directness in communicating with people. In a letter she wrote to Du Bois in 1944 during a time of increasing stress resulting from the death of her eldest son, she shares with Du Bois an attitude that is interesting as it pertains to her relationship with her mother. Her portrait not so much reveals something about Mrs. Graham as much as it reveals an attitude that Rev. Graham had toward his wife and Graham McCanns attempt to emulate her father. She tells him that her mother stayed with her for approximately six weeks from the first week in January to mid-February and during that time her mother "was under the doctor's care—taking regular treatments. I was doing all I could to keep my own problems from her. This is nothing new. I assumed this attitude along with papa when I was about ten years old. Practically all my life I've been older than mamma" (Du Bois Collection R 56 F 128).

What is to be made of this comment and attitude? Was this an expression surfacing from frustration in dealing with a family health crisis, complicated by the stress resulting from a growing climate of McCarthyism? Could it have been that Graham McCanns saw herself as more capable than her mother in handling the

weightier matters of public life? Did Graham McCanns regard her contribution to society as being more significant than her mother's since the majority of Etta Graham's early years were dedicated to the domestic realm while Graham McCann's life's had placed her outside the home in the public domain where she interacted with powerful brokers in the black and white world. Was she now a bit heady off of her accomplishments? By this time she had surpassed both parents in the educational realm and in maybe what she deemed as accomplishments, but the fact remained that she never spoke of her father in a condescending manner as she now was doing with her mother. Or could there be another way to look at this comment? Certainly it was expected for the male figure to support the family and in this role shoulder the cares and worries of the family. Although this might have been normative practice for the head of household, was it normative that the oldest child should assume the responsibility of protecting the mother? The image one gathers from this comment is that Etta Bell Graham might have been a simple woman, incapable of handling complicated or complex matters, however, the record demonstrates otherwise.

The way she presided over the household and took control of her affairs after her husband's death suggests something completely different. She was a woman who made up her own mind, choosing to listen to the advice of her children, but ultimately making her own decisions. It was her decision to sell her home in Richmond and move to New York to be closer to three of her adult children in the 1940s. Another insightful example that reveals that Etta Graham was not a timid, self-effacing woman in need of the protection of her daughter/children is revealed in how she communicated with her daughter. Approximately four years after the death of Rev. Graham, Mrs. Graham was

overseeing Robert and David. It appears that David was orderly most of the time, but Robert often showed signs of laziness and rebelliousness. He would be late for school and come home late at night. Mrs. Graham relayed this information to her daughter and evidently mentioned something about money in correspondence with her. Exactly what context the money was mentioned is not known, but being a proud woman, it is highly improbable that she asked her daughter for money. It seems she only expressed concern about her earning some. However, when McCanns writes her mother back, her letter expresses concern in regard to Mrs. Graham's mention of money. It appears that McCanns overstepped her bounds, for when Mrs. Graham responded back she felt the need to address her daughter's concerns in a letter. Her letter does not disclose a mousy woman unable to articulate her thoughts or fumbling in an attempt to discover her voice, but rather reveals a woman who is direct in addressing a concern of her daughter. She is not angry with her daughter but direct. She begins, "My Darling" and fills in the introductory paragraph with information about her busy schedule and her state of health. In her next paragraph she moves to her concern by stating the following:

Now your great stress was in my interest in money. I feel the other things I pointed out was far more important[,] for having or getting money is solely that I may buy and go when I please and not have to inconvenience [inconvenience] others. If that is a fault I plead guilty—It is to my mind a very important that any child should be so raised it could live with others—Be it your child or mine society requires we must be qualified [qualified] to fit in if we expect success (Sch. 13.1 Nov. 1939).

She continues to appraise McCanns on the behavior of her boys, while developing her point that her concern for money emanates from her desire to continue living the manner that she and society deems a woman of her stature should live. She tells her

daughter, “I do not hold out I am poor or cannot do some things they think I should do.” She further states, “I do not consider I am on charity” and quickly reminds McCanns that “the mother of these boys is in Yale on a fellowship – that does not mean they are rich, but are good liver.” She continues, “The fact that any child or grown up shows industry and a desire to make money – places them far higher in the estimation of those who are worth while.” Etta reminds her daughter,

Surely the way I get on the train and travel—The way these boys go and come – Violene [violin] lesson wheels plenty of cloths does not savor of poverty neither does it permit boastfulness more like gratitude to the one who is able to bestow (Sch. 13.1).

It is clear from this letter who was mother and who was daughter. The tone of it suggests that Etta was clearly in control of the direction of her life and trying to advise her daughter and gently guide and direct the lives of her two grandsons.

Near the end of her life she decided to sell her home in Richmond, Indiana and move to New York, where three of her children, Shirley, Lorenz and William, were living. She ended up living with Lorenz and his family, and this arrangement in the end caused a rift between the Graham children. After her death, she rested in an unmarked grave for over a year. This caused her daughter, who was by this time, Shirley Graham Du Bois much grief, and she chastens her eldest brother, D. A. for neglecting the interest of his mother “in matters so vital to the whole pattern of her life.” She reminds him that both of their parents, “paid their obligations no matter what denial or sacrifice it meant. She had pinched and saved and denied herself to have the money to see that she was ‘put away decently’”(Sch. 11.13 Sept. 23, 1953). This rift between Shirley G. Du Bois and her brothers, mainly D. A. and Lorenz lasted for well over a year, and

caused ill feelings that lasted well into the decade. But her concern with respect for the dead and carrying out her mother's final wishes led Graham Du Bois to continue scolding her brothers. She, the eldest child, stepped in when she felt her brothers were not doing what they were suppose to do.

Etta taught by example. The education she received in high school in the mid-west and during her time in the AME church stood her in good stead during her lifetime. Arguably, her knowledge surpassed the masses of black folks and that of many whites during the time in which she lived. After her husband's death she continued working on the lecture circuit, speaking before mostly white audiences. She once remarked to her daughter in 1940, four years after her husband's death, "My work in the white institutions have made me very popular here. I hope I will keep able to carry on a while" (Sch. 13.1 April 10, 1940). She continued to educate herself by taking classes well into her sixties and was "just bubbling over with ideas from [her] training" (Sch. 13.1 April 10, 1940; 13.2 April 13, 1942). She also took classes to continue her educational development.

She enjoyed a public life just as her daughter. The newspaper documents are cursory in their treatment of her speeches stating only generally what she spoke on: missionary work, her missionary travels to Africa, and the African students attending the missionary school. Nonetheless, what these newspaper articles verify is that in the early twentieth century when Black women rarely had a public voice, there were some such as Etta Bell Graham, who did. She was doing what Patricia Hill Collins said black women in the 1980s began doing in large numbers, "challeng[ing] the legitimacy of public transcripts claiming Black female inferiority" (Collins 51).

Etta's ascent into the public domain however, came at a slower pace than her daughter's. But even situated as she was in the historical time and space when she was a young woman, she helped make possible her daughter's ascent into public life. As Shirley G. McCanns pursued the seemingly unachievable for a black woman in her time, her mother cared for her children. It can probably be argued successfully that Robert and David McCanns had more personal interaction with their Grandmother than between their mother. For all their growing up years, Shirley McCanns was only able to reconstitute her family briefly on two occasions, once while she was living in Chicago and once while she was living in Indianapolis.

Etta Bell Graham worked hard during her life and gave dignity to tasks that were common, ordinary activities. Her organizational skills and focus facilitated her in getting much work completed in little time. She seemed to be an effective multi-tasker, who would dictate a letter while she ironed or cooked. She was comfortable with herself and felt she lived a full and complete life. When she was a married woman, she was satisfied occupying her position in the family. She and Rev. Graham enjoyed a peaceable marriage that lasted forty-one years. When she became a widow, one can imagine that this part of the journey was scary initially, but she continued enjoying a fulfilling life as she continued to lecture and take care of her home. She modeled what some might call a heroic example of both worlds, doing, what many in that day, felt a woman "should," do, operating in the domestic realm, and doing what many of that time felt a woman "shouldn't," navigating in the public realm. Shirley Graham McCanns in many ways followed in the footsteps of her mother, but was able to do more and see further because she was assisted in this process by her parents.

How is it that Etta Bell Graham never became a domestic or laundress of white families like so many other countless black women of her time? How is it that Shirley Graham came to be able to break out of the mold of a life designed to keep black women in a prescribed and menial role? What ingredients gave them an advantage of not having to fall into this normative pattern orchestrated by an exploitative economic system designed to nullify black progress? They were able to use the church as a cocoon, an incubator or sorts, a protector that would cushion them from the attacks of a white supremacist system, while simultaneously using it as a vehicle that allowed them to launch attacks on this unjust system. The church was used as a space where black men and those white men who sought to act in a conciliatory manner could meet on common ground.

CHAPTER 6

FROM OBERLIN TO NASHVILLE: 1931-1935

Being exposed to the black theatrical culture in Washington D. C. and Baltimore fueled Graham McCanns creative energies and altered her focus when she left the area. The musician would now erect a more substantial story around her music. When she left Morgan College to began working on her college degree at Oberlin, she was about to get her first taste of success on a large scale. It is likely that her years spent in the Washington D. C. and Baltimore areas turned her solidly toward play writing. In 1931 at the age of thirty-five she applies for admission to Oberlin.

Her experience far exceeded that of probably any students applying at that time. Newspaper coverage of her musical tours out west, her studies at the Sorbonne, her job as a musical librarian at Howard, her position as Director of Music at Morgan College and coming from a home where activism was a way of life made Shirley Graham McCanns a poster girl for the type of student Oberlin administrators wanted to attract. Graham McCann's life's accomplishments demonstrated initiative, activism and ambition. It is likely that one or more white faculty members at Wilberforce who were Oberlin alumni might have written letters for her or it could have been that some of Rev. Graham's ministerial friends who had attended Oberlin might have written letters of recommendation on her behalf. It is almost certain that Mrs. Marshall and Randolph Edmonds, both Oberlin graduates wrote letters on her behalf. The gem in Graham's possession however, was her musical knowledge and skill in lecturing about the spiritual and demonstrating them before audiences. Andrew Ward states that Oberlin's

College Choir “routinely featured spirituals in their repertoire, saving them for the end of their concerts as if serving up dessert” (405).

Oberlin was the perfect educational institution to foster her growth. The founding of Oberlin College was rooted in an abolitionist legacy which made it an excellent choice for a young woman with Shirley Graham McCann’s background. To what degree her family’s connection with Missionary Societies helped influence her admission is unknown, but her family’s Christian background and leadership in black community circles would certainly have captured the notice of members working on the selection committee. Founded in 1832 Oberlin College “imbue[ed] them [students] with a missionary spirit, and fit them to be instructors and leaders of others,” it ascribed to the principles of thrift, and operated on the premise that “study and labor should be combined, andthat enterprising students could defray all their expenses by their labor, without any detriment to their progress in study” (Shaw 70-71). During Graham McCann’s first year there she worked in a laundry and was housed off campus because she didn’t have the money to live in the dormitory (Sch. 1.1 Jan. 7, 1971). She studied and worked hard to receive an education and was ever mindful of the two young boys living at home with her parents. It can not be determined how much she was able to contribute to their care during these early years, but this setting was conducive to enabling her to contribute to their upbringing and to her receiving a sound educational foundation, and the faculty was liberal enough to allow Graham to pursue research that was somewhat unorthodox during that time.

A number of professors were impressed with her because of her past experiences and specialized musical study at the Sorbonne. One day one of her instructors told her

that “he would like something for Negro students in a public presentation.” Upon hearing this, she looked up a manuscript she had written and presented it to the teacher. The teacher suggested that she let Russell and Rowena Jelliffe of the Gilpin Players of Cleveland read it. They recommended that she reduce the work to fit the theatre stage. Mr. and Mrs. Jelliffe then passed Graham McCanns’ work on to Dr. Ernst Lert and Laurence Higgins “of the stadium productions” in Cleveland and they accepted it for production (Sch. 9.21). So it is while she is still a student at Oberlin that she is thrust into the limelight with her musical opera Tom Tom. Her years of hearing her father preach on spirituals, her personal engagement with lecturing on them, demonstrating them through music, and working with plays during her days at Morgan had all come together to nurture the creation of this play.

Impressed by her musical abilities, and her vision of what she wants to accomplish, officials of the college issue her a grant for study during the summer of 1932 and the president of Oberlin, President Wilkins, recommends her for a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship for her to perform research work on the study of black music. The grant facilitates her in the production of the play Tom Tom and the completion of an article “Black Men’s Music” (Du Bois Collection R 41 F 97). She performs this research and sends Dr. Du Bois a copy of an article that results from this intense period of study. The article appears in the August edition of The Crisis in 1933, a little over a year after her play Tom Tom was produced in Cleveland.

Graham McCanns’ first play, Tom Tom, premiering in June of 1932 comes on the heels of the Harlem Renaissance. The geographical locale was far from the Black Mecca of Harlem, but it debuted at yet another site that could be considered another

Black Mecca -- Cleveland. Kenneth Kusmer in his work, A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930 notes that large numbers of blacks pouring into Cleveland and other Northern urban centers stimulated white prejudice which “fostered a growing sense of unity among Negroes, while a new middle-class interest in African and Afro-American folk traditions helped bridge the cultural gap between the average Negro and the black bourgeoisie” (Kusmer 206). It was to an audience of Black Clevelanders perched and primed for entertainment that the opera debuted.

Tom Tom follows the lives of four archetypal figures, The Voo Doo Man, The Mother, The Girl and The Boy, who move the storyline from Africa through the middle passage to the shores of North America where the Africans undergo acculturation and fuse their traditional African ethos with a developing and ever evolving American ethos which results in new cultural forms, artistic expressions, utterances and musical forms. Perhaps the most significant aspect of Tom Tom is its demonstration of musical forms that can attribute their creation to an African influence. The opera begins with the single stroke on the tom-tom. A chant commences and evolves into various musical forms.

Tom Tom appealed to the widest possible audience. Blacks and whites attended and within these two groups, members from all strata were represented, from the Governor of the state, to high profile personalities on down to the working class constituencies in both groups. And in theatre, audience was always of upper most consideration when producing a play. Graham McCanns had managed to appeal to both black and white audiences, and the various factions within each of these audiences. The appeal however, likely emanated from different aspects of the opera that appealed to her

multi-faceted audience, and this was not necessarily a bad thing for her because she desired for her work to have popular appeal. The driving impetus behind this musical opera was the music -- all kinds of music – from the simple beating of the tom-tom to complicated drum cadences to sorrow songs – jubilee songs, to rag time music and to the blues. Music was the common thread that connected all aspects of the play and because of its centrality, audience members were transported at times into different modes of experience.

To better understand those aspects appealing to the different audiences, it is necessary to view Graham McCann's comprehensive reach in what was covered in this musical opera. It was comprised of three acts. In Act I, she recreates life in Africa during the time when millions of Africans were being sold into slavery. Several of the scenes presented African involvement in the slave trade on stage. This aspect of the play which took a backward glance at a historical event was probably educational to many audience members who had never been exposed to African history either in school or via the media during that day in time. The early scenes in Act I also present an African religious ethos that observed as one of its tenants human sacrifice as a necessary act to appease the angry gods when some misdeed had occurred. While this aspect of the play probably offended the sensibilities of many audience members both black and white who were of the Christian faith, the impending death heightened the tension in the play and made interesting drama. The young girl who is to be sacrificed is never offered up, for Africans active in the slave trade come and ravish the village as the last scene ends. Graham McCann's takes up a problematic aspect of the slave trade, the issue of African involvement in the demise of its own country and people.

Act II opens up with Africans living in the agrarian south during slavery and becoming acculturated to a different way of thinking as their enslavers go about the process of seeing them as chattel. The mother and the Voo Doo man are figures of resistance, determined to be free. The mother is planning on killing her young daughter when she discovers the daughter is going to be sold. The Voo Doo man, determined to stay as closely committed to his African ethos as possible without taking on a newly contrived identity, flees after killing the overseer. The defiance exhibited by these two figures likely appealed to the black audience and by the same token, the historical period of slavery might have conjured up halcyon days of yore for some white audience members. The musical renditions from a spiritual with lyrics such as “Dar is peace in dat lan” to the movement toward a more contemporary piece with lyrics such as “Sometimes I feel like a motherless child” doubtless moved the audience.

Act III opens up in an urban setting, specifically Harlem. The broken dialect utilized by the southern blacks in Act II is replaced in Act III by proper diction being utilized in the city. Although the play was presented in Cleveland, Clevelanders could no doubt easily identify with Harlemites in terms of the urban setting and the social issues the play engages. The transplanted African has experienced a kind of metamorphic transformation into the “Negro,” an American whose roots can be traced back to Africa. Through years of acculturation, the Negro now has opportunity to return back to Africa, but new-fangled cultural beliefs and experiences have caused the Negroes to debate the best path: Should they remain in America or leave for Africa? Can they find a meaningful future in America or Africa?

The issues she engages in this play are 1.) African cultural influences manifesting themselves in the music and dance patterns of African Americans, 2.) the oppression of African Americans under the institution of slavery, 3.) the evolution of a syncretic religious belief system and 4.) the debate surrounding the Garvey Back to Africa movement. The debates concerning the authentic motivations of the proponents of this movement versus those who used it as an opportunity to profit and capitalize off the hard earned monies of sincere enthusiasts represented a social realism on stage that a black urban constituency would identify with.

The Africa Graham presents is one of people respecting the gods of their forefathers and the laws that govern their culture. Some of the pronouncements prescribed by custom might have appeared harsh and “uncivilized” to an American public but Graham includes for example, the human sacrifice to represent a certain reality and truth about some African cultures. Robert Hemingway states in his literary biography of Zora Neale Hurston, that a common Renaissance technique used by black writers during this period was to stress instinctual Africanisms. He says, “the black writer could easily symbolize a racial pride growing from a cultural difference.” Tompkins usually signaled a Harlem Renaissance artists’ attempt to implement or experiment with the exotic-primitive theme. “The theme itself flirts with racist stereotypes of black people as only partially civilized savages whose veneer of civilization slips away at times of stress, but its major purpose is to emphasize cultural difference” (Hemingway 75-76). For Graham McCanns’ *The Elephant*, the jungle scenery, the polyrhythmic percussion and quick stepping dance movements were essential in setting Africa apart from America. She does this as a way to show the

difference and in Graham McCanns' mind African culture was not inferior to American culture. The train tracks, blowing whistles and beeping horns presented in Act III that were a part of the city landscape, were equally important in her conception of an African American identity.

Black Clevelanders flocked to this play, but they were not alone. The Cleveland Plain Dealer reported that Governor George White was in attendance “to witness with 15,000 or more other spectators, the second performance of ‘Tom-Tom,’ Shirley Graham’s ‘epic of music and the Negro race’” (Sch. 9.21 “15,000 Hear Rhythms..”). In addition to the Governor, a number of other high profile whites were a part of the audience to see what was billed as “the first all Negro opera.” The Afro-American devotes a paragraph to listing the names of “opera stars” in attendance. The article continues, “As fast as they arrive, from various parts of the United States, and from Europe, the singers first ask about “Tom-Tom,” and the enthusiasm of their inquiries evinces genuine interest in the revolutionary project” (Sch. 9.21). It was normative for Black pageants to be presented in black settings, but this was advertised as something other than a pageant. This production was a musical opera, and it extended beyond racial boundaries.

One writer of an article covering the play aptly describes this music as “a vocal harmony, utterly unique and colorful in its composition.” From the spiritual, the music evolves into a “harsh atonality” reflective of the jazz sound that breaks the bounds of conventional harmony and rhythm (Sch. 9.20). What was observed and critiqued as an underdeveloped plot or a fragmented story is likely seen this way because of Graham’s attempt to fashion this play into a musical operatic form. On paper Tom Tom doesn’t

seem to flow. It appears to be ineffective drama; however, because it is classified as a musical opera, and it is difficult to reconstruct the drum cadences and tunes Graham used to bring this work to life, it is probably unfair to make a judgment of this work. Dr. Ernst Lert, co-director of the production said in an interview that “nothing but percussion is used at the beginning. With a single stroke on the tom-tom the dramaturgic flood is released” (Sch. 9.20). As the life of the Negro increases with complexities, so does the music of the opera.

Tom Tom and the other plays featured that brief summer season in Cleveland were unorthodox in a number of ways from traditional opera. It was “outdoor opera” and Gertrude Jacob, an observer, noted, “Having food vendors moving up and down the aisles during the performance was in sharp contrast to attending Metropolitan Opera in Cleveland’s Public Auditorium” (Oberlin File). It was untraditional also in the large numbers of people who played a part in the drama. Untrained members of the cast came from the community and were delighted to be a part of a work emphasizing their cultural origins. In the case of Tom Tom a large elephant was brought in as a part of the theatre production. This was theatre of the people, by the people and for the people.

The production of Tom Tom enriched the community in a number of ways. One writer in the Cleveland Plain Dealer observes that “The production of “Tom-Tom is regarded as the greatest opportunity that members of the African race have had to demonstrate their cultural ability.” Community people had an opportunity to play a part in the action of the play, many serving as Africans. “Those who have attended rehearsals come away with glowing reports of the opera and its singer” (Sch. 9.20 “World Fame..”). Over two hundred people from the black community participated in

the production. Other cultural activities were generated from the production of the play. Within the city other institutions had some of their activities to coincide with the cultural production of the play. The Museum of Art held an exhibition of Negro literature and art. “The Playhouse Settlement, under Russell W. Jelliffe, [conducted] a contest for the best full-set designs of masks, costumes, tattoo designs, spear heads, shields and such.” Children and young people especially, were targeted to become involved in activities leading up to the play. Various creations resulting from the personal ingenuity of participants and guidance from Chiakazia Steady, a missionary of Africa, were used in the play, and it appears that some of them were used to make the jungle scenes realistic (Sch. 9.22 “Our Stars..”). The State Association of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People also took an active part in support of the production (Sch. 9.20 “World Fame..”).

The spin-off of activities resulting from the play is a powerful testament to the important cultural work that Graham fostered in the community. The play and the attendant activities accompanying its debut created cultural spaces where black people could gain knowledge about their African roots and a degree of respect for the culture, while being entertained as well. Whites also received an education in African history. Because of Shirley Graham McCanns’ commitment to the survival, uplift and education of her group and her centrality in the creation of this space, historian Darlene Clarke Hines might characterize this activist work as “motherwork,” which is that work “designed to build strong Black identities capable of withstanding the assaults of White supremacist rhetoric” (Collins 223). The educational work that Graham McCanns was engaging in at Oberlin and the work that she had been doing prior to her enrollment at

Oberlin positioned her to be ready to step on stage when the opportunity presented itself, and as a result of this, a number of activities became available to Black Americans in the Cleveland community of which Graham McCanns was instrumental in creating.

Her acclaim resulting from this play spread beyond local borders. The Cleveland Plain Dealer touted Graham McCanns's play as a "Racial Epic, True, Moving," The Cleveland Press stated that it "promises to create a sensation on its world premiere" (Sch. 9.20). The Chicago Defender hailed her as "author of the world's first Race opera" (Sch. 9.21 "'Tom Tom' Big.."). Her Brother Bill was trying to transfer the energy ignited in Ohio to California. After the premiere of Tom Tom, Bill who is living in San Francisco at the time of the play's debut appoints himself her "publicity man" on the "Pacific Coast." He tells her, "The clipping from the Cleveland paper has caused more comment among the Negroes of San Francisco than anything that has happened in a long time." He managed to interest some "important patrons" of theatre in the San Francisco area. Frank N. Belgram and Noel Sullivan were two such persons. He tells Graham McCanns, "Frank N. Belgram of the Bank of America has asked me to secure all the details of the production. Noel Sullivan, millionaire sponsor of the San Francisco Opera Company, is granting me an audience Friday and by Saturday "Tom-Tom" will be the most talked about Opera in San Francisco (Sch. 11.11 July 13, 1932). Noel Sullivan was a well known patron of Black artists like Roland Hayes, Paul Robeson and Langston Hughes. If Bill were successful in impressing Sullivan with his sister's work, the prospects of Tom Tom being produced in San Francisco would have been a wonderful opportunity, but this did not happen. Bill tells Sullivan that he would

like to meet with him to get his “views on the practicability of presenting “Tom-Tom” in San Francisco sometime in the future.” Sullivan did respond, and future plans for Tom Tom were high for a period of time following its debut, but after about a year the prospect of a production on the west coast fell silent (Sch. 11.11). The economic depression in the country was gripping businesses and individuals harder thereby making any successful financial endeavors highly unlikely.

William Graham would function in the role of his sister’s self-appointed publicist for years to come. Is it not likely that the awareness of Rev. Graham’s habit of communicating with his congregation through newsletters throughout his early years in the ministry served as a powerful example to his children in regards to the importance of getting information out to one’s targeted audience? Is it possible to trace Shirley and Bill’s interest in the area of publicity back to Rev. Graham and his desire to begin a publication for the church? Was there not some transference of organizational knowledge and strategies that came into play to help the Graham children project themselves into the public realm?

Graham McCanns didn’t know at this stage of her life that her work would shift from playing music to writing plays. But she transitioned from writing musical compositions, to writing texts for musical scores to writing plays with relative ease. Years later she would explain in an interview with Ann Allen Shockley, Fisk archivist and librarian, the interconnectedness between the craft of writing and musical composition:

I learned how to write, I learned what a symphony was. And I learned how to write, to project the music, the movement, the first movement, the theme, to go into the andante and to come down and probably to introduce another theme and kind

of underneath theme and then how to weave the themes all together into the allegro and then how to pull them all together in the final (Sch. 1.2).

Graham McCanns' musical gift is the foundation upon which she would begin her debut on the world's stage. She was likely not aware at this time in her life that she would be remembered more for writing than for music. At this early phase of her life, from childhood to her years at Oberlin, she conceived of herself as a musicologist of Negro Music. She had shared with Dr. Du Bois her lofty goal of creating within a black college setting a Music History Department, offering courses in "the history, understanding and development not only of Music but of Painting, Sculpturing, Architecture and the Minor Arts" (Du Bois Collection R 42 F 321). She felt that "upon the background of History, the relation of these arts one to the other should be shown" (ibid). In this way black students of music would be able to exit college with a comprehensive knowledge of music and the other arts and they would understand the interrelated nature of different artistic forms and movements. By the time they exited college with a major in music, they would be equipped with more than the ability to sing and play. Her three years at Morgan likely made her see the need for this. But this is not the path that her life would take. With the passage of time, music would gradually take a back seat to her writing and speaking abilities, and although music had been her main tool of activism in her early life, the power of the written word would become her sharpest instrument of activism in later life.

Her thesis, "The Survival of Africanism[s] in Modern Music" was a challenging piece of scholarship in its day and perhaps by today's standards as well, for what Graham McCanns was theorizing was at odds with racists doctrines of the day that

directly stated and many times implied that nothing of intellectual value could come out of a backward and uncivilized continent and people. Notions of African backwardness were pervasive within the academy. Scientific theories produced in the academy were used to support the racist doctrines used in the United States and abroad to further establish and maintain a caste system within the country and unequal growth of indigenous populations throughout the world. Historian David L. Lewis states that “In late-1930s America, the proposition that Africans had been serious contenders in the making of history was scarcely credible” (The Fight 455). Graham McCann’s thesis went far in countering some of the fallacious theories posited within the academy in relation to her subject area. First she tackles how historians in the past discredited earlier writings that should have been used as valid sources regarding African music and its influence on other cultures. She states, “Historians discredited earlier writings by many Greeks and Latins, because they did not draw sharp distinctions in race” (“The Survival” 5). Using in her thesis a quote from Negroes of Africa by Maurise Delafosse she demonstrates instances of dismissiveness. He writes:

The names of the countries, localities and peoples are generally difficult to identify and when they are examined impartially it is found that they all refer to countries, localities and peoples to North Africa and not to Negro Africa. When, by chance, geographical or ethnical information seems to refer to the Negroes or to their country, it is drawn in an amalgam of impossibilities or obscurities from which it is extremely difficult to obtain light (qtd. by Delafosse in “The Survival” 5).

She counters this position by stating, “It is feared that the ‘impossibilities or obscurities’ were caused because these accounts frequently did not fit into the mold which had been created for the African Negro and therefore these ancient histories were

thrown aside” (5). She further gives support to substantiate why it is unlikely that European scholars were ignorant of sub Saharan Africa.

Graham McCanns’ M. A. thesis argues that European music was influenced by African music. She theorizes that European music borrowed African elements, specifically the polyphonic rhythms so commonly occurring in African music. She quotes German musicologist, Alfred Friedenthal to support this by stating, “the melody of the Habanera came out of Middle or Southern Spain, and the rhythm which accompanies it had its origin in Africa. We therefore have, in a way, the union of Spanish spirit and African technique” (28). Friedenthal further stated that in those areas where African Negroes “have been most numerous represented – in the Antilles, on the shores of the Caribbean Sea and in Brazil” traces of their influence is evident. However, in areas “where Negro has never been – in the interior of Mexico, in Argentina in Chili, and the Cordilleran highlands – nothing of influence is observed” (28-29).

She asserts that the African influence enters European culture through trade between the countries and makes headway into European culture through the lowest socioeconomic group. “It is out of Spain and the southern part of France that, in the 10th and 11th century came the Troubadours” (29). She uses as a source a “modern Arabian writer” Ameer Ali to establish that “Whilst Africa was enjoying the blessings of toleration and justice, and was advancing with rapid strides in the path of material prosperity under the Moslem rule, the neighboring peninsula of Spain groaned under the iron heel of the Goth” (25). It is because of this “Gothic and ecclesiastical oppression” that many Spaniards sought refuge in Moslem Africa. Graham McCanns in a somewhat

sketchy and at times convoluted way delineates the path by which the African influence is made and is able to establish a highly plausible argument.

Graham McCanns goes back to a time before European invasion, and before interaction between Europe and Africa turned toxic. She journeys to a remote past and uses the sources of Arabian historians and travelers such as El Bekri, El Jdrisi, Ibu Khalduhn, Ibu Batuta and Leo Africanus to fill in the contours of a historical past relatively unknown or dismissed by Eurocentric minded scholars. She also uses sources from people she refers to as “Negro historians,” such as Mohaman Koti, Anhmed Baba and Abderrakman es Sa’d. Graham McCanns’ inference that European music could thank Africa for contributing to its music was bordering on heresy. She then uses a predominance of Arabic scholars for sources, by-passing American and European scholars as central authorities to support her argument. Her selection of scholars was based upon their expertise in this area. She then demonstrates by discussing rhythms and chordal changes the shifts and rhythms that distinguish the African elements of the music. Her discussion is involved, sophisticated and accessible to musicians and musicologists who have specialized knowledge in this discipline but difficult for a layman to understand.

Graham McCanns’ time at Oberlin provided her with a nurturing environment where she could blossom academically. Her committee gave her leeway in developing her thesis and she consulted Dr. Du Bois on a number of occasions asking him to inform her of authorities and sources that he deemed helpful in this enterprise. She sent an outline of her thesis to him and would years later tell Ann Allen Shockley in an interview that she knew that “if he thought it was all right that it would pass muster at

Oberlin” (Sch. 1.2). She admits that her committee knew nothing of this scholarship and wanted to learn something about the survival of Africanisms in modern music. What she presented to her committee was scholarship venturing into heretofore rarely explored terrain. The scholarship she presented was in the same vein as her life long desire to discover and recover an African historical past.

Oberlin became a passageway to opportunity. Even before earning her Oberlin credentials, the doorway had been opened for her to work with others who had attended this prestigious college and to meet people with the same interest. This was the case with Hattie Gibbs Marshall, founder of a music conservatory school in Washington D. C. An article dated July 15, 1934 in The Washington Post corrects the false statement printed in “the daily press” about “Miss Graham” being given a permanent appointment to the faculty of the Washington Conservatory of Music and School of Expression. The article noted that she was appointed to teach the summer session. Mrs. Marshall offered her a permanent position, but in a letter she had to refuse the offer at the time because she told Mrs. Marshall that she must prepare herself to be of service to the race. She said, “Should I stop now, I should be like most of our Negro musicians. We do not have in our race a thoroughly trained musica[o]logist, one who speaks with authority, whose word must be accepted. If the Negro is to attain his place in music [,] we must have such leaders” (Washington Conservatory Papers Aug. 6, 1933).

Rowena and Russell Jelliffe were two other Oberlin alumni who fostered Graham McCanns career. Rowena Woodham and Russell Jelliffe graduated from Oberlin in 1914, attended the University of Chicago and received their mater’s degrees in sociology in 1915 and married that same year. They founded The Playhouse

Settlement in 1915 which was an interracial settlement home and a performing arts theatre combined. The Playhouse Settlement would later be renamed Karamu House by the early 1940s. The term “Karamu” is a Swahili word meaning “place of joyful meeting or gathering.” It is through this theatrical company that Tom Tom was passed to Laurence Higgins of stadium productions. It is through the Jelliffe’s that Graham McCanns made the acquaintance of Dr. Ernst Lert who would be important in giving her guidance in developing and reworking Tom Tom, and it is through The Gilpin Players, the theatrical troupe at Karamu house, that a number of Graham’s plays would come to the stage.

Rev. Robert A. Moody became another such acquaintance as Mrs. Marshall and the Jelliffe’s, although he was not an Oberlin alumnus. Moody was a young black minister who had written his theological thesis on a very similar subject as Graham McCanns. She had used him as a source in her work. He would assist her by providing his church in Hartford, Connecticut, Shiloh Baptist Church, as a place where she could hold musical programs. Later, in her days a field worker for the NAACP, they would partner up again for membership campaigns. This relationship that would span across the years helped her further expand her reach into influencing the lives of more members of her race.

Graham McCanns earned her educational credentials during the Great Depression which required her to work wherever she could to support her children and complete her studies. Even at this difficult juncture, she continued to serve as a cultural agent. During the year of 1934 she, along with Bernard Lee Mason paired up to perform a number of recitals beginning during the spring of the year in the Northeast

and along the Eastern corridor. These recitals continued throughout the year and took them to places like Pittsburgh, Wilberforce, Baltimore, Washington, New York and Hartford (Washington Conservatory Papers Feb. 22, 1934, March 16, 1934, April 18, 1934). As they would perform, they would get more requests to appear in other locations, in this way gaining a wider audience base and garnering the respect and attention of black communities across the nation.

In terms of the ways in which black people traveling across the United States networked for lodging, friendship and safety of members of the race, Stephanie Shaw observes in her work, What a Woman Ought to Be and To Do, that “because of the process of community, it was not always necessary to know people personally; the community functioned in such a manner that it was often enough simply to know someone who knew someone else” (Shaw 53). One can imagine that Graham McCanns affiliation with the AME network made her better connected than the average African American traveling during that time.

At this time in her life, she is setting her sights on working in the east. She has told Miss Ovington to “broadcast the fact that I [am] looking for a summer job” (Washington Conservatory Papers April 18, 1934). Her sense of urgency for representing the race or being a leader is seen in many of her actions but it can also be heard in her thoughts recorded in her correspondence. She tells Mrs. Marshall, “I must be about the work which is so much needed to be done. Negroes in New York are letting so many valuable opportunities slip by them. We do get tired so easily” (ibid). By May of the year she writes Mrs. Marshall seeking summer employment, but she is also trying to coax her into expanding her school, and tells her the following: “It seems

to me that your plan of building up a great center for Negro Art expression ought to be put before the public...if we could centralize the idea in one place I believe very worthwhile results could be obtained” (Washington Conservatory Papers May 24, 1934).

Although Graham McCanns had exhibited professionalism during the time she toured with her choir and during the time she taught at Morgan College, her graduation in June of 1934 endowed her with valid credentials to back up that professionalism. People who worked with her saw her desire for perfection and the proper handling of business matters. At some point it is decided that she will work during the summer months with Mrs. Marshall, and it is here that Mrs. Marshall is able to become fully aware of what can be characterized as Graham McCann’s attention to detail and aggressive, take charge manner when committing to an endeavor. She writes Mrs. Marshall a detailed letter instructing her on the best way to advertise the summer session:

I should like to come to you and teach classes in Music History and Theory. Also I should like to build up a large evening class for adults in Art Appreciation. Make the fee for this last class very reasonable and stress its general cultural and educational value. I believe with the proper push and advertising this project ought to be successful.... If you will get behind this with everything you’ve got we ought to make a real impression (Washington Conservatory Papers June 7, 1934).

Graham follows this letter up with another letter advising Mrs. Marshall that they must use “the American present-day method of careful advertising” (Washington Conservatory Papers June 16, 1934). She was ever pressing forward in trying to enlighten the public and in pursuit of establishing a reputation for herself.

Realizing that she could earn a graduate degree in a relatively brief time, Graham continued at Oberlin for the next year. By spring of 1935 she graduated from Oberlin with her M. A. and then accepted a job at Tennessee A & I State College. Now that she had earned two degrees and was earning a living wage, she believed that she could gradually bring her family together in one household. During the summer she makes plans for the next academic year, and cautiously begins the process of reconstituting her family. She is sure that this year it would be better for Robert to remain in the north, and has made arrangements for him to live with a good family in Oberlin, the Barnes. Robert leaves his grandparents in Kokomo and moves to Oberlin. His grades the previous spring had been disappointing. He had earned a "D" in Arithmetic an "F" in Music and an "A" in writing (Sch. 12. 5-7 March 7, 1935). His frequent correspondence in writing via mail with his mother was turning Robert into a good writing student, but this writing regimen did not transfere into other areas of education such as in physiology, arithmetic and music. After settling Robert into life in Oberlin with the Barnes, she prepares to get Graham ready to accompany her to Tennessee.

As Graham anticipates her next move, she stumbles upon a hidden behavior of Graham's that has developed in her absence. This discovery added to the guilt that she had from being away from them for such long periods of time, but now she had finally reached a point where the distance was coming to an end. She expresses the pain she feels to Robert and solicits his help in getting David back on the right path. First she shares the secret. She tells Robert that she sent Graham away to mail letter. While he

is gone, she remembers that another card needs to be mailed so instead waiting for him to return, she ventures off to mail it, and much to her chargin discovers the following:

It was just after dark. I expected to meet Graham every minute and wondered why he was so long. Well just as I turned into that lot by the railroad I met him and Billy Fierce. I didn't recongnize them at first. What I saw was two little boys coming across the lot – smoking. When I saw it was Graham I nearly fainted (Sch. 12. 5-7 Sept.20, 1935)!

Graham McCanns uses her letter in two ways. She appeals to the older son to use his influence to alter his younger brother's behavior by telling him the detrimental effects of smoking. Simultaneously she is sending this same message to Robert -- smoking will ruin all the plans that she has for them.

Nashville was a place that she fondly remembered from her youth, but the south was not the first place she thought of when thinking about educating her children. She left Kokomo by train on Saturday, September 21, 1935 in route to Nashville with an excited ten year old Graham in tow (Sch. 12.5-7 Sept. 18, 1935). It was not long before she realized her mistake. By Thanksgiving Graham has faced the grim reality that Nashville is not the place where her son can receive the type of education she desires for him, and when she returns home to Indiana for Thanksgiving, she gets him situated with Robert in the Barnes' home in Oberlin where he begins taking violin lessons (Sch. 12.5-7 Dec. 10, 1935).

Her tenure at this college was fraught with difficulties. After an utterly exasperating year at Tennessee A & I, Graham was looking for a better working situation. She still had a job at Tennessee A & I, but found this unpalatable. With her credentials, she was a great asset to the college, but she knew there were better

opportunities that she could aspire to based on her qualifications. This was the era of the depression, yet even during a time when the average American worker would consider it reckless to entertain the idea of looking for another job, Graham McCanns, entertained the idea. What supreme confidence she had to possess to consider making a difference in her occupational situation. She had written Du Bois two months into the job complaining about the “difficulties,” and telling him, “I am stifling, I am strangling” (Du Bois Collection R 44 F 177). The work load, large numbers of students, the teaching level at which she was expected to perform were at variance with what she had imagined before coming to the job. She had welcomed this job as an opportunity to build a “Music History” department at a black college, but there were too many adverse factors leading to her discontented state. The school was not up to par with what she was expecting, the students perhaps too far below the level of teaching that she had expected, and one letter discussed the great numbers of them scrambling during meal times to be served (ibid). No doubt Graham’s experiences in places like Colorado Springs, the Seattle area and Oberlin had given her a taste of conveniences that were sorely lacking at this black college in the south.

A trip to Chicago after the 1935-1936 school year would change the direction of her life. After hearing that Chicago’s Black Unit of FTP was threatening to be disbanded, she made a visit to administrators and talked herself into a job. Her engagement with The Federal Theatre Project would usher her into a career where she could soar and utilize her talents in a manner that gave her fulfillment.

CHAPTER 7

CHICAGO: GRAHAM'S FEDERAL THEATRE PROJECT DAYS 1935-1938

The Chicago phase of Shirley Graham McCanns' life represents a time of great success domestically and professionally. She had been working to reach a time like this when she could, for the first time in her life since the birth of her children, be able to reconstitute her family. She was able to do this, albeit briefly. After more than a decade of living apart, the three Graham McCanns – Shirley, Robert and David are now living under one roof. Her sons are adolescent boys and settle into school in Chicago while their mother prepares to lead the black theatre unit of the Federal Theatre Project. After Shirley McCanns graduated from Oberlin, she had switched back from using the name McCanns and had started using her maiden last name professionally. The family settles down to live in a cozy apartment in the city of Chicago together.

The Federal Theatre was designed to create a federation of theatres. It was an attempt to decentralize national theatre. Instead of New York being the dominant site of theatrical production for the country, “each region could develop its own drama in its own pattern” (Flanagan 22). Theatrical productions were to take place all across the country. The plan called for five great regional theatre districts: “New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, possibly Boston, possibly New Orleans, each one a production center for a professional company” (21). This idea differed from the European notion of Federal theatre where a “group of artists were chosen to represent the government” (23). This design was open to being inclusive of all of the nation's people, and it was theatre “subsidized by the federal government” (21).

One of the Federal Theatre's missions was to present "plays that were not mere entertainments but artworks relevant to the social and political problems of the day" (Brustein xii). Plays were to be based on real life controversies. So plays such as Spirochete, a drama tracing the history of syphilis, the most deadly of social diseases at the time were brought to audiences. The play dramatized the spread of the disease over the earth and recounts the "unremitting battles of scientists to isolate the germ" (Flanagan 144). Debates within the medical profession about the best way to tackle the spread of the disease, the implementation of new legislation requiring "mandatory blood tests for expectant mothers and marriage applicants" and the perceptions of the disease being one that was "ghettoized among perverts and Negroes," made the staging of this play controversial (Witham 114).

Big White Fog, one of the few plays written by a black playwright, was another socially realistic drama that was highly controversial. The plot of Big White Fog shows a black working class family striving to improve its condition and enter the ranks of the middle class but the strictures of racism and those aspects of a capitalist system that reward big business and adversely impact the little man thwarted their progress. Probably the most controversial aspects of this play that brought its production to premature close were the following features: "...an interracial coalition seems to provide hope for poor people and an alternative to sheriffs' guns. But in the course of the play's production, a divided white and black community made coalition seem close to impossible" (Fraden 120). Ward's belief that interracial solidarity could overcome racial hatred instead, heightened fears rather than allayed them. Communism was alive and strong in Russia and any kind of suggestion that groups unite or the masses work

together to change institutional systems was frowned upon by the elite. The wealthy and those in power, in most cases people who were one in the same, had to ensure stratification within American society to maintain their privilege.

Spirochete and Big White Fog are examples of how inflammatory social realism presented on stage could be, and even with all of the FTP rhetoric of desiring controversial plays, pressures from outside the organization always threatened to undermine this policy. In addition to outside pressure, it must be remembered that FTP was a microcosm of the larger American society, so play readers, directors, actors, set designers, and all FTP personnel brought to their positions their personal biases. When plays were too controversial they ran the risk of being pulled at any time, even right before a play was to be staged. Also, the rhetoric of inclusiveness that the FTP touted to the public went a long way in helping its detractors speak against it until its ultimate demise.

Many of the concepts of the FTP shared similarities with Du Bois' ideology concerning requirements for theatre for the black community, such as the plays should be "about us", "by us" and "for us" ("Krigwa Little Theatre Movement" 134). But a look at some of the works that were staged during Graham's tenure as head of the black Chicago unit reveal that oftentimes the plays were not "by us" --- that is the plays for the black units were not written by blacks, and it is debatable if they were "for us," as is observed later. Yet the history of American theatre almost dictated that the plays would be "about us" since blacks have had a central position in American theatre, but the distinction was most ignoble, for blacks served in stereotypical roles for the amusement of white audiences as the butt of jokes.

From most accounts, Flanagan genuinely desired for Negro units to be successful in staging theatrical productions that were popular with their audiences, but the audiences were interracial and what was humorous to one portion of the audience might not have been humorous to the other portion. This contention would prove to tear away at the strength of the project. What was realism to some people was stereotypical to others, what was authentic to some was inauthentic to others. So many aspects had to be considered.

The concept behind Federal Theatre was revolutionary. Here was theatre for the great masses of people, not theatre for a special few, the rich and privileged. Its function was to “extend the boundaries of theatre-going, to create a vigorous new audience, to make the theatre of value to more people (Flanagan 43),” and by a number of accounts it did just that. The price for a movie was in line with the price to attend a play. The affordability factor made this type of entertainment more accessible to blacks. It is perhaps because of the notion of art being something all people could enjoy and benefit from that the FTP would suffer from strangulation and defeat after only four years. Almost from the beginning of its implementation, it was plagued by rumors of subversion, of communist affiliations and of a lack of ability and skill on the part of the workers who made up all aspects of this endeavor. Insidious rumors were hurled at this program because of its attempt to blur distinctions between classes and break down some of the barriers between the races, such as encouraging both races to attend the theatre together.

Another factor influencing its demise was concerned with the operational aspect of how the institution was run. The Federal Theatre was subject to the dictates of its

parent organization, The Works Progress Administration, (WPA) and as such, was limited in its ability to function without going through a lot of red tape in order to run the business of Federal Theatre. The distribution of government funds, the juggle between selecting the people who were “‘right for the part’ and those who were qualified for relief,” the costs of essential items needing to be raised at the local level instead of coming from the parent organization were all logistical problems that required solving (Witham 4).

But even with all of these problems, the success of many of the plays was phenomenal. Barry Witham, Professor at the University of Washington’s School of Drama observes in the introduction of his work The Federal Theatre Project that, “The Federal Theatre did not fail. It was stopped” (Witham 4). The fear of how successful this venture could become was likely to blame for its undoing. For the first time during the course of this nation, theatre ran counter to the status quo. Issues of race, class and politics were subverted. One example that demonstrates why the House of Un-American activity was concerned about Federal Theatre can be gleaned from one of Graham’s letters to Du Bois. After returning from a summer session at Vassar, she tells him that the “Negro group” would no longer be limited to the Princess Theatre. “We have three down-town theatres and a rehearsal hall. Each group is supposed to begin its rehearsals in this hall and when production is ready to move in[,] any one of the theatres which is considered best for that particular production [can be used]” (Du Bois Collection R 47 F 511). As is seen by this example, the philosophy behind the operation of this institution allowed for the easing of racial barriers and an aspiration towards equalitarian ideals.

The end of the Federal Theatre Project was a great loss to the great masses of the American population, but during its existence, it created opportunities for theatrical professionals of all sorts to get paid to work at their craft: playwrights, seamstresses, costume designers, stage builders, pit musicians, conductors, educational directors, etc. It created spaces where people who had never experienced theatre before were able to be entertained in this manner. FTP re-imagined the way that theatre was produced in this country and the black female playwright, Shirley Graham whose name has so often been neglected in scholarship examining pioneering black female playwrights, was centrally positioned in Chicago Federal Theatre history.

It was fortunate for Graham that the U. S. government had instituted New Deal legislation that allowed for out of work theatre artists to be paid wages by the Federal government for working in their chosen profession. “Between 1935 and 1939 the United States provided more than 45 million dollars to pay salaries of actors, directors, designers, technicians and others so they could produce plays” (Witham 1). Graham was not “out of work” and would not have qualified for relief work, in fact, she was at the top of her game professionally. Here she was in 1936 leaving a teaching job, not because she had to but because she chose to, and accepting a position as Director with the Federal Theatre.

But a change in employment was a welcomed relief. One of the requirements for eligibility for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) payroll was that one had to qualify for unemployment; however, “supervisory personnel were ordinarily not eligible for welfare. Directors, designers, lead technicians and others who were required to make the productions happen often used up the quota of nonrelief

personnel” (68). Graham fit in the category of non-relief personnel, and was able to get this job based upon her years of experience in the area of what could loosely be considered theatrical work. For years she had toured the country with musical groups she developed. Her groups sang spirituals and performed musical adaptations of other songs. Many times Graham interspersed these musical events with lectures, but directing a theatrical production was different. She had worked at Morgan College with Randolph Edmonds, a playwright of note and with him had successfully accompanied him as a musician presiding over the musical aspects of the play. They had put on a number of plays, including at least one of Willis Richardson’s plays. She had studied at the Sorbonne, had earned two degrees from Oberlin and the gem in her crown was the writing and successful production of her play Tom Tom. Prior to this time she had not written any other plays, but through the years Graham had demonstrated her ability to lead and direct groups of people and this was an element sorely needed with Chicago’s black unit.

Years removed from her FTP days Graham Du Bois shared with Ann Allen Shockley in an interview just how she acquired the Directorship of Chicago’s Black Unit. She shared that during the summer when she visited Chicago in 1936, the FTP in that region was getting ready to disband the Negro Unit because “they hadn’t been able to do anything” (Sch. 1.1). At first Marie Merrill, a white woman had led this unit. When she left, Charles DeSheim, a Jewish man took the helm, but contestations of all sorts interfered with the ability of this unit to proceed successfully (Fraden 111). The racial dynamics within theatre culture and the intra-racial rift between West Indians and U. S. African Americans within the black unit made this new enterprise that the FTP

was setting out to accomplish -- and particularly the job Graham was getting ready to tackle ---- all the more fraught with difficulties. Graham Du Bois elaborates on her conversation with FTP officials:

...in a burst of indignation, I went down and talked to the director of the Chicago Federal Theatre and told them they didn't know what they were doing. That these people were the most talented and most gifted of anybody that they could possibly have in the Federal Theatre and they evidently just didn't know how to handle the situation (Sch. 1.1).

This interview reveals an essentialistic and somewhat racist view that Graham held at the time and that was the opinion that all black people were inherently gifted with the ability to sing, dance and act. She suggested this on other occasions as well. During her interview however, her conversation with the FTP officials in concert with Flanagan's directives to bring into existence a new kind of theatre, "to revitalize the classics, to experiment with acting techniques, and to pay attention to local concerns (Fraden 33)" was enough to convince the Chicago authorities of FTP that it was in their best interest to hire her so that she could help save this unit.

In a number of ways, Negro units had an ally at the headquarters of FTP. Flanagan was greatly influenced by the noncommercial movement and had a great deal of experience with putting on plays in university and community settings. She also was genuinely desirous of seeing the Negro units succeed (Fraden 33). Graham insinuates in this interview however, that the regional people who hired her were not altogether sure that she could make this unit work together or viable, so if this black unit failed, it would be better to let them perish with a black person at the helm rather than a white person. After getting the job, Graham told members of the Negro unit about their

tenuous standing and told them it was time to get down to business (Sch. 1.1). As if needing to validate the black unit's existence, she tells Shockley that it was this Chicago Negro unit "that attracted more attention than any other unit of the Federal Theatre." Also she shares that it was this unit that finally took the Swing Mikado to Broadway (Sch. 1.1).

Rena Fraden notes in Blueprints for a Black Federal Theatre 1935-1939 that Chicago had a long, rich and thriving black theatrical community as well as a black community full of vitality with "hundreds of organizations to which people belonged on the south Side" that could rival New York's black community. What Graham might not have realized at this early point in time was the extent to which this unit had been plagued with contestations. She would soon discover however that her ideas of appropriate theatre would sometimes be at variance with some people who came under her direction. Fraden suggests that it was understandable that the Chicago Unit would have a tempestuous history because of the varying types of theatrical groups that made up this one unit: vaudeville, opera, drama, and various political artist-activists groups (Fraden 111). Actors working in certain types of theatre felt their brand of theatre was superior over other types. Because audiences responded more positively to theatre that entertained over theatre that agitated toward change, vaudevillians valued their abilities over that of actors who performed serious drama. Likewise, actors performing serious drama deemed their skills more valuable than vaudevillians.

When Graham came to the FTP, it doesn't appear that she consciously took this job with the intent to become a playwright. It appears the playwriting aspect presented itself as she discovered the dearth, if not absence of performable scripts for blacks. The

job of playwrights, especially black playwrights was difficult due to all the considerations that had to be factored into how plays would be perceived by audiences. “The dichotomy between what the people ‘wanted’ – entertainment – and what the socially committed playwright wished to give them – problem plays – haunted discussions about productions throughout the FTP” (126). By looking at Graham’s career with FTP, it is easy to understand why she would take up the charge to write plays. The one play that she personally directed at the FTP, entertained audiences but fell short of being a play that presented controversial issues that provoked the kind of self reflection that might prod one to change.

Graham had her finger on the pulse of three African American critics of the day: W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke and Charles Johnson. Of the three Du Bois was her closest confidant. She maintained contact with them, sharing her most recent work with them for a critique. With their ideologies in mind and ideas of her own, she struggled to bring to the stage black characters representative of a range of black realities. Rena Fraden in Blueprints for a Black Federal Theatre 1935-1939 notes that the theatre was seen as a site where the creation of a “new Identity, a Negro, or black, or African, or African American, or American identity of resistance and pride” could be formed. “Black cultural critics turned their attention to the theatre...as a crucible for a new nationalism, a new Negro national theatre, ‘about, by for and near’ them” (xv). It was a site that could be used to reshape the relationship between black and white America. Commercial theatre had confined blacks to certain cultural roles, but the non-commercial theatre became an alternative site. Uplift could be packaged in popular forms (Fraden 49). The community and university theatres that had been used by black

playwrights to present their work had precluded them from reaching larger audiences and getting their ideas across communities beyond their own. So Shirley Graham's leadership position at the helm of Chicago's black unit was viewed with optimism by Du Bois and Johnson although it is not evident how Locke felt.

Early on it appeared that the Federal Theatre Project, because of the concept behind its inception, would be a place where black theatre could take hold in the country and appeal to a large audience of people. By many accounts, the plays the FTP black units across the country put on were highly successful, but when examining most of the plays that Graham's unit was constrained to perform, it becomes apparent that the plays written by black playwrights were still not getting to or making it through the play reading department of the FTP. Jasmin L. Lambert in her dissertation, "Resisting the 'Hottentot' Body: Themes of Sexuality and Femininity in Select Plays by Female Playwrights From the Harlem Renaissance" notes that Georgia Douglass Johnson submitted six plays to the FTP with hopes that at least one would come to production, but none of her plays were ever produced through the FTP. Lambert says, "Her plays reflect her abhorrence of lynching, discrimination, and sexism, amongst other social and political issues" (125). Four of the plays she submitted were anti-lynching plays: A Sunday Morning in the South (versions I and II) Safe, and Black-Eyed Black Boy (125). These plays certainly would have met the criteria of being controversial, and it is almost guaranteed that the reason they were never selected was because the content would have provoked strong reactions from all involved: the play readers, the actors and the audience. The other two of her plays fell into the category of historical dramas. They were titled Frederick Douglass and William Ellen Craft. Most of what was

written about black life was written by white playwrights and lacked what many would say was a certain authenticity. It was while Graham was working with the FTP that she saw even more, the need for plays written by blacks.

The separate status of the black unit was designed in part out of observance of the social codes of the day but also they were in place to allow the black units a certain degree of autonomy, but what ultimately happened was that many times the outstanding work they did was sabotaged in some way. Black playwrights rarely found their plays selected by the playwriting division and on the rare occasion when one was chosen, if it made it to production, it might be forced to close early because of some controversy surrounding it. The reasons were nearly always the same —it might incite a riot, or it might not appeal to a broad audience. The nature of black life in America almost ensured that black playwrights would not have an open reception in the theatre if they wrote about those aspects of life that consumed their thoughts.

It was during Graham's two years working with FTP from the late summer of 1936 until August of 1938 that she amassed great skill in the craft of theatrical production (Du Bois Collection R 48 F 1087). In her role as Director of Chicago's black unit, she demonstrated good executive ability and oversaw a range of specialty areas. She learned costume and scenery design, and set construction. She had to preside over electrical and technical crews, yet her forte lay in the area of music composition. She conducted classes in play acting and play reading (Du Bois Collection R47 F 511). She even learned how to scout out audiences and evaluate how the community might receive a play. She gained experience by having to coordinate the various work crews, and being in the company of great numbers of professional and

amateur theatre people had to have some beneficiary effects. She was exposed to a range of different possibilities in theatre. She was familiar with pageants, but at this juncture she was exposed to other dramatic techniques: drama taking place in aisles, radio production, and when working with children's theatre, learning to work with puppets.

Graham worked on a number of projects and plays during her tenure as director of the Chicago Black unit. From the early months of 1937 to 1939, Chicago's black unit staged four plays: Mississippi Rainbow, Big White Fog, Little Black Sambo and The Swing Mikado. During the early months of 1937 the unit was working on staging Mississippi Rainbow which was set to open at the Princess Theatre in March of 1937. The Princess Theatre had been the permanent headquarters of the Negro group, but changes in FTP practices occurring during the summer of 1937 made it so that the black unit was no longer relegated to using only this theatre. By April 7th of 1938 Big White Fog was staged and played until May 30th of 1938. Little Black Sambo was staged from August 29th 1938 to June 30th of 1939. The Swing Mikado ran from September 25th 1938 to February 25th 1939. By the time The Swing Mikado came to the stage, Graham had already left the FTP in Chicago and was in school at Yale, but she helped get this play ready during its rehearsals long before its staging (Du Bois Collection R 48 F 1091). She did not direct all these plays, but presided over different aspects of certain plays.

John C. Brownell directed Mississippi Rainbow, one of the first plays produced by the Chicago black unit under Graham's supervision. Graham's involvement with the play reveals some of her administrative roles as Director over this unit. She was to

advertise the play, stimulate interest in it and scout out an audience. When it was due to be staged, Graham sent out letters to leaders in the black community trying to drum up enthusiasm for the play. After expounding on the opportunities made available to the black community through the FTP she attempts to convince the recipients of her letter of the positive implications of the upcoming play. Graham stresses the symbolic implications of the rainbow and its possibilities for the future. She then asks the recipients of the letter the following:

Can't you picture that deep, wide muddy river turning all crimson gold beneath the bow of promise?" Doesn't it mean something to you? We searched the country for a play which would bring just the quality of this comedy-drama- a play of hope and happiness woven in the colors of rich emotions and human understanding (Du Bois Collection R 47 F 495).

She encourages members of the black community to come out and see this play that she tells them will be presented in *their* theatre. She ends her letter by saying the play will "send you away with a smile on your lips and an IDEA in your HEAD" (R 47 F 495).

Her letter demonstrates her ability to advertise her product and shows her interest in cultivating an educated audience. She had learned early the importance of the audience to the success or death of a play. This letter allows her to not only advertise the play but develop a connection with the potential audience. As director of the black unit she worked to make this play a success and was given the opportunity to use her musical skills by writing the lyrics for the main song to be used in the play.

Mississippi Rainbow was a success with theatre goers. Her correspondence to Du Bois states that the first week of performance, people were turned away from the Great Northern Theatre which seated fourteen hundred people (Du Bois Collection R 48

F 1089 Sept. 8, 1938). An article titled, “Mrs. Joe Louis Entertains Theater Cast,” stated that cast and staff of the Negro unit of FTP were guests of Mrs. Marva Louis. Pictured are Mrs. Marva Lewis with the Negro unit. Shirley Graham, Theodore Ward and Thomas Poston are among the group who are touted to be in their “eight week” run at the Princess Theatre with the staging of Mississippi Rainbow (Sch. 9 25 “Mrs. Joe”). It is unclear if the production was moved back to the Princess Theatre because of the high turn-out.

Graham was in close contact with Du Bois and his excitement about her position as Director of the Chicago Black unit is evidenced by his sending her two of his plays for critique. Perhaps also he was hoping she could use her influence to expose his work to the play reader division and by extension, a larger audience. So confident was she in her growing knowledge of playwriting techniques that the mentee switches roles with her mentor, albeit briefly, and uses this opportunity to critique two of Dr. Du Bois’s plays, Seven Up and Black Man. After Graham had kept them for a while, Du Bois requested that she return them, and she does so with her critique. In her letter she suggests that they are incomplete and need some re-working. Demonstrating her oneness with the FTP institution and assuming the appropriate posture for her position, Graham tells him, “Please forgive us for not returning these plays sooner. I am so glad you are planning to build them up for use.” She continues her critique by saying, “If I may criticize them from the viewpoint of commercial theatre, I should say: “Seven-Up”... is too short for a full evening...you move too quickly from one important scene to another thus sacrificing atmosphere and characterization.” Of his play Black Man she says that although it’s a “beautiful and moving piece of literature” its “highly

artistic” form would appeal to a limited audience, one who has “a developed sense of aesthetic values” (Du Bois Collection R 47 F 516). What some might observe as Graham’s talented tenth elitist tendencies can be observed in this correspondence.

During the summer of 1937, Graham shares with Du Bois that the National Federal Theatre has given her a Rockefeller grant to study at Vassar during the summer session (Du Bois Collection R47 F 503). It was during this time that her duties expanded when she became a member of the National Planning Board for the FTP. Graham was honored at being given the task of locating a place where a conference could be held for all the black units of the FTP. She pens another letter to Du Bois, appearing to be heady off her success in being awarded this special assignment and writes, “As sole representative of thirteen million dark skinned artist[s], I must immediately have certain information. I want to present plans for bringing together a body vitally interested in the Negro in art” (Du Bois Collection R 47 F 505-506). She is requesting a place where all the black participants in the FTP could convene for a conference. Her stance in the letter is not so much directed at Du Bois as it is to the President of Atlanta University. The letter’s pomposity is necessary so that the President will feel honored to host such an event. Graham is hoping that Du Bois can use his influence to bring about a conference at Atlanta University, but this tentative meeting is ill timed. Du Bois writes back advising her how to proceed with this prospect and is cautiously optimistic. John Hope has just recently died and the new president, Rufus E. Clement, has taken the helm at Atlanta University. This conference never came to fruition, and it is not surprising in view of all the factors that would be difficult to line up. There was hesitancy on the part of the new Atlanta University

president to host the conference and it was always difficult cutting through layers of FTP bureaucratic red tape.

Hallie Flanagan was impressed with Graham's drive, attitude and her willingness to tackle jobs that would stomp others, and it is probably because of this initiative that her responsibilities increased; however, when it came to the production of Big White Fog, the second play that Chicago's Black Unit staged under Graham's leadership, Graham again was not selected to direct this work, but her abilities to connect with organizations and social institutions in the community were centrally important in evaluating audience reception. Big White Fog was a play that was a "polemic against race hatred" which suggested that class and interracial solidarity was a likely solution to gaining power. Flanagan selected Kay Ewing, a rich, white woman who was a former student of hers to direct this play (Fraden 127). Prior to this time Graham had had very little experience if any in directing plays of this magnitude, so this is perhaps the reason that she was not selected to direct it. This, no doubt, was a safe way to handle this play which was the most socially responsible play that came under Graham's unit during her tenure with FTP. It can be deduced that nothing would have made Du Bois more proud of Graham than her directing this play. Nervous tension surrounding how it would be accepted by the community was always a concern because of the play's content, so weeks before it was scheduled to be staged, it became Graham's job to scout out an audience.

It is surprising that a socially committed play of this type, written by a black playwright had made it through the play reading department at all. Although the official position was that controversial plays were what were desired, more times than

not, the nature of what black playwrights wrote about eliminated their plays at this stage of the game. But now Ward's play was poised for production, and Chicago's black unit was scheduled to stage it. Graham was initially supportive of this play and should have been elated that a fellow black playwright's work stood up to the scrutinizing eyes of the play readers, but it is not clear how she really felt. Strangely enough Big White Fog is the one play, of all the plays that were staged during her tenure as head of Chicago's black unit that is never mentioned in her written correspondence to Du Bois, and this is the one play that neatly fit into a Du Boisian conception of black theatre. This is not to say that there was no discussion of it when they spoke on the phone or met in person, but it is interesting that a play of this significance never finds its way into her letter correspondence to her mentor who so loved theatre.

Graham's abilities were used to scout out an audience and evaluate the audience's reception of the play. This job would later serve her well in the development of her own plays, for considering the audience as she began to create and contour the design of her plays would help in targeting certain audiences and evaluating possible reactions to her works before they were staged. Fraden notes that a black playwright's task was made all the more difficult for a number of reasons, one of the main ones being the consideration of the "split nature of the audience" (110). The very action that gave whites a reason to applaud, might be reason enough to make blacks scowl. And plays written by white playwrights about black life oftentimes lacked a realism with which blacks could identify. Graham having benefit of all this knowledge would know how to better craft future plays that she would write, knowing that audiences determined the success or failure of plays.

After arranging a staging of Ward's play with him, the director Kay Ewing, along with leaders in the black community, Graham's initial support of the play wavered. In a letter to Harry Minturn, the acting director of the Chicago Project in 1937 she explains the reasons for her caution in proceeding with the production. She shares with him that Ms. Ewing, after viewing the play very innocently said, "This play is so absolutely typical of the Negro family in Chicago" (124). Some of the blacks hearing this remark resented it and expressed to Graham that the play was *not* representative of them. What threatened to undermine Ward's play would end up being framed as a debate between what was perceived as realism versus stereotype, what was authentic representation versus what was inauthentic (124). Graham elaborates to Minturn further by describing specific comments made to her. They told her,

We *do* have many successful business men in Chicago – our sons *do* get scholarships – we *do* support our own businesses—black *men* are respected not only in their own homes, but throughout the community—our respectable women do not keep all kind of rooming houses – and our girls *do not* have to sleep with white men to get fifty dollars (123).

When Graham heard all these rumblings, she tells Minturn that she re-read the play with this in mind and then suggested to him that the play's production at this time would do "immeasurable harm to the very people it is attempting to help." She tells him that her reasoning for this was because the problem of "color *within* the Negro race" was a very sensitive issue and the play's treatment of it would "tear open old sores" and leave them "uncovered and bleeding" (123). Ewing and set designer, Hal Kopel felt that the play "in representing the Negro more 'realistically' and in rejecting old stereotypes, they were helping an oppressed people to shake off the slurs of hatred thrust upon them by people in power as well as the internalization of hatred" (125). Ward felt that Graham

tried to sabotage the play because she wanted to direct it, but he says when she was “passed over” in favor of a white woman it angered her (127). His rationale was based on the competitive climate of the FTP that oftentimes pitted people against one another.

Fraden suggests in Blueprints that competition was fierce between black and white directors. Based on an interview with Leonard De Paur, a part of the New York black unit, Fraden explores if the possibility of Ward’s assessment of Graham might have credence by examining interviews of blacks who were a part of the FTP. De Paur revealed that black directors operated in a very limited space. There were few options available for them to move up within the organization. In De Paur’s analysis of the competitive atmosphere provoking scandalous behavior of directors he says the following: “if he lost his opportunities there, he had none anywhere” (128). It appears that Graham’s favored status perhaps gave her more flexibility than other directors, and her credentials and past experience placed her in a privileged position where she would have been able to find a space to work above others whether that place was inside FTP or elsewhere. But it is interesting to note that in August of 1937 Graham shares with Du Bois that she has rewritten an adaptation of white playwright Eugene O’Neil’s play, The Hairy Ape. Graham’s adaptation deals with as touchy a subject as the issue for which she faults Ward’s play. Ward’s play examines colorism, Graham reworking of O’Neil’s work focuses on class division within black culture which in many ways is inextricably linked to colorism, both of which could easily “tear open old sores.” Was it possible that Graham could not see the parallelism between these two issues? If some black theatre goers would turn their backs on Ward’s play, how would they react to her adaptation of O’Neil’s play? Or did she feel that an adaptation of O’Neil’s work would

be more acceptable because of his name recognition in theatre culture? Fraden suggests that Graham really did not fight for the production of Ward's play, and when she, in her role as representative of her people, spoke to FTP officials, she did so after reconciling the conflicting desires of a divided community and spoke as though the black community had *all* responded in like manner as those who spoke out on the night of the play's preview (121).

It is interesting to review what Graham shares with Du Bois concerning her reworking of O'Neil's play. She tells him that she changed the imagery and philosophy and gave it a Negro setting. She dropped some passages and in one case wrote an "entirely new scene." The result of what emerged she tells Du Bois "has produced a study of Negro psychology and the clash of Negro "classes" such as has never been placed on the stage" (Du Bois Collection R47 F 509- 511). How would this clash between Negro classes be perceived by various black audience members? Would some of them feel that their dirty laundry was being aired on stage or would some appreciate that Graham was presenting on stage one of many realities of black life? In Graham's mind she was using her position to make progress in the theatrical realm for her people, but there is some evidence in this same letter that some of the black people under her had different views of what she was doing. It is very possible that she was seen as a tool for that segment of the white administration that was working to keep blacks in the same position they had always been relegated to in theatre.

After some setbacks, Big White Fog was finally staged by Chicago's black unit, but not without Theodore Ward experiencing hard feelings against Shirley Graham. He felt that Graham had tried to deliberately undermine the success of his play and said that

she “spread the rumor that the play was defeatist in order to sink it.” In his own words he later shared in an interview the following:

I thought the whole thing was confined to the ambition of a Negro woman who was not prepared really to become the instructor or the supervisor of anything else in the Negro unit, but whose ambition was to be head of the project which she couldn't keep (Fraden 127).

Is it possible that at this phase in Graham's career that she would have a lapse in judgment that would allow her to “ambush” Ward's play so that a play that she had been tirelessly working on could be the next big production for the black unit? Was it in her character to exercise this sort of subterfuge? Graham's correspondence is free of guile, but curiosity about this issue is raised when there is absolutely no mention of Ward's work on a socially responsible play that Du Bois probably would have appreciated.

After Big White Fog, the next theatrical production of Chicago's Black unit was Little Black Sambo. Flanagan remarked on Graham's growth in the art of theatrical production in her work Arena giving special praise to Graham on her directorial skills in production of this particular play. She says the following:

Before Miss Graham was sent by the Chicago project to Poughkeepsie, her experience had been confined to opera performance. At the summer session she plunged into every type of work, on stage and backstage. She set lights dyed and made costumes, composed music. Returning to Chicago she started classes in acting, movement and speech, to such effect that her production for Federal Theatre of *Little Black Sambo*, for which she designed, composed, and directed, won her praise from the critics and a fellowship at Yale (Flanagan 215).

Graham's success in bringing to life on stage *Little Black Sambo*, brings up the question of exactly what kind of activism was in operation when she directed works

written by white playwrights who incorporated racist material that conformed to the cultural biases of the day. In this particular case, Charlotte Chorpenning, a white playwright adapted Helen Bannerman's book *Little Black Sambo* into a play. Graham directed this work, but how much of a choice Graham had in rejecting this play or any other play(s) already approved by the playwriting division for FTP is not apparent. And if the option were available to reject this play, would she have done so? The play had enjoyed over a year's run in New Jersey and over a two year run in Philadelphia. So FTP officials were confident in its value to entertain and keep the theatre relatively full. Did Graham direct this play because she was marking time until plays more Negro friendly came along? Or, in 1930s America, was the sting of racism more palatable -- more acceptable?

Rena Fraden states that this play was "given by puppets with black faces and 'thick red lips'" (Fraden 59). This description makes it appear that the costumes and make-up border on minstrelsy. Conversely, Flanagan commends this work, and states in Arena that "The Chicago project was at its best when it was itself and at its worst when it imitated anything." She elaborates on those Chicago productions that were distinctive in "creating their own new patterns out of its own material," among these are Little Black Sambo and Swing Mikado. Exactly what "new patterns out of its own material" to which Flanagan is referring is unclear (Flanagan 138). Graham does mention elsewhere in a biographical sketch that she was responsible for designing and composing the musical score for this production, so perhaps Graham recreated the vivid images from Africa that her brother Lorenz and parents had shared with her and she used her musical composition skills to arrange the music (Sch. 1.1). In the case of The

Mikado , is it not possible that the *swing* incorporated into the play during its rehearsal period might have come from some of those African polyrhythmic cadences that Graham discussed in her master thesis?

In an attempt to characterize Hallie Flanagan and nuance the type of personality that she had and demonstrate the moral conviction and ideological mindset that guided her movements, Rena Fraden in Blueprints recounts the story of a young Flanagan as a college freshman who when confronted with a racial conundrum, demonstrates her progressive views. Fraden states that Flanagan was popular among the members in the student body at college and was a member of a planning committee assigned with the task of organizing the freshman class party. Part of their job was to decide which boys would accompany which girls. The problem was that there was one black male student. The dean of women suggested that he attend alone or else come with a group. Outraged, Flanagan announces that she would attend the event with him. Others objected, noting the adverse effects this arrangement would have on her reputation. Flanagan, even more appalled at their assessment of damage done to her reputation determines more than ever to attend the party with this young man. However, this harangue came to naught when the lone black student withdrew from the college (Fraden 45-46).

Without a doubt, during her time, Flanagan was much more progressive than many of her contemporaries in terms of race, but she was born and bred in a culture whose dishonest dialogue with itself, caused all its members to bear the stain of white supremacist thinking. Regardless of the racial grouping the person came from, a certain ethos was central to the thinking of Americans and it was always in operation.

A system of coded signs and symbols enveloped the members of this society and created a kind of collective thinking that upheld certain boundaries. Part of that ethos dictated that no matter how well meaning some progressive whites were and no matter how well intentioned they might have been, at least a seedling of a thought somewhere in the collective mindset dictated that a built-in factor of white superiority and black inferiority resided in the minds of the people. This overarching American construct framed the organizational and institutional structures within this country. Hints of this mindset are in operation when Flanagan writes what should be deemed as a complimentary letter to Graham after viewing a rehearsal of Little Black Sambo.

After watching Little Black Sambo Flanagan expresses her elation at observing a theatrical production put on in top style. She tells Graham that she was impressed by the “simplicity and directness with which the play is conceived, and by the combination of abandon and restraint which kept the play, particularly in the animal scenes, savagely convincing.” She compliments Graham on her “affectionate understanding of both animals and people.” Flanagan’s letter is to be taken as one of praise. It is straightforward and open, yet, an unfortunate choice of words as in her characterization of how “savagely convincing” the scenes are (Sch. 15.19 July 21, 1938). And yet perhaps Flanagan is following the dictates of the day where Negro artist used the primitive/exotic theme to set themselves apart to establish a separate identity from mainstream American culture.

In what ways Graham altered the script to try to make this work appear celebratory to a black aesthetic is somewhat difficult to recover decades removed from the context of the 1930s, but from the ideology expressed in her private letters, it is

revealed how she is wedded to the idea of cultural uplift. The beauty Graham saw in black culture would not allow her to trivialize her weighty mission to represent her racial group in its most positive light. Graham would try her best to resist old stereotypes and create new character types on stage.

What becomes clear is that while at the FTP, Graham was in the undesirable position to use her skills and talents to try and fit her ideas into a pre-existing framework that had an anti-black bias, and it was difficult if not impossible to shed the cultural baggage. The plays that the black units performed across the U. S. were plays that had been approved by the playwriting division of the FTP, and very few of those plays were written by black Americans who were rooted by experience in black life, so Graham found herself making adaptations to plays written by white playwrights, and was more convinced of the need for her to develop her skills as a playwright.

As noted earlier with the production of Big White Fog, there was some conflict associated with Graham's tenure at FTP, at least in the eyes of Theodore Ward, but perhaps the biggest disturbance that occurred while Graham was at the helm of Chicago's Black Unit took place after her return from the summer institute at Vassar in 1937. Her correspondence with her mentor, rarely gave an indication that she was experiencing problems at her job in Chicago with the exception of this one occasion. She had been on the job a year and upon her return from the summer workshop, she returned to discover that she had a small mutiny on her hands. She shares with Du Bois that she had allowed a Mr. Edward Perry, a black assistant from the Negro unit in New York, to come and direct the Chicago Negro unit in her absence. When she returned from the summer session, her job description had changed. She had more

responsibilities and her office was moved to the regional headquarters. Because of this, she didn't request that Mr. Perry return to New York. She allowed him to remain, telling Du Bois "I saw two jobs for Negroes where there had been but one." She tells Du Bois that she was "completely absorbed" in her work when she found a rebellion on her hands.

It transpired that Mr. Perry had represented me to my own people as having completely alienated my self from them and their interest. I had allied myself with 'white folk' of the administration to the extent that I was only seeking my own selfish ends; I was ruthlessly ambitious; "The Hairy Ape" was entirely a personal undertaking; I was adding my personal friends to the project; the play was an 'insult' to the Negro, etc., etc., etc., etc. Need I say more? (Du Bois Collection R 47 F 511).

It appears that Graham's social positioning or the way she perceived her role was a deterrent at times with her making inroads with the very people that she desired to represent. As was the case with black critics of the day, instead of her leading the masses, at times she found herself at odds with them. This letter reveals that in her mind, she is working for the group, attempting to use her abilities to write a new part for blacks. She had been re-vamping Eugene O'Neil's The Hairy Ape trying to reconfigure something positive out of this previously existing play that had only received minor success. But some of the blacks in her unit did not believe that Graham was working on their behalf but was trying to fulfill her own individual aspirations. It must be acknowledged that to some degree they perhaps were correct. Shirley Graham was very driven and desired personal success, but it would be too simple to contribute all her drive to the pursuit of individual aspiration, especially in view of the home life that she emerges from where striving for the group took precedence over individual pursuits.

Graham was well aware that her fate was inextricably tied to the millions of Negroes who were her fellow brethren. Graham felt it was incumbent upon her to represent her group well, and she knew the capabilities of Negroes. Her correspondence with various and sundry individuals speaks of her desire to make headway for her racial group. It was not so simple to demarcate where her desires for group progress ended and her individualistic aspirations began. It was probably impossible to extricate one from the other.

The crab-in-a-bucket mentality was defeatist. If Graham broke through that invisible ceiling that was limiting opportunities for blacks then others would be able to come behind her. No doubt when Mr. Perry requested to come to the Chicago unit, he knew something of the unit's turbulent history. That this group could have been disbanded was a very real possibility. From FTP's inception in 1936 to 1939, the black units dwindled from seventeen units to ten. Was Mr. Perry jealous of Graham, and did he think that he could steal her position as Director of the Chicago Black Unit? If Ward was disgruntled with Graham or Perry jealous, their resentments came to naught for Graham's connection to Flanagan was strong enough to stand her in good stead with FTP.

In addition to dealing with the bruised feelings and conflicts of some blacks associated with FTP, she also had to manage the information that she shared with Du Bois. To understand some of the tensions that she felt in relation to her work there, one only need to look at some of her correspondence with Du Bois during this time. It then becomes clear that she carefully nuanced the information that she shared with him. When discussing Little Black Sambo she makes no mention of its name which seems to

suggest that on some level she is reluctant to disclose the name of the play because of its obvious controversy. She knew him well enough to know that the production of this play might have offended his sensibilities. When she mentions her adaptation of Eugene O’Neil’s The Hairy Ape, or mentions the production of The Swing Mikado , she addresses them by name, but when she alludes to Little Black Sambo, she says, “Also, I am rehearsing a very delightful storybook play for our children’s theatre. I have been appointed one of the two directors for this new Children’s Theatre” (Du Bois Collection R48 F 1082).

Graham’s directorship over Little Black Sambo appears to be a convenient appointment, for her words illuminate the orchestration of a scheme, not of her making but one seemingly orchestrated by the larger powers, whereby Graham becomes a puppet caught up in the larger politics framing FTP culture. She had been selected for special training during the summer of 1937 at Vassar. When she returned her position had expanded, not in pay but in responsibility. A white director was over the children’s unit, but Graham was brought in as another director. How better to neutralize a play about a black character that could have been perceived as controversial by a black audience than to put someone black at the head, as in “appointing” Shirley Graham to serve as another director for the new children’s theatre. It is interesting that when Flanagan mentions the success of this play in her work Arena, all the credit is given to Graham and no other director is mentioned, and yet when The Swing Mikado is mentioned, Graham’s name is absent although she was Director of the unit during the rehearsal stage of this play.

On August 16, 1937, the Federal Theatre announced a nationwide play competition designed to “encourage young authors” and was “limited to those who [had] not achieved a commercial production on Broadway running more than three weeks, or 28 road performances” (Witham 122). Graham completed It’s Morning by March of 1938. It seems highly consistent that Graham would have submitted her play, for one of her dreams was to reach Broadway. However, a key criterion in the plays selected and written for a FTP audience was for it to deal with a contemporary issue, and the play that she had just completed took a backward glance at slavery.

Before leaving Chicago’s Black Unit, Graham had completed her second play, It’s Morning. Although it was completed during her tenure with the FTP, it was never accepted for production there. None of her plays nor those of fellow playwrights she was familiar with in the black community of playwrights in the Baltimore/D. C. area ever had any plays produced through the Federal Theatre. Du Bois’ submission of his two plays to Shirley Graham while she was at the helm of the black unit in Chicago was certainly an attempt to generate some interest in his work but it was very involved getting plays accepted for approval within the FTP.

By May of 1938 Shirley Graham, Arna Bontemps and Dewey Jones, were among four-hundred applicants, thirty-four of whom were black, applying to the Rosenwald Fund for a fellowship. Graham, Bontemps and Jones were recognized in the local paper as three black Chicagoians receiving Rosenwald Fellowships (Sch 9.24). This fellowship enabled her to attend Yale School of Drama in New Haven, Connecticut.

CHAPTER 8

YALE GRADUATE STUDENT:

PRODUCING PLAYS TO BE ACTED, NOT JUST READ 1938-1941

The plays created by Graham after her days of working with the Federal Theatre Project differed from those that were staged under her directorship. She was able to begin with a clean slate and not concentrate on writing a play that might appeal to the playwright division of FTP. She no longer had to alter existing plays to make them fit a Negro cast. For Graham there would be movement away from *black Sambo* characters, jungle themes, slavery and southern settings. She was now able to recreate a world that was very familiar to her. There was movement to the urban industrialized north. Trains, railroad tracks, coal mines and urban, black middle class parsonages became the settings of her plays. By the fall of 1938 she was at Yale and ecstatic, learning the science behind playwriting and directing. She would complete five more plays plus a tone-poem, which would make the total number of plays she created total seven.

The seven plays Graham authored were Tom Tom (1932), It's Morning (1937), Coal Dust (1939), Dust to Earth (1940), I Gotta Home (1939), Elijah's Ravens (1940), and Track Thirteen (1940). A dominant feature of her playwriting is the process of reworking, sometimes cutting down on the scale of a play and at other times expanding on certain aspects. It is because of this that the content of some of her plays is very similar yet bear a different name. For example, the most obvious example are two plays in print with a similar name, one is titled It's Morning and another It's Mornin'. Both plays are about slavery, but two versions made it into print. There are four plays in print that have similar content. Elijah's Ravens and I Gotta Home are plays that tell

basically the same story of an itinerant minister and his family who have a bountiful supply of love, excitement and adventure, but are forever deficient in monies necessary to enable them to get ahead. Rev. Cobb, the lowly preacher believes that God will supply all his family's needs just as he did for the prophet Elijah through a raven. Another example of dual versions of a play can be found in two more plays, Coal Dust and Dust to Earth. A look at the cast members from both these plays reveals that cast members are the same, but in the case of both plays, Graham never tweaked them in a way that she felt they stand without further changes. After a play was written she would get immediate feedback and would continue the process of revamping the work. When a play was going through the staging process, she oftentimes found it necessary to tweak it differently, sometimes shifting and building up and sometimes after a play had gone through production, she would still rewrite some parts of it.

Graham's plays reveal different aspects of black life. As has been mentioned earlier, Tom Tom gives a historical sweep of the African American experience beginning in Africa and ending in America, giving emphasis to the evolution of African American musical forms; It's Morning takes a backward glance at the experience of slavery and stages an alternate version of how some black women resisted exploitation. It tells the story of an enslaved mother who decides that the only way to protect her daughter from the degradation of the institution of slavery is to make her free by releasing her from her earthly bonds to this life. The mother has learned that her fourteen year old daughter is to be sold off in the morning to a white man whose wanton desires are easily perceived. The mother plans a celebration which is to be her daughter's last. Slave community members can look at the mother's distant stare and

her strange disposition and surmise that she is planning something amiss. Close friends and the preacher try to dissuade her, but to no avail. Emancipation is bittersweet, for on the dawn of emancipation when a soldier comes to the mother's living quarters informing her that the slaves are free this news is empty because her for she has killed her daughter the evening before. In this work Graham conceptualizes the black female not as a wanton female seductress, but as an enslaved young girl trapped in a system that uses the black body as a commodity for the use and profit of others.

I Gotta Home and Elijah's Ravens examine the day to day joys and sorrows of a middle class black family. Both stories are thinly disguised versions of Shirley Graham's early life growing up in parsonages across the country. The mother Liza Dell is the equivalent of Shirley Graham's mother Eliza Bell. The AME minister, Elijah Cobb is a prototype of Rev. David A. Graham. Graham captures the audience by pulling them into the day to day comical drama that can be found in the home of this middle class black minister's family. The middle class status of the family is anchored not so much in its finances as it is in the standard of life enjoyed by family members because of the father's leadership role in the community. The piano in the home, Rev. Cobb's study and church members who regularly come by to clean the home and make repairs are manifestations of their middle class status. In spite of the advantages of having some of the trapping of a middle class lifestyle, the Cobbs are woefully lacking in cash. It is for this reason that throughout the play an allusion is made to the biblical story of the prophet Elijah being fed by a raven. This is the plot of the story. God provides for his servants, and the lowly Rev. E. J. Cobb and his family will be provided for.

Rev. Cobb's sister Mattie arrives in town, and she represents the opposite of everything for which Rev. Cobb stands. Mattie is loud, boisterous, and a lover of liquor and gambling, whereas her brother shuns all forms of worldly living. Yet unbeknownst to Rev. Cobb, one of the ways that he will be provided for is through his sister, who it appears has amassed a fortune through her former employer, who has died leaving Mattie a fortune. This fortune however, turns out to be non-existent, but when Mattie buys a ticket and places a bet on a horse race, her luck changes when her horse comes in third place. Mattie wins 50,000 dollars. Some of this money is used to secretly help Rev. Cobb, his family and the church finances.

Graham does a number of things with this play. She revolves the play around the home life of the Cobb family featuring Mrs. Cobb and her children. While the action revolves around Rev. Cobb's absence and his ministry, it is Mrs. Cobb and her children who are front and center in terms of dialogue and action. The lines of dialogue for Rev. Cobb are scarce as well as the times he appears in the play. Graham also represents a wide spectrum of behaviors. Rev. Cobb and his sister represent two completely different sides of the spectrum. While Rev. Cobb's ascetic lifestyle precludes him from advancing within the hierarchy of his religious organization and making monetary gain, other family members are evaluating not so scrupulous ways of supplementing the family income. So it is not beyond the thinking of E. J. Jr., the eldest son to run numbers in order to supplement the Sunday offering. When Rev. Cobb comes up deficient in the dollar allotment that AME ministers are responsible for having, his sister, Mattie Cobb is literally dreaming up numbers that she believes will

usher her and by extension, her brother and his family into a different realm of financial prosperity.

Graham therefore blurs the lines separating the spheres between the sacred and secular. This blurring more than anything represents an ideological movement toward entertaining alternative operations of thoughts concerning how to navigate through the world. Graham seems to suggest that Rev. Cobb's dogged reliance on the literal translation of the bible is too rigid. Mattie Cobb's belief system, recognizing the significance of numbers is given validity when she comes in third with the horse race. Mattie's belief system is much more liberal and accommodating. Graham's presentation of two belief systems reveals an evolution in her development. It can be taken that she is suggesting that there is room for a synthesis of different belief systems.

This comedy presents a range of characters. Graham gives us a play about another female figure who presides effectively over numerous duties falling under the realm of domesticity. Mrs. Cobb is the first lady of the church and living in the parsonage presents many amusing experiences. The preacher's children just as easily recite passages from Paul Lawrence Dunbar as they on occasion curse. The baby girl practices her piano lessons while her oldest brother gets his first taste at running numbers. Graham, attuned to language being indicative of class difference, pokes fun at class status by having Miss Hall, a young school teacher naturally using correct English while the doctor's wife, Mrs. Swan, a woman who prides herself on her elevated rank in black society, displays her ignorance through the way she splits verbs and mispronounces words.

The plays Coal Dust and Dust to Earth presented the life of a mixed race protagonist named Brick who grows into manhood feeling resentment for his white father, Anthony Clayton. Brick's mixed race heritage makes it difficult for him to fit into either race. His hatred for his father finds expression thirty years later when the father comes to visit the Illinois mine that he owns and where his illegitimate son is working. The mine owner's white daughter, Leslie, complicates matters when she attempts to look into the family matters of the mine workers with intentions of helping improve their conditions. Leslie, unaware of her kinship ties to Brick, takes him by the hand and calls him brother.

Brick, wanting nothing more than to trap his father in a mine pit to settle old scores, ends up getting trapped himself and dying from gas fumes in the mine alongside his father. As they lay dying in the mine, they clasp hands. This work of Graham suggests something similar to Ward's Big White Fog which is blacks and whites can unite across racial lines. It further suggests that they can unite across class lines as well when Leslie reaches out to the mine workers because of her concern for their living conditions. Graham's gravitation toward coalition building across racial lines goes back to her teenage years; the roots of racial unity could be found in her parents' belief in interracial cooperation. This leaning toward interracial solidarity had Graham perfectly poised to have an open ear for those who advocated a different way of attaining equality in this capitalists system. It is because of this propensity to be open to interracial alliances that facilitated her movement into circles that would later be branded communist.

The Gilpin Players staged this play in Cleveland in May of 1939 and local critic Ken Jessamy, covers the play for The Cleveland Call and Post, a black newspaper in Cleveland with a local readership. He titles his article on Coal Dust “Shirley Graham’s New Play Lacks Social Significance.” He acknowledges that the production was fine, but says he left with “mingled emotions” and was at a loss to pinpoint what was lacking until after he had left the theatre and the fog dissipated. He then shifts point of view and momentarily changes from first person to third person by saying the following: “The cold air hit me however and mist began to fade away and then it dawned on me that what the play lacked was social significance. Checking and rechecking we decided that the play had fallen short of the mark” (Sch. 1.12-1.14). His change in point of view seems to intimate that he felt he needed others to support his conclusions. He continues his critique by saying, “While the play dealt in part with the trials and tribulations of the workers at no time did it offer a solution.”

Another critic, to whom Graham had sent the play, responds in February of 1941 after seeing the play staged at Yale and details some areas that needed to be reexamined. Writing from the department of anthropology at Yale, Ann Ableson commented on the strengths and weaknesses of the play. Ableson tells Graham that her “handling of the ensemble,” her “understanding of simple people” and her ability to “depict action” were good. But there were several areas requiring more attention. Ableson notes that there was a “confusion of the issues.” She observes that a number of themes --- racial injustice, personal morality, industrial strife and issues between labor and capital, could have been individually treated successfully in a play. She further elaborates, “If you intended no patent ideology, no commentary on social conditions, it

seemed pointless to lay your production in a coal mine with such powerful implications bulging out of the text, but never faced or resolved” (Sch. 15.23 Feb. 5, 1941). In this regard, Ableson identifies the same problem with the play as Jessamy, by citing in Graham’s attempt to be expansive, she loses a focus needed to have a powerful impact.

Ableson also noted that Graham’s portrayal of the altruistic Miss Clayton was too sentimental, to the point of being “unconvincing.” Graham’s having “cultured voices rendering spirituals backstage” during the interaction between Miss Clayton and Brick were theatrics that were unnecessary (ibid). The lack of resolution of the strike rendered the play ineffective. The specifics developing motivation for the actions of some of the characters and the intent for a strike were lacking or underdeveloped. Ableson summarizes her critique by saying, “The play is full of interesting, pertinent, magnificent material for half a dozen tragedies” (ibid.).

Graham hints at solutions with the finely nuanced clasping of hands between the key players -- Brick, Anthony Clayton and Leslie -- which suggests uniting not just across racial lines but across class and gender boundaries as well. The staging of this play in 1939 through 1941 offered a bright glimpse of hope toward better race relations in this society. At this point in time to be a progressive was not a detriment to one’s livelihood, but a few years beyond this time people who were responsible for suggesting unity among the classes and races would find themselves being questioned about their allegiance to this country. It is probably because of all these weaknesses that Ableson and others pointed out that no copies of Coal Dust or Dust to Earth were left on file at Karamu House, and ultimately Western Reserve Historical Society, the institution that archived the plays of Karamu House.

Track Thirteen was a radio comedy written by Graham. It aired in 1939. It was published a year later in the book Yale Radio Plays (1940). But as its genre type suggests, the play never came to life on stage, but rather over the airways. This who-done-it would be the last play Graham would write. It is the story of two black train personnel, one a porter and the other a dining car worker whose superstitious beliefs come to the fore when they realize that instead of their train departing from track fifteen, its regular track, it will depart from track thirteen. In the words of the porter, “something’s bound to happen” and in fact something does. Before the train leaves the station, the local authorities have received a tip that a bank robber, Ace Kelly, is traveling west and they solicit the help of train personnel in assisting authorities by notifying them of any suspicious passengers. Porter Wilson acts as a spotter and is told that if the culprit is captured, those assisting in a capture that leads to an arrest will receive a five thousand dollar reward.

What Porter Wilson thinks will be a terrible trip turns out to be a fortuitous trip for him, for he unwittingly gets pulled into the drama when Ace Kelly hides the stolen money in the baby bag that Porter Wilson is handling. When Porter Wilson discovers that the money has been placed in the bag, he proceeds to try to find the person responsible for putting it there by setting a trap which Ace Kelly falls into before the train reaches its final destination. Ace Kelly is foiled in his attempt to escape and is captured. It is Porter Wilson’s good fortune that is responsible for Ace Kelly’s capture, thus making this presumably ill-fated train trek a fortuitous one. Easily observed in this play as well as the play, I Gotta Home is Graham’s penchant for using numbers and incorporating folk beliefs in her work. Her usage of folk beliefs is not used to poke fun

at the belief system, but to validate what many in the religious world probably considered an unorthodox thought system.

When she submitted her application to the Julius Rosenwald Fellowship for the third time, the 1940-41 school year, she reminded the committee of her “intensive training” in dramatic work and her intention to contribute to the development of Negro Theatre. “I now want to go to work...I wish to set to work furnishing that first and most important need towards the development of a Negro Theatre (or any theatre) – good plays” (Sch. 16.2). Graham’s plan envisioned her writing plays for the Gilpin Players of Cleveland. “Together we shall raise the standards of production, produce better and better plays until our influence will be felt throughout the country” (ibid.). Graham and Rowena Jelliffe had a plan and were working in concert with each other. Graham would supply the plays and the Jelliffes would produce them. Graham’s application was sent off to Rosenwald with Rowena Jelliffe’s blessings. Although Graham did not get renewed, the Gilpin Players of Cleveland would go on to produce both Coal Dust and I Gotta Home (Sch. 16.3).

In terms of exposure, Graham’s plays were viewed by audiences connected to the university settings and local community settings of Cleveland, Oberlin, and Columbus, Ohio; New Haven, Connecticut; Atlanta, Georgia; New Orleans, Louisiana and Nashville, Tennessee. After her initial success with Tom Tom early in her career, she was never able to burst out and garner a wide audience with her plays. Her dreams of breaking into commercial theatre would never be realized although in her private correspondence she spoke of it often and thought that she was right at the door. Her close contact with George Kondolf, a New York producer of plays whom she had met

during her FTP days never resulted in the production of any of her plays in New York, but her plays were staged mainly on college campuses and at the Western Reserve Historical Society in Ohio.

Graham felt that the Yale production of It's Morning staged in November of 1939 was "bad" (Du Bois Collection R 52 F 1011). Her personal correspondence to Du Bois reveals that she felt white producers had a difficult time getting black plays right. Another reason that Graham says this is because close attention was not given to the theatrical development or race of the actor. She shares with Du Bois that Yale was planning on putting on another of her plays the following February but she was not looking forward to it being staged saying, "They are doing a one-act play of mine here at Yale in February. Honestly, I wish they wouldn't. It was written for a Negro cast. It is highly emotional and has an impressive dignity which I do not believe these young students can achieve." She shares her belief that although Yale had the benefit of "superior staging," she felt that Fisk would do a better job in terms of performance (Du Bois Collection R 50 F 193).

Professor Allardyce Nicoll, Graham's advisor at Yale, was British and was not indoctrinated with the American brand of racism and neither fully grasped the pervasive effect of it over all aspects of American life. So when The Yale Faculty Club would not allow the Gilpin players to come to campus to produce Elijah's Ravens, Professor Nicoll was disappointed and determined to find a group of Negro players that could be brought in to rehearse and present the play. Graham was pleased and found it refreshing that Professor Nicoll would tackle the issue of finding actors that were appropriately aligned for the roles the script called for. She told Du Bois that she felt

Mr. Nicoll “was utterly free from making racial discriminations.” She further states, “I believe he took more personal interest in what I was trying to do because I am a Negro. (Du Bois Collection R 52 F 1011).

The year of 1941 was full of activity as it relates to the production of many of Graham’s plays. On January 29th, 30th and 31st of 1941, Yale performed three productions of Dust to Earth which was billed as her “first full-length drama.” She returns back to Yale after an absence and is warmly greeted and ecstatic seeing her creation take shape on stage. She tells Du Bois that the play had become stronger since he last read it and that the ‘red hair’ aspect has been reduced to the minimum” (Du Bois Collection R 52 F 1003). Graham’s “red hair” comment brings up an interesting problem that she had to contend with being a black playwright whose plays were many times performed on white college campuses. Her plays were written for black actors, but the actors competing to play the parts for her plays were white. This positions Graham a bit differently from many of her black sister playwrights who rarely if ever got an opportunity for their plays to be staged in white academic spaces that were congenial to a black playwright. Graham’s fellow black classmate at Yale, Owen Dobson, is among a small group of black playwrights who can boast of experiencing this opportunity as Graham.

While she is visiting New Haven in the month of January, two of her plays were in rehearsal elsewhere – Ohio, “one for an all – colored group and one for an all-white group” (Du Bois Collection R 52 F 1005). In Columbus, Ohio during the month of April, the Ohio State Playmakers were staging a performance (Sch. 9.23). Of this production at Ohio State, Graham spoke her concern to Du Bois about the possible

downside to this. She felt, “few white directors can do a Negro show properly” (Du Bois Collection R 52 F 1005), but she was appreciative for the efforts made to bring this play to production. Meanwhile Alfred Farrell of Ohio was requesting that he and his all black group be allowed to pay fifteen dollars for one performance rather than twenty-five dollars due to the great expense incurred for putting on a new production (Sch. 16.3 dated Jan. 17, 1941).

Playwright, Randolph Edmonds, working at Dillard during May of 1941, staged Elijah's Ravens with his Dillard University Players (Du Bois Collection R 52 F 1012). By June of 1941 Atlanta University President, Rufus Clement is requesting Graham's permission to produce Elijah's Ravens on Atlanta University's campus and asking her to quote him the amount of royalty on three performances (Sch. 16.2). What Graham does not know is that Ann Cooke, theatre director has a copy of an old script of Elijah's Ravens and has been rehearsing the play. President's Clements' letter is only perfunctory and written believing that Graham will readily give consent. He does not realize that different versions of the play exist and that the version Cooke has is out-dated. Graham tells Du Bois that she does not agree to Cooke staging the play because she has sold the professional rights for Elijah's Ravens. She herself would have to get permission for a college production (Du Bois R 52 F 1015). It is unclear to whom she sold her rights, but apparently this had just happened because this was not mentioned to others who contacted her about royalties. Even in the midst of a number of her plays being staged this year, financial success would not accompany this busy activity.

Chasing dreams of fame in the arena of playwriting would compel Graham to send off plays to a couple of places. In July of '41 she sent Dust to Earth to W. Richard

Gottfried, Director of the Octet Players, a professional theatrical group in New York only to be told that it was a good play but a “too large cast” and “difficult scenic problems” made it “impractical” for them to produce (Sch. 16.2). By September of the same year, she sent Elijah’s Ravens off to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer only to be told by Julie A. Herne, Editor of the Play Department there that she was sorry there was no interest in the play out there (ibid.). After 1941 the performance of Graham’s plays would decline markedly.

There would be a shift in priorities as a wartime climate began to dictate the direction of the country. The work Graham performed after her New Haven days was still in the arena of playwriting. When she moved back home to Indianapolis, Indiana then to Fort Huachuca, Arizona as USO Director, she would still be working in an area of entertainment, but by 1943 she would discover her writing taking a detour. The plays of yesterday had become a thing of the past. The current international crisis, WWII, compelled her to write political pieces, and almost by chance it appears she discovered the joy of writing children’s literature.

Popular success in the realm of playwriting would elude Graham, and Broadway would forever be an elusive dream. Although she would craft five plays after her FTP days, applying many of the techniques she had learned during her time in Chicago and some of the newly learned skills she acquired at Yale, her knowledge of staging scenes, developing drama and creating the right amount of entertainment along with infusing some ideas that invoked her commitment to being socially responsible, were not enough to help her break through the invisible ceiling that conveniently kept the majority of black playwrights forever earth bound in American theatre. She confided in Du Bois

that she was building a “‘reputation’ not financial security” (Du Bois Collection R 52 F 1014). This earthbound status could be attributed more to a certain attitude toward black material rather than the ability of the black playwrights. Du Bois had keenly observed in a Crisis editorial dating back to 1927 that “The themes on which Negro writers naturally write best, with deepest knowledge and clearest understanding, are precisely the themes most editors do not want treated” (Du Bois “Mencken” 519). This was the case with black playwrights.

A look at her time at Yale reveals much academic growth and success, but she was not able to return to her studies there during the fall of 1941 due to a lack of finances. She had received funding from Rosenwald for two years and had accomplished tremendous academic growth in the discipline of playwriting, but for her third year she sorely needed financial assistance and if she could have received funding from any source, she might have been able to complete her studies. At the beginning of her second year of using the funds from this fellowship, an unexpected mini drama of sorts played out in Graham’s own personal life which demonstrated the counter effect of her AME affiliation.

Much has been said concerning how AME connections facilitated members within the organization; however, at times this connection might have hindered the progress of members. Perhaps at this important juncture in Graham’s life, her AME connection or more specifically acquaintances from her former time out west interfered in her educational life, and possibly altered the course of events which would have helped her complete her educational studies at Yale. On November 8th, 1939, a Maude L. Booker, wrote the Rosenwald Fund a lengthy, vitriolic letter regarding how Shirley

Graham, her mother and sons had wrecked Brooker's new house and disfigured much of her furniture the previous summer. Her long list of complaints note that Graham left a "large telephone bill," "greasy and soiled" walls, broken dishes and lamps, a destroyed electric fixture, and a piano and coffee table "disfigured from liquor glasses." She stated that Ms. Graham's elaborate form of entertaining had caused much of this damage and further suggested that because of Graham's lack of hygienic care within the home, (she claims Graham left decayed food in the kitchen) she now has to contend with roaches and mice. Mrs. Booker informs the Rosenwald Fund that it is not her "desire to inconvenience or embarrass anyone" but she does an excellent job at doing exactly this (Sch. 15.23).

The reputation of the Grahams was something that they greatly valued and guarded, and attacking Shirley Graham in this way certainly must have caused rumblings in a number of places. The Rosenwald people were probably concerned about this incident concerning one of their recipients. At this point Shirley Graham was establishing an impressive record in the Yale Drama Department, but she was still practically a newcomer to some faculty and students. They were still in the early stages of knowing her, so this must have caused them and her grave concern. Appearance was very important in the cultural and social spaces out of which Graham emerged, and in Graham's attempt to excel in academic and social settings, she could little afford negative reports to stain her reputation.

While Maude Booker's letter dated November 8, 1939 is traveling to the Rosenwald Fund, a letter from Yale University graduate School is being composed to go out to Graham. The letter from the school, dated November 15, 1939 encloses the

following content: “the Committee on the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy has considered your program of studies and has accepted it as work that may count towards that degree” (Sch. 15.21). Had Yale been notified about the negative report on Graham before writing the content of this letter? If not, what effect if any would this accusation have on Graham’s academic career? Graham had completed an original play Elijah’s Raven and had submitted it to Stanford University, but the results of this submission would not be revealed until months later when she would discover that she had received distinguished second honors in the competition for the Etherge Award of 1940, an award in Drama sponsored by Stanford University (Sch. 16.2 July 20, 1940). She also had other works in the making and was busy engaging in much study and being creative. Would her habits of industry that had been observed thus far be enough to continue to stand her in good stead?

Although the letter to the Rosenwald Fund was severe, the three page single-spaced tirade that Mrs. Booker sent directly to Shirley Graham was far worse. The damage she accuses Graham and her family of is so extensive until it seems impossible for one family to carry out such a destructive assault on a house; nevertheless, Mrs. Booker’s articulate and specific charges in her letter about the nature of destruction that took place in her home during her family’s absence could appear to be plausible to some degree provided no other facts were given. Probably after Graham provided the history of her relationship with Maude Booker and the particulars of Booker’s life, parties receiving Mrs. Booker’s complaint would have easily been able to dismiss her grievances.

Maude Booker appears to have been a member of Graham's sister circle during the time when Graham was a young woman living in Portland, Oregon. Graham's arrangement with Maude Booker began as a simple summer house rental that would allow Graham the opportunity to have her sons with her during the summer. Booker's initial correspondence is friendly but quickly becomes overly chatty. Over the course of the summer of 1939, she writes Graham numerous letters revealing a familiarity between the two women and a troubled Maud Booker. The letters also indicate that Booker has extensive knowledge concerning Graham's past. Booker's letter mentions old AME acquaintances from the Graham's time in the state of Washington, telling Graham that a Mrs. Moten had called and she (Mrs. Booker) had informed her of Graham's "accomplishments, ambitions and aspirations." She informs Graham that Mrs. Moten had been wondering what Graham had been doing, and that she (Mrs. Moten) wished to be remembered to her (Sch. 15. 6-15).

During the month of July, Booker writes Graham six letters revealing extensive details of her life. She has lost her young daughter, Maude; discovered that her husband of twenty-two years has been unfaithful, and the Bookers are a few steps away from losing their home due to foreclosure. The purpose for her trip to Oakland, California and Yakima, Washington, during the summer of 1939 is for rest, relaxation and escapism. But much to her chagrin, she discovers that the embarrassing facts of her husband's philandering ways on the east coast have preceded her visit to the west coast. Some of the motive behind Maude's letter writing campaign to Graham is to supply her with enough information so that Graham can serve as an interloper between Maude and her husband. In one letter she tells Graham, "Since Dr. does not have time to write –

please let me know what is going on there.” In the same letter she rambles, “Tell my husband – Aunt Millie is praying for him – and everybody else thinks he is just about crazy – Thank God I left an unblemished reputation as a faithful wife and mother.” In another letter she laments:

I received a letter from the illustrious doctor –very business like --- in fact not even business like---didn't even start off dog, cat, horse or else --- just the date and Sunday --- then the letter proper. I am afraid I love him much more than ever now (Sch. 15.6-8 July 8, 1939).

With each letter that Maude writes, her psychological and mental well being appears more strained. She appears obsessed with her husband who has remained in New York while she and her remaining daughter, Avia, travel. During the month of July Booker reveals that she has been under a doctor's care. She seems to be threatening a mental break down. She reminds Graham to take special care of her mattresses, walls and furniture. Maude Booker's frantic letters foreshadow that a storm is gathering on the horizon. She reveals that her great fear is losing her house. At some point, Graham tries to curb the liberties in conversational exchange in which Booker feels free to engage. When this occurs, Booker's surface friendliness shatters.

Upon receiving Graham's letter which advances her intentions to follow her mother's admonition to “stay clear of this man and wife situation,” Booker goes into attack mode. She can not understand why Graham lacks empathy for her in this stressful situation since Graham, she reminds her, was in similar distress in the past. Mrs. Booker tells Graham, “remind your mother of the time that you were in even more serious trouble when you fled to Portland and asked cooperation and help from friends and people you didn't even know before and they rallied to you. The people out here

on the coast have never forgotten it and they still rehearse it to everybody” (Sch. 15. 6-15). What was this “even more serious trouble” of which Booker refers? Trouble more serious than a philandering husband like “Dr. B” as Maude Booker refers to him? Or does Booker refer to an abusive husband, or worse yet, an abusive father? David Graham Du Bois in an essay written a few years before his death discloses knowledge he gained about his biological father a few months before his mother’s death. He remembered being told that his brother and he were “taken away from him because he endangered [their] lives.” But David G. Du Bois felt compelled to push for more information when he realized his mother’s passing was imminent. He asks:

‘Tell me about my father.’ It was a very quiet, moving, very significant moment. My mother hesitated for a very long while. and then all she said was, ‘McCants’ – that was his name, McCants---‘was more sinned against than sinner,’ She didn’t say another word. She didn’t need to say another word (David Du Bois qtd. in Carrol 50).

It is impossible to know specifically why Shirley Graham lived the rest of her life determined to keep her sons from ever knowing their biological father, but the statement strongly hints that Shadrack McCants might have been the victim of his former wife’s ambitions. She lived in a time when blacks as a whole had been brutalized. In some ways it was more difficult for black men than black women. The majority of lynchings taking place throughout the country were of men. Could it have been that Shadrack T. McCants was a man who was afraid of his own voice. The suppression of many men of his generation and the generation that followed was so complete that fear many times stymied their actions. The ambitiousness of Shirley Graham couldn’t palate a man who was afraid to exert himself. And his name, the more she thought about the implications of Mc Cants, the more she realized that this name

was an omen for her future aspirations and that of her children. Thusly, it is likely that she took matters into her own hands and devised a plan to change the trajectory of her life and the lives of her children. Black feminist writer Marita Golden observes the role that names play in our lives. She states the following:

Names are predictions and affirmations. We live up to our names, or change them because they don't fit. Names are poetry, philosophy. We are given names that confine us like chains and names that give us wings. In naming us, our parents invest us with their unfulfilled dreams as a way of ensuring we will be fit to shape our own" (Golden 129-130).

It is probably that this is the philosophy that was working in the mind of Shirley Graham when she decided to change her name and that of her sons. The negativity associated with "can'ts –cants" became too much. But the suggestion of "canns" was far more positive and appropriate for her family. This theory offers a probable explanation for the name change from McCants to McCanns! Whatever is the truth of the situation, Shirley Graham's somewhat ambiguous sentence is enough explanation for David Graham Du Bois who was a mature man in his fifties at the time of this revelation.

Booker further solicits Graham to remember, the time Dr. B. and she "took insults and made enemies when they tried to solicit financial aid" for Graham. She then complains as a few more of Graham's associates would do over the years. She says that after these favors, Graham had "forgotten" them because they could no longer be of service to her (Sch. 15.6-8 Sept. 5, 1939). What should have been an enjoyable summer house rental occupying a nice home located close to the beach, turns into a web of horrific events that in the end threatens to tarnish the reputation that Shirley Graham was working diligently to establish. By summer's end Booker's assault on Graham

congeals and instead of exchanging niceties between the people back on the west coast with Shirley Graham and family, Booker's comments turn nasty. She tells Graham, "Dr. Booker use to tell me even the days in Portland that you would ask a person for their life and think it not too much and that has been clearly demonstrated all these years" (Sch. 15.21 Oct. 16, 1939). Mrs. Booker refers to negative comments regarding the Grahams made by other people associated with the church. She continues, "Mrs. Moten and Mrs. Handsaker had described very beautifully to me the careless, ungrateful and unreasonable type person you are." She is very aware of Graham's long absences from her children, and reprimands her by saying, "You can't train children two months a year and you can't train them then if you have no training yourself" (Sch. 15. 21). She indicts not just Shirley Graham but her entire family. "That selfishness which you so clearly demonstrated here is obvious in the entire family" (ibid). She even goes so far as to indict Graham's friends by implying that those associated with her are selfish and careless. Many times over she calls into question Graham's integrity.

Mrs. Booker's last letter is extreme in its venom, and the damage she claims Graham has done to the house is too excessive to believe that a woman like Graham, who grew up in parsonages all across the country would commit to a property that she would temporarily occupy. Graham likely had perfected the art of settling into a living space and effectively clearing out at the appropriate time and leaving few if any traces that would suggest that she lived there. She was acquainted with living in a space "lightly." This same young woman had received praise a number of times from a number of sources who regarded her as a perfect hostess who lived in clean

surroundings. Is Mrs. Booker's letter an attempt to settle some old vendetta, or is she a battle scarred woman suffering from the stress of too weighty problems?

Shirley Graham and Maude Booker's relationship comes to a split by summer's end when Mrs. Booker focuses in on Graham, instead of Dr. Booker, as the source of her anger. Maude Booker sends a letter to Graham stating, "Now of course as far as friendship goes one is better off without a person like you...There is nothing to be gained by being friendly with you but there is much to be gained by not being friendly with you" (Sch. 15.21). Here was Graham in one of those "outsider within" locations where she faced great scrutiny as one of two blacks in Yale's Drama Department. Owen Dodson was the other black student. And here she is being publicly attacked from a former member of her sister circle who should have been a protective force. It was regrettable that this disagreement had to spill into Graham's professional and academic life, a location where her status was a "border location" making Graham's marginal status even more marginalized.

Graham was not timid, and shot back a relatively brief saucy letter to Mrs. Maude Booker recounting the nature of their conversation and agreement and detailing her proof of rental receipts. The numerous letters she bombarded Graham with during the course of the summer, were in Graham's possession and could easily be used to reveal the thoughts of a fragile mind on the brink of sanity. She ends her letter to Mrs. Booker by telling her that "neither Yale nor the Rosenwald people care to be any further annoyed. She states that she was leaving a copy of her letter to Booker with "the authorities" (Sch. 15.21 Nov. 16, 1939). Exactly what "authorities" Graham is referring to is unclear.

Knowing that Graham was so close to completing her doctorate, but lacking the funds to continue to remain in New Haven and support her two boys, Du Bois wrote Edwin Embree a rather lengthy letter on her behalf, unbeknownst to Graham, or so he tells Embree. He informs him of her busy summer schedule after completing the academic year of 1939 to 1940 at Yale. He details that she has put on an opera, “Priates of Penzance” in Indianapolis and was taking two courses of English at Butler. He tells him that the people at Yale “assure her in one semester she can finish the dissertation, take her orals and get her doctorate.” Hoping to sway Mr. Embree, he ends his letter by asking if the fund could arrange to “break a few precedents” in this most unusual of circumstances. His P. S. queries, “Perhaps a loan could be negotiated?” (Sch. 14.13 Nov. 7, 1940). Unfortunately, no loan was negotiated and by the fall of 1940 Graham remained in Indianapolis. This is the second place where she and her boys share a home together. Both boys attend Cripus Attucks High School. It is in Indianapolis that Robert meets his future wife, Edith (Robert G. McCanns, Jr. 15) and attempts to become rooted.

Ironically of all institutions, she found a job working at the YWCA in Indianapolis, a thriving YWCA that she perhaps remembered reading about through the Indianapolis Recorder. Forty-three years removed from her birth, she returns to a city changed somewhat but a black community with members in it who still knew David and Etta Graham and had memories of baby Shirley. The youth of Bethel AME, now in their fifties and sixties, who were members of the Young People’s Christian Endeavor Society under Rev. Graham’s leadership, had not forgotten the activities they engaged in due to his efforts in making them a part of a national movement. Graham could have

attended Bethel AME while living in this community, but there is no record indicating this.

The money she earned was not satisfying, and by May she was complaining to Du Bois. “I need more money. They want my time --- twenty-four hours a day. Anything which I might do to increase my income a little is objected to” (Du Bois Collection R 52 F1014). She tells him that she continues to build a “reputation, not financial security” (ibid.). She remains in Indianapolis until the end of summer when she is selected by the national staff of the YWCA as an appointee for a new position.

The work that she performed at Yale demonstrated her ability to effectively write plays and successfully complete work, for even though she would never return to Yale as a student, some of her plays would be produced there after she had relocated to Indianapolis, Indiana. Maud Booker’s letter appears to have had little effect on Graham’s standing. Financial restraints were the main reason she didn’t return, then a few months down the road, World War II would alter universities all across the country, by pulling young men and some faculty members from among the ranks of the educated elite.

A coterie of black female playwrights, mostly living in and around Washington D. C., was actively writing plays in the 1920s, 30s and 40s. Elizabeth Brown-Guillory in her work Their Place on Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America names nine mother playwrights who paved the way for future black female playwrights. These mother playwrights born between the years of 1873-1905 are Ruth Gaines Shelton (1873), Alice Dunbar Nelson (1875-1935), Mary Burrill (1879-1946), Angelina Grimke (1880-1958), Georgia Douglass Johnson (1886), May Miller (1889), Eulalie Spence

(1894-1981), Myrtle Smith Livingston (1901-1973) and Marita Bonner (1905- 1971). Elizabeth Brown-Guillory notes that these “mother playwrights were working against previously constructed images of blackness that upheld and affirmed notions of white supremacy.” Her premise is that these “mother playwrights paved the way for Alice Childress, Lorraine Hansberry and Ntozake Shange who came along a generation or two later following in the footprints left by their mother playwrights and would realize the staging of one or more of their plays on Broadway. Noticeably missing from this auspicious list is Shirley Graham, a contemporary of these mother playwrights and someone who spent considerable time in close proximity to them especially during the late 20s and early 30s.

Graham’s evolution into becoming a playwright began in childhood and ended in the early 1940s. From the time she was a young girl she arranged Negro spirituals to be sung by groups selected by her. From there she organized choruses and presented what she called “singing plays.” She advanced to assisting playwright Randolph Edmonds with the staging of plays at Morgan College (Sch. 1.1). She then moved from there to Cleveland where her musical opera was produced and continued on her journey working with the FTP for two years. Her time with FTP was time well spent, for she navigated in a space where few blacks traversed, even fewer black women.

When reflecting back on her time at FTP, it must be recognized that it is very likely that Chicago’s black theatrical unit would have been disbanded had not Graham come on board. If she had not, it could have been that the black actors and crew members would have been dispersed into the white units and would not have had any degree of autonomy that the black unit was able to enjoy. It was because of her

approval that Edward Perry was allowed to fill in at Chicago's black unit. She was open to expanding the numbers of blacks in roles within FTP, not averse to it. During Graham's time a pronounced feature of the African American struggle in the United States was the need for members of the race to act as a unit for civil progress. Because one of her primary goals was to advance her race, many times her ideology revealed an essentialist perspective. This perspective was needful because she was trying to improve the conditions of the group; however, there were occasions when this perspective made her a sacrificial lamb. Her intentions were misunderstood and made her an object of contempt to the very people she was trying to advance. During the era in which Graham lived and labored, an essentialist view was a crucial stepping stone to future gains.

What is clear is that when the currents of change were blowing to bring the curtain down on FTP, Graham was perfectly poised to take advantage of the opportunities for advancement offered through the FTP. Fraden observes that "As a movement that trained and sustained African Americans and others, the FTP served as a channel by which people could be carried along to other tributaries, other rivers" (Fraden 44). And Graham moved on to a better place --- Yale where her playwriting would flourish. In the academic environment of Yale, she wrote five more plays.

Graham's work in the arena of black theatre ensures her noteworthy position in black theatre history. She lived for a period of time in major geographical areas where theatre was accessible: Washington D. C., Baltimore, Cleveland, Chicago and New York! During the time she worked at Howard Library of Music and Morgan College, she lived in close proximity with some of these "mother playwrights, although it is not

evident that she networked with any of them, she certainly must have come in contact with some of them somewhere along the way if for no other reason than because of her contact with Du Bois and Edmonds. There are letters from Georgia Douglas Johnson to her and Du Bois, but this is well after Graham's playwriting days. She had to be familiar with some of these sister playwrights through the Crisis and Opportunity contest. She probably had read their work and just as she had come in contact with Walrond at one of the affairs sponsored by Charles Johnson, she had likely met or certainly milled around with some of them.

Although Graham only authored seven plays between 1932 -1941, it can be argued that her work garnered more attention in the field of playwriting than any of her sister black female playwrights. With Tom Tom premiering before an audience of 25,000, it can be argued that Graham's work ranks highest in terms of being exposed to more people in that time than any of her fellow black sister playwrights whose plays oftentimes were plays "to be read" or plays that were only viewed in small community settings like churches and black schools. The spin-off of activities closely connected with this production doubtless, ---to use a phrase of Graham,— opened up "unsuspected rooms" in the brains of many black Clevelanders who had never before experienced this whirlwind of activities centered around something related to black life -- a black musical opera.¹ How exhilarating it must have been for some Clevelanders that felt that some of their dreams and aspirations could be achieved because of what this young black woman had just accomplished. Kathy Perkins, the first scholar to closely examine Graham's cultural production notes that Graham's play, Tom Tom is significant because it was the first all-black opera to be produced on a professional level

in America” (Perkins 209). Her enrollment at Yale enabled her work to get exposure from an interracial audience. Her plays were performed at both black and white colleges. Because of Yale’s close proximity to New York, Graham felt little reservation in inviting persons who would easily be characterized as big shots to see her productions. Among some of her invited guest were Arthur Spingarn, W. E. B. Du Bois, Charles S. Johnson Essie Robeson, Walter White, and Henry Allan Moe (Du Bois Collection R 52 F1003). Some of these people in turn brought attention to her work in the publications they were affiliated with. Du Bois who was at Atlanta University included mention of her plays in Phylon (Du Bois Collection R 52 F 1010), and Randolph Edmonds, editor of Arts Quarterly did a write-up while she was with FTP (R 47 F 511). Through the interloping of Walter White, one of Graham’s scripts would be sent to Marc Connelly in Hollywood to test its commercial possibilities a couple of years beyond her playwriting days (R 47 F 516), but nothing came of this. Hollywood was not ready for black material.

In terms of being in the vortex of black playwriting history, Shirley Graham during the decade of the 1930s and early 40s is prominently positioned. She crafted and directed plays, stimulated interest in them and scouted audiences. Many times she stood in the gap between black theorist and black pragmatist; between white administration at FTP and the Chicago black unit. She serves as a bridge between those black playwrights who lacked the technical training to those playwrights who would come along later with the benefit of specialization in the art of playwriting. In these ways and more, Graham filled a need by pressing the bounds of established mores and widening the spaces where blacks could operate. What she achieved is truly

noteworthy and she did so with full gusto and confidence that she was doing what needed to be done and what she had the ability to do. American theatre is incomplete without the recognition of what all its playwrights, regardless of ethnic origin, have contributed to the corpus of plays that are a part of the American cannon. African American theatre is especially indebted to the early black playwrights who groped in darkness trying to bring into existence a theatre representative of many different versions of their reality. American theatre will always be indebted to Shirley Graham for what she attempted as well as what she achieved in the realm of black theatre.

Notes

¹ When Graham first made it to Yale, she wrote Du Bois saying that Professor Nicoll had “opened unsuspected rooms in my brain” (Du Bois Collection F 1090 Letter dated Oct. 23, 1938).

CHAPTER 9

FORT HUACHUCA: POLITICS DICTATING ACTIVISM 1941-1942

The “wave” came – tossing Shirley Graham “to unexpected places” during the end of summer in 1941. By a wonderful turn of events she had been freed from her Indianapolis job at the YWCA that overworked and underpaid her. She had been elevated to being a member of the National staff of the YWCA (Du Bois Collection R 52 F 1017) and, as a result of this promotion, was targeted as someone qualified to serve as a USO director at the military installation in Arizona that would train black servicemen. In February of 1941, in response to a request from President Franklin D. Roosevelt, six civilian agencies – the Salvation Army, the Young Men’s Christian Association, the Young Women’s Christian Association, the National Catholic Community Services, the National Travelers Aid Association and the National Jewish Welfare Board -- coordinated their war efforts, thus forming the United Services Organization (USO). Graham’s work the previous year at the YWCA in Indianapolis demonstrated her skill and ability at coordinating activities, providing entertainment and administering programs. Her time in Indianapolis had left much to be desired in terms of excitement, but as she headed to the west coast, she was giddy with excitement for this job appealed to her sense of adventure and she looked forward to this new odyssey.

By late summer she was traveling to the west coast, taking both sons with her. Robert would enter school in Los Angeles as a college freshman, this move enabling Graham to be relatively close in proximity to him. While David would visit the west coast briefly, then return back to Richmond, Indiana, where he would complete his

senior year of high school, while living with his grandmother. On Labor Day, September 1st 1941, she leaves Los Angeles on a train with all her baggage heading to Fort Huachuca, Arizona (Sch. 12.20), an infantry division training center that will also serve as a supply station issuing clothing and equipment, distributing rations, and providing laundry services for servicemen all around the state (Huachuca Illustrated 13). While traveling she writes a letter to her young son Graham and opens mail that she has received from USO headquarters in New York informing her of conditions on the base. She discovers that a “large percentage of whites” live on the base and that there is “a white air training school” (Sch. 12.20). Knowing the status of race relations in the country, the War Department’s mimicry of the larger society’s racism as reflected in its reticence in opening the armed forces up for an increase in black participation is cause for concern for Graham. Since the exigencies of war compelled the War Department to admit blacks, it is just a matter of time before “complications” arise (Sch. 12.20).

Graham had traveled a long way from the teenager who had discovered her voice and challenged the YWCA in Colorado Springs. Because she was a teenager and living in the home of her parents, she was shielded in many ways from repercussions that were a consequence of confronting racism and elitism. Her parents might have felt the brunt of her challenge when she was a teenager, but the record falls short of any mention of this. Over twenty years had passed since she had taken the Colorado Springs branch of the YWCA to task for discrimination, more recently she had worked for the YWCA in Indiana and now here she was working in a prized position that this Christian organization had enabled her to get. Although much time had passed and her

station in life had been elevated, she and Black Americans still struggled against the racism that would continue to circumscribe their existence. The stakes were higher now that Shirley Graham was the bread winner of her family of three. It would not be so easy to confront her “immediate supervisors” Paul V. McNutt, Federal Security Administrator and Charles Taft, son of the former President William Howard Taft (Sch. 12.20) on issues of discrimination without risking losing her job.

When she arrived on the base she could have easily been discouraged. She discovered a large, desolate, expanse of land “in the middle of the desert surrounded by high mountains” (Sch. 12.21 May 2, 1942). The base was so huge that it appeared the “size of a small city” that had “no buses, no sidewalks, and no street lamps” (Sch. 12.20 Sept. 5, 1941). Her housing accommodations also left much to be desired, but the saving grace that offset the “bare” room where she initially lived was the beautiful location where the house sat (ibid.). The USO facility from which she was to operate was non-existent at the time, but the projected completion date was a few months away in February 1942. The plans for this facility, however, were impressive in design allowing for an auditorium, stage, swimming pool, gymnasium, club rooms and a wing with apartments for the directors (ibid.).

Robert Franklin Jefferson in “Making the Men of the 93rd: African American Servicemen in the Years of the Great Depression and the Second World War, 1935-1947” states that Graham “faced the unenviable tasks of vitalizing the post’s dismal recreational activities for black servicepeople” (241). He credits Graham for encouraging black servicemen “to carve out their own separate spaces,” and notes that during her time there she preformed a number of duties including staging and directing

plays, art exhibits, and creating literary societies (241). The service that she provided replicated the type of work she had done much of her adult life, and she was not stunted by the enormity of the job. Indeed, she welcomed it.

As head of the USO at Fort Huachuca, Graham was responsible for boosting the morale of the black soldiers and infusing entertainment into their lives. Initially, she got off to a smashing start, putting in place a program that would fulfill the requirements of her job. She could hardly contain her excitement about working at a job that brought her so much gratification. She shares with Du Bois her enthusiasm concerning working in this position:

I have the most amazing job! Sometimes the gods laugh right out loud. I complained of boredom—and so they pick me up and fling me out here among the mountains and deserts in the largest aggregation of Negro soldiers in the United States --- I suppose in the world – place me at the head of several thousand square miles program and hand me the United States mint! The skies the limit. I can do anything!” (Du Bois Collection R 52 F 1050).

Graham, along with other USO workers, Mr. Lawrence Palmer, Mr. Thomas Jackson, Mr. Edwin Johnson and Miss Lorraine Sprott (Sch. 16.6 Jan. 25, 1942) were busy from the time they got on base preparing for the incoming soldiers. They put on their first dramatic production on the base on October 1st, staging two one act plays (Sch. 12.20 Oct.2, 1941). A few days later, they oversaw “running an excursion to Los Angeles for the Ohio University-Southern California game” on October 4th (Du Bois Collection R 52 F 1050). In 1941, Ohio University had a black player on its team. During this era, the weight of the race rested on the shoulders of any black individual whose abilities marked him or her as an example of achievement. Graham surmised that the black soldiers going to the game received a greater satisfaction from it when

Ohio defeated Southern California. Perhaps the energy coming from the Fort Huachuca soldiers was akin to that coming from black community members from all over the nation when they sat glued listening to the radio during the Joe Louis / Max Baer fight when Louis triumphed over the German boxer. Simultaneous with all this activity, soldiers were always arriving on the base by train or convoy. A new detail of three hundred soldiers were coming and it was the USO personnel's responsibility to entertain these in-coming troops. So they threw a party for these soldiers whom Graham observed were "pretty dull and homesick boys" (Sch. 12.20 Oct. 6, 1941).

The region falling under her jurisdiction covered a wide expanse. She regularly traveled to Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona and Los Angeles, California. Because the base is in the middle of nowhere, she has to travel well over one hundred miles to get the simplest of supplies not found on base. Because of the requirements of her job, she earns her driver's license (Sch. 13.1 Nov. 3, 1941, and approximately two months after getting on base she receives from the New York office a "new Ford De Lux V-8 Tudor Sedan" for her use (Sch. 12.10 Oct. 27, 1941). When the car arrived she made the most of traveling long distances by doing most of the highway driving and turning the wheel over to more experienced drivers when entering a city zone.

Graham enjoyed the top salary the YWCA paid (Sch. 12.21 Jan. 19, 1942), and the benefits of her position – a car at her disposal, a generous budget, freedom of movement and great potential for advancing to an even more powerful position were all enticements that would have made the most ardent activist think twice before speaking against those in power. Her salary and the perks of the job might have been enough to influence others to keep quiet about injustices for the sake of keeping their token

positions, but Graham's tenure at Fort Huchucua is a pivotal time for her as she matures as an activist. She solidly channels her energies into addressing the needs of the soldiers in more ways than just providing entertainment. She supports the black servicemen by providing a space for them to vent their frustrations, and she physically joins them in the trenches of warfare against segregation. If she were to remain the golden girl, she would have had to turn a blind eye to unjust and discriminatory practices on base, turn her back on the activism that had always been a pattern in her life, and more importantly a practice within her family extending several generations back into the past. She would have had to follow the prescribed line of behavior of a "token Negro" that would compel her to walk tentatively in her position, being cautious of her every word and deed and never once saying anything that could be construed as antagonistic.

However, this is not the trajectory she chooses. Graham performs her duties effectively incorporating many of the practices the USO would later be praised for in their service to troops fatigued by war and its accompanying difficulties. These services included arranging for singers and entertainers to come and provide amusement for the soldiers; providing a space where they could vent their frustrations; providing forums where speakers could come, encourage and build-up morale, and making available a place where they could receive counseling. Some of the activities that would later be deemed by her bosses at USO as "unprecedented" might have been Graham's encouragement of soldiers to press beyond the limitations trying to be imposed upon them. Jefferson notes that she organized "mass gatherings for soldiers to discuss various issues from military training to family concerns" (241). It was perhaps

her organization of the soldiers that helped them decide how they would tackle segregation on base. Soldiers sought her out for advice, and informed her of their ill treatment. Maybe during those times when they sought counsel, they were advised to fight to be treated with dignity.

Does she react spontaneously during her tenure at Fort Huachuca or do her actions result from a protracted careful assessment of the situation? Graham chose to abandon navigating tentatively through this space. Rather than being complicit with a system designed to keep blacks in a disadvantaged place, she consciously steps into the fray with the soldiers to rattle the metaphorical bars and agitate for an improved status for the GIs on base. She responds to their cries out of a sense of duty and because she realizes that her fate is inextricably interwoven with theirs. No doubt she remembered the family talk in her childhood home concerning how her father's outspokenness, brought scorn from a bishop thus leading to some of his difficulties within the AME hierarchy. Perhaps she also remembered her not too distant exchange with the YWCA in Colorado Springs. These were all cautionary experiences that forewarned her that trouble results from agitating, but Graham's actions on the base demonstrate courage and an inner strength that is oftentimes missing in the average person. Although retaliation was eminent, she had to try to use her agency to facilitate change.

The service Graham and her staff performed was vital for the soldiers. Entertaining them and providing a space where they could socialize was just a part of what she was hired to do. In order for her and her staff to be successful in building morale, the soldier's treatment on base and in the surrounding communities had to be taken into account. Their morale could not be lifted if their separate and second class

status made them victims. It was wholly unconscionable for Graham to use her position to appease the soldiers while they were systematically being mistreated.

The soldiers flooding the gates of the fort made up a varied mixture of black men from all across the country. They came from all walks of life and different geographical regions around the country. Age, experience, exposure or lack thereof determined the type of soldier that arrived on base. Some were socially conscious, having been exposed to national and international news through black newspapers like the Pittsburg Courier and the Chicago Defender or by listening to the radio. Some were familiar with the Daily Worker. Some were members of politically conscious AME or CME churches where international occurrences were often analysed and discussed through the church. A few were educated, had received degrees oftentimes from black colleges and had entered professional life, while some had completed a number of years of schooling. Many were illiterate, a consequence of living in an apartheid society. Others were still in school, young boys growing into manhood. When they came to base many had never gone many miles beyond their small rural towns or overcrowded urban communities. They arrived there frightened, homesick and longing for something akin to the familiar. Many soldiers found it difficult getting conditioned to the grueling marches across the huge base, and the military discipline. Graham could sense their fear and only needed to look in their eyes and recognize the hope and promise that she saw in the eyes of her two sons. The fact that her sons, Robert, now eighteen and draft age and David, sixteen and quickly approaching it were poised to be soldiers like many of the young men she was now spending her time with perhaps made her identify more with the young soldiers. She endeavored to do her part in making

their brief stay on the base as warm and welcoming as possible. She saw this as part of her duty. Graham and her USO crew functioned like an oasis in a desert for these black soldiers who were buffeted at every turn by taunts, cursings and unfair punishments and starved of human kindness. These soldiers welcomed the activities arranged by this organization.

Numerous problems immediately began to crop up with the servicemen. The entire state of Arizona was being transformed as military bases were springing up in all corners of the state as well as inside the state. Taking advantage of the “state’s clear skies and negligible air traffic” air bases dotted the state (Huachuca Illustrated 13). When given opportunities to leave base black soldiers’ options were limited. The businesses in small communities nearby, mostly restaurants and bars, were not welcoming to them. There was an exception. Robert F. Jefferson states that some 93rd veterans remember Fry, an unincorporated town two-hundred meters off base, as a place where servicemen could go to take advantage of the brothels, saloons, dance halls and gambling dens that were available there. Sanitation was a problem in this area which was comprised of “shacks and shanties without running water and latrines” (246). One 93rd veteran remembered that “every pay day soldiers would form long lines outside the village just for a half hour with women in the town” (246-247). Graham’s staff, small in comparison to the growing aggregation of black soldiers being shipped to the base, was no competition to these forms of unsavory festivities.

In other towns soldiers received unwelcoming stares. When they would go off base to other surrounding areas to practice tactical maneuvers, they would run into problems with the townspeople and white soldiers. Wade Hammonds, head of the

Urban League of Phoenix, Arizona wrote Graham a letter several months after she had been on base interpreting the effect of black involvement on the white psyche: “The coming of the 364th, colored, to Phoenix is another headache for the whites who would win the war and hold on to their prejudices at one and the same time” (Sch. 16.5 July 13, 1942). Black soldiers were needed for the war effort but not valued. In areas like Phoenix, Fry and Flagstaff Arizona, Boulder City, Nevada and Barstow, California resentment against black servicemen was palpable as they received unwelcoming stares from many of these cities’ racially different residents (Sch. 16.5). In addition to the white population there were Mexicans, Native Americans and small pockets of blacks. What the black soldiers regretfully discovered was that although the Native Americans and Mexicans were discriminated against by the dominant culture, these two oppressed groups imitated similar attitudes toward the black soldiers as was used against them.

The conflicts pretty much begin as Graham eases into her new job. As early as October Graham shares with her youngest son that she is being “pulled into all sorts of disputes, quarrels, politics, army matters and soldiers’ troubles” (Sch. 12.20 Oct 27, 1941). Jefferson notes that one of the main grievances with the soldiers was that the jobs they were assigned in the military mimicked the heavy labor and service jobs they had been relegated to in prewar years. Unloading trucks, carrying fifty-five gallon gas drums (224) and picking crops (258), were not jobs they expected to perform in the service of the U. S. military. Their induction into the military meant to many of them that they would be trained in military warfare and not jobs that resembled menial labor. Because Fort Huachuca performed the laundry service for other state bases, it is almost certain that the black soldiers cleaned and ironed and dry cleaned the clothes of white

servicemen from other bases. “In a single month 500,000 pieces of flat work and 700,000 pieces of clothing were handled by the laundry” (Huachuca Illustrated 20).

Because of the caustic environment of racism, many other troubling issues kept surfacing the longer black troops were in service. A constant source of irritation was the eminity that existed between senior white officers and the blacks under their charge, whether they were officers or enlisted men. The senior white officers oftentimes came from the south bringing with them the social mores of southern culture. When soldiers left base there were run-ins not just with townspeople but military police. Many black soldiers were court-martialed unjustly as they tried to defend themselves from harassment. Many received lengthy prison sentences, and some were killed simply for wearing the uniform of the United States Army.

As she traversed across the region under her directorship, she networked oftentimes with rich and powerful people, developing new friendships along the way that might prove helpful in waging war against injustices. She met the President of the University of Arizona (Sch. 12.20 Sept 19, 1941) and was wined and dined in the home of a millionaire while visiting in Berkley, California (Sch. 12.20 Oct. 27, 1941). During her time in Arizona, Graham also made the acquaintance of Wade H. Hammonds, one of the first African American bandmasters in the United States military. Their affinity for music must have made them fast friends. In addition to their musical connection, their activist proclivity was evident, for Hammonds had organized the Urban League of Phoenix.

It is important that Graham made the acquaintance of Hammonds with the Urban League because she will be hard pressed to get any type of assistance from the

Phoenix branch of the NAACP because of “factional disputes” (NAACP Papers II: C 7 Folder 7). Prior to her arrival in Arizona, the national leadership of the NAACP instructed field secretary William Pickens to travel out to the west to assess the problems with the Phoenix, Arizona and the Raton, New Mexico branches. The Tucson branch is experiencing no problems, but the Phoenix branch is in critical trouble. At this historical juncture when the war crisis opens up a fissure through which blacks can whittle away in the wall of white supremacy, the NAACP needs to be able to demonstrate strength. Handsel Bell is the central figure in the Phoenix branch controversy. Bell’s desire to lead the Phoenix branch threatens to undermine it. His persistent, bellicose letters to Walter White and national branch coordinator E. Frederic Morrow warn of the pressing issues within the state of Arizona that needed to be tackled. The current fight for the NAACP branch should have been against discrimination in the national defense program and the military installations in the state as well as inequalities in the educational system, but instead most of the fight was between Bell and other members of the local branch (ibid).

The disagreement as characterized by field secretary Pickens “narrows down to the personal ambition of one Mr. Handsel Bell and his mother” (ibid.). Bell’s desire to lead the branch has caused him to write the national office decrying the illegal procedures carried out during the most recent election. Pickens tells the Board of Directors that Bell ran for two offices and was defeated for both. Bell’s complaint, Pickens tells the board “did not prevent him from running for two offices.” After holding a meeting with Bell and members of the Phoenix board, all persons agreed that the election was honest. Pickens evaluation is that Mr. Bell is “obstreperous,”

“belligerent” and “no good can come from upsetting this election” (ibid.). Pickens observes that the branch in Raton, New Mexico is “pathetic.” In this small mining community, there are hardly enough blacks to sustain a branch. The dispute in this chapter is between a Mrs. Johnson and a Rev. D. S. Jordan. Picken concludes that “The situation in Raton is in such a hopeless state that a decision rendered by the National Board for either faction would kill the branch (ibid.).

Such was the state of affairs with these two NAACP branches on the west coast when black men and women from all across the nation were converging in Arizona. To add fuel to this sad state of affairs, when Mr. Bell is informed that the national board was upholding the most recent election, he brings the Governor of the state, Sidney P. Osburn, into what should have been a private matter between the NAACP office in Phoenix and the national office. This action of the part of Bell made national officers recoil with surprise and anger, for it weakened the organization by informing the majority culture of internal strife within the largest civil rights organization in the state.

While Graham was serving on base, she on occasion ran into old friendships. Once while in the San Francisco area, she made contact with a family that had years earlier been a part of one of Rev. Graham’s congregations. The Motens, who were living at that time in Oakland – were the same family that Mrs. Maude Booker had mentioned just a year ago in one of her nasty letters to Graham as being people who had implied that Graham was careless, ungrateful and unreasonable. Graham’s pleasant meeting with them seems to suggest that Maude Booker had lied concerning their negative comment on Shirley Graham. After spending time with them Graham writes her youngest son telling him to tell her mother that the Motens had come over from

Oakland to see her when she was in San Francisco in October, and that they were proud of her. She says, “They haven’t changed a bit and were so sorry I couldn’t spend some time with them” (Sch. 12.20 Oct. 27, 1941).

The bombing of Pearl Harbor changes the mood and outlook on the base as well as Graham’s own sense of responsibility. Soldiers were worried about the uncertainty of their futures, for once they left the base, they were usually headed to a war torn area. The threat of imminent war gave Graham a somber perspective. The serious nature of what could likely happen to the soldiers once they left the base weighed heavily upon her. She confesses to Du Bois, “Before December 7th, this was a vital, vastly interesting even exciting ‘job’. Now, it has become a service into which is poured everything (Du Bois Collection R53 F 1037). All around the base there are signs of escalating readiness. “Preparations for war – huge guns, anti-tank guns, anti-aircraft guns and machine guns” were cropping up all over the base “with men sprawled around on the ground near them” (Sch. 12.21 Jan. 4, 1942).

By February the new USO building is nearing completion. The first week in the month, they are moving into their new building which is really not completely finished. Supplies needed for the base have to be purchased over a hundred miles away (Sch. 12.21 Feb. 14, 1942), and on an occasion when Graham discovers that Marian Anderson is nearby, she devises a plan to drive to Tucson, approximately one hundred and five miles from Ft. Huachuca, to entice her into coming to the base and singing for the troops. As she turned off the highway into 6th Avenue she “crashed into an immovable object.” Her resulting knee injury landed her in the “Officers Section of a military hospital” (Du Bois Collection R 53 F 1039-1042). After getting out of the

hospital, she walked around with crutches which slowed her movement significantly and likely made her a much more difficult boss. Nonetheless, she continues to work on behalf of the troops.

Notables within the black community noticed the work Graham was doing on the base. Benjamin Mays commends her on holding this commissioned position. He tells her that it means “much to our race, that we are more than capable of holding such” positions (Sch. 16.6). Charles S. Johnson complimented her on the programs she instituted on the base. He tells her that “Mr. Fred Hoehler of the joint Army and Navy Committee on Recreation and Welfare was one of the persons who described your work as having such high value” (Sch. 16.5 April 6, 1942). Captain Wagner of the Morale Division of the Army also spoke well of her program to Johnson (ibid.). Their comments suggest that Graham was being very effective in her position.

Between May and June of 1942 anxieties are increasing as Black recruits poured in from all over the U. S. at a rate of 200 per day (Jefferson 226) and Graham needs to vent. By this time there are over thirty thousand Negro troops, and only about “twenty-five ‘lesser’ officers (Negro)” (Du Bois Collection May 2, 1942). It is also during this time that Graham hints to Du Bois that much has been going on at Fort Huachuca. “I wish I could tell you what my life is like now. Only seeing you will give me that opportunity. The things which are most important and vital cannot be written. What you read in the Negro press merely skims the surface” (Du Bois Collection R53 F 1045). To protect herself against the contents of her correspondence getting into the wrong hands, she is careful not to divulge specifics in her letters. She continues in this letter by stressing her need to get to Washington, telling him, “...there are things I want

to do, things only I can do – if I can make the proper contacts. The situation is almost desperate ! (Du Bois Collection R53 F 1045). What people did she want to contact? Was she naïve enough to think that leading military figures would side with her over existing racial norms? Was she trying to make contact with McNutt and Taft, or perhaps was she trying to reach NAACP official William Pickens? The possibility exists that Graham was also seeking favor on behalf of her son Graham who she was trying to get into a privileged position upon his being drafted into the military, but it is clear through her correspondence with Du Bois that the nature of her primary business has something to do with affairs on the base. She continues to tell him, “Certain letters which I wrote Washington have caused me to be interviewed by high Army officials. Some people were afraid for me. But – results are on the way!” (Du Bois Collection R 53 F 1045).

Exactly who Graham is referring to is unknown, but it appears that she felt that there were high ranking white officials who were not threatened by black advancement and could be counted on as allies and would throw their clout behind her and the black soldiers in the battle for racial equality. It is significant to note that her boss Charles Phelps Taft, Director of the U. S. Community War Service at the Federal Security Agency, was the son of William Howard Taft, who was Secretary of War during Teddy Roosevelt’s administration when “three companies of black soldiers were dishonorably discharged on unproven charges” (Rudwick 70). Elliott Rudwick notes that William H. Taft was a “veteran apologist for the southern caste system as well as a denigrator of higher education for blacks” (71). Is it possible that the son’s ideological position was more enlightened than his father’s? It appears more likely that Charles Phelps Taft was

very much like his father who had imbued in him a certain way of thinking about Negroes.

The early part of June, Graham leaves Ft. Huachuca for a three week vacation. She plans to make several stops, and probably the first part of the trip takes her to Washington D. C. Graham, a maturing political neophyte, was not privy to the behind the scenes maneuverings in the nation's capitol and the political arena. She felt that the Roosevelt Administration and its defense arm, the War Department, was slightly more amenable to the concerns of black civil society and black servicemen than previous administrations. The first lady championed many social issues and demonstrated a strong interest in civil rights. Her influence on her husband could not be underestimated. She was his closest and most personal advisor, his moral conscious on social issues. Graham likely felt that her candid accounts relating to abuses on base, along with perhaps her dropping the name of Mrs. Roosevelt from her Vassar days with the FTP, might give the issue more consideration in the minds of War Department officials.

She could not have known the countless number of times President Franklin Roosevelt sided with racist advisors in his cabinet and war department officials who pushed him not to budge an inch in an attempt to mollify the racial discontent of black servicemen and black civil society. During a critical juncture between 1939 and 1944, much legislation was concocted with legalistic jargon which obscured the true intent of the legislation which was to continue to defraud black soldiers of opportunities to advance within the armed services. An example of this deception can be seen in Assistant Secretary of War Robert Patterson's draft of the military's plan on integration

sent to President Roosevelt on October 8, 1940. Patterson stated, “The policy of the War Department is not to intermingle colored and white enlisted personnel in the same regimental organizations.” He further stated that any “changes” to this policy would be “destructive” to morale and “detrimental” to national defense. Experiments at this critical juncture would be foolhardy (Koerner 56). To this Roosevelt jotted two letters: “O. K.” (57). In addition to memos like this, Roosevelt was also receiving letters from anonymous southern congressmen reminding him that it is far better to satisfy the “thirty million southern Americans” rather than try to appease the NAACP. The outcome of Graham’s visit to Washington D. C. would reveal itself months later.

The most important stop on her vacation, however, was to attend the graduation of her youngest son. David Graham is one of three students – the other two are white -- to give a baccalaureate speech on June 12th (Sch. 13.2) at his high school in Richmond, Indiana. Her jubilation was tainted when she received word that more turmoil was breaking out on base. Robert Franklin Jefferson notes that in June of 1942 “Post Adjutant General Carroll Nelson issued a memorandum establishing separate officers clubs for all black and white cadre on the military post” (258). This sanction represented the second class citizenship that soldiers had endured in the larger society during “the prewar period.” Black outrage resulted in officers boycotting the Service Clubs. They wrote “numerous letters to black newspapers protesting their operation on post” (ibid.). Graham informs Du Bois that she had to return to base. Her having to “return” to base suggests that she didn’t initiate the boycott but perhaps had coaxed it along in earlier forums. She had already spoken with high ranking military officials in Washington before returning to base. Of this incident, Franklin notes that although

immediate results failed at outlawing separate service club facilities, by the end of the war the “Post Commandant was forced to abandon the policy” (Jefferson 258). So it was that in the heat of this battle there would be many casualties, of which Graham was one.

It appears at times that Graham was naïve in her belief that whites who benefited from an unjust system were inclined to change it. It is not clear that she had ever met with Paul McNutt and Charles Taft to get a sense that they were interested enough in social equality to attempt to divest the military of its racist character. Maybe she dared to think that the women in leadership positions at headquarters thought highly enough of her to turn a blind eye to her activities on base. The positive changes that she was expecting did not occur, for by October 30th, 1942 she is writing Du Bois telling him the inevitable, “I need a job – at once! (Du Bois Collection R 52 F 1047). She had suffered the fate that awaits those who overstep the invisible lines of racial impropriety.

Initially she is not dismissed, for she is a valuable employee of the organization. But plans are in the works for her to be transferred. Jessamine C. Fenner, Personnel Secretary for the USO Division writes Graham a gentle letter in August of 1942 framing her job change in a way that suggests that Graham’s move will help the establishment “start [their] work with Negroes in Muskogee, Oklahoma” (Sch. 16.5). Fenner lets Graham know that “the Negro problem is a big one” in Muskogee and this is another “pioneer” job that she can tackle (Sch. 16.5). They had so planned her itinerary that they lay out the details of her travel itinerary.

Our plan provides for your leaving Fort Huachuca on the night of September 9. (Is there a night train?) The new director for Fort Huachuca will arrive on September 8. She is Mrs. Alene Brown who has been our USO director

in Columbus, Georgia. Mrs. Ervin knows her and feels that she can carry on the work which you have developed (Sch. 16.5).

The real truth is that this change is designed to put to an end the activism that Graham is carrying out on base. However USO officials had to know that moving her to Oklahoma would invite the same kind of activism that had been demonstrated at Fort Huachuca. Was this letter a ruse, only written to temporarily disguise the true intentions of the USO? Or perhaps were the ladies at USO sincere in transferring her, and then later after hearing from top military brass, changed their minds about her employment with the agency?

By the latter part of August, she is anticipating her next move. Graham tells her son David, "I'm being sent out on a new assignment early in September – to set up a new USO unit in Oklahoma and it will be impossible for me to receive mail from you promptly" (Sch. 12.21 August 24, 1942) but, by September 10th, she is still on base. She shares with Grahammie, "I am up to my eyebrows in this, that and the other." She then mentions that "Walter" from New York had come out to the base the past weekend for the opening of the Officers' Club. She tells Graham, "All pale faces are regarded with suspicion around here, so I had to introduce and explain who he was to the Colonel" (Sch. 12.21 Sept. 10, 1942). It would be naive to think that White's presence on base was an impromptu visit made just for the sake of seeing the new USO facility, as Graham states in her letter. Long before the inclusion of large numbers of black servicemen into the military in 1941, the NAACP, of which 'Walter' was the Executive Assistant, had been pushing the Roosevelt Administration to integrate the armed services. White was apprised of the difficulties black soldiers were experiencing from

various sources, but in this case he probably had a direct line into what was happening on base from Graham, and it is almost certain that he made visits to the two branches in the region that had been experiencing problems. His appearance on base was probably greatly appreciated by black soldiers who knew who he was and not so appreciated by many of the white officers on base.

She leaves the base on September 18th (Du Bois R 53 F 1048), nine days later than planned, but instead of heading to Oklahomo, she was ordered to come to a conference in New York (Du Bois R 53 F 1050). Once in New York she resides with her brother William who is living in the Hotel Theresa, the place that writer Jervis Anderson refers to as “Harlem’s Waldorf Astoria” (325). The delay in her leaving the base probably resulted from the USO organization not knowing what to do with her. It is almost certain that she is fired at this meeting. In November after everything is over and done with she shares the specifics of the meeting with Du Bois in her characteristic dramatic style. She lets him know that when base personnel discovered that she was being transferred, “such a furor arose that it shook the Empire State Building here in New York.” Requests, pleas and threats came from “Generals, Commanding Colonels, USO Citizen Committees throughout the state and finally a petition signed by soldiers representing every company in the 93rd Division” (Du Bois Collection R 53 F 1050). The bombardment of all these requests angered the “ladies at the YWCA” (ibid.). Did it just rattle the “ladies” at the YWCA or did these ladies get instructions from higher up, perhaps from Taft and McNutt, that Graham needed to be eliminated? Graham tells him that the women were opposed to her activities that were “outside the recreational program of USO.” They told her that race problems were not something that their

organization could consider (ibid). Graham found it regrettable again that this supposedly Christian organization fell short living up to its religious ideal.

Collins notes in her work on black feminist theory how surveillance has always been used as a device to control and maintain the unequal positioning of blacks. Although Graham was thousands of miles from USO headquarters, there were still ways that she was scrutinized. She explains to Du Bois one way that word traveled back to her superiors about her activities on base.

It seems that the F.S.A. man out there had written in that I was 'using my position as a USO director to influence military and civic affairs throughout the state. Which was perfectly true....not so much as to the 'USO position' but as to the influence. I had things so tied up inside the fort that every time this particular dirty little rat came along with his discriminatory program I was having him thrown off the reservation! (Du Bois Collection R 53 F 1050)

The Federal Security Agency (F. S. A.) representative came under the direction of Paul McNutt. Graham's having him thrown off base couldn't have put her on good terms with McNutt and likely raised suspicion back at headquarters. She tells Du Bois that she couldn't "stand silently by and observe discrimination and injustices practiced against our soldiers by the very organization under which I was working" (Du Bois Collection R 52 F 1047). In addition to getting this F. S. A. man thrown off base, she informs Du Bois that she had spoken to military authorities concerning the sentencing of one soldier in particular. There was little coverage of this incident in the newspapers. She tells him that after a riot in Tucson when a soldier had been given a life sentence, she reached the General and influenced him to reopen the case and by military ruling the soldier's sentence was reduced to ten years. She also had been called

in to sit on a court martial case within the fort and her USO bosses discovered this and were not pleased (Du Bois Collection R 53 F 1050). She tells him, “I did gradually become a threat to the complacency of USO and so, a few weeks ago they politely, but firmly decided to transfer me to a little industrial town in Oklahoma where my work would be ‘more definitely with women and girls!’” (Du Bois Collection R 52 F 1047).

After going to New York and discovering her fate with the USO agency, Graham, unsure of her next step, continues living with her brother William. She does not reveal to her children that she has lost her job, instead, she tells her young son, David that she is still waiting for a “very special assignment,” and she acknowledges that her business affairs are “a bit confused” (Sch. 12.21 Oct. 11, 1942). She has applied to go overseas with the Red Cross (Du Bois Collection R 52 F 1047) and is hopeful about her chances of going, but this door of opportunity has been closed. She would be an even greater threat on foreign soil.

When Graham mentions to her youngest son in October that she managed to get her November check a little early (Sch. 12.21 Oct. 24, 1942) this probably means that she has received her last check. She continues, “I don’t have the money quite as I planned it, but I’ve got some “big fish” frying and if things turn out as I hope (and am working my head off to accomplish) all will be more than well” (Sch. 12.21 Nov. 13, 1942). In the midst of her pessimistic jobless reality, Graham protects her sons from worrying about the difficult situation she finds herself in. By the first week in November she is working at a white magazine located in downtown New York City (Du Bois R 53 F 1048). In addition to this job, she had several possibilities for other jobs. She has applied to teach at several historically black colleges: Morgan, Howard and

Dillard (Du Bois Collection R 52 F 1047). With so many of the men being called off to war, the possibilities of employment for her are good (Du Bois Collection R53 F 1048).

Reminiscent of an earlier time when her parents' duties carried them to various communities, ministering to the needs of community members, Graham's purpose driven life now paralleled that of her parents. She moved from one community to the next: from Nashville, to Chicago, to New Haven to Fort Huachuca and so on. And just as Rev. Graham galvanized community members after a black child had been beaten, she galvanized servicemen abused by an unjust military system, allowing them a space, free from the scrutinizing eyes of whites, to come and voice their concerns. Like her father who served as a leader in the community, a go-between of sorts, connecting the black community with the larger community, Shirley served as an advocate between the servicemen and the higher authorities within the military establishment. Also like Rev. Graham, Shirley established a news publication, Sage and Sand. Jefferson notes that she "created a camp newspaper through which she articulated her opposition to the racial discrimination that black servicemen of the 93rd faced" (241). This printed publication, disseminated on base was likely part of Graham's undoing as well. USO nor army officials could sit idly by while Graham's outspoken and challenging voice critiqued the unjust system that both organizations participated in.

Graham's Fort Huachuca experience politicized her in a way that she had not been previously. Observing young men nearly the same age as her two sons being used by the U.S. military to fight fascism overseas while trying to strip them of their fighting ability to eradicate a similar form of injustice within this country, compelled her to take

a stand. Having put the Huachuca incident behind her, she waged battle differently. She simultaneously began waging both a direct assault and an indirect literary assault. Her direct assault was waged on two fronts. One way was manifest when she wrote articles directly recording assaults on black servicemen. Another way that her direct warfare was launched was in her work as a field secretary for the NAACP. She served as field secretary for the NAACP during the year of 1943, and she traveled the north eastern corridor assisting local leaders of the various chapters in recruiting new members to the organization, new voters and organizing new branches. Her indirect warfare was waged through her biographies that would attack racism in a more subtle way, engaging young readers in stories revealing the intelligence and courage of black Americans. For the majority of her readers, reading one of her books was the first time they had been introduced to a non-white person in a positive way.

Graham would not be accused, this time, like she had been during her Chicago days of being complicit with the system. She was one with the soldiers. She had put her job on the line during those times when she spoke out on their behalf. And perhaps another factor was at work. Because Graham was not military brass, and her role lay in an auxiliary mode, the anger and frustration that servicemen felt was not directed at her but against some of their immediate officers and higher ranking military brass. Naturally a schism existed oftentimes between black servicemen and their white officers, but in some of cases a schism arose between the black servicemen and black officers. Also many black servicemen resented how black newsmen and black representatives of the race attempted to frame through their rhetoric the parameters of the how the war should be perceived by their racial group. If any blood was to be

spilled it was that of the servicemen. How dare anyone not willing to risk the same dangers of war tell them how they should view their service.

Graham's absence from the fray is regrettable. After she left the state, Arizona Governor Sidney Osborn requested that the War Department relieve soldiers at Ft. Huachuca from their military duties to assist in the harvesting of the long staple crop in two counties in Arizona. He insisted that the crop was "necessary for the war effort" (258-259), but the black soldiers and black leaders were not fooled at this attempt to make a racist strike against the soldiers who had no desire to pick this staple crop -- cotton. Her presence might not have stopped the soldiers from being used in this way, but she certainly would have made such an outcry that officials would have pondered this request longer and possibly with a different outcome. In the end, the black soldiers were forced to harvest cotton. Handsel Bell might have unwittingly had a part to play in this sad episode as well, for of the many air bases located in the state, it appears that Fort Huachuca, where the black soldiers were stationed is the only base that used the men in this way. As far as Du Bois was concerned, Graham's departure from the base was unfortunate. He relays to her that he is not surprised that she could not "affect a revolution there". He then bemoans the present situation and tells her that her presence would have been better than her absence (Du Bois Collection R53 F 1049).

Graham had been removed from the base by the time the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAACs) made it to the Fort from training at Fort Des Moines, Iowa. (Jefferson 242). However, Jefferson attributes the efforts of her and these other black women on base in the interest of black servicemen for reaffirming "notions of family and community for black soldiers in a military setting" 241 Their activities

dramatically reveal the ways in which they challenged the larger society's and Afro-American societal notions of women's proper roles (241-242).

Graham and other black women on behalf of black servicemen are significant because they not only reflected beliefs that extended and reaffirmed notions of family and community of black soldiers in a military setting, but their activities also dramatically reveal the ways in which they challenged the larger society's and Afro-American societal notions of women's proper roles" (Jefferson 241-242).

Patricia Hill Collins notes in Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice how black women "could exercise power only from positions of authority in Black civil society and not in private and public spheres controlled by Whites, namely, within White families or the social institutions of government, corporations, and the media" (7). Graham's time at Fort Huachuca is an exception, for although this is indeed usually the case, Graham's education, professional success and ability allowed her to cross this line. It is clear that as USO Director at Ft. Huachuca her abilities were to be used to entertain black soldiers, but there were times when in this position she came into spaces where her black image was the face of this white institution in the western region that was under her jurisdiction. In broadcasting the work of USO in the southwest, USO officials made sure that the white papers in Tucson and Phoenix carried articles about Graham and the USO staff while it dismissed the idea of sending anything to black papers. In spite of the USO overlooking the black press they regularly covered activities on the base.

Also Graham's report that was broadcast over the NBC airwaves (Sch. 12.20 Oct. 27, 1941) should not be underestimated in the positive effect it had on a "community of millions of listeners spanning the boundaries of region, class, race, and

ethnicity” (Savage 1). In this aural sphere, Graham had control, albeit briefly, over the image and portrayal of the black USO representatives, framing the content of what they were doing and how it was being received by the the black servicemen at Fort Huachuca. Her skill in crafting rhetoric ensured that she framed the contents of her report in such a way that favorably reflected the blacks working on behalf of the agency and the black soldiers. Her ability to orate made her the perfect candidate to make the national broadcast. Defying the stereotypes of the day, Graham constructed an image different from the negative portrayals of blacks propagated in the media, portrayals of dimwittedness and incompetence to name a few. Over the airwaves listeners heard an intelligent, articulate and in-charge authority. Listeners could tell Graham’s race not because of improper English, but because of the black timbre in her voice and contextually speaking, they knew she was in a training camp with black soldiers and 1940s logic dictated that she was black. Shirley Graham’s voice and the report delivered from her perspective was heard by mainstream America. In many ways Graham’s geographical distance from USO headquarters enabled her to use her activism through this white social institution to press the boundaries that would eventually forge equality. By the end of WWII black soldiers, the black press, the NAACP, black agencies and civilians acting individually had pressed the War Department to make noticeable changes in military practices.

CHAPTER 10

“A SHAKY AND UNCERTAIN FOOTHOLD OVER THE YAWNING CAVERN” 1943-1946

Although revved up from the battle she had waged at Fort Huachuca, Graham now in the solitude of her living quarters in New York had time to reflect on what had brought her to her present circumstances. Fighting to bring equitable social conditions to black soldiers on a U. S. military installation had resulted in her being fired from her position. She vacillated between a range of emotions from seething to a lingering moodiness which by turns changed to an optimism ringing with a message from one of the spirituals she had her choir sing years before. The refrain questioned listeners, yet implied an affirmation: “Didn’t the Lord Deliver Daniel.” Deep in her soul was a confirmation that a change in her circumstances and the status of her people was coming. Justice could not be crushed down forever.

In December of 1942 Graham experiences another wave of optimism. Job prospects are looking up. January’s ‘Common Sense’ carried some of her writing. What she considered as her little ‘masterpiece’ was coming out in February. It was titled ‘The Negro and World War II’ (Du Bois Collection R 53 F 1052). The article was originally titled, “Negroes Are Fighting for Freedom” (Sch. 20.12 Oct. 14, 1971) but Graham must have been encouraged to drop the martial-like title and settle for one that sounded less antagonistic. The editors of Common Sense would permit another magazine, Catholic Digest to reprint the article. Catholic Digest also had a Braille edition which carried Graham’s article, so her work was read by the blind as well as the sighted. (Sch. 16.7 Sept. 1, 1943).

The imperatives of earning a living to support her family compelled Graham to consider job offers that she might have passed up. Perhaps her most important job opportunity during this time was from the NAACP in December offering her a two thousand dollar salary. David Graham, newly enrolled at Oberlin writes her for money to purchase glasses he is required to have (Sch. 13.2 Oct. 12, 1942) Robert is newly enrolled at Indiana University, so the pressures of accepting this offer weigh heavily on her. Meeting with Du Bois is upmost on her mind. Speaking with him will help settle in her spirit if this is the right option to take. She and White have had a personable and friendly relationship, but Du Bois had another take on White who by now was running the organization with what historian David Levering Lewis referred to as “a military efficiency” (The Fight 497). The job at USO had been her dream job, allowing her freedom and the discretion to direct her activities as she saw fit. She surmised her ability to manage her activities would be minimized and her duties would be different at this job. Just how different is something she wanted to discuss with Du Bois on her trip south. When they got together they likely discussed a range of issues: black involvement in the war, her odyssey to Arizona and back and the challenges she might find working at the NAACP.

Living in New York away from active battle with the black soldiers allowed Graham to evaluate what had brought her to her current situation. Certainly she must have pondered how the Christian organization that she had worked for had once again vacillated and indeed fallen below what was expected. This experience along with other life battles forced her to reinterpret the complex social environment in which she was navigating and to analyze the many ways in which religion functioned in this

society. While it encouraged and empowered little men to strike out against the Goliathas of the world, it simultaneously was used to silence those already oppressed. Metaphorically, sitting at the feet of Du Bois and hearing his observations on various issues such as colonialism, imperialism, exploitation, Pan-Africanism and religion and reading his extensive writings was enough to cause her to reevaluate some of what she had observed in operation in her life and the lives of her parents.

Her recognition of some of the detriments of religious doctrine came to the fore in some of her correspondence with Du Bois once she began working for the NAACP in New York. During a field trip down to Little Rock, Arkansas she was put off by the provincialism of the black citizenry. She tells Du Bois, “My people. I mean, I am constantly on guard less I offend some cherished custom” (Du Bois Collection R 44 F 320). Many codes of behavior observed by these southerners could be attributed to backward notions and superstitious beliefs. Astonished at the proliferation of black churches in the area she tells him “...there are something like ninety colored churches here!” And perhaps her most revealing utterance that discloses her recent engagement in studying communism and her drift toward communist ideology is discovered in her critical commentary on preachers in general. She notes, “I can more clearly see why the Russians closed all the churches! Come the revolution – that would be the first thing I should advise --- throughout the south. These fat, thieving, ignorant preachers! All of them should be put to work” (ibid). David Graham notes that once when he came home from the military they sat down all night discussing and reading parts of The Communist Manifesto (interview 3). His correspondence with her during this time reveals that she regularly sent him and fellow soldiers PM magazines to read.

The angst of losing a good job slowly became a passing concern as Graham found herself busy traveling again in a job related capacity. In January of 1943 Julian Messner Publishers sent her to Tuskegee to engage in research for writing a children's biography on George Washington Carver. Eagerly, she "undertook writing" on Carver at the publisher's suggestion (Sch. 16.9). She was excited about writing this biography and even more excited about future possibilities relating to a potential writing career. At some early point in 1943 she began working for the national office of the NAACP as a field secretary. Taking this position put her even more on the front line of the political struggle, more than she was at Fort Huachuca. In this position she traversed Ohio and Indiana in the mid-west; Arkansas and Tennessee in the south and New Jersey and Connecticut on the eastern seaboard, presiding over membership drives, discussing ways of increasing black voters and creating new branches. One new branch that she started was in Richmond, Indiana where her parents had purchased a homestead years before (Sch. 16.8). In addition to organizing new branches, the NAACP also wanted regional offices to be more active in local and national activities and to be branches that engaged in sustained and consistent activity rather than sporadic activity (NAACP II:C 307 Folder 6).

Graham's work with this freedom organization occurred at a pivotal time in its history. Barbara Ransby notes in her work, Ella Baker & the Black Freedom Movement, that between the years of 1940 and 1946, NAACP membership mushroomed "from 50,000 in 1940 to almost 450,000 by 1945" (108). Naturally, some of this growth was prompted by the exigencies of war pressing for changes in social interactions between the races, but Ransby notes that part of this growth was promoted

by its active national staff. Indeed Graham's active participation on the battlefield at Ft. Huachuca and passage to what her YWCA-USO former bosses probably thought might have been out to the proverbial pastures did not materialize. Instead her movement away from Fort Huchuca put her in a context which enabled her to exercise greater power. It certainly permitted her to formulate a broader grasp of the issues impacting Negroes nationally. As a field representative she was in contact with civilians but this did not preclude soldiers from continuing to contact her. It appears that the influx of letters she received from servicemen now perhaps, more appropriately, resulted because of her new position at the NAACP.

Her disillusionment with the white Christian church has taken root and finds a place within her speeches. In May of 1943, a couple of months into her job with the NAACP she delivers a speech before a literary forum at St. James' AME Church in Cleveland, Ohio and uses as her topic "The American Negro is ready to fight for his right to work." She likens the year of 1943 to that of 1776 by saying that it is the year of the American Negro. She continues, "He is 100 percent American; he antedated millions of whites in this country. Now is the time for him to assume his full responsibility as a citizen and to declare for full and complete racial equality." She makes the decision to indict the "white Christian church" for its actual stand "against racial equality" in spite of its declarations to the contrary (Oberlin College Archives).

At the NAACP she worked with people whose names became synonymous with civil rights activism. Walter White was the Executive Secretary, and had followed Graham's career from her earliest days as a musician. Graham's past association with him paved the way for her employment with this agency. Her operatic play, service

with the FTP, graduate studies at Yale and the plays she produced during the time she was there as well as her engagement with the soldiers at Fort Huachuca endowed her with exposure and experience that would benefit this organization. Roy Wilkins was Assistant Secretary and editor of The Crisis. Thurgood Marshall served as Special Counsel, and Daisy E. Lampkin mentored Graham on the ins and outs of establishing branches and running successful membership drives. Ella J. Baker, a young black woman seven years Graham's junior had recently been promoted to the position of director of branches around the time Graham arrived at her position (Ransby 121).

From the historical distance of the twenty-first century, it would appear that at the national office of the NAACP, Graham would have discovered a professional and somewhat cozy relationship with some of the black women there. Women like Ella Baker, Lucille Black, and Charlotte Crump, coordinator of publicity and promotion (120) worked in close proximity with her, and were a pool of women who could have been close confidants in the struggle for equality. Graham and other field workers experienced similar treatment during train travel as they constantly traversed the nation en route to NAACP offices across the country. They engaged in the same type of work, shared the same interest in activism – were crusaders for justice, but this doesn't appear to have made them close friends outside of the office.

On the surface it would appear that Shirley Graham and Ella Baker could have easily been close associates since their interests were so similar and they worked closely together during this time when the organization experienced exponential growth. Both were educated black women steeped in a black religious background that stressed involvement in community and political affairs, they also shared a leftist

political orientation, although the degree to which their leftist views converged is unclear. This engagement with the left in New York City ensured that they were acquaintances with some of the same people who were a part of leftist political circles. Their commitment to achieving justice through radical social change were also factors that would appear to knit them in a close friendship.

Their differences were probably strong enough to undermine any closeness. Whereas Graham's gravitation was always geared toward associating herself to those in positions of leadership, Baker was not impressed with kowtowing to big name personalities. Her gravitation was to the common man, and she was genuinely concerned with providing knowledge that would empower the layperson to discover the potential within that would bring about changes in his daily life. Barbara Ransby, states that "she met hundreds of ordinary black people and established enduring relationships with many of them" (136). Graham's individualist quest to fame precluded her from developing relationships with people who weren't in a position to advance her position.

It appears that Graham shared a professional, yet cordial relationship with these women and the men in the office, on one occasion loaning Baker and Wilkins her copy of Howard Fast's Freedom Road (Sch. 16.11 Aug. 1, 1944), but beyond professional engagement, they appear not to have been cozy friends. Du Bois would have easily known some of the people in the office and conversations about office business would have been interesting gossip, but the names of NAACP officials rarely pass between Graham and Du Bois in letters from December of 1942 up through July of 1944 when he enters into talks with NAACP personell concerning returning to the organization as director of the Department of Special Research (Lewis The Fight 498). This is not to

say that in person and in phone conversations they did not discuss the political intricacies of the organization. Nevertheless, these are not the people that Graham writes to Du Bois about. Another group of acquaintances have captured her imagination and are discussed in her letters.

In this new space in New York, she however began to associate with a new circle of writer friends. These new “writer friends” had leftist ties or were communist. The Communist Party had a writers’ organization called the John Reed Club that was “close to the party, but not the party” (Fast 54), and it also had a cultural circle (77) where “writers, artists, dancers, actors, producers, editors, publishers, flaks and advertising people” came together and met (76). It is this cultural circle that attracted Shirley Graham. In one of her letters she makes Du Bois aware of her new circle of friends and their amazement at discovering that she is a close friend of Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois. She brags, “I never quite get over the miracle of being able to say to people...with a great deal of dignity – ‘Yes - I know Dr. Du Bois.’” She continues:

The fact that many of my new literary friends up this way think I’m talking ‘big’ doesn’t faze me in the least. (I’ve recently been taken into a rather important writers club – me being the only and first of the darker brothers (Du Bois Collection R 56 F 126).

In Howard Fast’s memoir published in 1990, several decades after leaving the Communist party, he states that the communist establishment “loved important names and the publicity that came from those names” (154). Shirley Graham likely dropped the name of Dr. Du Bois during a gathering with these new friends and in this way the news of her association with him spread. Some of the writers she identifies as being

among her new circle of friends are Howard Fast, Carl Van Doren, Ring Lardner, Jr., Ira Wolfert and Dashiell Hammett (Graham Du Bois His Day 90).

Graham's new circle of friends exposes her propensity to gravitate to personalities whose accomplishments had garnered them national reputations. Of the artists she mentions to Du Bois, Carl Van Doren was a Pulitzer Prize winning biographer, Ira Wolfert was a Pulitzer winning correspondent, Ring Lardner, Jr. was a Hollywood filmmaker who would become infamous as one of the Hollywood ten after being blacklisted for his refusal to cooperate with the House of Un-American Activities, and Dashiell Hammett had written the novel, The Maltese Falcon which had been turned into a movie featuring Humphrey Bogart and Mary Astor in the lead roles. Before the decade would end many of these artists would fall from grace, victims of McCarthy's red baiting campaign.

The red-baiting campaign cranked up steam in the mid to latter years of the 1940s. During the early years of the 1940s while the war was still being waged, the government's concentration was primarily on the war, but after WWII came to an end the United States and Russia enter into an ideological warfare referred to as the Cold War. In the United States a committee was developed to monitor whether fascists fleeing Europe were trying to take root in the United States. The idea behind the creation of the House of Un-American Activity was admirable, but this idea was turned on its head and became something totally different from its original purpose. Thusly a committee that was originally begun to root out fascists, who might have escaped from Europe into this country, began scrutinizing not fascists, but leftist.

Because many communist were in the forefront of the movement to ban the bomb, they were targeted. Fast remembers the late forties as a time when he was constantly bagged by the House of Un-American Activity, when his books were pulled from library shelves and his book sales dwindled, when he was imprisoned for not giving up the names of people who had contributed to the peace fund for victims of the Spanish Civil War. He refers to this time of persecution of liberal minded Americans as a time of the “small terror” (159). He refers to it as such because compared to what millions of Jews had experienced in Europe during the Holocaust this terror was, relatively speaking, comparatively small. But for those living in America during the waning years of the 1940s, this “small terror” was anything but that. Countless innocent, well-intentioned people suffered ostracism, financial ruin and imprisonment.

David Graham Du Bois remembers that from his mother’s earliest days in New York “her identification with her writing was a result of a contact with Howard Fast who was a communist party member and a popular writer of novels” (DGD interview 4). So warm and friendly was their association that the advertising/ public relations firm of her brother, W. B. Graham and Associates, Inc., had a part in handling Fast’s Freedom Road (Du Bois Collection R56 F 132), a work that David G. Du Bois characterized as a “beautiful story about the reconstruction period” full with “black characters” (DGD interview 4). Up to this point, Du Bois had held a central position in her life, guiding her ideological position; however, in New York Graham is introduced to an infusion of variant strains of leftist ideas and once Du Bois returns to New York

from the south in 1944 she brings him into certain ideological spaces where he might not have otherwise traveled.

Just as Eric Walrond in the late twenties had been a connective link uniting Graham to other Harlem Renaissance personalities and informing her of patrons who could bestow favor on fledgling artists, Fast in the 1940s was her link with the then literary left, connecting her with writers, artists of varying types and publishers who helped facilitate her ascent to national acclaim. She would cultivate significant relationships during this time that would ensure her ascent into the world of young adult literature, and David Graham identifies Howard Fast as being the writer who influenced Graham's writing. Fast himself notes that in the late 30s he had been drawn into a circle of friends who were part of the Cultural Section of the Communist Party's organizational structure. After meeting Graham he facilitates her in making publishing connections. His literary agents, McIntosh and Otis (Fast 65), later became her agents.

It is very likely that while meeting with her writer's group discussions took place concerning the craft of writing and the function of literature. What becomes apparent in Graham's biographies is that they were crafted to illuminate the brotherhood between the featured African American and some white acquaintance. In her first biography on Carver, Graham thoroughly develops the relationship that young George Washington Carver had with Farmer and Frau Carver, German immigrants who were settling into life in the border state of Missouri. After his mother was taken off by night riders, George and his brother were left without parents since their father was enslaved. Out of human compassion, the Carvers extend a hand in helping to raise the two boys made orphans by their mother's abduction.

The publisher who made such things possible for her during this time was Julian Messner, and in typical Shirley Graham fashion, she was able to cultivate a close professional relationship with him and his family that lasted beyond his death. In addition to her association with her publishers, she developed a good friendship with Helen Ferris, editor-in-chief of the Junior Literary Guild, the organization that exposed her to a national audience of young readers ranging in age from six to sixteen. Her relationship with staff members of the Junior Literary Guild would be the key to opening up a door to a life that Graham had been searching for most of her adult life.

If Shirley Graham would have limited herself to working with and through black organizations only, she would never have received the opportunity or the exposure necessary to extend to a larger audience. It is likely that a number of people around the country affiliated with the AME church who knew of Rev. Graham and his family would follow with interest any accomplishments his family made. But this would have been a relatively small audience, much too small to facilitate Shirley Graham in vaulting into popular success and crossing over into a national audience. In 1940s America, many black residents of major cities were denied access to libraries and the struggle to survive worked against one engaging in the leisurely activity of reading. In terms of blacks living in rural areas of the south, many were barely able to eke out a living to take care of their needs much less indulge in any luxuries such as buying books.

Before Graham's ascent into stardom occurred, she hovered in a gloomy state months before her first work came out in print. In 1943 Rackham Holt's biography, George Washington Carver: An American Biography, published by Doubleday, Doran

and Company had come out. Although Graham had completed her work on Carver months before it was released, her publishers held back her book until April 1, 1944. In February of that year, she complained to Du Bois. Rackham Holt “has had all opportunity to cover everything --- radio and screen, included. Furthermore she knows all about my book. I don’t appreciate the editors, Julian Messner, Inc., having allowed her to read the galleys some time ago” (Du Bois Collection R 56 F 126). Graham’s melancholy was further amplified by the illness of her eldest son Robert who by February was gravely ill. The jubilation at reaping the rewards of long, hard work would be tempered by feelings of guilt and regret at her failure in being more present in his life, especially since this son manifested angst years before, and had mentioned in earlier letters problems with his chest.

Graham’s inception into the world of the Junior Literary Guild created an audience that was eager to not only read her works, but eager to learn more about her. The book club would feature the works of selected authors and send the books to club members all across the country. The children would receive membership pins and were often a part of reading clubs. The JLG also fostered interest in the books through a literary magazine called, Young Wings. The purpose of this magazine was to “make young members...acquainted with the authors and illustrators of their books” by featuring biographical sketches of the authors and illustrators (Sch. 16.7 Dec. 15, 1943). After the publication of Dr. George Washington Carver: Scientist, Alice Palmer, the managing editor of Young Wings encouraged Shirley Graham to write a biographical sketch of her life by including pertinent information about her childhood such as where

she was born, where she was educated and when it was that she first became interested in writing. Palmer shares with Graham the following:

We have found that our young readers are much interested in the books you liked to read as a girl, your hobbies as a girl, and any special incidents of your growing up days that you can remember as significant. In short, send us what will make these young members of ours acquainted with you (Sch. 16.7 Dec. 15, 1943).

This was Graham's opportunity to articulate for a young audience of readers what the reading life of Negro children was like in early twentieth century America.

Nevertheless, in response to Alice Palmer's request, Graham shared her childhood reading experience with young readers by commenting on being enraptured with stories read to her by her father: "Just when he first opened a book and began to read aloud I cannot say. But finding my rapt attention gratifying, he continued to share his books with me. For I cannot imagine that he chose Ben Hur, Quo Vadis, Les Meserables, and [A] The Tale of [T]wo Cities for a five year old" (Sch. 1.1). The reading experiences she shared with her young audience glosses over a number of ugly realities: the inability of Negroes to go to libraries, the dearth of positive reading materials about Negroes and the lack of literature written by them. Graham couches the pleasurable reading experience of a young child in love with words within a framework that does not allow race to diminish the power of storytelling.

Although Graham's first work on Carver was co-authored with George D. Lipscomb, an English and Speech professor, it appears that all of the attention and publicity was centered on her. The speaking engagements advertising the book are requests to Graham and make no reference to Professor Lipscomb. The extent of Professor Lipscomb's involvement in writing the book was negligible as evidenced

through his portion of the proceeds; he received twenty-five percent of royalties for his input (Sch. 16.15-19 April 2, 1945) and after this first biography Professor Lipscomb fades into memory.

The publication of George Washington Carver: Scientist, established her as an author of great promise. After the publication of this seminal work Graham received a number of letters from across the country, sharing with her the impact of this biography. She received letters from librarians inviting her to come and meet young readers in person, principals and the children themselves who gave notices of praise, or queried about some aspect of the work. In January of 1944 Alice B. Fairclough, a representative of a public school in Manhattan wrote Graham requesting that she be “guest of honor” at the school’s Negro History Week program. She tells Graham that the children are familiar with George Washington Carver – Scientist, and the entire program will be conducted by them. She ends by telling Graham “There will be about eight hundred children, whose age range is from eight to twelve” (Sch. 16.10 Jan. 9, 1944).

Helen Ferris wrote Graham in April of the same year informing her that her “new book in its Junior Guild coming-out dress” was hot off the press. “It comes to you with our pride in having your splendid work for our boys and girls, and the package is all bound round, you may be sure, with every good wish.” She further informs Graham of the magnitude and far reaching implications of having a book be a part of the Junior Literary Guild. The accompanying magazine, Young Wings was then “being bound for permanent reference in the leading public libraries and school libraries throughout the country, as well as the Library of Congress.” The tone of Ferris’ letter is

very enthusiastic as she shares with Graham how “splendid” this publicity is. “In each year’s bound volume is also included our printed Index, which lists the authors and illustrators of our books in a way that enables boys and girls readily to obtain information about their favorites” (Sch. 16. 9 April 1, 1944). Graham’s inclusion in this index permanently records her participation in the children’s literary movement in the 1940s. No matter how obscured her presence in literature would later become, or what book banning and censorship campaigns would be implemented against her work, Graham’s biographies could not be erased from the record nor from the minds of the young people who read her work and were refreshingly presented with Negro protagonist who were endowed with their full humanity.

The editors of the Junior Literary Guild and the authors and illustrators affiliated with the JLG had their fingers on the pulse of their national audience. Ferris received feedback about the success of the book selection from “boys and girls, from their mothers and fathers, from their librarians and their educators in all parts of the country” (Sch. 16.9 April 1, 1944). Likewise, Graham also received letters from some of her young readers. Little Miss Elsie Fischer from Sunset Beach, California wrote Graham a three page letter sharing with Graham the impact the Carver book had on her and her sister.

The life of this little son of Heaven was so very sympathetically portrayed by you. We were all saddened to think that he had such an unhappy young life in this lovely rich country, and very much inspired by his gentle and loving attitude toward life in spite of his hardships. Truly he learned by the things he suffered, but there is no doubt that his wonderful understanding and sense of unity with his God, was the foundation of his mighty works in his after life (Sch. 16.10 April 27, 1944).

One can only imagine what other young readers like the Elsie Fischers felt and what impact this and other biographies by Graham would have on this young community of readers. Would these books be enough to encourage young white readers to think differently about a race of people or would the small trickle of books by Graham be too small to make any headway in changing the direction of thinking in this group of readers?

Interest in Graham's biography continued to spread from various sources. Marion Young of the Public Library of Des Moines, Iowa wrote to Miss Helen Hoke, the Children's editor for Julian Messner, Incorporation thanking her for giving her permission to craft a script for adaptation of a radio program based on Carver's life. Young tells Miss Hoke, "The people at Simpson College and the outstanding negroes in our community are being informed of the broadcast" (Sch. 16.9 June 17, 1944). Graham's personal friend, Rev. Robert A. Moody, of Shiloh Baptist Church in Hartford, Connecticut sent his personal copy of the Carver book to Fred D. Whish, Jr., the Superintendent of Schools in Hartford, Connecticut and Mr. Wish told him that in the course of study among eight graders, Graham's book was "among the biographies recommended for emphasis on achievement, character and heroism" (Sch. 16.9 Sept. 25, 1944).

From the 1930s through the 1950s Shirley Graham functioned in spaces that Patricia Hill Collins would call, "outsider within locations," meaning that Graham oftentimes was situated in social spaces and occupied positions "marking boundaries between groups of unequal power" (Collins 300). In these spaces her presence and her skills served as proof of the intellectualism, ability and humanity of members of her

group. As a graduate student at Oberlin, Yale and New York University, while serving as head of the Black Theatre Unit in Chicago, she was leader of the black theatre people there while serving under a number of white superiors. Hallie Flanagan was at the helm of the FTP in Washington, and Harry Minturn was regional head in the mid-west. In her position as USO Director, where she agitated for social equality, she was socially situated between the black servicemen she identified with and her white superiors at the USO headquarters office and white military officers on base. When she authored biographies in the 1940s, she much like the people she memorialized functioned as an example to members of her group who in spite of obstacles, demonstrated that they could excel. In the various positions in which she found herself, she needed to walk a fine line, and she managed to walk this line well enough to get from one powerful and lucrative position to another.

In her role as the “outsider within” she served as a goodwill ambassador, an agent of change. During the presidential election year of 1944 she would write Eleanor Roosevelt thanking her for endorsing through the Junior Literary Guild, her book on Carver, at the same time using this opportunity to advance two agendas. One was to reacquaint Mrs. Roosevelt with her. She had met Mrs. Roosevelt when she visited Vassar College during the summer Graham studied there in connection with the Federal Theatre Training School. In her letter she would remind the First Lady that she was “the sound technician for that first production of ‘One Third of the Nation’” (Sch. 16.9 May 6, 1944). Trying to forge a relationship and announcing her next writing project, she would mention in this letter her new work on Paul Robeson, telling Mrs. Roosevelt, “I believe that any boy or girl who because of race, color, creed or poverty, has had

reason to feel that life somehow is passing by on the other side, will catch new vision, will lift the head, will walk more surely with PAUL ROBESON, AMERICAN” (ibid). Mrs. Roosevelt responds by saying “I am glad that your little book, ‘Dr. George Washington Carver, Scientist’ is being so well received, and I wish you equal success with ‘Paul Robeson, American’. I do think you are right in your reasons for writing this book. Good luck to you” (Sch. 16.9 May 30, 1944).

She also sent the presidential contender for the Democratic party, Wendell Willkie an autographed copy of the Carver book. Mr. Willkie’s response was brief and simple. He is “delighted” to have the book and was looking forward to reading it (Sch. 16.10 May 8, 1944). These seemingly small actions of reaching out from her station in life to interact with whites on a basis of equality could be taken as too forward according to the dictates of the day, but they demonstrate Graham’s adeptness in moving between the social classes and also speaks to her fearless nature and keen understanding of people and human nature.

Attempting to build bridges of understanding and cooperation between the races, she would also send autographed copies of her book on Carver to others, one of whom was Henry Ford Sr. Ford had in some ways shown himself to be, if not a friend of the Negro, a man who gave them an opportunity to work for a living wage. He was a pragmatist, letting his actions speak for his beliefs. His company, Ford Motor Company was one of the “nation’s largest employers of black men, even during the depression” (Hine 135). She would tell Henry Ford, Sr. that during the material gathering stage in her research, she “constantly ran across [his] footprints.” She continued ingratiatingly:

I am inclined to believe that you gave Dr. Carver the most complete, mature friendship of his entire life. It is impossible to estimate what the friendship meant to him. At this time when nations and races and groups distrust each other so bitterly I wish people knew more about this very intimate and beautiful story. My book does not betray confidences, but it does attempt to portray to a discouraged world that men of goodwill can walk together (Sch. 16.9 June 5, 1944).

Her overture of sending Alain Locke a copy of the Carver biography was received, and he returns an acknowledgment containing a measured and guarded critique. Locke is well acquainted with Graham. He is familiar with her Rosenwald fellowship and had seen her in Owen Dodson's play Garden of Time which ran in New Haven in May of 1939 (Sch. 15.15; Hatch 61). On the evening of the play, the two chatted briefly with Graham filling Locke in with news of her accomplishments. He had to hurriedly return to Washington, and did so without purchasing a tie that had caught his eye. Much to his surprise Graham purchases the tie and sends it to him. Locke was really touched by this gesture and mails her a long note expressing his "hearty thanks for the beautiful tie" (Sch. 15.15).

Quite possibly, a children's biography did not provide Locke, a Rhodes scholar and professor of philosophy, with the type of intellectual engagement he enjoyed, but he understood the significance of Graham's contribution and after thanking her for lending him the Light Galley and giving him a copy of the book, he tells her, "I am returning the light shots after a hasty but enlightening reading. I think it let's on badly at the end, -- as did Native Son also—but the early and mid-sections are important social documentation." He informs Graham that "an erroneous impression is given that this is the typical Negro Experience. It isn't Thank God" (Sch. 16.15).

There are a number of elements that worked in Graham's favor in the successful reception of the Carver book. When George Washington Carver passed on the 5th of January 1943, he had been acknowledged by white America as a scientist of considerable note. The effect of his passing appears to have added to the success of the book. Writing from Oberlin College in January of 1943, David Graham questions his mother on the effect of Carver's death on her work. First he laments Dr. Carver's passing by saying, "That certainly is to very bad about Dr. Carver dying, isn't it." Then he queries: "Won't that hinder your book a little or maybe a lot because of your lack of personal contact? However, wont his death make your book sell much better because of the increase of interest and the publicity it will naturally get?" (Sch. 13.3 Jan. 18, 1943). The timing of the publication of the work couldn't have happened at a more fortuitous time. Within a year of the first printing in 1944, the book had gone through several re-printings.

The momentum of book exposure continued. In 1944 while David was in service at March Field, in Riverside, California, he sent in several orders for the book and knew fellow soldiers who were interested in purchasing it "directly from Messner Publishers" (Sch. 13.5 May 21, 1944). The book jacket had a section where those interested in purchasing the book could order it and have it sent by mail. This method reached many potential readers. The Afro American weekly also carried an advertisement on Graham's work.

After successfully writing the biography on Carver, publishers offered her another contract. Her second biography to come out in print featured Paul Robeson. The selection of this artist would ring the death knell on Graham's literary career,

although her passage into infamy would take some time in coming. She had wanted this second work to be a biography on Lieutenant Colonel Charles Young, the highest ranking Afro-American officer during World War I who was forced into early retirement on “spurious medical grounds” (Lewis When Harlem 12), the same Charles Young living in Xenia, Ohio when David and Etta Graham moved there in 1900 when Shirley was a toddler. There was discussion between Graham and Du Bois concerning writing a biography on Young (Du Bois Collection R 55 F 324), and the possibility exists that Du Bois might have made the suggestion to her. He knew in a way that Graham could not understand at this point, the true and ugly story of Young’s forced retirement. In a tribute to him upon his death in 1922, Du Bois says of him that if he had been sent to Europe instead of the fever coast of Africa, “he could not have been denied the stars of a General” (Lewis A Reader 125-126). It is not clear what considerations went into the selection process of the second biography, but capturing the life of Lieutenant Colonel Charles Young would be left to another biographer.

As success was lifting Graham up, up and away, the weight of an irrepressible sadness tethered her to earth as Robert lay in a hospital in New York waisting away. Her success had come too late for her children to reap the benefits of her diligent pursuit for security for them during their childhood. Robert, who had been living in Indiana since his return back from the west coast, had secretly married one of his Cripus Attucks High School classmates. His correspondence to his mother mentioned Yvonne Smith as his “girl” but he married Edith Eatherly after conceiving a child out of wedlock. Robert’s first child was a boy who became his father’s namesake, Robert Graham McCanns, Jr. In June of 1944 he goes into the hospital (Sch. 13.5 June 25,

1944), the same month as his daughter's birth in Indiana, but he will never see this child for he passes in New York in July of 1944. This second child, Jennifer, was a daughter who would bear a remarkable likeness to her Grandmother Shirley (McCanns, Jr. 4). But the surreptitious nature of this marriage, Shirley Graham's all-consuming concern with appearances, and her desire to present to Du Bois' a cultured black family free from faults were all factors contributing to her bungled handling of this matter. Consequently, Graham's attachment, or more appropriately her detachment from her two grandchildren – the only two blood grandchildren she would ever have -- would be more tenuous than her geographically distant relationship had been with her two sons. She attempted to enter their lives when they were teenagers in a tepid manner, but her efforts at bonding were too little, too late and she failed to actively and consistently pursue a relationship with grandchildren who would have welcomed her into their lives (ibid.).

Graham turned in her resignation to the NAACP in September of 1943 (Sch. 16.8). Robert is very sick and at some point he spends an extended time in Montefiori Hospital in the Bronx (Sch. 12.14) For a woman so accustomed to working hard and pressing her way through difficulties, Shirley Graham was now very concerned about the state of Robert's health. This state of worry left her bereft of energy and inspiration, so much so that the demands for travel as a field secretary were too arduous for her to continue to perform. It is hard to imagine her traveling when it seemed inevitable that she might lose him. Du Bois would months later come to live in New York at 409 Edgecomb Ave., a home that Graham and her roommate Noma Jensen located for him. NAACP stationary in the latter part of 1944 includes his name as Director of Special

Research. His return to New York after being forcibly retired from Atlanta University was a godsend for Graham after the death of her eldest son, for he provides comfort being in close proximity to her. When Graham commenced to move forward in her life she engaged full time in the solitary activity of writing.

Carver was not a controversial figure during his lifetime, and his death put him safely out of reach. Robeson, one of Graham's contemporaries, was altogether different. His living status ensured that he could not be conveniently marketed and packaged in a way that sanitized him for a white American public accustomed and conditioned to 'Negroes' being presented in a way that belittled and demeaned them. A Negro exercising their right to challenge white supremacy was quickly dealt with in a way that ensured that he became too fearful to step out of place again. At the time Graham penned his biography, he was at the height of his career and the full fury of opposition against his political views had not yet gathered. He had garnered an international reputation that cushioned him from the virulent racism he was to experience in this country. As the book came out for publication, the tide was turning against the likes of Robeson, Graham and Du Bois, people whose outspoken critique of the American system put them at odds with the white establishment.

In addition to selecting a political person, she incorporates a number of elements in his biography that would be politically incorrect beginning around 1946. Instead of her closely aligning Robeson to a particular white character, she demonstrates how his humble beginnings give him an affinity to the common man all around the world. Robeson's leftist leanings, his enthusiastic embrace of Russian culture, in concert with the United States' growing estrangement with this world power put him at odds with the

establishment. He would pay dearly for his outspokenness and Graham would begin to see a noticeable decrease in the sale of her books as the decade came to a close.

Graham's communist leanings reverberate through the text. The opening scene in the Robeson biography is a dream sequence where Robeson is in Spain and is drawn to members of the working class there, the street cleaner, the fisherman and the porter. He is a man who is attuned to the sufferings of the common man all across the globe. Russia is presented in a positive light. Concern for the earth's resources being used for everybody finds expression in the work. The personalities she links with Robeson were also at odds with the administration. Some, like Langston Hughes would later be baggered by the House of Un-American Activities, others like Claude McKay, who meets Robeson on the streets of France and sings the praises of Russia, would be under F.B.I. surveillance (Maxwell 39-65). These were just a few of the problems that those in power would find wrong with the book.

This book would be targeted as a book that should be banned from libraries. It came under fire after 1946 as the United States and Great Britain drifted away from Russia and the Cold War set in. A New York Times article reported that the West Virginia Library commission had "removed a biography of Paul Robeson, Negro singer, from its list of books recommended for children." Mr. William C. Piper, a member of the House of Delegates, had requested that the book be removed on the "grounds of Mr. Robeson's political views" (Du Bois Collection R 61 F 1057). In response to this Graham writes her publisher and requests that they join forces to fight against the threats to democracy. Du Bois, an old veteran to attacks of this sort consoled her by telling her, "Do not be at all amazed at having your books proscribed. That is standard

technique for such times as these” (Sch. 14.9 March 26, 1948). In this same letter he commented on the “situation” in the country at this time and the “frightful war propaganda” that was being circulated. He maintains that all he can do is to “keep still and write” and appear on a few “ostensibly, non-political” public forums. His advice to her is to continue writing (ibid.).

Although Graham’s pattern of life appears to demonstrate that she was reticent about establishing meaningful relationships with other black women in her peer group, black women as a group proved to be her most loyal constituency in terms of generating interest of her work in the black community and supporting her. Their mission of self-help and racial uplift compelled them to support black women who were working toward this same end. They arranged forums for her to meet with members of the community. While attending New York University, Graham affiliated with Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, a sorority thirty years into its existence. It appears her engagement with the organization was more perfunctory rather than genuinely desired. She states in her memoir on Du Bois that before the end of her first year of graduate school at New York University that she was “elected to one of the graduate sororities, but I did not have time for social activities” (82). The sorority did not have at that early dated the status that it came to have in later years. It could be that her father’s encouragement of connecting with organizations within the church rather than social organizations might have tempered her relationship with sororities and other organizations. The fact remains that she benefitted from this sorority through its support of her, once in loaning her money and other times with various branches throughout the nation reaching out to her to support her in her endeavors. The Deltas in

New York City arranged a Book Project, and requested that she be a guest speaker at the Book Forum in 1946. Sorors Baker, Lipscomb, McLean and Maude L. Watkins “soror librarians “were responsible for purchasing the books for “those so desiring” (Sch. 16.15-19). In 1947 the Deltas of West Virginia State College engaged her to speak to the student body and faculty (Sch. 16.19 March 14, 1947; March 22, 1947).

Emerging out of the cultural context where the AME church was the seminal organization that structured almost all the activities of the Grahams’ lives, Shirley Graham would have been familiar with “sister circles.” In a very general sense, “sister circles” refer to those spaces where black women gathered freely to commune with one another. Sharing very similar experiences, having mutual concerns, enduring the same kinds of oppressions provided them with a similar lens through which they viewed the world. Nellie Y. McKay in the foreword of Sister Circle: Black Women and Work, an anthology written by black women scholars from various disciplines about black women defines the meaning of sister. She notes that “Sister” defines their relationships with each other, always in dimensions spiritual and secular, social and religious, and idealistic, without ever losing sight of the harsh reality of what it means to be black women in white America (ix-xiii). Sister circle activities ranged the gamut from congregating to make quilts, to getting one’s hair coiffured, to discussing scholarly concerns. Through her affiliation with the AME church, Graham had been a part of black women sister circles as she was growing into adulthood, especially in her capacity as choir director; however as she climbed the proverbial ladder of success it appears that she migrated from the AME church circles and probable sister circles to more racially mixed circles.

There could be a number of reasons why her engagement in sister circles appear to be limited. Growing up in a family where an itinerant life was normative did not allow her time to develop deep and meaningful relationships. As the family moved, she found herself in different social settings, meeting new and different people. Some of her acquaintances were of other ethnic groups. Her exposure to people of different cultures and her parents' desire to intermingle in mainstream American culture gave her a perspective that was open to meeting people of different ethnicities. Another factor that limited her engagement with sister circles was her feverish working pace which did not afford her the time to routinely engage in sister circle activities. Whatever the case, the racially diverse groups that were standard fare in Graham's life were very supportive of her. It does not appear that black women groups or sister circles appear to have felt snubbed by Graham.

The "shaky and uncertain foothold" that Graham bemoaned in November of 1942 (Du Bois Collection R 53 F 1048) slowly gave way to a blossoming writing career that allowed her to realize the beginnings of a fame and economic security that she had sought most of her adult life. The uneasiness Graham felt, in what she likely perceived as growing financial indebtedness and job instability, was allayed as circumstances changed. Job offers came in from multiple organizations, and both sons were pulled away from school months later because of the war.

Simultaneously to these events, her political life heightened as she was immersed in the cultural life of New York City which provided her with a context where diverse political theories were discussed through different mediums – newspapers, and magazines, and in the different environments she frequented: the

NAACP, her Communist writer's circle, and on the street corners she traversed where soapbox speakers spouted their ideas during her daily travels between home and work. In library forums, churches and living rooms the ideological philosophies of Communism and Socialism were debated. In an article written by Asa Philip Randolph in 1925 "The Negro and Economic Radicalism" he names Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Bishop Daniel Payne, Bishop Henry M. Turner and Trotter as being among the ranks of old guard radicals who "damed the detractors and blessed the exploiters of the race" (Opportunity Reader 479). Randolph names the exploiters as being the philanthropist who after profiting from the caste system in place in the country turned around and "subsidized" Negro "industrial schools and colleges" (ibid.). Because Randolph felt that Du Bois' criticism of these philanthropists was not sharp and he gave tacit approval to them because of their finances, his approach to Socialism differed from Du Bois. Hubert Harrison, a former member of the Socialist party, parted ways with the Party because of his belief that class-consciousness in a racist economic order was not strong enough to unify people when changes would occur in the economic structure; however, race consciousness "must of necessity survive any and all changes in the economic structure (Anderson 122). Within the ranks of the left there were competing ideas about methods and approaches which in some cases caused breaks in friendships.

Her affiliation with the national office of the NAACP brought her in contact with activists in states that came under her jurisdiction as a field secretary. Instead of being limited to one locale, she was able to inject life into stagnant branches, develop new ones, and encourage and affirm those that were active. Her connection with a new writing "circle of artists" exposed her to writers whose careers had catapulted them into

a national acclaim because the inherent benefit of white supremacy opened up possibilities to them that hindered the brilliant minds like that of her mentor, who because of his race had been unable to reach his full potential in this country. The kaleidoscopic range of ideas in New York gave Graham an education that she could not have received in a classroom.

Christianity had played a monumental role in Graham's upbringing, but many events gave way to her psychological migration away from orthodox religion. She would maintain her belief in some core religious tenants while questioning and shedding others. Graham did not declaim her new position on religion in an essay or particular pieces of writing, rather her speeches at NAACP meetings where she criticizes the white church demonstrate her gradual drift. Behind the scenes, she would save her criticism for the black church and black ministers for Du Bois. Graham's observations of the way in which religion was used to maintain hierarchial positionings throughout the nation brought her to a new enlightenment, and the Christian church was a main player in maintaining the status quo. The decade of the 1920s found her in churches across the nation performing with her musical group, the 1930s found her in churches and other venues lecturing on spirituals and presenting plays, the early 1940s found her embracing her activism in a more direct way, spouting a more defiant message – one that pointed out the fault of a Christianity that didn't allow injustices to be confronted.

Within a few months after Robert's death, Dr. Du Bois' return to live and work in New York and Graham's subsequent enrollment in school offer her solace. After a period of grief her engagement into the world of ideas resumes. By the spring of 1945,

she enters the Ph. D. program in the School of Education at New York University and engages in writing papers on various subjects. This study opens her up to new worlds and becomes an elixir to a fainting soul. It gives her a respite from the constant bombardment with problems of racial injustice and allows her fleeting moments of engaging in thoughts of other sorts. She examines Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass, Stephen Vincent Benet's epic poem John Brown's Body (Sch. 3. 1-13). She examines the life and writings of poet Percy B. Shelley and is struck by his questioning of faith and his subsequent expulsion from Oxford because of it. Shelley's observation, "The delusions of Christianity are fatal to genius and originality; they limit thought" (Sch. 3.12) offers just another reason for Graham to re-evaluate her world. She also examines the literature of Charles Dickens and W. E. B. Du Bois (Sch. 3.1- 13), and although much of the literature she interrogates momentarily turns her attention away from direct activism, much of what she selects to analyze gives her a stronger foundation in examining the struggle for freedom from other people around the world – the people in England from Dickens' world, the people in Ireland whom Shelley was drawn to because of their suffering (ibid.).

Du Bois' presence in the city made regular discussions on any number of subjects possible. When he is away and attends the United Nations Conference in San Francisco in 1945 Graham is privy to the proceedings (Sch. 14.7 May 9, 1945) when he is threatened with non-renewal of his contract with the NAACP (Lewis The Fight 519) Graham is aware. His contact with her is becoming more frequent and deepens, and although Dr. Du Bois is her primary mentor, she could look to a number of people now for their explication of ideas. What could have initially been perceived as her fall from

grace at Ft. Huachuca led to her rise from obscurity in New York in a more politically fulfilling way.

Her first book set the stage for her ascent into popular culture as a writer whose works were read by a national audience during the 1940s, and her second book triggered the onset of her descent. Her national recognition gave way to an international acclaim as her writings were translated into several languages, and her international stature would sustain her as McCarthy's red-baiting tactics took full effect in adversely impacting her life. As she trudged ahead into 1947, she did so with enthusiasm and vitality, determined to plough through.

CHAPTER 11

SHIFTING FORTUNES AND CHANGING MARITAL STATUS: 1947-1955

The new year of 1947 begins “auspiciously” for Graham. In June of the previous year she had turned her book on Douglass in to her publishers. By December of 1946, before the book is released on the market, she discovers that There Was Once a Slave...The Heroic Story of Frederick Douglass has won the “Best Book Combatting Intolerance in America” (Arthur B. Spingarn Folder 8.6). The New York Times coverage of the award, “Douglass Biography Wins 6,500 Award,” on December 17th almost ensures an eager audience of readers when it comes out in print by March of 1947 (Sch. 16. 15-19 March 11, 1947). The award money changes her future.

Graham is discovering the joy and rewards of living life as a successful “professional writer.” Monies from the sell of her books enable her to realize the type of life for which she has always striven. She is feted at autograph book signing parties in book stores, libraries and even in the home of celebrated New York socialite, Carl Van Vechten. Adoring fans, full of adulations for her biographies, bestow on her a seamless stream of blandishments. She moves from her apartment at 3111 Broadway that she shares with Noma Jensen to a home that she is purchasing located on Long Island. 173-19 113th Street in St. Albans will now serve as a place of refuge where she will write more biographies in the “studio” within her residence (Arthur B. Spingarn Papers Folder 8.6). She can now afford to have cleaning help to tidy up her home and is in the position to engage the legal services of Arthur B. Spingarn. She requests that he now handle her business affairs (Spingarn 8.6 Feb. 13, 1947).

The national recognition and acclaim that Graham was enjoying occurred before her third biography, There Was Once a Slave...The Heroic Story of Frederick Douglass, is released on the market. With the release of this work, her prominence takes another leap for she poured her soul into it. She had been groomed most her life to capture Douglass' life in print. The folklore from her childhood was full of stories about the Underground Railroad and abolitionists. Rev. Graham's stories about Frederick Douglass' visits to the mid-west and specifically his coming to his father, Washington Graham's home, had early on fueled her curiosity about this hero. Her familiarity with spirituals, slavery and this time period, her knowledge of Quaker involvement in assisting slaves in their quest for freedom, and her education at Oberlin, an educational institution and community more open to an egalitarian ethos than other spaces, all endowed her with an authority to write convincingly about this great leader, and his national and international travels. Graham's access to Douglass' only living grandson, Haley G. Douglass, who was then working at Dunbar High School in Washington D. C. during her research stage, also added a certain validity to her work (Sch. 16.15 May 19, 1946)

Readers were carried away into the world of Frederick Douglass and followed a perspective that had been, for the most part, non-existent to white audiences prior to this time. Shirley Graham's portrayal of Douglass's life was unique for the manner in which she would handle his personal life, specifically his life with his love interest and later wife Anna would be different from the way white male and female writers and black male writers would handle it. Elizabeth Brown-Guillory in her work Their Place on The Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America makes the point that black

women writers, more so than black male writers have found it important to include in their art “the element of compassion and dedication to one’s spouse and immediate community. Of particular interest are the genuine, supportive, loving black female-male relationships” (14). This is an area in Douglass’ life where it was important for Graham to write about sensitively for several reasons.

This work gave her the occasion to write in a way that had not heretofore presented itself. Douglass had long since died and his story had been presented by himself and other biographers, allowing Graham some agency in freeing herself up to dramatize his life. With her first two biographies she had not developed the romantic life of the featured person. Carver was a man whose love life with a member of the opposite sex seemed relatively non-existent. He never married and largely focused his energy into his work. Robeson was a robust figure whose wife had written a biography on him prior to Graham’s biography. His living status, Graham’s cautiousness at not overstepping bounds, precluded Graham from poking around too deeply into his love life, but Douglass’ biography was targeted at a young adult audience and his death of over a half century gave Graham a freedom and distance to engage his life in a way that she was not able to do with Robeson.

From her days as a playwright, she had never had the opportunity to develop a story line that concentrated on affection between a black man and woman. She had written about the killing of a daughter within the confines of slavery, the problems of miscegenation and class struggles in a play set within a mining setting, a church family struggling to live with dignity and survive financial blight, and a who-done-it train mystery, but never had she had the opportunity to write about a romantic relationship

where a free black woman supports her man in his struggle for freedom. She realized from the standpoint of being an avid reader and a Negro woman the dearth and perhaps non-existent writing that engaged the subject of mature relationships between black men and women. Possibly helping to fuel her creative energies at this stage in her life was the fact that Graham was in a passionate relationship with her activist/mentor, and although he is unavailable to enter into a legal relationship with her, Graham could so easily cast the figures of Anna and Frederick into the role of Shirley and W. E. B. with Shirley doing all within her power to support the man of her hopes and dreams in his struggle to alter the course of history.

The publishers' questions reveal how Graham was breaking ground in a new literary direction. Before the Douglass book was printed, there were questions raised about the appropriateness of including certain love scenes between Douglass and Anna. Graham responds to the queries about this point with directness and firmness.

Page 144 -- Love scenes. True, Douglass was a man of action. He was also a man. These scenes with Anna (short enough indeed) are necessary to present the whole of Douglass and must not be cut. I have talked with people who knew Douglass. Every one of them stressed his human qualities. This is an important part of the picture (Sch. 16.9).

It is unclear what love scenes, if any were expunged from the original manuscript and what remained unchanged by the time the book was published. In the account that made it to the market in 1947 there is nothing titillating about the Frederick and Anna's relationship, but Graham develops a warm, affectionate relationship between Frederick and his wife. Graham gives subtle expression to their love through poetic phrasing. When Douglass is falling in love with Anna she communicates this in

the following way. “The calm, sweet face of Anna Murray shimmered in his dreams. He had to be free” (There Once 74). Douglass felt the need to direct the activities of one’s life was essential to one’s humanity. When they marry there is nothing risqué that Graham communicates about the night of their honeymoon. Race precludes them from enjoying the comfort and privacy of a cabin on board the steamer, John W. Richmond; instead, they discover pleasure in the knowledge that both were free. “They were on their way, to make a home, to build a life together.....how bright the stars shone that night! (88). As they begin experiencing life together as a married couple “Everything floated in a dreamy mist” (90). Douglass and Anna’s union was a demonstration of black love and defied notions of animalistic behavior that had far too long come to characterize the engagement of blacks. During slavery black men and women were forced to breed, but this relationship between Douglas and Anna challenges this taboo. If whites could accept the realization that black people were capable of engaging in loving relationships with each other, this was crossing a crucial barrier because one could then cross the next logical step in recognizing that blacks could engage in loving relationships with other human beings, perhaps human beings of another race.

Graham’s correspondence to the publishers demonstrates her willingness to fight for what she felt was the proper representation of Douglass the man. For her, it was unacceptable for them to try to obscure Douglass’ humanness or natural affections for the black woman with whom he would share the majority of his adult life. By standing firm and maintaining that the passages that she had written be kept in the text, she represents in books a wholesome example of black love between a black man and

woman, something during this period altogether missing in literature of the period. The significance of this seemingly small act should not be underestimated in the imagery it represented to young readers since it was taking a stand against a collective white supremacist mindset that devalued black life and black relationships.

The fact that the reader follows Douglass' life through the mind of this Negro woman's perspective is significant since the perspective of any non-white person rarely had an opportunity to emerge during this period. Howard Fast made a significant point about perspective in his biography when a book of his, The Last Frontier was rejected in the early 1940s by the editors of Simon and Schuster. When a new editor, San Sloan read the work he asked Fast did he know where he had gone wrong. When Fast could not see it, Sloan told him that he had tried to tell the story from the "Indians' point of view." He advised him to rewrite the story and "tell the whole story from the white man's point of view" (73).

Many readers note that Graham's biography on Douglass marks a noticeable sophistication of style over the Carver and Robeson works. Dan Dodson was a member of the Executive Board of the Camp Fire Girls of Greater New York, and also the Executive Director of the Mayor's Committee on Unity. Of her Carver book, he complimented it for its "simple straight forward style" that "set forth in thrilling fashion the saga which was Carver" (Sch 16.9 July 14, 1944). Of the work on Douglass, Carl Van Vechten remarks that it was "such an advance in style, manner, and thought that I am convinced you are going a long way and have only just begun your glorious journey" (Sch 16.19). Van Vechten had been accused of being, especially by old guard literary figures like Benjamin Brawley and Will Marion Cooke, too indiscriminate with

his endorsements (Anderson 215), but Van Vechten's recognition of Graham's expert handling of Douglass' life deserved the accolades it received. Jervis Anderson notes that the "cream of Harlem writers, artists, actors, and musicians" received invites to his parties (215), and years beyond what was considered the Harlem Renaissance movement, Shirley Graham became a frequent visitor to affairs hosted by him, in large part because of her new literary life. And although Du Bois had been highly critical of his Nigger Heaven Van Vechten did not let Du Bois criticism of his book diminish his respect for Du Bois, for often Graham and Du Bois were invited together or paired in correspondence by Van Vechten before they married.

Of this work her Oberlin professor Frederick Artz praises it for being "a fine achievement" but complained of its too laudatory tone. "To me, a saints' life is more convincing, if there are a few blemishes" (Sch. 16.16). Did Shirley Graham make the lives of the people she featured too heroic? Were the people she wrote about too atypical, exceptions to the rule rather than the norm? Overwhelmingly American literature overemphasized flaws in the non-white personality. Her laudatory portrayal was not enough to provide a balance to the existing literature. She was driven by her desire to feature the positive and her motive to improve relations between people of different cultural groups. She knew the power of books to function as socializing agents.

Oftentimes the subjects of her biographies had a following of admirers who became fans of hers once she wrote a book about the person they idolized. This was certainly the case with the personages in her first three biographies. Carver and Douglass had lived close enough to recent history for people to still remember them.

Robeson was still living. Admirers of these persons transferred their affections onto Graham when she paid homage to these highly respected men. In March of 1947, Sallie W. Stewart, President of The Frederick Douglass Memorial and Historical Association, Inc. in Evansville, Indiana, the city where Graham's paternal grandmother Lucy grew up, requested that Graham grant them "the favor" of using her name without obligation as one of the vice presidents of the efforts" to raise funds for the launching drive of 100,000 for the perpetual upkeep of the Home of Frederick Douglass. Graham graciously grants this permission by telling Stewart, "I have never permitted the use of my name in any organization of which I was not an active member. But I am so fully in sympathy with the Frederic Douglass Memorial and Historical Association and so anxious that its objectives be reached that I am happy to lend whatever assistance I can" (Sch. 16.15-19 March 8, 1947).

She continued to press forward with her writing, and began collecting research on her next writing interest which would be a source of great joy and sorrow. Graham undertook writing a novel on the life of Anne Royall, a white female travel correspondent living during the colonial period which captivated Graham. She had come across Royall's footprints while writing the Douglass biography, and Royall is featured in detail in that work. Royall had published a weekly paper between 1851 through 1854 and these papers were preserved in the Congressional Library. Graham had an opportunity to research these papers while in Washington D. C. touring for her book on Douglass. This work on Royall was to serve two purposes: the completion for her Ph. D. and her next published work. Nevertheless, at different stages along the way in the writing of this work problems occur. The academic record falls silent concerning

why Graham's Ph. D. aspirations at NYU were never fulfilled; nevertheless, countless letters to and from publishers and critical readers make clear the full fledged struggle that ensued to get this work which Graham considered her best up to this point published.

Early on the Messners commented about her "writing approach" with this particular writing which Graham had decided to title, Royal Anne. By November, Messner publishers have one chapter of the book and they hedge on proceeding forward by saying, "they (Kitty and Julian) cannot afford to contract for a book so early in the game. While they liked the chapter, they did not consider it quite as successful a performance" as Graham's agents had considered it. McIntosh and Otis tell Graham that the Messners "...think you haven't gotten into the stride of the novel form yet" (Sch. 16. 16-18 August 15, 1947). They asked Graham a number of questions regarding the work. To these questions she sent back detailed responses to their queries, but in the end, despite her high hopes for this work, it never reached publication (Sch. 17.2).

When the work was completed, comments from different publishers varied. Van Wyck Brooks, a literature professor and a man whom Graham referred to in her memoir of Du Bois as "the literary conscience of America" (225) told her that he thought she was doing a fine piece of important research, but he told her, "You won't make any money on this." Graham also mentions that the market was bad for books at that particular time, especially for an "unorthodox" novelized version of accounts surrounding Aaron Burr's treason case (Yale Collection Jan. 2, 1948). Several attempts were made to distribute this work on Ann Royall to different publishers under different names. By February of 1951 an agreement to publish a work of Shirley Graham's titled The Verdict, is cancelled (Sch. 17.6). As late as November of 1954 the book had been

reworked and renamed, The Woman In The Case, and sent to publishers in London, but it was turned down by publishers there because publishers felt it dealt with a section of American history that the English would not be interested (Sch. 17.4).

There is no evidence that the Messners were faint of heart in their support of Graham due to the threat of communism, but it appears that their concern about the “writing approach” or rather Graham’s writing perspective lay at the heart of the problem for publishers. Editor, Earl Schenck Miers of The World Publishing Company wrote her an extensive critique discussing areas where the work needed changes to successfully fit into the novel genre. At this stage, Graham had not quite mastered the technique of writing the novel, but she did not stop. She reworked this text to emphasize the life of Aaron Burr, and packaged the new work as a novel called Enigma (Sch. 17.11 June 13, 1953; June 17, 1953). She shared with Van Vechten in January of 1952 that the “best piece of work” she had “ever attempted” had been turned down by four publishing houses. She believes the reason for her difficulties in this matter result because she presents an “*unorthodox*’ view of certain events which took place from 1796 to 1807.” She further notes,

In some of my research I ran across some rare material on Aaron Burr which led me to doubt his so called “treason”. He became the leading figure in my novel. I do not attempt to ‘clear’ him but I do project a little known and truly fascinating Burr. My agents argue with the publishers that this is a novel – not an historic text book, nor is it even a biography of Burr. They are completely sold on the book and McIntosh and Otis are not fools (Yale Collection Jan. 4, 1952).

In spite of Graham’s optimism, Messner nor any other publisher would bring this work to print; however, Messner would go on to publish five more biographies by

Graham. To a great degree Graham's maligned position as a Negro woman opened her up to viewing historical events with a different angle of vision. But to what degree did Graham's maligned positioning hinder her from putting forth an "unorthodox" view in the publishing world?

Was it truly a question of Graham having difficulty with the novel form, or was there some unspoken concern lurking in the darkness? Although Graham had crossed over into the white children's audience quite successfully, was writing about a non-black person pressing the bounds of propriety? Just how appropriate was it for a black woman to take on the enterprise of writing about a white person in the 1940s? Or was it possible that the growing miasmic atmosphere of red-baiting was beginning to influence the way her publishers scrutinized her work since the Roberson biography was coming under fire? Certainly the climate was changing and it was becoming more difficult for authors with leftist leanings to publish their works. This was the case with Shirley Graham. Perhaps a look at some of the coverage she was receiving in the press in the mid to late forties gives insight into outlying factors that could have possibly undermined Graham's success in this area.

In the mid forties, Shirley Graham's name was quickly becoming ubiquitous in American newspapers. The Boston Daily Globe, The New York Times, Chicago Sun, The Hartford Courant, The Indianapolis Times, The Arkansas World, the Herald out of Washington, Memphis –Press Scimitar, and the Cleveland Plain Dealer represent just a few of the papers that reported news on her activities. Black weeklies most proud of boasting of her accomplishments were The Afro-American, Pittsburgh Courier, and Amsterdam News. Percival Prattis of the Pittsburgh Courier had a close relationship

with her, and Baltimore's Afro- American editor, George Murphy, was also close with both Graham and Du Bois. Whenever her books were reviewed or she spoke at social functions, coverage of the event usually found its way to these papers. Graham knew the magic of good publicity; she also knew the disastrous effects of it.

Political antagonisms were lurking just beyond Graham's peaceful existence. While speaking at the headquarters of the National Association of Colored Women about the contributions of Frederick Douglass in 1947, a reporter from Washington's Star who said he had come to interview her, milled around in the company of people attending the event and sat and listened to Graham's talk. Graham spoke about Douglass' life "particularly stressing his service to and his vision for the United States of America" Sch. 16. 16-18). She shares the content of her speech with Dr. George M. Johnson, Dean of Howard University Law School because she finds it necessary to consult him about this interviewer's attempt to stir up controversy around her name. She tells Dr. Johnson the following:

I said that Frederick Douglass was a great American that he loved this country and never once swerved from a steadfastness of purpose in claiming his place and asserting his citizenship (Sch. 16. 16-18).

Graham further says that she read excerpts from Douglass' "Call to Arms" as he had encouraged Negro soldiers to serve in the Civil War (Sch. 16.16-18). When the Star reporter writes his article, he provocatively titles it "Communism Assailed by Colored Author," and conveniently interjects the word "communism" immediately followed by quotes from Graham's speech, thereby editing the piece to make it appear that Graham is deriding communism and giving an overtly political speech. She recounts the events of the evening to Dr. Johnson telling him that before she left the event, the reporter

“asked whether I did not think that because of hardships heaped upon them Negroes were likely to turn to Communism.” Graham suggests that this question came from left field and tells Dean Johnson the following:

The question was so far from anything that had been said that there was laughter in the group. I laughed also and said I was not a politician and certainly not an authority on communism. But I was pretty sure what Negroes wanted to see was the Declaration of Independence come alive (Sch. 16.16-18).

Graham’s determination to assert black people’s right to full participation in the American system made her subject to attacks. During her book tours, it was not her habit to directly incorporate any of her political beliefs in her message. Her politics were interwoven in the messages in her books and her life’s actions. She carefully chose the venues where she would speak and exercised a great deal of agency in the selection of people she would write about and the manner in which she wrote about them. But Graham was not one to shy away from a fight nor allow someone to misrepresent her meaning.

This reporter’s article puts Graham in defense mode, and in a bizarre twist, Graham is compelled to seek legal help in finding out how to defend herself against the charge of assailing communism in a politically charged climate where it was politically correct to do just that --- assail communism and anyone espousing it as a favorable economic ideology! If Graham would have come out publicly retracting the interviewer’s article, she was sure to come under more fire, and be branded as red. If she publicly said that she was a communist, her book sales were certain to be negatively impacted. Either way, in the contentious climate of the day, she was damned.

A letter located in Graham's collection however, sheds light on Graham's political life during this time. A letter dated June 29, 1954 from Richard Morford, Executive Director of the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, Inc. to Shirley Graham suggests that Graham was a member of the Communist Party dating back as far as 1944 or 1945 (Sch. 17.14). The contents of the letter inform Graham of some procedural hearings where her name was given as a member of the communist party. Was the reporter privy to this information, and was he motivated by this knowledge to nip the wings of this colored woman or this communist acolyte? Graham did not broadcast that she was member of the Communist party, but her activities and the organizations she joined and was affiliated with give an indication of her ideological philosophy. She was aware of the negative baggage that came with that association. It is because of this that she seeks the advice and representation of Dean Johnson.

As Graham is enjoying the perks of being a successful writer and struggling through the trials of being associated with the left, she and Du Bois grow closer. Their engagements together increasingly became more politically oriented. A formal letter from Du Bois dated October 20th 1947 invites Graham to accompany him on a political outing. "Go with me to the United Nations for the reception of the petition" (Du Bois R 60 F 66). They along with other NAACP officials presented the appeal to the director of the Division of Human Rights (Lewis, The Fight 528).

During the month of March in 1948 while away in California Du Bois' letters to Graham come with a frequency. Spaced three to four days apart, the letters during this month are brief, but they detail his itinerary, tell her the number of people attending his lectures, touch on his living arrangements, dining experiences and political angst.

Sharing these details with Graham suggests how much of a confidante she is and a high level of comfort that Du Bois feels with her. Du Bois biographer David L. Lewis observed that in 1948 Du Bois requested that his Defender readership join him in asking Henry Wallace to run for president (The Fight 532), so it is no small wonder why much of Du Bois' energy is put into showing his support of this candidate while he is on the speaking circuit. On his first letter to Graham, dated March 5th, he shares with her his decision to "resign from the chairmanship of the committee on the Council of African Affairs." He ends this letter bemoaning the fact that he has lost his Wallace button. "DARLING! I've lost my Wallace button! Rush me two by air" (Sch. 14.8)! Evidently she responds immediately, for in his letter of March 13,th he's ecstatic that he's been able to sport his Wallace button when addressing an audience at the University of California, a university where Wallace had been disallowed from speaking. He tells Graham in his letter, "I wore my Wallace button, which came just on time" (Sch. 14.7 March 16, 1948).

On June 22, 1948 the first meeting of the New York State Council of the Arts, Sciences and Professions met, and Graham took an active role in this organization, serving as secretary for the Board of Directors, heading up the literature division of the organization and chairing the membership committee. Graham would later tell Mr. Lawrence Hautz that one of the functions of this organization was to protect academic freedom on college campuses (Sch. 17.3 Nov. 3, 1949). Also another main reason for the formation of this group was to help elect Henry Wallace for President, but Graham indicated to members that they should "think of ASP as a permanent organization over and above the Wallace Campaign" (Sch. 17.1). In her memoir on Du Bois, Graham

discussed the backlash against progressives after the death of Roosevelt and notes that when his Vice President, Henry Wallace decided the run for the presidency, this group comprised primarily of intellectuals and artists with leftist leanings wanted to support him. There was discussion about the “political role of ASP,” whether it was “an independent, non-partisan pressure group or a definitely affiliated political organization” (Sch. 17.1). The reasons behind the formation of the group certainly hinted at its political propensity, but other undertakings began to shape its proclivity to support causes that were to the political left in nature, such as its support of Du Bois against his ouster from the NAACP. By October of 1948 the National Council of Arts, Sciences and Professions wrote a letter in defense of him.

This year is pivotal for she is gaining friends and foes because of her political sympathies and her allegiance to Du Bois. Her allegiance to Du Bois certainly must have put her at odds with people like Walter White, Roy Wilkins and Eleanor Roosevelt when she eagerly came to the aid of this “eighty year old warrior” when he was stripped of his position in the NAACP (Sch. 17.2). Her work as a field secretary for the Association made her familiar enough with the organization and its practices to be in a position to know the best way to set the record straight and speak out on behalf of Du Bois. In November of 1948 Masses and Mainstream published her article, “Why was Du Bois Fired?” which gives the history of Du Bois’ relationship with the organization and the reasons behind his firing. Her critique of the operations of the organization did not speak well of White or Wilkins in their roles as Executive Secretary and Executive Assistant Secretary of the organization. She notes how their autocratic control over the organization did not utilize the strengths and abilities of other members of the

organization. She also notes the executive secretaries imposition of authority to erect a wall between the member branches and administrative staff members and the Board of Directors. This did not allow many concerns and issues of the mass members that the organization was supposed to represent to get beyond the scrutinizing eyes or approval of the executive secretary. Graham airs this dirty laundry, and clearly positions herself as being at odds with the NAACP administration. Her denunciation of the NAACP reveals a further shift to the left for Graham who finds criticism in the methods employed by the NAACP in addressing the social ills of the black populace. The organization's willingness to cooperate with the Truman administration and overlook the government's blatant disregard for the oppressed masses is unacceptable to Graham. What is more insulting is that the NAACP would commit treason of sorts, by turning away from the very crusader who helped institute the founding of the very organization that now had turned its back on him.

Around the same time, the group plans an International Conference for World Peace that was to take place at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City, March 25-27, 1949. The answer as to whether the group's status was non-partisan or affiliated politically was determined for them on the occasion of the Conference for World Peace where many delegates from all around the globe who had been invited to speak were denied visas. The media, following the lead of the U. S. State Department branded this Conference as an ambitious intellectual front promoting Communism (S. G. Du Bois, His Day 107). When Du Bois attends the Congress of Partisan of Peace in Paris the last week in April of 1949, in his speech he is very direct about the motivations behind the current militaristic spirit in countries like the U. S. and Great Britain. He notes, "the

real cause of the difference which threaten world war is not the spread of socialism.....colonialism has been and is and ever will be one of the chief causes of war” (His Day 119). His criticism was not well received by governmental heads within the United States, but this in no way frightened Graham away.

Graham and Du Bois’ relationship continues to deepen. While Du Bois is at the family home at 2302 Montebello Terrace, a picturesque community, a stone’s throw from Morgan College in Baltimore, Maryland, he writes Graham and tells her that “Mrs. D. [is] quite comfortable and contented....The home is quiet and so beautiful. It would be heaven here alone with you. I shall come back Tuesday and phone as soon as I arrive” (Sch. 14.8 Aug.29, 1948). He will be able to spend some cherished time with Graham when he returns to New York.

Graham is awarded a Guggenheim a few months afterward, and travels to Europe. This trip to Europe offers her the first occasion to spend time alone with Du Bois abroad. They had been in Paris together during the Congress of the Partisans of Peace in Paris the last week of April in 1949, but they were a part of a U. S. delegation (S. G. Du Bois, His Day 116). It had been close to three decades when she had first heard him speak of his travels to Paris. Now decades removed for that first meeting, they have an opportunity to spend time together and alone in this romantic city. This, no doubt, for the first time allowed them to express themselves in a special more intimate way. When he returns to Europe a year later, he can call the names of places he stays and he and Graham have a point of connection because they have spent time in some of these places together.

This award comes at a critical time because by 1949 the political climate in the U. S. is becoming more repressive. Lewis refers to this time as one of “feral hysteria” (The Fight 537). By spring the European landscape is the perfect setting for Graham to enjoy some leisure time and accomplish much serious writing. Much to her delight, she discovers that her name and reputation precede her in her travels abroad. It was absolutely refreshing to get away from the stifling political scene in the United States. She spends time in Paris and Nice and then goes to the foothills of the Alps and does some mountain climbing. She visits places she has never seen before but has heard of. Before going to Copenhagen, Denmark where she sees “Hamlet” performed in the “original Elsnore Castle,” her publisher tells her if she has not made reservations for living arrangements there, he has “hundreds” of invitations for her to visit private homes.

To understand how Graham’s name was being established internationally, one need only look at her first work. Graham’s biography on George Washington Carver solidly established her career as a writer of children’s literature, and three years after its publication, translations of it gave the work a life beyond its national scope. Maurice Glasser wrote Graham from Victoria, Australia informing her that Melbourne Booksellers had informed him that the English version of Graham’s Carver book was “on order, and is expected in this country very soon” (Sch. 16.15 April 2, 1947). Curiously enough by 1952, Gertrude Blumenthal, her editor at Messner shares with her the latest information she has on the work. “I find that it is being distributed by the Department of State as a good will gesture in connection with a project to translate into many obscure languages books of great import” (Sch. 17.9 Aug. 20, 1952). The

countries for which this work would undergo translation were Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and parts of Africa (ibid.). Just why the Department of State would help this work gain a life beyond these shores is questionable, especially since this same Department was not allowing Graham and Du Bois to travel. Graham's mission of enlightening men about the lives primarily of black people in the United States was becoming a success with people of color globally, and the Department of State was assisting her in this matter.

Graham's time in Europe was fruitful and she ends her sojourn abroad by "seeing Cuba before settling down at home" (Yale Collection April 20, 1949; Aug. 8, 1949; Du Bois Collection R63 F 1103). The outcome of her time spent away from the U. S. results in two books coming out in print by December of 1949: Your Most Humble Servant, a biography on Benjamin Banneker and Life of Phillis Wheatley: Poetess of The American Revolution. The books did not have the same level of development. The book on Banneker seems more targeted for a young adult audience while the work on Wheatley seemed to target a children's audience. However, both books develop the interesting origins of the featured hero/heroine and the conflicts involved in their attempts to live as human beings striving to develop their talents and interest.

Back in the states, Graham's fan base continued to grow among a broader constituency as her book publications increased. There were still people who were not fearful of the tactics used to silence public figures. She was gaining the respect and admiration of adults all over the nation. New Jersey, Illinois, California, Tennessee and Georgia, are just some of the states that Graham received mail from with people sharing

the impact her work made upon them. One adult fan from New York sent her one such letter. After the publication of her biography on Banneker, Cecelia Cabaniss Saunders of the Harlem YWCA Branch of New York City writes her a “fan letter,” sharing with Graham the following:

...after three decades of a ‘heap of living’. I read every word of “Your Most Humble Servant”, including ‘notes on sources’, and enjoyed it all—the story, the words, the research, the dramatic interpretation. In unearthing these unsung heroes of the past, you are doing America a real service just as did Benjamin Banneker during his day; for this I am grateful and also for the personal joy and inspiration you gave me! (Sch. 17.3 Dec. 12, 1949).

So taken with Graham’s ability to tell a story, Saunders suggested future leads on “New York Negroes during the decade of the depression.” She tells Graham that “source material can be found in the case work files and records of the Harlem Branch YWCA” (ibid). Graham’s experience with writing about a live hero/heroine like Robeson, whose living status increased the likelihood of their being subject to a higher degree of scrutiny perhaps influenced her to not be so open to this idea. The depression was too recent in memory.

Many colored YWCA’s across the country had honored Phillis Wheatley by naming their buildings after her. One such association was in Indianapolis where Graham worked in 1941. It is perhaps because of the preponderance of so many YWCA’s named in honor of Wheatley that Graham chose to honor her life by capturing it in print. The Story of Phillis Wheatley, a story of a Boston slave girl purchased by kind Quakers opened up many channels for Graham to speak. She likely felt that colored YWCA’s named after this poetess across the nation might invite her to speak, and other doors might open up. She was offered an opportunity to speak at the Boston

Public Library and Brandeis University. When her home state of Indiana finally took notice of the accomplishments of this native Hoosier in the early 1950s, it was after she had written five biographies. By 1952 Broad Ripple High School in Indianapolis, Indiana wanted to pay tribute to all Hoosier authors, so they wrote for Graham to send a picture and an autographed copy of one of her works. To this requests she sent her most recent publication, The Story of Phillis Wheatley.

In 1950 Du Bois engaged in a series of events that would push the government to the brink in terms of no longer being able to ignore him. He ran as the labor candidate for the U. S. Senate in 1950 and in the spring of the same year he became one of the founding members of the Peace Information Center, an organization that wanted to ban the bomb (S. G. Du Bois, His Day 124, 129). This was difficult terrain to plow through, and a help mate was certainly what was needed during this time, but sadly as he was taking on all this responsibility the time was fast approaching when his ailing wife of fifty-five years passed. Nina died July 1, of this year (Lewis, The Fight 545). As Du Bois' personal life was caving in, Shirley Graham inched closer and closer to his side.

When Nina died, Graham was positioned above all other suitors that Du Bois had dallied with over the years – Mildred Bryant Jones, Eileen Diggs, Ethel Ray Nance, Georgia Douglas Johnson and Elizabeth Proctor, -- to take her place beside him in matrimony. Du Bois sent his paramours, with the exception of Proctor, letters informing them of his decision to remarry (Lewis, The Fight 550). Virginia Alexander had died (545). Du Bois' causes have become Shirley Graham's causes, and she is eager to get in the trenches with him. Over the years Graham flattered him, noted his

wisdom, his courage to lead, his steadfastness, and yet this by itself was probably not enough to pull Du Bois fully in to her charm. This was accomplished through her activism, her constancy. Play by play, book by book, speech by speech, and essay by essay all coalesced to make a foundation firmer than any of the love affairs that he had ever known. At a time when friends in the U.S. were falling silent or turning their backs on him, Shirley Graham ran boldly to his side and stayed there and clung closer. Her gift of oratory and ability to rouse a crowd proved the perfect compliment to Du Bois' stern, stilted, sound, brilliance, especially when just a few months later they would have to travel around the country making speaking engagements to raise funds for Du Bois' upcoming trial in 1951. He was indicted February 9th and Graham thought it best to move the wedding up from February 27th to February 14, 1951 (His Day 136-141). Graham had originally selected the day of February 27th because it was Robert's birthday, and since his death, it had become associated with sadness, but by making this the date of her wedding, this would remove all vestiges of gloom (136).

Historian David L. Lewis discusses Du Bois' enlightening attitude about the role of women, but he is quick to point out that the relationship he shared with Nina was "rigidly Patriarchal" and at odds with his sensibility (Lewis, The Fight 15). This was not to be the case with his second marriage. Being married to Shirley Graham would provide him with an opportunity to allow the woman to share life with him and to live an unorthodox role for a wife in the 1950s. Before they are married, he writes to Graham spelling out his views on the type of marriage they will share. He tells her that he is not looking for the "conventional" marriage.

The marriage I plan with you is based on economic equality:
I pay my way and you pay yours; except of course in case

of sickness or like calamity. We are trying the mutually supported marriage of self-supporting companions, whose union is not money but friendship, common work and love (Sch. 14.10 Letter dated Jan. 23, 1951).

In spite of the twenty-eight year age difference, Graham desired to live in a traditional marriage, in large part because she had spent the majority of her adult years as the sole breadwinner for her family of three. Du Bois recognized this, and spelled out what he envisioned their lives together as being.

I think that unconsciously, and because in the past you have had no one to take care of you, [you] are looking for a husband who will pay your expenses as a duty. I see the lure of this situation. But with us it has got to be share and share alike: divide theatre costs, dinners in town and carfares; share cost of rent and food; be partners in expense as well as comfort and love. That is the marriage for men and women, but not for parasites. Think this over. I love you. W. E. B. D (Sch. 14.10 Jan. 23, 1951).

After their marriage, Graham would spend the next twelve years of her life devoting her attentions to assisting her husband in working on the last great projects of his life. She became the vessel through which his ideas were espoused, many times delivering his speeches in various and sundry places. Many who knew them both agreed that she in a number of ways extended his last remaining years. Theirs was indeed a love affair melded through activism. Yes, perhaps Irene Diggs, his assistant at Atlanta University should have been the next Mrs. Du Bois. David L. Lewis notes that she was the woman that everyone thought would be the next Mrs. Du Bois because she was smart, efficient, loyal and accomplished in a number of ways, but perhaps the quality that she could not trump Graham on was her zeal, passion, and stick-to-it-ness.

After the case against the Peace Information Center was dismissed on November 13, 1951 (The Fight 552), Du Bois and the other co-defendants found themselves in

need of funds to pay the lawyers for their defense of them. To remedy this Du Bois and his new wife, co-authored a political commentary detailing Dr. Du Bois' ordeal with the United States Government. The commentary was titled In Battle for Peace: The Story of My 83rd Birthday and was published in 1952. Du Bois writes each chapter and Graham comments on each. His tone is somber, filled with gravity and her voice when added, presents another perspective of the same event that is very similar, yet the tone is lighter, more chipper, even giddy at times. In this work Du Bois would comment on Graham's "beautiful martyr complex" (62), her willingness to surrender herself to a cause, a characteristic so many others recognized in her. A special edition of two-hundred copies of the book was printed exclusively for the Du Bois Foundation. The covering for the book had a beautiful, red, felt-like texture that was accentuated with Du Bois' signature inscribed on the front. These special editions were made available only to close friends and supporters of the defendants (Sch. 13.24).

In the meantime she had taken up the charge to write about the man who established an outpost in the region now known as Chicago. Gertrude Blumenthal, Children's editor at Messner, wrote Graham in November of 1951 reporting that she had talked with others at the company and she had decided that "we would like the biography of your famous Chicagoan, Mr. somebody or other whose name I forget. Would you be an angel and send me a one page synopsis on the basis of which I want to go ahead and draw up a contract at once" (Sch 17.5 Nov. 29, 1951). Blumenthal's blunder in not knowing the subject of Graham's book demonstrates how Graham was able to exercise some agency in her choice of subject and also shows the need for Graham to inform readers of the little known fact that the man, Jean Baptiste Pointe

DuSable, who first established the foundations of a city which later became known as Chicago was a black man whose ancestry also included French and Indian blood. When the book was finally published in 1953 many were happy to receive it. Charlemae Rollins, Children's librarian of the Chicago Public Library from 1932 through 1963 who would also complete a work, Famous American Negro Poets (1965), wrote Gertrude Blumenthal a very enthusiastic letter about the book.

As soon as the De Sable book came I took it right home to read. I re-read it at once anxious to see what had been left out. To my great delight I found that nothing has been omitted! It's all there just as wonderful as can be. I agree with you that it has gained in the cutting. Now I am certain it will be read by both adults and young people. It is my happy privilege to introduce it at one of our monthly book order meeting on Tuesday and I can certainly recommend it wholeheartedly enthusiastically for purchase in all the branches of the Chicago Public Library (Sch. 17.13 May 28, 1953).

This work on DuSable along with another work Graham published in 1953 featured persons with ties to Native American culture. Messner brought out Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable: Founder of Chicago which Graham says was the first work written on Du Sable. She felt that this book would be of "tremendous help in interracial appreciation" (Sch. 17.9). Because of his membership in the Potawatomi Indian tribe, the story of the Native American held a "prominent place in the book" (Sch. 17.9 Sept. 20, 1952).

Her work on Pocahontas, a full-blooded Native American was published by Grosset and Dunlap. It fore-grounded the lives of Native Americans of the Powhatan tribe. Graham wanted this work to be titled Pocahontas, Lovely Guardian of Jamestown, the idea coming from a letter Captain John Smith had written to commend

Pocahontas for the survival of the colony. He says, “During the time of two or three years she, next under God was still the instrument to preserve this Colony from death, famine and utter confusion” (Sch. 17.8 Dec. 12, 1952). When the book was finally published the title instead became The Story of Pocahontas, minimizing the ethos that guided Pocahontas’ actions in trying to help the colonists survive and diminishing the spirit of cooperation and interdependence. Graham’s biography of Pocahontas was written for young children, and in many ways continues the myth of what Helen C. Rountree, would call an “Anglo-centered legend” (Perdue 14). Instead of refuting phallacies conjured up to make the Pochantas story a love story between John Smith and the girl Pochantas, Graham continues the legend by shaping it to be a fanciful story about a young girl whose benevolence and humanity to the English becomes heroic.

Both the Du Sable and Pocahontas biographies illuminate the foreboding tone associated with European intrusion and their schemes to subject Native Americans. Du Sable’s quest is to find a place where he can live in peace with those around him, but everywhere he tries to settle his rights are ignored. Unlike Du Sable, the Powhatans inhabited the area where the English decided to settle and through a series of failed alliances with the English they were eventually driven off their land. Graham’s next biography, although featuring Booker T. Washington, illuminated the continuing saga of the U. S. government’s attempts at handling Native Americans.

Booker T. Washington: Educator, of Hand, Head, and Heart (1955) was the last biography of Graham’s that would be published in the 1950s. As the title suggests, Graham’s presentation of Washington captures him in his fullness. Her work does not reduce him to a simple man whose famous debate with her husband forces him to to be

viewed as a sell-out to his race. His commitment, sense of purpose and responsibility resonate through the pages of the book as she follows him from a young slave to a newly freed boy who overcomes tremendous odds to educate himself. Graham's biography on Washington reveals to young readers little known facts, such as Robert Smalls and Blanche Kelso Bruce being black United States congressmen serving during the nineteenth century. They also discover that Frederick Douglass is U. S. Marshal for the District of Columbia (109). Young readers discover that the political world of the nineteenth century was not a completely white world.

The eight biographies Graham authored between 1943 and 1955 did more than illuminate the lives of Negroes and Native Americans, they gave lessons in American history that chart the unfolding racial compact being shaped during colonial times up through the antebellum period, the civil war, the reconstruction period and extending into the mid-twentieth century. Phillis Wheatley's biography casts light on life in Colonial New England, the Pocahontas and Banneker's biographies give insight into colonial life in Virginia and Maryland, and Du Sable's work mainly sheds light on living conditions for non-white persons in the mid-west during this time. Carver, Douglass and Washington were all born prior to the Civil War and lived into the early decades of the twentieth century, with the exception of Douglass who died on the eve of the eighteenth century. Robeson was in the prime of his life when Graham captured his life in print and as such explored a number of current day issues.

Although racial struggle was at the heart of American society, Shirley Graham did not attempt to exploit differences. All of the biographies demonstrate many ways that some white Americans facilitated the hero/heroine in their struggle toward

freedom. Banneker's relationship with Major Ellicott is helpful in him being commissioned by L'Enfant to assist in laying out the design for Washington D. C.; George Washington Carver's relationship with one of his white classmates opened the door for his being invited to speak before the House Ways and Means Committee in 1921; Booker T. Washington relationship with General Armstrong gave him the opportunity to go down to Tuskegee to begin a school. In these ways and many more, Graham used her books to "open gates" for young readers (Sch. 1.1). She knew the power of the written word to move people, change opinions, and the expand and enrich one's thinking.

The decade of the fifties was a difficult period for the Du Boises, but they persevered. For much of the decade, the U. S. State Department retained their passports. Shirley Graham Du Bois says that prominent publishing houses would no longer accept Du Bois' manuscripts, and she also suffered from dwindling revenue. In 1956 Graham Du Bois accompanied her husband on an extensive lecture tour within the states. She had side engagements with "book clubs, schools, libraries, civic group luncheons and bookstores" where she autographed books that had been published during her heyday. There were about "a half-dozen" of her books still in circulation (His Day 219).

Between the years of 1947 to 1955 Graham would experience the financial fortunes that would enable her to buy a home on Long Island in 1947, and she would observe her financial resources steadily dwindle as the red-baiting campaign gained power. Literary success strode aside the constant and knowing presence of red-baiting. The Authors League of America Inc. sent Graham a letter and questionnaire examining

the effects of her name being listed in Red Channels. The effect of this ostracization resulted in her income steadily decreasing. To illustrate the disturbing trend, Graham gives the following example in response to the questionnaire. She tells the League, “Your Most Humble Servant, in spite of excellent reviews has sold less than five thousand copies in this country. It came out in German this past fall and already has sold over ten thousand copies” (Sch. 17.8 Jan. 30, 1952). Her royalty on translation copies was far less than her royalty on copies sold in the U. S. She also suggests in this letter that the reason that her historical novel on Ann Royall and Aaron Burr has been turned down by five publishers is because of this red baiting ordeal (Sch. 17.8 Jan. 30, 1952.). Perhaps the nature of the text and its treatment of treason drew too many parallels to the suspicious climate of the day.

The work that Graham performed during this stage of her life was following in the footsteps of her mentor who decades earlier initiated The Brownies’ Book for the purpose of presenting Negro children with positive images of black people. It was a small attempt to chip away at an anti-black bias. In Graham’s writing of biographies, she took up the charge from Du Bois and expanded the historical grand narrative to include the voices of members of oppressed communities. Over her lifetime she published eleven biographies, twelve if the pictorial biography is counted, that illuminated the lives of not just African Americans, but Native Americans, and Africans, and had she been successful in bringing her work of Anne Royall to print, she would have brought attention to a white American.

Young adult books were a forum used to teach young people a number of acceptable behaviors. Graham’s books put forth a challenge to young children to treat

all people with respect and dignity, regardless of their skin color or ethnicity. For Negro youth, her biographies showed them the possibilities of what could happen in their lives if they, like the mighty people she memorialized, prepared themselves and were persistent in overcoming hurdles. For white youth, her biographies challenged them to step beyond the established norms of American society and extend mutual respect to non-white children.

The audience that she might not have reached with her plays, could possibly have been reached with her biographies. Many would perhaps discount the significance of reaching this audience; nevertheless, her most powerful constituency was not the politicians, nor the preachers, or teachers, librarians, black women's club organizations, intellectuals or writers, but the young children, who would at the proper time, take their places on the nation's stage and in the nation's moments of crisis and struggle they would grapple with issues of justice and equality. It is probable that some of the young women and men who were exposed to Graham's biographies found themselves unlikely activist. Perhaps other young readers emerged to take leadership positions in their respective cities and as a result of being influenced by Graham's writings they had a more enlightened way of thinking and operating. The power of Graham's portrayal of healthy images of non-white people can not be underestimated.

Graham's writing ideology guided the whole process of her writing from the core kernels of thoughts that undergird her writing to the personages that she selected to the manner in which the subject was presented. She once commented in an interview about her writing ideology. She believed that "One should not put down on paper anything that degrades or destroys our kinship with God and with people. Words have

life. They should be constructive. Otherwise they make a void” (Sch. 9.23
“DistinguishedStatus”).

Graham utilized wisdom in reaching out to the youth instead of adults, for some of the seeds of goodwill planted in this targeted audience blossomed into radical flowers a generation later. Great numbers of white Americans of Graham’s generation were ill prepared to accept “Negroes” and Native Americans as human beings deserving of the same treatment as whites; nevertheless, Graham’s commitment to enlightening a young generation of Americans prepared young white Americans to see black people and other non-white people in a different and fuller way, while it encouraged Negro children to live to their full potential. It would be safe to assume that children, especially black children became aware that greatness was only limited by one’s expectations of oneself.

At book signings, radio broadcasts, interviews, talks before adult audiences, Graham was always promoting her works of goodwill, telling her audiences that young people carried the hope of the future and it was incumbent upon the youth to learn the meaning of democracy for all (Sch. 9.24). Herein resides one of Graham’s greatest contributions to American democracy and American literature. She challenged existing mores of the day and created a literature that presented black people and other non-white people in the breadth and expansiveness of their humanness, thereby dispelling racial ignorance and exposing “many thousands of children of varying backgrounds, abilities and degrees of intelligence” to a more enlightened way of living in this world (Sch. 17.10).

In terms of the personal sphere of her life, her partnership and ultimate marriage to Du Bois strengthened both of them in areas of weakness. Graham brought Du Bois

into interracial circles and coalitions that he would not have entertained otherwise. On some occasions these coalitions added support and force to his message. When Du Bois needed a secretary, Graham had one of her white acquaintances to stop by his office. Du Bois was initially furious, but in the end, this arrangement worked out. Although he was initially disinterested in Graham's circle of literary friends on the left and a bit hostile, he warmed up to them when he began to realize that within this group there were many whites who looked up to him. It was through the interloping of Graham that some of Du Bois work was handed over to Van Vechten for the James Weldon Johnson Collection at Yale in the early 1950s. When it was time for house hunting after their marriage, Du Bois let Graham take care of this task, and knew that she could count on some of her "blonde" friends to assist them in attaining an attractive home in a location that pleased them. It ended up that the Du Boises purchased the home of Arthur Miller and his wife. Graham and Arthur Miller knew each other from their FTP days.

When the Du Boises were traveling around the country trying to raise funds for Du Bois' upcoming federal indictment trial, some of Graham's connections from her former working life (of being a musician, playwright and popular writer of biographies) opened doors that would have been closed to them. Most notably, when the Du Boises made it to Milwaukee, they received first rate accommodations from Mr. Lawrence Hautz. Lawrence Hautz was a respected member of the Milwaukee community and used his prestige to maneuver and accommodate his guests. His openness and advanced progressive attitude can be attributed in part to his belief system; he was a member of the Bahai' Faith. Graham had begun corresponding with Hautz when she was writing her biographies. On this particular tour across the country, the Du Boises were taken to

Mr. Hautz's palatial home on Lake Shore Drive and shown to a "luxurious bedroom" (His Day 164).

Du Bois had a profound influence over Graham's life, but perhaps the most dominant area where Du Bois affected change in Graham was in her thinking regarding world issues and the operation of the color line in the world at large. Du Bois' analysis of how race and class worked in tandem to maintain economic hegemony for the white world globally in the modern world and how because colonialism and imperialism are rooted in the fiber of the global economy, capitalist enterprise will disproportionately benefit whites over non-whites, moved Graham Du Bois more toward directly confronting these isms. Her international travels with Du Bois made clear his "color line" concept. Whether in the form of Jim Crow in the U. S. or colonial rule globally, the line drawn between white and non-white "transferred the reign of commercial privilege and extraordinary profit from the exploitation of the European working class to the exploitation of backward races under the political domination of Europe" (Du Bois qtd. in Kelley's Freedom Dreams 43). When she and Du Bois move to Ghana, one begins to see Graham Du Bois shift to a more Pan Africanist position. Throughout her life, she maintains a nice coterie of white friends, and as she attends conferences and travels with Du Bois, she gains a number of international acquaintances. After Du Bois' death and her ouster from Ghana, one hears a more defiant tone from Graham Du Bois, but it doesn't influence her to rend her relationships with her white friends. The variegated experiences of life had molded her perspective on life.

Graham's ability to write and speak and entertain an audience, her ability to cook and entertain guests in her home, her international exposure, some level of fluency

in speaking and understanding French, her ability to multitask and her “oneness” with him in ideology all factored into the admiration and appeal Du Bois had for her. He was impressed with her energy, drive, steadfastness and passion. And it is perhaps her passion that was the most vital ingredient in her appeal. David Graham said of his mother in 2002 as he reflected back on her life that the essence of his mother was *passion*. It was the dominant thread that ran through everything she did. It is perhaps this single ingredient that made Shirley Graham the second Mrs. W. E. B. Du Bois. Lewis notes that Bobbie Branch, a former associate of the NAACP characterized Nina as “tiny, and very timid, but sweet” (The Fight 471). Shirley Graham was small of stature but aggressive in temperament. She was a mature woman who would help Du Bois feel young again. She shared his same level of enthusiasm about his life’s work. And it is his influence that is responsible for Graham’s rise as a figure of Pan-Africanism, the mother of it because of her position as wife of Du Bois. Here is this woman, Shirley Graham, someone so accustomed to working so easily with whites, to the point where oftentimes she appeared to be a token by members of her racial group who transitions to become the symbolic Mother of the Pan- African movement. But her ascent to Mother of Pan-Africanism was a process, the beginnings of which certainly had roots in her childhood, and observable most during moments of crisis. Her Fort Huachuca experience during WWII, Du Bois’ ouster from the NAACP, his indictment by the Federal government, the stripping away of their passports were all factors that politicized her. Du Bois already a seasoned warrior, stands as an example for her. Her direct political engagement began in earnest during the 40s, and under Du Bois’ tutelage she acquired a level of political sophistication that she never could have

experienced from her parents. Upon Du Bois' death, Shirley Graham stepped into a role that she had been groomed for many years before. She became the protector of his legacy, much like she had protected him during his last years.

In a 1971 interview with Ann Allen Shockley when Graham Du Bois was visiting the states, she was questioned about her "match" with Du Bois. Shockley asks, "Could you tell us the date that you married Du Bois and where you married him? At this time you were 40 years younger than Du Bois. Could you tell us just how you felt about such a match" (Sch. 1.2)? Graham Du Bois giggles and is embarrassed by this question, partly because it is a bit intrusive, but also because Graham Du Bois is aware of her deceit about her age. When she begins to answer, she talks about how he had lost his wife and she had "sort of grown the habit of helping him." She continues by saying that she had lost her father and Du Bois was her father's friend. It appears that even though Graham Du Bois says this, she really makes more of this relationship between Du Bois and her father than actually existed, however, she comes out and flatly says to Shockley, "Well, who thought about age?.....he needed.....needed help in a lot of different ways...everybody admired and looked up to him...he was the greatest man in sight. So age, what did it have to do with it? (laughter)" (Sch. 1.2). And age, played a small part in Graham's relationship with Du Bois. Scholarship, admiration, respect, a strong work ethic and yes activism were central features of this successful partnership years before it turned into marriage. It would be safe to say that Du Bois and Graham enjoyed a fulfilling partnership years before their marriage and when they finally vowed their love to one another, it was a commitment rooted in a deep abiding love.

Shirley Graham Du Bois mounted a challenge to the literature that was marketed for reading audiences in the 1940s and 1950s, a challenge made all the more effective, and perhaps some would say ineffective, by her association with Du Bois and her immersion into his world of ideas and the various strains of thought swirling around in her community in New York. To be sure, there were great numbers of people who were not happy with the work she was doing, or with the success she was enjoying, but the cultural production she advanced during the height of her career as a popular writer will forever serve as a lasting testament to her legacy.

CHAPTER 12

EPILOGUE

The years leading up to Shirley Graham's birth reveals strains of activism running through both sides of her family. With her birth and development an artistry and activism become apparent in her life as she learns the history of her people and uses her natural talents to convey that story initially in music then in literature. She grew up emulating her forebears by pushing the boundaries used to circumscribe her and the lives of her people. By the time she reaches adulthood she is poised to fight for equal treatment and upon earning her educational credentials in the early thirties, she goes through a series of jobs – trying to improve her position and pay, but more importantly, always striving to make an impact on the lives of the people she meets. In the mid-forties she ascends to national prominence and by the early fifties she undergoes, not a reversal of financial fortunes but a dwindling of financial resources. The publication of Booker T. Washington: Educator of Hand, Head and Heart in 1955, marks the end of the first phase in Graham's career as a writer of biographies.

At the age of fifty-nine she had acquired much of what she had desired. She had supported two sons to adulthood, attained some degree of success in the areas of music and playwriting, spearheaded a number of organizations that utilized her organizational ability and her activism, and in her personal life she had finally captured the man she had pursued practically all of her adult life. Life was both good and challenging for Shirley Graham Du Bois in 1955, but international travel restrictions placed on her and W. E. B. Du Bois by the U. S. government were unjust and insulting to these two scholar/writer/activists who were recognized internationally and revered. When

President Nkrumah invited them to come to Ghana so that Dr. Du Bois could work on the Encyclopedia Africana in 1961, the Du Bois' with some hesitancy agreed, leaving just before legislation was handed down that would have resumed a ban on their travel.

Graham Du Bois would enjoy several other phases of life before her death in Peking, China on March 27, 1977. After the mid-fifties, her emphasis was on supporting Du Bois with his work. After his death in 1963 she would devote herself to assisting Nkrumah and the people of Ghana with developing the country. After Nkrumah was overthrown in 1966 she then took up the charge to let as many people as possible know what was going on in Ghana and other African nations. In her early seventies, she now set herself on the course of getting Du Bois' writings in a venue where world researchers could study and examine his thought. It was during this time that she made a series of visits to the states. These visits enabled her to make contact with publishers and after a fifteen year hiatus from writing biographies, she returns to the genre with a passion. In addition to writing the biographies, she authors her first published novel and returns to what was one of her first passions – teaching. Near the close of her life, just as she had done at the beginning of her professional career, she inspires a new generation of students.

She would not enjoy the life of a popular writer at this stage of life however. The magic of her biographies being embraced by an eager national audience was to be no more. The adverse effects of the red baiting campaign of earlier years still lingered in the psyche of the American public, but as the decade of the seventies unfolded Shirley Graham Du Bois had attained a new status, and one of perhaps greater importance to her. She was now revered as the Mother of Pan-Africanism. In this case,

time and distance had worked in her favor. A new generation of young people who were socially conscious and politically engaged had emerged.

She had spent her life trying to bring about understanding between people through various mediums: recitals, lectures, plays and her writings, and the effect of her work did not go unnoticed by the thousands of people she met. Wang Pin-nan, was just one of many people whose life was touched by Graham. On the occasion of her death, Wang Ping-nan, President of the Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, eulogized Mrs. Du Bois as “a close friend” who did a lot of work in enhancing the friendship and understanding between the Chinese people and the people of the United States and the Third World” (George Murphy Papers Washington Afro-American). The imprint of her life and work has left an indelible mark in the world, so that even now, over a quarter of a century after her death, her artistry and activism are still having an impact on the lives of people who never met her.

Kwame Toure, formerly known as Stokely Carmichael, was aware of how Graham’s stature would gain value over time because of her dedication and her life of service. As a young freedom fighter during the 1960s, Toure revered Shirley Graham, or more aptly as he called her “Mother Du Bois.” He paid her the ultimate compliment by reflecting on the multi-faceted nature of her work. Penning a letter to her son, David Graham Du Bois, Toure reflected on her life of service in the struggle for human dignity for all people. In ill health and sensing his own mortality, Toure reminds David Graham Du Bois that acts of great people live beyond their mortal existence. He tells him the following:

Your mother has etched her work into life’s history leaving that indelible mark. Centuries from now she will be

researched. A great woman becomes even greater after her death and the longer she is dead, the greater she becomes. Your mother is already assured of this. When one speaks of Pan-Africanism, she will be there; of Nkrumah's early model in Ghana, she will be there, of struggle in the states, she will be there, of authors who wrote for history, she is already in all of these and much, much more. She will be a cross-reference of struggle (Ekwueme M. Thelwell Papers June 28, 1997).

She had been at the vortex of American history, the African American struggle, and the African independence movement at a time when political, economic and social currents were rapidly changing and had great possibilities of improving the status of peoples of the African diaspora and other oppressed groups world wide. However, the United States and other Western nations missed the opportunity to follow a humane path and continued the same course, relegating developing countries and non-white populations to continued poverty. Toure recognized her positionality, serving as a participant-observer in numerous movements: Pan-Africanism, the Civil Rights struggle in the U. S. and Nation building in Ghana/Africa.

In addition to these movements it must be acknowledged that Graham serves as a vital link in many other areas. The field of black musicology of the 1920s and 30s was enriched by her being one among the ranks of its most educated musicians. Through her music she touched a number of communities across the nation: Seattle, Portland, Chicago, Cleveland, Hartford, New York, Baltimore, and Washington D. C. The churches she entered, whether at Shiloh Baptist Church in Hartford, Connecticut or Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, New York, were powerful institutions of social and political activity. Within these black spaces there was little to contest for oftentimes she was among kindred spirits, except for those few sophisticates who

wanted to distance themselves from spirituals, that music given birth to by slaves. It was with this music that she ushered audiences into realms of possibility by bolstering their pride in blackness. With her Oberlin conservatory credentials she took her place beside her musical counterparts of the day who were a little older than she: James Weldon Johnson and his brother, New England conservatory-trained J. Rosamond Johnson (Lewis When Harlem 144), Noble Sissle, Eubie Blake, Harry T. Burleigh, Will Marion Cook (29) and fellow Oberlin graduates Hattie Marshall Gibbs and R. Nathaniel Dett. She was a contemporary of the father of gospel music, William Dawson, and like Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington, she composed, arranged and conducted music.

She can be found at the center of so many literary locations. She was a playwright. She shares in the distinction with black female playwrights like May Miller, Angelina Grimke, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Mary Burrill, Eulalie Spence and Alice Dunbar-Nelson as being a precursor to a number of black female playwrights who came into a public recognition in the sixties, like Alice Childress, Lorraine Hansberry and Ntozake Shange, yet the mass appeal that later black female playwrights received eluded their progenitors. At a time when most black playwrights, female and male, were writing that their plays were “to be read” because there was little hope of them being staged, Shirley Graham was writing plays, having them staged and heard over the radio airways. She was also directing plays, acting in them and writing the music for them (Hatch 61).

As a biographer, she followed in the path of W. E. B. Du Bois and Benjamin Brawley. Two of her well publicized contemporaries were Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps. Her books not only informed readers of the lives of great women and men,

but they gave readers lessons in the history of the country, lessons that were a truer reflection of the growth and development of the United States. Her works did not erase nor minimize the presence of Native and Negroes, nor did they try to obfuscate the contributions of these groups. Many of the biographies taken together reinforce the theme of how these populations – the first Americans and Africans imported from Africa then later their offspring-- were subjugated. She delineates the methods devised to implement that subjugation. While Booker T. Washington’s biography illuminates his struggle toward building up the race, it also cast light on the governmental experiment at Hampton in “civilizing these red men” (118).

Graham takes her place behind Du Bois in terms of authoring literature for black children. They were early precursor figures of seeing the need for young black children being exposed to positive images of black people in literature and providing a literature to fill that void. Contemporaries of Graham, Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes contributed to this genre, and even Graham’s brother Lorenz Graham wrote for black youth. Decades removed from the 1940s, Lorenz Graham, appears to have received more recognition in this area than Graham although she started in this genre before him, but her brother didn’t have the cultural baggage that she had of being associated with the communist party. Many of his works were not biographies, but stories about black life. Many black children writers have since followed in their footsteps. Contemporary artists include writers like the late James Haskins, Virginia Hamilton, Rosa Guy, Walter Dean Myers and Julius Lester.

She was breaking ground in the arena of education, entering Ph. D. programs at both Yale and New York University at a time when blacks were hard pressed to be

accepted into white institutions of higher learning. At Yale School of Drama, she, along with John “Mac” Ross, Owen Dodson and Anne Cooke (Hatch 55-56), were Negro students there in the late 30s who enjoyed an open and accepting atmosphere. They were precursors to future African American Drama School students who would later be given wide exposure in the field of television. A few contemporary drama school students who have followed them at Yale are students like Sabrina Le Beauf, the oldest daughter of the Huxtables on television comedy hit, The Cosby Show; Angela Bassett, Hollywood A-1 actor; Tonea Stewart, aunt of Virgil Tibbs on the television hit show Heat of the Night, and Robin Lee a young actor who has played in a number of movies, two of which are Deliver Us From Eva and 13 Going on 30.

Perhaps the group Graham Du Bois would be most proud of influencing were the countless numbers of warrior/activists of her ilk who were encouraged and emboldened by her example and have walked onto the world’s stage to fill the parts that they are to play in humanizing the world. Of this group numerous African activists and scholars can be named and closer to home American scholars/activists such as Nathan Hare, Angela Davis, Michael Thelwell, John Bracey and Sonia Sanchez can be named. Shirley Graham Du Bois is immortalized in the work they do whether they are writing books, teaching classes, leading campaigns against some unjust cause or reciting poetry. The long shadow of Graham’s legacy extends into the twenty-first century affecting the lives of people today.

Graham had traveled a long distance in both her activism and artistry. Her understanding of racism and the operations of it had matured by leaps beyond the one dimensional lens through which her parents, especially her father analyzed it. Rev.

Graham's religious views were myopic and oftentimes did not allow him to look beyond the U. S. in seeing the larger implications of racism in the larger global community. Shirley Graham's life experiences, her knowledge of and engagement with the Du Boisian color line concept, and her immersion in political life in New York matured her as an activist. In terms of her artistry, expanding her artistic expression from music to encompass other mediums made her even more effective as an artist.

Utilizing her vast array of talents, Graham left an impression on arguably most of the people she encountered. She was one of a small coterie of Negroes who from the 1920s through the 1970s was making headway and headlines for their racial group. As such, she serves as a vital link connecting African American trailblazers of past years when only a select few were able to walk in the corridors of history, to current day achievers who are now flooding the gates and ushering in a new era in the American social compact.

APPENDIX A
MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

John Bracey Papers, Courtesy of John Bracey, Amherst, Massachusetts

David Graham Du Bois, Courtesy of David Graham Du Bois, Amherst, Massachusetts

Shirley Graham Du Bois Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard
University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

W. E. B. Du Bois Collections, W. E. B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts,
Amherst, Massachusetts

Shirley Graham File, Oberlin College Archives, 420 Mudd Center, 148 West College
St. Oberlin, Ohio 44074-1532

Federal Theatre Project Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D. C.

Fort Huachuca Museum, Stephen Gregory Museum Technician, Fort Huachuca,
Arizona

James and Esther Cooper Jackson Papers, Courtesy of James and Esther Jackson,
Brooklyn, New York

James Weldon Johnson and Carl Van Vechten, Yale Collection of American Literature,
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven,
Connecticut

Hattie Gibbs Marshall, The Washington Conservatory of Music, Moorland-Spingarn
Research Center, Howard University Library, Washington D. C.

Julian Mayfield Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York
Public Library, New York, New York

George Murphy Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University
Library, Washington D. C.

NAACP Papers, The Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

Kwame Nkrumah Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University
Library, Washington, D. C.

Rosey E. Pool Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University
Library, Washington, D. C.

Percival Prattis Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University
Library, Washington, D. C.

Roselyn Richardson, William Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society,
Indianapolis, Indiana

Arthur Spingarn Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University
Library, Washington, D. C.

Ekwueme Michael Thelwell Papers, Courtesy of Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, Pelham,
Massachusetts

Western Reserve Historical Society Manuscript Collection, Karamu House Records,
Cleveland, Ohio

APPENDIX B
NEWSPAPERS

93d Blue Helmet

The Christian Recorder

The Recorder Indianapolis, IN

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