

**Designing Progress: Race, Gender, and Modernism in Early Twentieth-Century
America**

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ABSTRACT

In the late 1930s Amaza Lee Meredith (1895-1984), an African American woman from Lynchburg, Virginia, designed and built a modern style house for herself and her female companion on the grounds of Virginia State College. Between the wars, she studied at Columbia Teacher's College in New York, receiving a BA in Fine Art in 1930, and an MA in Art Education in 1935, under a curriculum designed by Arthur Wesley Dow. Remarkably, unlike many African Americans who relocated north to take advantage of training and employment opportunities, including those artists who sought the community support of Harlem's cultural network, Meredith returned to the rural South. Here, at her alma mater, Virginia State College, where she had earned a teaching certificate in 1922, Meredith established the art department and implemented a progressive art curriculum, teaching art production and art appreciation. In addition, Amaza Lee Meredith practiced architecture as a personal and community endeavor, designing homes for friends and family and planning a vacation community for African Americans on Long Island's Sag Harbor, once a whaling village and now a cosseted resort for African American elite.

Examining Amaza Lee Meredith's life and work through a multidisciplinary lens, this dissertation provides a re-thinking of the New Negro Movement, New Womanhood, and American art and architecture between the wars, enriching theories of gender, race, and sexuality in illustrating the significance of aesthetics in the formation of a modern African American identity.

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Introduction

Each day when you see us black folk upon the dusty land of the farms or upon the hard pavement of the city streets, you usually take us for granted and think you know us, but our history is far stranger than you suspect, and we are not what we seem. (Richard Wright, *Twelve Million Black Voices*, 1940)*

The Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, "Get out of here!" We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what he is missing. (Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men*, 1935)*¹

Located on the edge of the Colonial Revival grounds of Virginia State University in Petersburg, Virginia a single-story, white concrete house nestles behind a screen of trees. The small modern dwelling seems out of place, and is eye-catching in its difference. Seen together the educational buildings of the Colonial Revival university campus and the modern domestic space suggest an awkward marriage of tradition and progress. Screened to a degree from public view, the house suggests a further desire for privacy through the small glass bricks that puncture rounded ends of the building's façade, which faces the campus. It's a clear manifestation of a personal creative expression that nevertheless engaged innovative trends in modern architecture occurring across the Atlantic and in progressive pockets of the United States. Further investigation reveals the building was home to two women, who lived openly as a couple, yet whose sexuality remained ambiguous. Moreover, this dramatically different architectural construction was the product of an African American woman, Amaza Lee Meredith, who taught art studio and appreciation classes at the neighboring institution of higher education and whose architectural drawings and photographs of the house interior, preserved in Virginia State

¹ *Cited in Kenneth W. Goings and Raymond A. Mohl, eds. *The New African American Urban History* (New York: Sage, 1996),187.

College archives, reveal the cultural artifacts representative of a commitment to the modern idiom in a middle-class lifestyle.

It is through this modern building that the foundations of my project are constructed and explored: the history of early twentieth century American architecture, African American creative production in the modern enterprise, the importance of art in African American education, the meanings of female sexuality and New Womanhood in the 1930s, and the role of higher education in creating an African American middle-class. My project takes this building not as a static object but as the foundation for examining broader themes and a means to consolidating theoretical ideas important to its design. For this purpose my narrative draws on the theoretical work of Bruno Latour, tracing the flow of transformations, which have connected and intersected to produce this building. Latour argues that the problem with our understanding of buildings is that they are drawn in perspective space, suggesting a static object. Yet, we know that a building is far from being static, that it is a “moving project, and that even once it has been built, it is transformed by its users, modified by all of what happens inside and outside, and that it will pass or be renovated, adulterated and transformed beyond recognition.” But even before the building has been constructed there are many issues to consider. Latour raises the question of where to put the many factors which contribute to creating the building, which not only includes the material aspects of the building itself but the context, not a context that favors the historical, philosophical, stylistic, and semiotic dimensions, but what he describes as a different kind of context, “a complex ecology.” Latour refutes the context that is considered static. Arguing that: “context would not stink so much if we could see that it too, moves along and flows just as buildings do.” A context “in flight,” Latour argues, is made up of the many dimensions that impinge at every stage on the development of a project, in other words, Latour understands context as deeply complex. He argues that “context is this little

word that sums up all the various elements that have been bombarding the project from the beginning – fashions spread by critiques in architectural magazines, clichés that are burned into the minds of some clients, customs entrenched into zoning laws, types that have been taught in art and design schools, visual habits that make neighbors rise against new visual habits in formation etc.”²

A wealth of literature on the decades between the wars exists to reinforce the centrality of housing as a building type within modernist architectural debates. In Europe, new housing was driven by the need for reconstruction in the wake of devastation; in the United States, an imperative existed to house the masses that were moving from rural to urban centers and then from overcrowded cities into the outskirts and suburbs. Observations on the new architecture being constructed in Europe had begun to be published on this side of the Atlantic by 1926 and it was clear that the shift in architectural values was likely to influence design theory and professional practice in the United States. Early twentieth century architects were deeply concerned with seeking designs that were highly economical, yet also attractive, comfortable yet functional. Amaza Lee Meredith was keenly aware of such concerns, both as a member of a socially marginalized group in need of new housing types, and as someone interested in the contribution architectural design could make.

Ms. Meredith was not a formally trained architect, she studied fine art and design under a curriculum established by proto-modernist Arthur Wesley Dow, who, together with Denman Waldo Ross, espoused a universal approach to design that combined the Hegelian view of beauty as a unity of form and content with Ruskinian notions of the experiential and

² Bruno Latour, “Give me a Gun and I will Make all Buildings Move: An Ant’s View of Architecture, online at <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/poparticles/poparticle/P-138-BUILDING-VENICE.pdf>

perceptual.³ As her designs for domestic space attest, Meredith was also interested in new materials, innovative technology, efficient construction techniques, and fluid spatial configurations appropriate to an affordable housing agenda and new gender relations. Studies of architecture from this period, derived to some extent from a pragmatic approach, have largely ignored the role played by African Americans. Some architectural practitioners have recently received scholarly attention in a handful of dissertations and popular publications; the pressing need for new housing for African Americans was, however, well documented during the early twentieth century by leading black social scientists as well as some government agencies.⁴ Yet the role of African American architects, their education and preparation for entry into the profession, and their role in building a world segregated from whites, yet demonstrating the aspirations of a growing middle-class, have yet to be fully examined. More significantly, gaps remain in the discussion of women as participants in the architecture of the early twentieth century, particularly as their role of keepers of the home underwent dramatic change, and affected the domestic spaces of the early 20th century.⁵

³ Marie Frank, "The Theory of Pure Design and American Architectural Education in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (June 2008): 249.

⁴ See for example Elizabeth Milnarik, "The Federally Funded American Dream: Public Housing as an Engine for Social Improvement, 1933-1937" (PhD Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2009) and Kelly Quinn, "Making Modern Homes: A History of Langston Terrace Dwellings, A New Deal Housing Program in Washington, D.C." (PhD Dissertation, University of Maryland, 2007); Ellen Weiss, *Robert R. Taylor and Tuskegee: An African American Architect Designs for Booker T. Washington* (Montgomery, Alabama: NewSouth Books (December 23, 2011); Allen R. Dorough, *The Architectural Legacy of Wallace Rayfield: Pioneer Black Architect of Birmingham, Alabama* (Birmingham: University Alabama Press, 2010); Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Classic Hollywood Style* (New York: Rizzoli (April 24, 2012); Carson Anthony Anderson, "The Architectural Practice of Vertner Tandy: An Evaluation of the Professional and Social Position of a Black Architect," (Masters Thesis, (Architecture), University of Virginia, 1983); John M. Gries and James Ford eds. *Negro Housing: Report of the Committee on Negro Housing* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1931).

⁵ The literature on domestic space varies according to the author's focus on housing type, the influence of domestic advice manuals and new technology for example, see Alice Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006); Despina Stratigakos, *Women's Berlin: Building the Modern City* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Hilde Heynen, *Negotiating Domesticity* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity* (Chicago: MIT Press, 1999); Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze, Carol Henderson, *Architecture and Feminism* (New York; Princeton Architectural Press, 199) Daphne

African American women complicate this traditional female role however, for them, the notion of domesticity is far more complex. In the South, from their earliest arrival on the American continent through the early twentieth century, most black women historically labored outside their homes, alongside men in field and factory, or in domestic service. As such, they were defined outside the parameters of femininity, and were excluded from cultural and political discourses. Except, however, those few who began in the early twentieth century, to join the ranks of professionals in medicine, education and commerce. Some also found support from within the segregated social interactions of their own world, as members of women's church groups, clubs, and community organizations, and most importantly in the world of segregated education, where women teachers formed the majority and from which the historical foundation for civil rights activism evolved.⁶ But what of African American women architects? A number are highlighted in a recent biographical dictionary of African American architects, but their stories remain mere whispers.⁷

The significance of black education and the numerous transformations it underwent as whites and blacks sought, sometimes together but more often, separately, to determine

Spain, *Gendered Spaces* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Gwendolyn Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Susanna Torre, ed. *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective*. Architectural League of New York, Archive of Women in Architecture (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1977); Emily Gee, "Where Shall She Live?: The History and Designation of Housing for Working Women in London, 1880-1925," *Journal of Architectural Conservation*, Vol. 15, No.2 (July 2009).

⁶ See Cynthia Neverdon-Morton *Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of Race*, (1999); Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a woman ought to be and to do: Black professional women workers during the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: the Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1998); Tera Hunter *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁷ Dreck Spurlock Wilson, ed. *African American Architects: A Biographical Dictionary, 1865-1945* (New York, London: Routledge, 2004).

the role African Americans might play in a developing American economy of the South has been well documented.⁸ What has been afforded less attention however, is the role of art education in contributing to the professionalization of the African American artist, in forming a black aesthetic, and in disseminating art appreciation as a tool for molding a black middle-class in the period of the 1930s.⁹

African American education had been a controversial subject since the end of the Civil War, when the need to educate formerly enslaved people was generally recognized, but the method and type of education was in dispute. The history of black education differs widely across state and regional lines and is perhaps most easily grasped by dividing it into the ascendancy of different opinions across two periods. Between 1880 and World War I white supremacists and those who believed in accommodating the vision of a vocational education for blacks overwhelmed a more liberal and academic system, which descendants of antebellum abolitionists, Northerners and blacks themselves had established during Reconstruction.¹⁰ After World War I, and through the 1920s, determined to overcome the demoralizing effects of post-reconstruction Jim Crow and the degrading absence of recognition for their participation in battle, blacks reestablished collective political action. Sympathetic whites adopted a more progressive and egalitarian approach, advocating a

⁸ James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Bobby L. Lovett, *America's Historically Black Colleges and Universities* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011); Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); Julian B. Roebuck and Komanduri S. Murty, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Their Place in Higher Education* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993); Ronald E. Butchart, *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks and Reconstruction: Freedmen's Education, 1862-1875* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); Raymond Walters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

⁹ A handful of works explore the history of art education in the United States, in which scant mention of African American art education exists: Arthur D. Efland, *A History of Art Education: Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching the Visual Arts* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990); Peter Smith, *The History of American Art Education: Learning about Art in American Schools* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996).

¹⁰ See James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 79-109.

liberal education that would give greater autonomy to students and provide them the academic standards necessary to compete in mainstream society. Culture, or the arts, was a crucial component of a more liberal education and contributed to the blossoming of African American cultural production, during the Harlem Renaissance or the New Negro Movement, in Northern metropolitan centers such as Chicago and New York. African Americans' arrival in New York through the Great Migration transformed the physical and social dynamics of the city and challenged rigid Euro-American perceptions of their social and cultural place in American society. In the 1920s and through the Harlem Renaissance, Americans were prompted to acknowledge black contributions, past and present. Yet African American contributions to an emergent modern national culture would create tensions within their own community, particularly among black intellectuals and cultural producers, pitting assimilationist strategies against those who sought to define "the expression of their own soul-world."¹¹

Art education played a significant role in the development of African American artists, their exposure to outside influence and the type of work they would produce. Moreover, as a professional field of employment for African Americans art became increasingly available, with new areas connected to technology, such as print illustration, the mass production of advertising, and magazine publication. But related to art production of the 1920s and '30s were discourses centered on the parallel searches for distinctly American and specifically African American aesthetics, that were distinct from European trends, and the role of art in everyday life.¹² In seeking a distinctly American aesthetic

¹¹ Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," quoted in Patricia Hills, *Modern Art in the USA: Issues and Controversies of the 20th Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: 2000), 76.

¹² For discussions of American and African American art production between the wars see Sharon Patton, *African-American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), James Porter, *Modern Negro Art* (New York: Arno Press, 1969). Erika Doss, "American Folk Art's

artists and critics looked both to the past and to the future. America, after all, was the land of the machine age, and home to quintessential modern forms such as the skyscraper.

African Americans witnessed European moderns embrace African art for the formal properties it expressed, and in seeking to define a past beyond the negative legacies of slavery and claiming a new future they too looked to Africa as a source for artistic expression and pride. Struggling with increased racial tensions, some African Americans believed that a demonstration of cultural capital was an effective way to improve relations between blacks and whites and to garner respect in the fight for equality. Cultural capital could come from art production, but strategies were also needed to create black audiences that would appreciate, support, and preserve black cultural production.¹³

Alain Locke's 1925 volume of essays re-defined African American identity in the 'New Negro,' securing his place at the helm of the movement. But as scholars have recently shown, sociologist Charles S. Johnson played an equally significant role, particularly for his consideration of the facts of racial oppression and strategies to overcome them.¹⁴ The Harlem Renaissance was significant in drawing attention to African American cultural production but race leaders like Charles S. Johnson and W.E.B. Du Bois realized the need to teach further generations of young adults to both produce and appreciate fine art. In order to accomplish this they sponsored and recruited potential artists to become teachers that

'Distinctive Character: The Index of American Design and New Deal Notions of Cultural Nationalism,' in Virginia Tuttle Clayton, Elizabeth Stillinger et al *Drawing on America's Past: Folk Art, Modernism and the Index of American Design* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1925). W.E.B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (New York: A.C. McClurg, 1907, reprinted 2007).

¹³ Mary Ann Calo has argued that newly developed accessible print culture and rapidly expanding publishing industry in the urban centers of New York and Chicago were in fact fractured because African Americans, until the mid-twentieth century and more recently, had very little access to art and little background knowledge of the art movements. See Mary Ann Calo, *Distinction and Denial: Race Nation and the Critical Construction of the African American Artist, 1920-1940* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Gilpin and Gasman, *Leadership Beyond the Veil in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003); Richard Robins, *Sidelines Activist: Charles Johnson and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 1996).

they in turn, might train a new class of blacks fitted to compete in the cultured spheres of American society alongside whites.¹⁵ By the 1930s, the imperative to develop a body of African American artwork became critical in a new way when the depression threatened to further marginalize African Americans from capitalist possibilities. Some leaders of the New Deal Arts programs, such as philosopher and education reformer John Dewey, wanted to subvert the idea of art as a luxurious commodity that adorned museums and the homes of the wealthy by relocating it as part of ordinary life. The effect of such strategies was increased accessibility to public art venues, a particularly positive development for African American artists who had traditionally been excluded from major venues, and lacked a public for their work.¹⁶

The climate of change affecting the nature of art production and reception also influenced human identity, specifically sexual identity. So-called pseudo-scientific discoveries in the burgeoning realm of late 19th century psychology and sexology would lead to more open discussions of identity and the effect of identity on creative production.¹⁷

¹⁵ Although this strategy has rarely been discussed in the scholarly literature, it is raised in broader discussions of individuals instrumental in developing improved race relations, and of individual artists who became teachers. See for example, Patrick J. Gilpin and Mary Jane Gasman, *Charles S. Johnson: Leadership Beyond the Veil in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003); Susan Earle's edited volume, *Aaron Douglas, African American Modernist* refers to the moniker given the artist by Alain Locke as the "father of Black American art." While it is possible that Locke was referring to the birth of a black aesthetic it may just as easily refer to Douglas as one of the major figures recruited to educate young artists and promote black art in the South.

¹⁶ See Susan Noyes Platt, *Art and Politics in the 1930s: Modernism, Marxism, Americanism: A History of Cultural Activism During the Depression Years* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1999).

¹⁷ New ideas in sexology and gender definitions became part of public discourse through the work of Havelock Ellis, and his publication *Sexual Inversion: Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1927, first published 1897), as well as the public court trial of Radclyffe Hall's romantic lesbian novel, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). Later analyses of these ideas and further investigation into gender constructions have been explored in Carroll-Smith Rosenberg's *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Knopf, 1985), George Chauncey, Jr., et al, *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: New American Library, Penguin, 1989); Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer eds. *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars* (New Jersey: Rutgers, 2003), Laura Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modernist English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), Maureen Honey, ed. *Shadowed Dreams: Women's Poetry of the Harlem Renaissance* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

For African Americans, who were deeply concerned with identity issues, the realm of sexuality became yet another site of exploration. Some literature by members of the Harlem Renaissance for example, demonstrated the importance of exploring one's sexual identity, which could often be understood as multivalent. Individuals emboldened by the new interest in African American cultural production and possibly responding to attempts to classify them as exotic, turned Harlem into a place of experimentation, pushing the boundaries of art and identity. Nevertheless, if Harlem was a place where behavioral rules were discarded and bourgeois norms thrown to the wind, it was the exception. In African American communities outside the metropolis, leaders worked with the less educated to improve sexual morals and to understand the importance of presenting a respectable appearance in the face of persistent negative stereotypes.¹⁸ Such concerns with moral behavior often focused on erasing images of black women prevalent in the American imagination, but in doing so, reinforced notions of patriarchy. Nevertheless, greater access to education, new ideas about sexuality, and the demand for greater freedom and rights highlighted by the feminist movement led to the emergence of a new type of woman. This highly educated, autonomous individual, eschewed marriage, fought for professional visibility and championed innovation, challenging gender relations and the distribution of power.¹⁹

Amaza Lee Meredith belonged to this cadre of New Womanhood. As a young student at Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute she fell in love with her instructor, a similarly young, and independent woman. Initially, both women regarded this emotional attachment

¹⁸ See Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, *Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race 1895-1925* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989).

¹⁹ Caroll Smith- Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 247.

as a form of mutual admiration or like-mindedness, and as some scholars have noted, the ground here remained somewhat murky. Simply in defying gender norms the New Woman didn't necessarily identify with a lesbian subjectivity. Despite the prevalence of new sexual identities explored relatively openly in the urban centers, women's knowledge and recognition of alternative sexualities emerged tentatively. Amaza Lee Meredith and Edna Colson, the young woman she deeply admired and for whom she felt a strong affection, both developed a new sense of self as they spent increasing amounts of time testing their independence and self-reliance while travelling away from the comfort of familiar surroundings and expectations. It is clear that initially both women conformed to expected relationship norms, as each experienced close relationships with men. Edna Colson was also, at one point, on the verge of marriage. Her conviction regarding such a course of action however wavered as Amaza Lee Meredith refused to relinquish her place in Colson's affections, producing confusion for both women. Meredith and Colson contributed to and participated in changing notions of Womanhood, African American social and sexual identity, and transformations in African American education.²⁰ More precisely, Meredith's experience as a New Woman, an artist and architect provides a lens through which to

²⁰ A number of terms or names employed in the dissertation must first be clarified however. As scholars Lee Sigelman and Steven A. Tuch argue: "The collective term that members of a group use to refer to themselves can provide interesting clues about the group's status in society and its strategy for advancement. For Americans of African decent, this terminology has undergone many changes..."During the early years of the twentieth century, usage evolved from 'colored' to 'Negro,' to 'black.' By the late 1980s civil rights leaders made an argument for the term African-American, which indicated an ethnic or cultural identity more in line with other groups of Americans descended from other places. See Lee Sigelman and Steven A. Tuch, "What's in a Name: Preference for "Black" versus "African-American Among Americans of African Descent," Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 3 Fall 2005: 429-438. In certain cases, when referring to specific historical usage I have complied with the term Negro, capitalized, as in the "New Negro."

examine the discourses of modernism in American life during the period between the world wars.²¹

The notion of the modern has been variously defined, but is commonly understood as a break with tradition and rejection of the past. Indeed, the modern condition is dependent on change, and a desire for progress and emancipation, which can only be achieved if the “stifling conventions of the past can be overcome.”²² The anomaly of American modernism is that it sought to express an identity emancipated from the tradition of Europe, while simultaneously connecting to an authentic American past. Also intensely complex, the notion of modernity is often presented as “a heroic pursuit of a better life and a better society.”²³ However, such a pursuit is, of necessity, destabilizing, as Marshall Berman has argued: “To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are.”²⁴

Methodology

²¹ Another frequently occurring term in this dissertation is ‘modern.’ Despite its common usage for this particular moment in time, Modern capitalized or not, is a tricky word to define, but because so much depends on it, it is important to attempt to clarify what we understand by it today and how it was understood by various groups at the turn of the twentieth century. The etymology of the word ‘modern,’ according to most sources, here specifically, the Oxford English Dictionary, is French, and means to exist now, in the present time, as opposed to antiquity. See Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 2013, online at <http://www.oed.com> (accessed February 23, 2013).

²² Hilde Heynan and Gülsüm Baydar, *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (London/New York: Routledge, 2005), 1.

²³ Heynan and Gülsüm Baydar, *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*, p.1

²⁴ Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air. The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1985 reprint of 1982), 15, cited in Heynan and Baydar, *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture*

Using an interdisciplinary methodology encompassing biography, architectural and art history, race and gender studies, social history, and the history of education, my project contributes to recent efforts to rethink art and architectural modernism by embracing the efforts of women and African Americans, as key agents in this process. Moreover it complicates the manner by which place, cultural specificity and attention to landscape can displace persistent notions of modern universals. My project provides a rethinking of the New Negro Movement by deepening understandings of the two-way migration system through demonstrating the significance of southern centers of education and culture in the formation of a modern African American identity and creative production.

Chapter one establishes the creative environment into which Meredith and others introduced new ideas, locating her experience and practice in the Southern crucible of discriminatory race relations, within which she would fight for improved conditions. Chapter one further introduces Meredith as a participant in the formation of an African American middle class comprised of those who worked to own property, fought for the right to education, and espoused values not dissimilar from members of the mainstream white middle class. Chapter one demonstrates moreover the vast integrated network of those who worked to achieve such rights.

Chapter Two follows Meredith through her own educational journey as representative of broader developments in higher education, disentangling the ways in which African Americans negotiated constraints imposed on them during slavery and emancipation. By analyzing methods through which they disseminated knowledge and improved conditions across urban centers through remote rural enclaves, I discuss how Meredith's understanding of the significance of art and architecture was constantly reinforced.

Chapter Three locates the roots of the New Negro Movement in the South. As leading intellectuals and activists sought to nurture a class of citizens imbued with the cultural capital necessary to garner respect and recognition for their contributions to American society, I demonstrate how attempts to cultivate art centers and train artists, illustrated a web of connections reaching from northern urban centers to southern nodes of production and learning.

Chapter Four explores the cultural milieu of New York in which Meredith, and others, shared in the flurry of fresh ideas about aesthetics and the role of art in everyday life; ideas that she absorbed and reinterpreted as she journeyed south. Through this cultural framework, this chapter analyses the pedagogical methods of early modernists taught in the northern universities related to discourses surrounding a search for authentic American cultural identity.

Chapter Five returns to the South where Meredith used the design of her home as a site of experimentation, while disseminating practical and ideological possibilities for better living. Moreover it reveals how Meredith participated in efforts to uplift African American communities, and sought solace and relief in spaces that were temporarily freed from the burden of such social responsibilities and the overwhelming effects of a life in constant conflict. In view of the adventure, power, joy, growth, transformations and destruction encountered, this chapter provides a sense of the utopian possibilities Meredith imagined through modern architectural interventions.

Chapter One

“Artistically and culturally, Virginia’s legacy is its architecture. Far more than through painting, literature, or any other traditional art form, it is through built form that Virginia has been known and has influenced the nation.”¹

Architecture in Virginia and the South

In the period following World War I, American architecture was in a state of flux. Individual designers were torn between reconciling remnants from the past into a romanticized eclecticism, and embracing the possibilities of a brand new architectural language distinctly expressive of a rapidly transforming modern age.² In the state of Virginia, however, the architecture of the past stood firm as the popular choice for monumental and domestic buildings. As a means to connecting to or preserving what, in effect, was a mythologized past that reinforced Virginia’s primacy within the history of the nation, the Colonial Revival was the preferred style, providing symbols through which to express the present and the future.³ The most obvious expression of this yearning for a past, that was both stable and secure, (for some members of the population), was the re-creation of the old town of Williamsburg into an historic site, known today as Colonial Williamsburg. Intended as a shrine to mark Virginia’s role in the founding of the nation, the project began in 1928 at the behest of W.A. R. Goodwin, Rector of the historic Bruton Parish Church, with

¹ Richard Guy Wilson “Introduction,” in Richard Guy Wilson, Sara A. Butler, Edward Chappell et al., eds. *Buildings*

² Richard Guy Wilson illustrates this point through the discussions held at the 1930 symposium of the American Institute of Architects. See Wilson, “Architecture in the Machine Age,” in Richard Guy Wilson, Diane H. Pilgrim and Dickran Tashjian, *The Machine Age in America 1918-1941* (Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 149. Prior to the AIA meeting, critics such as Lewis Mumford had also expressed concern. In his 1923 publication, *Sticks and Stones*, Mumford argues that “the rate of change in the modern world has altered, so that processes which required centuries for their consummation ...have been accelerated into decades,” and “eclecticism has not merely persisted, but the new familiarity that the American architect has gained with authentic and Asiatic work...has increased the range of eclecticism.” While Mumford embraces the idea of the machine, he fears that architects have yet to realize built forms that exhibit the spirit of the times without destroying the human quality that separates us from the machine. Lewis Mumford, *Sticks and Stones: A Study of American Architecture and Civilization* (New York: Dover, 1924, revised ed. 1955), 155-190.

³ James Michael Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion: Preservation and Traditionalism* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 5.

support from John D. Rockefeller, Jr.⁴ As a mid-twentieth century designed restoration project, Colonial Williamsburg drew on examples from the early American Republic, providing an antithesis to modernity, and reinforcing the continued relevance of the Colonial era [figure 1-1].⁵ In turn, Colonial Williamsburg's self-promotional marketing material helped popularize the Colonial Revival style for house designs as well as interiors. Indeed, popular and professional journals alike attest to the predominant allegiance to historical forms, filling their pages with variations expressed in domestic and institutional buildings [figure 1-2].⁶ Architect and historian Fisk Kimball, writing in 1922, also underscored the pervasiveness of the revival forms in domestic American architecture.⁷ However, it could easily be argued that this drive to infuse American design with forms reminiscent of the colonial era had begun back in the 1850s when Ann Pamela Cunningham led the fight to preserve George Washington's home, Mount Vernon. This highly visible campaign jumpstarted a long relationship with the Colonial Revival on the private level of domestic residences but also on the world's stage of international fairs, exhibited in the form of Mount Vernon replicas at the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition, a practice that continued through to the 1934 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago.⁸

Despite the predominance of historic architectural forms in Virginia, some attempts were made to reflect a knowledge of European modernism, disseminated through the New

⁴ Richard Guy Wilson, Sara A. Butler, Edward Chappell et al. (eds.) *Buildings of Virginia, Tidewater and Piedmont* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

⁵ See Richard Guy Wilson, Shaun Eyring, Kenny Morotta, eds. *Re-Creating the American Past: Essays on the Colonial Revival* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 7.

⁶ For a comprehensive analysis of the prevalence of the Colonial Revival and its potential meanings see Richard Guy Wilson, Shaun Eyring and Kenny Marotta (eds.) *Re-Creating the American Past: Essays on the Colonial Revival* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2006); also, Richard Guy Wilson, *The Colonial Revival House* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004), 90

⁷ Fisk Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the Colonies and Early Republic* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), xviii, 261.

⁸ See Lydia Brandt, "Re-creating Mount Vernon: The Virginia Building at the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 43, No. 1, Spring 2009. James Michael Lindgren argues that the establishment of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA) was a much stronger force for laying national foundations for traditionalism and preservation. Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion: Preservation and Traditionalism* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 243.
The Virginia Building at the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition

York exhibits and popular representations that drew on the influence of the 1925 Paris world's fair, the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes* [figure 1-3].⁹ As in the Northern cities of New York and Chicago, Virginia's cities demonstrated their awareness of the new spirit of the age in a handful of skyscrapers such as Lynchburg's Allied Arts Building (1928-1931) and Richmond's Central National Bank (1930). The new Art Moderne or Art Deco style, an idiom clearly in conversation with the Cubist art movement, and aesthetic expressions reflective of the Machine Age, was in the 1920s "the embodiment of sophistication." To this day however, the legacy of Virginia architecture is considered to be its contributions of the Colonial period and the Colonial Revival, despite those minor inroads made into modernism throughout the twentieth century.¹⁰

As Virginia's architectural legacy remained steeped in history so did its cadre of local architects, as far as their training was concerned. In fact, much of Virginia's innovative modern architecture and even its Colonial Revival architecture of note was not designed by the local apprentice-trained or builder architects but by out-of-state architects with professional academic credentials from the French *École des Beaux Arts* or its American equivalent found in the few college programs in the North.¹¹ A sign that Virginia, along with twenty-one other states, lagged behind other the leaders in architectural education is indicated by the establishment of a local chapter of the New York official professional body, the American Institute of Architects (AIA), which required architects to be licensed. Even despite the presence of the AIA, in the early twentieth century, many architects remained unlicensed and unregistered in Virginia through the 1950s. Licensure was not required for

⁹ Wilson, "Architecture in the Machine Age," *The Machine Age in America 1918-1941* (Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 150.

¹⁰ Richard Guy Wilson, "Building on the Foundations: The Historic Present in Virginia Architecture," in Charles Brownell, Calder Loth, William M. S. Rasmussen, Richard Guy Wilson, (eds.) *The Making of Virginia Architecture* (Richmond, VA: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 1992), 102-103; 374.

¹¹ A number of architecture programs existed in the South in the early twentieth century, including: Texas A&M (1905), Auburn (1907), Georgia Tech (1908), the University of Texas (1909), Rice (1912 and Clemson (1917). See RGW *The Making of Virginia*, 90-91.

domestic architecture; however, university education became a desired qualification for those competing to design large commercial and public buildings.¹² Thus, the establishment of a local professional body signaled the way for the future, as official registration would create a demand for professionalization. Nevertheless, for much of the twentieth century, architecture and its education in Virginia remained rooted in tradition.

Much of the early architecture in Virginia had been designed by ‘gentlemen architects’ who had gleaned their knowledge of architecture from books, Thomas Jefferson being the prime example, or from those who had been apprenticed builders. But the detailed work had been executed first by enslaved African Americans, and then by freedmen. This was particularly the case in urban centers from the ca. 1840s when free blacks established themselves as skilled tradesmen. In Richmond for example, carpentry accounted for forty-five percent of free black labor and the building trades.¹³ Scholars have documented one African American as having studied architecture, in France, probably at the *École des Beaux-Arts*, prior to the early twentieth century. Although little is known about his time in France, Louis Metoyer (1770-1832) returned to Louisiana to design a home for his mother, a formerly enslaved woman, and mistress of Claude Thomas Pierre Metoyer, a Frenchman, at the Isle Brevelle [figure 1-4].¹⁴ The singular example however, serves to complicate the general rule that most African Americans were builders or artisans and members of the building trades.

Although often lauded for their skill and excellent craftsmanship, free black artisans during the antebellum period, were not always assured a place in the labor market; with the

¹² “The Virginia Chapter, *AIA, a History*,” *Virginia Architect’s Handbook* (Richmond: Virginia AIA, 1968), 19, 21, 23, cited in Wilson, *The Making of Virginia*, 92; US Census, 1950 cited in Wilson, *Making of Virginia*,

¹³ David R. Goldfield, “Black Life in Old South Cities,” (Goldberg notes, however, that shoemaking and barbering accounted for eighty percent) in Edward D.C. Campbell, Jr. and Kym S. Rice eds. *Before Freedom Came: African American Life in the Antebellum South*, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, VA (Charlottesville VA: University of Virginia Press, 1991), 128, 133.

¹⁴ See Sharon F. Patton, *African-American Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 33-34 and Richard K. Dozier, “Tuskegee: Booker T. Washington’s Contribution to the Education of Black Architects,” (Architecture Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1990).

escalation of industrialization and the growth of cities, many whites migrated in search of better opportunities. Likewise, European migrants arrived to challenge the place of free blacks in the labor force, often underbidding for the same jobs.¹⁵ From the 1850s when racial tensions began to increase, black codes were introduced to restrict movement and behavior, often resulting in limiting the role of blacks in the urban economy. Similar black codes implemented by Southern states during the period of Reconstruction were further intended to limit African Americans' access to the structures of economic and political freedom.¹⁶

However, despite its setbacks, Reconstruction did put African Americans on the route to establishing themselves as a self-determined, independent and highly competent group, albeit after the Supreme Court passed *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, in 1896, one which would operate within a segregated society. Long established as artisans and craftsmen, African Americans looked to their own people to physically build the commercial, financial, religious and private institutions and homes necessary for establishing themselves in a secure position in society.¹⁷ Disillusioned with the failed promise of post-Civil War emancipation and the dashed political hopes of Reconstruction, African Americans turned away from the public political realm to focus on domestic life, an area over which they might more successfully exercise greater social, political, and economic control. This was after all, the first generation of African Americans able to fully influence the private sphere of intimate family relations without the invasive effects of white masters. Thus, the domestic became the space in which late nineteenth-century African Americans sought

¹⁵ Thomas Day is one example of a master craftsman who gained prominence during the antebellum period see *Thomas Day: Master Craftsman and Free Man of Color* (The Richard Hampton Jenrette Series in Architecture and the Decorative Arts) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Goldfield, "Black Life in Old South Cities," in Edward D.C. Campbell, Jr., and Kym S. Rice eds. *Before Freedom Came: African American Life in the Antebellum South*, 135.

¹⁶ See Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1979), pp.366-371.

¹⁷ Seldon Richardson, *Built by Blacks: African American Architecture & Neighborhoods in Richmond, VA* (Richmond, VA: Alliance to Conserve Old Richmond Neighborhoods and the Dietz Press, 2007), 33.

solidarity; the home, the family and education became markers, which measured status and class participation.¹⁸

Education leader Booker T. Washington argued for the need to institutionalize industrial training in order to build with authority the communities that would identify African Americans as significant tax paying members of society. Bricks signaled permanence, stability and respectability, he argued, and addressing a gathering of black teachers, Washington declared:

A white man knows the Negro that lives in a two-story brick house whether he wants to or not. When a black man is the largest taxpayer in a community, his neighbors will not object very long to his voting and having his vote honestly counted.¹⁹

Washington was optimistic in his view of white prejudice. But in reality, training for black artisans was also necessary to secure the credentials to compete with whites in the building trades.²⁰ Naturally, this assumed that the market operated on a level that permitted blacks to compete with whites, but in the post-bellum period these occasions were rare, and competition for jobs in some southern cities often led to violence.²¹ With regard to training,

¹⁸ The problem of the African American family became a key aspect of the new sociological studies undertaken at the turn of the twentieth century by academics such as W.E.B. Dubois and E. Franklin Frazier as the search for conditions under which African Americans might gain the respect they deserved and be admitted into mainstream American society accelerated. See for example W.E.B. Dubois, "The Negro American Family," Atlanta, 1908 and E. Franklin Frazier, "The Changing Status of the Negro Family," *Social Forces* 9, 3 (Mar., 1931), 386-393; E. Franklin Frazier, "The Present Status of the Negro Family in the United States," *Journal of Negro Education* 8, 3 (1939).

¹⁹ E. Davidson Washington ed., *Selected Speeches of Booker T. Washington* (Garden City, NY, 1932) cited in Ellen Weiss, Robert R. Taylor and Tuskegee: An African American Designs for Booker T. Washington (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth books, 2012), 29.

²⁰ James E. Newton and Ronald L. Lewis argue that "Artisans and craftsmen represented a "privileged" echelon in the slave community, and their products offer a strong reminder that, as a group, bondsmen also possessed a wide diversity of talents and skills." James E. Newton and Ronald L. Lewis, *The Other Slaves: Mechanics and Artisans and craftsmen* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1978), xiv. Alain Locke, writing in 1940 argued that the African American artisan's skills can be attributed to his African heritage, and it is only due to his enslavement that these craft arts were stripped from him. (The retention of African skills and knowledge is however an ongoing debate). Referring to the blossoming of the arts in the 1920s, otherwise known as the Harlem Renaissance, Locke argues that: "...it should never be forgotten that in America the Negro is having his second rather than his first career in the fine arts." Alain Locke, "The Negro as Artist," in Newton and Lewis, *The Other Slaves: Mechanics, Artisans and Craftsmen* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1978), pp. 205, 206.

²¹ See for example the carpentry and woodwork of Thomas Day of North Carolina in Patricia Phillips Marshall and Jo Ramsay Leimenstoll, *Thomas Day: Master Craftsman and Free Man of Color* (Chapel Hill: Published in association with the North Carolina Museum of History by the University of North Carolina Press, 2010). Also,

however, Washington realized that in addition to producing individuals with official credentials to work as architects, certification would ensure employment for others in the trades, that is, black architects would employ black tradesmen, and together they would provide “fine buildings evoking pride and respectability.”²²

In 1892, Washington laid the groundwork for a program in architectural drawing at Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute for African Americans: in doing so he hired Robert R. Taylor (1868-1942), fresh from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Department of Architecture, the first African American to graduate with a degree from MIT in architecture.²³ Although Tuskegee is hailed as the most significant institution for training the first architects, these men had their start at Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute, where they had learned the building trades. Charles Thadeus Russell graduated from Hampton in 1899, with a certificate in carpentry, and then was hired as supervisor of carpentry, he served an architectural apprenticeship, and practiced mechanical drawing throughout the construction of buildings at Tuskegee. Russell credited his knowledge of architecture to the large number of books he studied and subscriptions to architectural periodicals and building magazines. After Tuskegee, Russell was hired as instructor of manual training and supervisor of university buildings at Virginia Union University in Richmond, an ideal location from which to network with potential clients of the African

There is a body of literature on the development of unions that arose out of the competition between white and black artisans and craftsmen, however it goes beyond the bounds of my study here. See for example, Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class and Power in Twentieth Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

²² Weiss, *Robert R. Taylor and Tuskegee: An African American Architect Designs for Booker T. Washington*

²³ Ellen Weiss, *Robert R. Taylor and Tuskegee: An African American Architect Designs for Booker T. Washington* (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2012), 3, 41. Weiss indicates that students at Tuskegee must have had some knowledge of architectural drawing as they would have had to be able to read such documents as trained masons and carpenters even if they were not able to draw them. She attributes this to the Hampton-trained instructor, William C. Bowen who taught at Tuskegee from the early 1880s. Hampton had been teaching architectural, freehand and mechanical drawing from the 1870s as part of an industrial arts curriculum (Weiss, p. 49).

American rising middle class, and to set up his own practice. In 1909, Charles Thadeus Russell became the first licensed practicing African American architect in Virginia.²⁴

At Tuskegee, they perfected drafting skills and received practical building experience, which they would use to build churches, libraries, financial establishments, schools and homes in their communities [figure -5].²⁵ Several graduates from programs such as Hampton and Tuskegee went on to gain further qualifications from Northern collegiate architectural programs.²⁶ John A. Lankford, perhaps best known as the first independent black practitioner of architecture, studied subsidiary subjects at Tuskegee for one year after having taken six years of scientific and industrial studies at Lincoln University in Missouri, followed by a distance-learning program in architecture with the International Correspondence School.²⁷ He went on to design and build a wide range of projects as the supervising architect for the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Like Booker T. Washington, Lankford equated architectural design and building with business and self-improvement. In 1906, before an audience gathered at the New York meeting of the Negro Business League over which Washington presided, Lankford underscored the importance of and need for African Americans as architects and builders in their communities:

In America for over two hundred years the Negroes in the South were the principal designers and builders; they cut the stone, sawed the timber, burnt the bricks and manufactured most of the tools and machinery in the machine

²⁴ Richardson, *Built by Blacks: African American Architecture & Neighborhoods in Richmond, VA* (Richmond, VA: Alliance to Conserve Old Richmond Neighborhoods and the Dietz Press, 2007).

²⁵ Richard K. Dozier, "Tuskegee: Booker T. Washington's Contribution to the Education of Black Architects" (PhD Dissertation, Department of Architecture, University of Michigan, 1990). 4.

²⁶ See W.E.B. Du Bois' survey and conference on the Negro Artisan and the responses these prompted on the part of African American black builders who desired further training as architects. W.E. B. Du Bois, *The Negro Artisan* (Atlanta, 1902), also cited in Weiss, *Robert R. Taylor and Tuskegee: An African American Architect Designs for Booker T. Washington*, 48.

²⁷ Lincoln Institute was started by the 62nd and 65th US Colored Troops in January 1865, received state assistance in 1879 to become Missouri's first black Morrill Land Grant Institution with agricultural and industrial training in 1891. See Bobby L. Lovett, *America's Historically Black College & Universities* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011), 21.

blacksmith shop, to carry out their idea of construction they designed and built ...The harvest is now great, as president of the Washington Negro Business League, I would advise any skilled Negro workman with pluck and push, coupled with some finance, to make a venture along this line; if possible in the community in which you live, if not come to Washington and we will assist.²⁸

One of those who would join Lankford in 1905, leaving a year later to establish his own practice in Washington, D.C., was William S. Pittman (1875-1958). In 1895-96 Pittman had completed a drawing course at Tuskegee Institute under Robert Taylor. His preliminary training then permitted him to gain a four-year architecture degree from Drexel Institute in three years, after which he returned south, along with others, to share his knowledge and skills as instructor at Tuskegee.²⁹ Lankford's name continues to be recognized to this day, as a significant builder of Washington's neighborhoods, and his name and practice has recently been inscribed into the form of popular culture as a Washington Post cartoon strip [figure 1-6]. However, Pittman's name has faded from memory. His most public achievement was in winning the 1907 Jamestown Tercentennial competition for the first exposition building to be designed by a black architect and designated specifically for the display of African American achievements. The building was built by black laborers, and supervised by black contractors, Bolling and Everett of Lynchburg Virginia.³⁰ State, regional and world's fairs were arguably the most prominent public spaces, which could demonstrate and represent a group's progress. So in constructing their own building, African Americans, for once, could experience a high degree of autonomy and control over the content and visual exhibition of

²⁸ Etheridge Harrison, "Black architects in Washington, DC: 1900 to the Present." (PhD Dissertation, Washington, DC: The Catholic University, 1979, cited in Melville Mitchell, AIA, *The Crisis of the African American Architect* (New York: Writers Advantage, 2003), 38. [check location of original dissertation- not available on proquest]

²⁹ Ellen Weiss, Robert R. Taylor and Tuskegee: An African American Architect Designs for Booker T. Washington (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2012), 49-50.

³⁰ Mabel O. Wilson, *Negro Building* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2011), 125-127.

their achievements, while demonstrating their academic, rather than simply trades' skills and credentials, as professional architects.³¹

The Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition was all the more significant for African Americans as it was an international space which “paraded the nation’s history,” and even though the building exhibiting black achievements was set apart, it nevertheless enabled blacks to “claim a physical space in the nations cultural landscape and a symbolic space in the nation’s historical consciousness.”³² The Jamestown Tercentennial Negro Building was not the first to be dedicated to African American exhibits, but unlike the Negro Building at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895, which was constructed by black contractors and laborers, but designed by white, New York architect, Bradford L. Gilbert, Jamestown Exposition’s Negro Building was designed by a black architect, William Pittman [figure 1-7].³³

By 1900 it appeared that African Americans were making progress in the field of architecture, just as architecture schools flourished around the country. Tuskegee in Alabama, offered a certificate in architecture from around 1895, and in Virginia in 1896, Hampton Institute opened its Armstrong and Slater Memorial Trade School, followed in 1922, by a Building Department, which offered a four-year course including “structural design and principles of architecture.” In comparison, academic architecture programs for white students in the South included Tulane, founded 1894; Texas A&M (1905); Auburn (1907); Georgia Tech (1908); the University of Texas (1909); Rice (1912); and Clemson (1917). In Virginia, the first school of architecture was founded at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, in 1919, followed in 1928 by Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Blacksburg.³⁴ By

³¹ Mabel O. Wilson, *Negro Building* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2011), 125-127.

³² Wilson, *Negro Building* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2011), 130, 3.

³³ Wilson, *Negro Building* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2011), 55, 61.

³⁴ See F.H. Bosworth and Roy Childs Jones, *A Study of Architectural Schools* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932) and Douglas McVarish, with K. Edward Lay and Boyd Coons, “Architectural Education at the University of

1930, the Southern Association of College and Secondary Schools accredited the trade school at Hampton, Virginia, advancing it to the college level and in 1934 William Henry Moses Jr., became the first formally educated architect to join the faculty.³⁵

However, as much as this advancement in educational opportunities might suggest progress, African Americans struggled to receive the recognition they had earned, and continued to be excluded from the architectural profession. This was highlighted in the controversy that surrounded the architectural competition to design the Virginia Room at the 1939 World's Fair in New York. At this fair, rather than a separate building for blacks and whites, the entire exhibit of the State of Virginia would occupy a space in one large building. William H. Moses entered and won the competition, receiving a prize of \$350.00. Interestingly, although perhaps not surprisingly, as it was such a highly lauded achievement at the time, Moses' design featured, for the center of the room, a scale model of the recently completed Colonial Williamsburg. The surrounding walls were to depict characteristic Virginia subject matter, ranging from agriculture to history, in the form of photomurals; a double-lighted photomontage of a map of Virginia was to cover one wall [figure 1-8, 1-9].³⁶

Although Moses won the competition on merit, when it was discovered that he was an African American, discussions behind closed doors resulted in the dismissal of his design. Denying that the decision was based on race, the subcommittee of the Virginia New York World's Fair Commission indicated that they feared the Colonial Williamsburg design might cause sectional criticism, that the photomural repeated an idea present in a number of other

Virginia," *Colonnade* 3 (Summer 1988) and 4 (Winter 1989): unpaginated, all cited in Wilson, *The Making of Virginia*, 91.

³⁵ John H. Spencer, "Hampton Institute Department of Architecture (1871)," in Dreck Spurlock Wilson, *African American Architects: A Biographical Dictionary, 1865-1945* (London: Routledge, 2004).

³⁶ Richard Guy Wilson, *The Making of Virginia Architecture*, 94-97.

state's exhibits, that is, presumably, it was not original, and that the light map would prove beyond their budget.³⁷

As newspaper accounts attest, the African American community was outraged. William H. Moses himself sought to disseminate the injustice of the case. He contacted W.E.B. Du Bois requesting permission to publish an article written for him by Mentor A. Howe, a research official for the Virginia Writers project. The article, which then appeared in W.E.B. Du Bois' edited journal *Phylon*, was strongly critical of the competition outcome, suggesting that whites were reluctant for blacks to "show a progressive creative aptitude," nor were Southerners "ready to accept them as equal competitors" in the market for architectural design. Howe contended: "the dilemma created by the winning of an open and anonymous context by a Negro, however brilliant, is to the 'true Southerner' too embarrassing for comfort."³⁸ He further attributed blame to the mainstream press, illustrating the insult added to injury on the part of the conservative Norfolk *Virginian Pilot*, in which the competition award winner had been announced as front-page news. In doing so, the newspaper had named the recipient *Mister* William Moses, the *Mister*, had then been rescinded and declared "a mistake," on discovering Moses' African American identity. According to Howe, the newspaper apologized to its readers for this serious oversight, explaining that it was due to the anonymous nature of the competition entry. Howe further indicated, that it was also likely the design entry address, Locust Street, Hampton, Virginia, had confused the newspaper editor, as this was typically a neighborhood in which whites resided. Thus the discrimination against and segregation of African Americans was revealed

³⁷ *Chicago Defender*, "Hampton Architect Awarded Prize for N.Y. Fair Design," (Nov. 16, 1938); *Richmond News Leader* "Moses Design for Fair Out," (January 27, 1939) section 2:8; *Chicago Defender*, "Find Artist is Race Man, Va. World's Fair Group Reject Design," (Feb, 4, 1939).

³⁸ Mentor A. Howe, "Come to the Fair!" *Phylon*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (4th Qtr., 1940), pp. 314-322.

on a number of levels in this controversy – through professional, social and residential practices.³⁹

Having stripped Moses of his award, the Commission awarded the project to Leslie Cheek Jr., a 1935 architecture graduate from Yale University, whose social connections had invited him to establish the Art Department at the College of William and Mary. Cheek went on to an illustrious career as Director of the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Virginia Museum of Fine Art, and as an appointee of the Virginia Art Commission.⁴⁰ William Moses, however, was not to be deterred from exhibition design. The following year, he mounted an exhibit of Hampton Institute student work at the 1940 American Negro Exhibition in Chicago, which the *Chicago Defender* noted to be among the most interesting exhibits by an “expert on visual displays.” Moreover, the newspaper, recalling the controversy of the previous year, reminded the public that Moses had won the competition for the “best design to be used for Virginia’s exhibit at the New York World’s Fair.”⁴¹ World’s Fairs offered prime sites for building commissions and even regional expositions were highly competitive and such competition often produced contentious results, as evidenced in the competition for the first World’s Fair building to be won by a woman. Sophia Hayden, an 1890 graduate of the MIT program in Architecture, won the competition for the design of the Women’s building at the Chicago Worlds Fair in 1893. She was paid a small sum of \$1000-\$1500 for her design, while men were being paid 3-10 times that much for theirs. Hayden's building received an award "for delicacy of style, artistic taste, and geniality and elegance of the interior hall." Critics, however, insisted it looked too feminine. One described the building critically as having a "graceful timidity or gentleness, combined however with evident technical knowledge, at once differentiates it from its colossal neighbors and reveals the sex

³⁹ Howe, “Come to the Fair!” *Phylon*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (4th Qtr., 1940), 315. See Wanda Corn,

⁴⁰ Parke Rouse, Jr., *Living by Design: Leslie Cheek and the Arts* (Williamsburg, VA: Society of the Alumni and the College of William and Mary, 1985).

⁴¹ “Hampton Exhibit at Exposition,” *Chicago Defender*, Aug. 17, 1940.

of its author [figure 1-10]."⁴² Thus, African Americans and women, despite similar academic training continued to be considered somehow lacking in credentials when it came to the architectural design of public buildings and consequently struggled to practice outside the confines of the racially segregated or domestic sphere.⁴³

Art in Virginia

If the state of Virginia has long been recognized for its contribution to the field of architecture, in the field of art, it has received far less attention. It was with the implementation of government-funded Works Progress Administration programs during the depression of the 1930s that the art scene in Virginia began to receive national attention. Interestingly, Richmond, Virginia, had once been the site of the first American Academy of Fine Arts, established by a young French officer in the Army of the Revolution, Chevalier Alexander Marie Cuesnay de Beaurepaire, who had envisioned the possibility of developing a cultural connection between the new American Republic and France. Together with interested local subscribers, Cuesnay de Beaurepaire succeeded in completing a building for the Academy in 1788, which, reportedly, served as the meeting place of the Virginia Convention, at which the Constitution of the United States was ratified. Unfortunately, although documents attest to the Academy's existence, including a list of the First Council of Administration, Committee of Correspondence in Paris, and a Constitution of By-Laws and a Seal, the Academy was unable to get off the ground as the French Revolution prevented Cuesnay de Beaurepaire from returning to Richmond after presenting his plan to the French King and the Royal Academies.

⁴² Wanda Corn, *Women Building History: Public Art at the 1893 Columbian Exposition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

⁴³ Discrimination against women and minority architects continues to this day as numerous publications attest. See most recently for example, Tanja Kullic, (ed) *Architecture, A Woman's Profession* (Berlin: Jovis Verlag, 2011); Melvin L. Mitchell, *The Crisis of the African American Architect, 3rd edition* New York: Writers Advantage, 2003).

Nevertheless, in July 1932 a group consisting of Richmond social elites, committed as Trustees to the restoration of the Academy, and met to launch its revival. The Board of Trustees included individuals dedicated to improving the visibility of Virginia in the arts such as Alexander W. Weddell, Webster S. Rhoads, Randolph Maynard, Jean Trigg,⁴⁴ Adèle Clark, and Thomas C. Parker.⁴⁵ Others too, had been involved in developing the arts scene in Richmond. In the literary world, a group including nationally renowned author Ellen Glasgow, literary magazine founder and critic Hunter T. Stagg, and author Carl Van Vechten of New York, brought national attention to the cultural richness and vibrancy of Richmond and the state of Virginia.⁴⁶ Through their regular, and raucous meetings, Glasgow, Stagg and Van Vechten discussed and promoted new literary talent, hosting readings by local artists and inviting recognized names such as Gertrude Stein to the city, as well as apprising New York publishers of fresh work.⁴⁷ Stagg and Van Vechten shared an interest in promoting African American work, and enjoyed a mutual friendship with author Langston Hughes. Their mutual appreciation and interests ranged from the professional to the social. On sending Stagg a copy of his new magazine *Fire!!*, Hughes remarked on the fact that Stagg and Van Vechten had named a cocktail in his honor:

Surely I enjoyed that evening with you and your fiends. It was a perfectly delightful little party, very New York-ish, and jolly. And I've never had the amusing honor of having a cocktail named from one of my poems before. And it was a really good cocktail, too. Richmond was certainly kind to me. And I discover that not all

⁴⁴ This needs further research but it is possible that Jean Trigg was in fact Emma Gray Trigg, a leader in Richmond's cultural affairs, see Papers of Emma Gray Trigg, 1921-1940, Accession # 5557-b and 5557-d, University of Virginia Special Collections Library, Charlottesville, VA.

⁴⁵ Unpublished document describing the establishment of the Academy of Sciences and Fine Arts of America, May 8, 1786; also, Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Richmond Academy of Arts, July 7, 1932, MSS1 C5472a FA2 Adèle Clark Papers, Folder: Art Notes and Articles, Virginia Historical Society (VHS).

⁴⁶ See Sarah Goodman, *Ellen Glasgow, A Biography* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 36-38 & 208-9. Goodman writes of the vibrancy of Richmond's cultural scene to which Glasgow returned in the 1920s; see also "Biographical/Historical Information," M261 "A Guide to the Hunter T. Stagg Papers, 1917-1981, Special Collections and Archives, James Branch Cabell Library, Virginia Commonwealth University.

⁴⁷ See Bruce Kellner, ed. *The Splendid Drunken Twenties: Selections From the Daybooks 1922-1930, Carl Van Vechten* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Edgar E. MacDonald, Unpublished Manuscript, "Cabell, Wylie, and Richmond-in- Virginia in the 1920s," Cabell, 1979, Accession #8698-a, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

Southerners are as vile as Mr. Mencken of Baltimore and the Negro press makes them out to be.⁴⁸

In addition to raising the profile of the arts in the South, which included cultural programs at the Virginia Historical Society, studio art schools, and art exhibits and literary readings throughout the city of Richmond, many of these same individuals worked to improve interracial relations and cooperation. Attempts to revive the Academy of Fine Arts evolved into the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, for which the University of Virginia-trained art historian Thomas C. Parker was installed as Chief Curator, and Thomas Colt, as Director.⁴⁹ One of the tasks proposed at the first meetings of the Trustees of the Academy of Fine arts, was that they cooperate with the University of Virginia and the American Federation of Arts in undertaking an “experiment in developing an appreciation of art in the rural communities by conducting a series of exhibitions.” Furthermore, it was suggested that a division of the Academy be established “for the Negroes, thereby encouraging literary talent among this class.”⁵⁰

Adèle Clark, an artist trained at the Art School and Art Club of Richmond and at the Chase School of Art in New York, was instrumental in developing opportunities for art study and appreciation in Richmond. As a member of the Virginia Arts Commission, a contributor to the Index of American Design, and an instructor in art appreciation, Clark brought art to the public, working to make it more of a community-based endeavor.⁵¹ She also actively worked to change the lives of African Americans, supporting state bills 262 and 266, which

⁴⁸ Hunter T. Stagg Papers, Correspondence, Carl Van Vechten, 1924-1938, Box 2, folders 6-11, Box 3, folder 1-5: Correspondence Langston Hughes, Box 2, folder 2. Hughes to Stagg, Dec. 1, 1926.

⁴⁹ Some controversy surrounded the appointment of Parker as Director of the Museum and he was instead made Chief Curator: see “Virginia Artists Rally to Support of Modern Moses,” *Richmond –Times Dispatch*, March 17, 1935; For recent coverage of the events of this development see Harry Kollatz, Jr., “Beaux Arts Ball: Richmond’s Cultural and Social Luminaries partied till dawn for Art’s Sake,” *Richmond Magazine*, Oct. 12, 2010.

⁵⁰ Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Richmond Academy of Arts, July 7, 1932, MSS1 C5472a FA2, Adèle Clark Papers, Folder: Art Notes and Articles, Virginia Historical Society (VHS).

⁵¹ See M9 A guide to Adele Goodman Clark Papers, Special Collections and Archives Collection, Virginia Commonwealth University.

repealed segregation on various types of public transportation. At a meeting of the Community Recreation Association in February 1937, Clark spoke on the history and progress of art in Richmond. She noted the opportunity presented by the Federal Art Project (FAP) Works Progress Administration (WPA), with local sponsors the Valentine Museum, the Virginia Art Museum and the Academy.⁵² Indeed it is likely that Thomas C. Parker orchestrated the FAP, WPA as in 1936 Holger Cahill, director of the Federal Art Project, had appointed Parker director of the national staff in Washington D.C. and tasked him with scouting areas in the South and West in which to establish art centers.⁵³ As a result of local and national collaboration, the Craig House Art Center, a place for promoting and teaching fine art for African Americans, was established in 1938, with C. Braxton Valentine as President.⁵⁴ The Craig House Art Center's mission was to:

...foster an interest and participation in art among Negroes: to establish a cause to be conducted, schools or classes for the instruction of Negroes in painting, commercial art, sculpture... carving of all sorts, music and dancing and in general in all branches of human endeavor designed to inculcate and encourage aesthetic sensibility; and to employ instructors for such schools or classes; to hold exhibitions, public or private, of the work of Negroes; ...to act as agent for the sale of the work of Negroes...⁵⁵

The project was accommodated in a building that had become a preservation effort. Local preservationist and member of the traditional Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA), Mary Wingfield Scott, realized the possibility to salvage the historically significant 18th- century two-story frame house originally built ca. 1784 by clerk of

⁵² Adele Clark, ViHMss7:2 R4155:6, Virginia Historical Society.

⁵³ A. Joan Saab, *For the Millions: American Art and Culture Between the Wars* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 56.

⁵⁴ MSS3 C8443a, Craig House Art Center Certificate of Incorporation, Craig House Art Center Records, Virginia Historical Society; Mss72 R4155:6 Virginia Historical Society; MSc75 Craig House Art Center, Valentine Richmond History Center.

⁵⁵ Mss3 C8443a, Certificate of Incorporation: Craig House Art Center, Craig House Art Center Records, Virginia Historical Society.

Richmond court, Adam Craig, and subsequently the birthplace of Jane Stannard, protagonist of Edgar Allen Poe's *To Helen*. In the 1920s, this architectural treasure, had found itself in an area of Richmond that was populated by working class African Americans, as well as Polish, Russian and Jewish immigrants. In arguing for the preservation of the building through its redevelopment as a center for Africa American art, Scott demonstrated the larger importance of urban preservation, in bringing together the significance of historic building stock with the social realities of racial and class segregation. By saving the historic building, the APVA could simultaneously infuse new life into neighborhoods that were at the mercy of exploitative landlords, while preserving history.⁵⁶ Ironically, the gesture helped preserve the building and improve the neighborhood through the building's re-use and renovation, but it nevertheless reinforced the reality that organizations created for African Americans, were likely to be located in areas outside of the main social and cultural experience.

On the one hand Virginia remained rooted in social and cultural tradition, while some worked to promote a different image of this southern state and ameliorate racial tensions and conditions. This arts activism and political engagement illustrates that Virginia was not the complete cultural backwater both contemporary and even today's scholarly emphasis on northern metropolitan cities suggests it to have been. Virginians, such as those trustees of the Academy of Arts, were exploring the possibility of what art could be, who might create art, and where it could be seen, much as others in the North were considering art in political terms, seeking to extend its reach to the masses. Such activity was very much in tune with national trends of the depression era and the policies of federal New Deal programs. It was in the 1930s that art became the province of activists, and those involved

⁵⁶ Scott D. Arnold, Virginia Department of Historic Resources, *A Guidebook to Virginia's Historical Highway Markers*. (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia press, 2007); James Michael Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion: Historic Preservation and Virginia Traditionalism* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1997), 236-237.

in the art world attempted to “put art in touch with society, to interpret and to celebrate an art that protested injustices and to encourage participation in political activity.” In response to the stock market crash of 1929, many artists were literally “forced out into the streets” and critics and theorists turned their attention to more practical matters such as the “process of art and the function of artists in society.”⁵⁷

In the 1930s art was tied to discourses about Marxism and Americanism. As such, some, typically émigrés from Eastern Europe, saw art as a “political weapon that could force political change and end oppression of the victims of capitalism.”⁵⁸ Others, among them, philosopher John Dewey, critics Lewis Mumford and Van Wyk Brooks, and New Deal program leaders such as Holger Cahill, advocated the relocation of art out of its traditional guise as a luxurious commodity adorning museums and homes of the wealthy, into the public and private spaces of ordinary citizens. They sought to define an authentic American art that was stylistically distinct from European precedent, in doing so they looked to the roots of folk culture.⁵⁹ As Stewart Buettner has argued, John Dewey’s unique contribution was in his philosophical divergence from traditional European aesthetics, and whereas traditionally art was thought of in terms of “making to the total exclusion of doing,” Dewey reversed the order. In his study of the creative process, *Art as Experience*, published in 1934, he defined art as a “quality of doing and what is done.”⁶⁰ Dewey dismissed the distinctions between high and low art, and criticized theorists who separated art from the objects and scenes of everyday experience, writing that: “It is when art is separated from the everyday

⁵⁷ See Susan Noyes Platt, *Art and Politics in the 1930's: Modernism, Marxism, Americanism* (New York: MidMarch Press, 1999), xi.

⁵⁸ Noyes Platt, *Art and Politics in the 1930's: Modernism, Marxism, Americanism*, xiii.

⁵⁹ See Patricia Hills, *Modern Art in the USA: Issues and Controversies of the 20th Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 53-4.

⁶⁰ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch and Co, 1934), 214. Also, Stewart Buettner, “John Dewey and the Visual Arts in America,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Summer, 1975): 384

that esthetic hunger is likely to seek the cheap and the vulgar.”⁶¹ The significance for art in life he saw as operating to “deepen and to raise to great clarity that sense of an enveloping undefined whole that accompanies every normal experience.” Theorizing that the processes of art, or the emotional experience it evoked, rather than the formal aspects of the object itself were of primary significance, Dewey saw art as a dynamic activity with which both the artist and the viewer engaged. His argument that this quality of experience was something undefined, “which binds together all the defined elements, the objects of which we are fully aware, making them a whole,” was a complicated phenomenon, which scholars have struggled to comprehend.⁶² It is helpful however to view it through the lens of William James’s notions of aesthetics on which Dewey drew in a number of ways. These include, insisting on the social dimension of aesthetic experience; expanding our possibilities for aesthetic experience by acknowledging the tastes and feelings of “people different from ourselves;” accepting the pluralistic notion of a continuum of aesthetic forms, “where the more primitive forms are not condemned or relegated to non-aesthetic status;” affirming popular art; and combining the aesthetic with the practical, as expressed in the integration of art and life.⁶³

As one of the key theorists of art and democracy of the interwar period, Dewey would have a lasting influence through making connections between aesthetics, art in public life, and art education, believing that a “philosophy of art is sterilized unless it makes us aware of the function of art in relation to other modes of experience.”⁶⁴ This more democratic perspective on the place of art in everyday life, played out in the 1939 New York

⁶¹ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch and Co, 1934), 6.

⁶² Richard Shusterman argues that this unifying quality in art experience originated with William James’ theory of the unity of consciousness. See Shusterman, “The Pragmatist Aesthetics of William James,” *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (October 2011); 348.

⁶³ Richard Shusterman, “The Pragmatist Aesthetics of William James,” *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (October 2011), 353-355. Shusterman refers to James and Dewey’s approach as a “somaesthetics, a wide ranging aesthetics of perception, presentation and performance.” Shusterman, 361.

⁶⁴ Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 12 cited in A. Joan Saab, *For the Millions: American Art and Culture Between the Wars* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 13.

World's Fair, where the general public could view American designed products for purchase, and experience everyday spaces in which art and life merged. In exhibiting objects of everyday life as art, the fair's organizers continued a trend found in department stores and museums in which the boundaries between fine art and mass-produced consumer culture were blurred.⁶⁵ It was this approach to American art however, that left wing intellectuals such as Clement Greenberg objected to, arguing instead for its isolation from society. Greenberg expressed this attitude in a polemical essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," published in the 1939 fall issue of *Partisan Review*, a journal funded by the School of Paris artist and critic George Morris. Greenberg would draw on Morris's interpretation of abstract Modernism as the true avant-garde as well as on his formalist methodology, which Morris himself had based on Roger Fry and Clive Bell.⁶⁶ Hans Hofmann is also considered to have strongly influenced Greenberg, in particular with regard to his interest in those artists who focused on the art medium itself. Paralleling Hoffman, he admired Picasso, Braque, Mondrian, Miro, Kandinsky, Brancusi, Klee, Matisse and Cezanne, whose work "explored the pure invention and arrangement of spaces, surfaces, shapes, and colors to the exclusion of everything that was outside the realm of the work itself."⁶⁷ On the one hand, this modern approach to pure abstraction in formalist aesthetics was hailed as the true avant-garde in art, while its elite focus on the art object demonstrated an opposition to fascist imitation, and thus inauthentic, culture expressed in "popular, commercial art and literature, with their chromotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics..." In other words, kitsch, the product of the industrial revolution and a newly urbanized population, which Greenberg argued was "formulaic, and turned out mechanically,

⁶⁵ A. Joan Saab, *For the Millions: American Art and Culture between the Wars*, 158.

⁶⁶ See Susan Platt, *Art and Politics in the 1930's*, 241.

⁶⁷ John O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg: Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol.1: Perceptions and Judgments 1939-1944 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), xxi.

providing vicarious experience and faked sensations.”⁶⁸ Greenberg viewed society as on the one hand, “a minority of the powerful —and therefore the cultivated, and on the other “the great mass of the exploited and poor- and therefore the ignorant.” Furthermore, he insisted, it was “the poor, ignorant and exploited who have had to be content with folk or rudimentary culture, and now kitsch; to the educated and powerful belongs formal culture.”⁶⁹ Greenberg advanced his theory regarding the folk, admitting that “ a good deal of folk art was in fact “on a high level” but was nevertheless, “not Athene, and it’s Athene whom we want: formal culture with its infinity of aspects, its luxuriance, its large comprehension.” He complicated understandings of the folk prevalent at the time, by arguing that expressions such as “old English ballads, were produced by the “post-feudal squierarchy of the English countryside” which “survived in the mouths of the folk, long after those for whom the ballads were composed had gone on to other forms of literature. Unfortunately, until the machine age, culture was the exclusive prerogative of a society that lived by the labor of serfs or slaves.” Greenberg’s note regarding the folk and his comment that “in Africa today we find that the culture of slave-owning tribes is generally much superior to that of the tribes that possess no slaves,” raises the question of the artist’s position in society once again. As only when the artist was able to focus entirely on making, it seems, could an authentic new culture be produced.⁷⁰ Greenberg’s attitude towards art production and his dialectic regarding the formal and the kitsch make him a contradictory figure, some scholars suggest. On the one hand he was “anti-Fascist in his dismissal of kitsch,” on the other, his admiration of the art produced in slave-state civilizations such as Ancient Greece, aligned him with proponents of an elitist model for culture such as

⁶⁸ O’Brian, *Clement Greenberg: Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol.1, 11-13.

⁶⁹ O’Brian, *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 17.

⁷⁰ O’Brian, *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism*, 19, Greenberg’s note 6.

Frankfurt School philosopher Theodor Adorno.⁷¹ Greenberg's division of art into the pure abstract as the praiseworthy avant-garde, and kitsch as mass-produced diluted culture to which the public gravitated, was an attempt to depoliticize art and its role in society, removing it to the province of "art for art's sake," which would dominate the discourses of Modernism for years to come.⁷² Thus within the realm of art and architecture it is clear that a number of tensions co-existed during the early years of the twentieth century, between tradition and modern, between art as a purely, formal endeavor exclusive to the artist and the notion of art as an experience available to all members of society, and finally the tension regarding who could participate in the production of American art and architecture.

Within these national and local discourses of art and architecture it is both remarkable and exciting to discover still standing today in a place at once hidden and yet in plain sight, a modern domestic space expressed in pure abstract avant-garde forms.⁷³ It's a modest cube-like structure, of concrete blocks covered in white stucco. A flat roof terrace is framed by azure colored curved metal coping, and is accessed by means of a steel ship's ladder, opening the building to the sky [figure 1-11, 1-12]. The building's façade is asymmetrical, incorporating rounded sides punctuated by bands of glass bricks, and a carport extends off a built-in garage. An abundance of glass fractures the smooth planar surface of the envelope, creating a dialogic relationship between interior and exterior: in the building's rounded ends, glass bricks invite sun and light into the intimate spaces of

⁷¹ Susan Platt, *Art and Politics in the 1930's* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1999), 248-249. Platt admits this is a provocative stance to which not every scholar adheres.

⁷² O'Brian, *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays*, 8.

⁷³ The notion of "hiding in plain sight" originates with David Roediger and whiteness studies. Roediger suggests that 'whiteness' is manifestly able to hide in plain sight" because it "remains at times ineffable and multiple," and our task is "thus almost never to say that something is really all about race, it is to show how whiteness exists in a complex history and a multiply inflected present." David Roediger, "How Old and New Whiteness Keep Showing up, but not by Themselves," in Maurice Berger and David Roediger eds. *White: Whiteness and Race in Contemporary Art* (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 2004), 95. Here I use the concept to draw attention to the possibility that although the object I will explore is on a black landscape, however, the physical presence of the object does not immediately align it with that landscape but is rather part of the "multiply inflected present" that is a more complicated understanding of blackness that coexists. The landscape of the African American campus is further complicated because it exists within and yet apart from the landscape of whiteness which surrounds it physically, metaphorically, emotionally and psychologically.

bedrooms, while obscuring views in [figure 1-13]. Paneled walls of glass in communal areas reflect light and provide views out; a large picture window spills views out onto the grassy woodland beyond [Figure 1-14]. The house nestles in low ground at the end of a driveway diverting off the main route that circumscribes Virginia State campus, across the railroad tracks and on the hilltop above the city of Petersburg. Landscape forms — a screen of symmetrically planted trees and a dip in topography — fracture the building's site from the college grounds, and the architectural plan orients the house self-consciously away from the campus toward a woodland creek. Thus the surrounding landscape features function organically with the architectural design, defining the character of the site [figure 1-15, 1-16].

With such early twentieth-century forms and possible intentions, the house might recall the work of known masters such as Le Corbusier, particularly his Villa Savoye and his Ozenfant House and Studio in which glass performs similar functions [figure 1-17, 1-18]. Or a borrowing of vocabulary and design aesthetics from other modern European innovations such as those represented in the modest houses of J. J. P. Oud and Mies Van Der Rohe, first seen in the United States at the 1932 Museum of Modern Art's *International Exhibition of Modern Architecture* [figure 1-19, 1-20]. Here exhibit curators, art historian Henry Russell-Hitchcock and architect Philip Johnson, had assembled what they considered a representative sample of the new architecture. Which they defined in relation to abstract art and according to three strict aesthetic principles: "emphasis upon volume - spaces enclosed by thin planes or surfaces as opposed to the suggestion of mass and solidarity; regularity as opposed to symmetry or other kinds of balance; and dependence upon the intrinsic elegance of materials, technical perfection, and fine proportions as opposed to applied ornament." Hitchcock, Johnson and Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) director, Alfred Barr, named the new architecture the 'International Style,' based on the number of buildings

discovered on a tour of Europe in 1930 and '31 that seemed to reflect this innovative idiom.⁷⁴ Alternatively, the house presents the kind of architectural spectacle fashioned by French architect Robert Mallet-Stevens in which the modern forms provide the setting for avant-garde ideas about aesthetics, cultured taste in interior design and a new way of living [figure 1-21, 1-22].

But this unassuming house on the grounds of Virginia State College, with its modernist architectural principles, was not the design of a white member of the fraternity of European architects. Modest and seemingly unimposing, the dwelling suggests a cozy intimacy, in stark contrast to the towering red brick Colonial Revival buildings, which dominate the skyline across the way. And yet it is a bold statement, remarkable in the way it breaks from tradition, refusing to adopt the national historic narratives of the colonial past, which persisted in the popular and professional architectural press, and in the buildings of the neighboring Virginia State College. Amaza Lee Meredith, an African American woman, designed and built this modern house in 1939 [figure 1-23]. The details of the houses' provenance, its early construction date, its female black designer, and its Southern rural location, signal a surprising feat, and prompt a number of questions: How did the house come to be here, in this particular shape and form, and on this marginalized landscape of black conservatism? What is the narrative that lies at the root of this remarkable place? What is its meaning? In her collected papers, now archived at Virginia State University, formerly Virginia State College, Amaza Lee Meredith bequeathed a number of clues. These include blueprints and architectural drawings for buildings she designed, a leather-bound scrapbook containing black and white photographs of the house under construction, and of its interior in the early 1940s, and a collection of paintings. In addition, Ms Meredith left materials pertaining to her career as a teacher and as head of the department of fine art at

⁷⁴ Philip Johnson, "Foreword to the 1995 edition," Johnson and Henry Russell-Hitchcock, eds. *The International Style* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 14.

Virginia State College, a thesis written in fulfillment of an MA in Art Education at Columbia University Teacher's College, and a large body of correspondence, most of which contain love letters.

In October 1938, when Amaza Lee signed a deed, purchasing one and five eighths acres on Boisseau Street in the Village of Ettrick, Chesterfield County, Virginia, from Thomas C. Davies and his wife Ola, she signed it jointly with Edna Colson [figure 1-24].⁷⁵ The contract Amaza Lee and Edna entered into in May 1939, with Russell Holmes of Petersburg, was to build the home that they would share together for the next forty years. It was the first time, as adults, that the two women would reside in their own home. Until this point in time they had boarded with family or in other private homes, and in school dormitories.⁷⁶ Amaza Lee and Edna had begun a relationship during the summer of 1915 when Amaza Lee attended summer school at Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute. In 1916, feeling the constraint of absence and the freedom to express her sentiments towards her former teacher, Amaza Lee embarked on a long and devoted correspondence with Edna Colson, passionately and almost desperately encouraging continued response. Edna seems to have been only too happy to comply and over a period of thirty-five years the two women wrote regularly (at times on a weekly basis), sharing their feelings and experiences. Their letters spoke of love and commitment to true friendship, often revealing great passion and excitement at an anticipated letter or visit. While the correspondence hints at cryptic transgressions, it is hard to discern the level of sexual intimacy the women enjoyed. The first letters suggest vague oblique references to an incident, which occurred during their days together at the 1917 summer school session. First to an "exchange" that occurred in a

⁷⁵ Deed Book 245: 148 Chesterfield County Courthouse.

⁷⁶ Both Amaza Lee and Edna had boarded with their own and other families or at the International Halls of Residence at Columbia Teachers College, while studying, and in the Virginia State College women's dormitories, while teaching. See census records for 1890, 1910 and 1930; Amaza Lee biographical notes, VSU; Letter from International House, Columbia Teachers College to Edna Colson, December 14, 1935, Edna Colson Correspondence, Box 28, Folder 20, Colson Hill Papers VSU.

private room, and the self-described “come hither looks” that Edna had given Amaza Lee. Then, as the couple visited each other more frequently, correspondence revealed references to preserving the memory of shared tenderness and affection. Further complicating an understanding of the two women’s relationship are letters in which each of the women indulged in transcribing their feelings while “languishing on the soft covers of a bed,” or “within the folds of an armchair,” and yet the women’s correspondence also related tales of male romantic overtures received and the possibilities for marriage. Edna, was in fact, engaged to be married at one point, and during the war, had an affair with a prominent black army officer who was married.⁷⁷ As well-educated independent women, Amaza Lee and Edna were well aware of the duty required of members of the aspiring middle class to be servants of their people. As professional teachers they were expected to dedicate their lives to supporting a new generation; their own private lives took second place. In a letter to her mother Edna declared that both she and her sister Myra, who as a trained sociologist and member of numerous committees, traveled the country lecturing and working for the cause, were both unlikely to marry, as they could scarcely combine the duties of housewife and mother with those of service to their communities.⁷⁸ For her part, Amaza Lee’s mother had possibly sensed what her youngest daughter’s future might hold, when in 1928, thirteen years before her own death, she wrote her will, bequeathing her entire estate to her youngest child who although twenty-five at the time, was of the four offspring

⁷⁷ From January 1919 to June 1920 Edna had a romantic liaison with Capt. Virgil M. Boutte’ which ended when his wife discovered the affair and wrote a number of letters to Edna. Edna had also been engaged to marry her school sweetheart Everett (Surname not known). Writing to her sister Myra about the possible marriage to Everett Edna’s attention turned to Amaza Lee Meredith, noting: “she is a most remarkable girl,” and “perhaps marriage is not for me.” In another letter two months later, in which Edna wrote to Myra about her official engagement to be announced April 12th to Everett, she again spoke of Amaza Lee: “Amaza sent me a dainty delicate copy of Innes’ Spring Blossoms the other day; she is a wonderful girl, she did it herself. I shall take my life in my hands and go to see her when I go to Botetourt April 17th...”

⁷⁸ Edna to her Mother, April 10, 1924. The Colson-Hill Family Papers, Accession #1965-13 , Special Collections and Archives, Johnston Memorial Library, Virginia State University, Petersburg, VA:Family Correspondence- Jan-Aug 1924; Sept-Dec 1924.

unmarried and without a family.⁷⁹

The correspondence between Amaza Lee and Edna continued over forty years during which each spent time between Petersburg and New York pursuing their higher education goals. When Edna finally completed her PhD at Columbia Teacher's College in 1939 she consented to Amaza that the time was right for them to construct the house they had clearly imagined for some time.⁸⁰ Amaza's older sister Maude wrote:

Dear Girls,

We are happy that at last you are 'safe' happy and really beginning to live... we are rejoicing in your success and aims...I know you are having a wonderful experience with your homemaking. May you get many wonderful thrills from it all!⁸¹

The blueprints Amaza Lee drew are highly detailed, conveying a meticulous concern for specifics in elevations, and clearly articulate spatial organization in sections and plans, interior walls are divided into rows of built-in cabinetry, shelving, and drawers that seem to respond to the lines of doorways and window openings. While the envelope of the building suggests an interest in volumes, drawings indicate a concern for design in geometric terms; in elevation volumes corresponded to squares, rectangles and circles. This interest in volumes, primary shapes, in particular the rectangle, permeates the drawings, expressing these shapes in the most general planar forms of the building itself to the details of interior fittings, this focus on a dominant geometric formula is a key aspect of modern design [figure 1-25]. Overall, this house that Amaza Lee designed for herself and her long-term partner Edna Colson, suggests an approach similar to that exhibited by growing numbers of newly independent professional women, who were choosing to live alone or with other women. Many such women chose to build modern homes that identified their own unconventional

⁷⁹ Emma Kenney Meredith, Last Will and Testament. Will Book O, April 27, 1928, First presented to Clerk's Office, Corporation Court, City of Lynchburg then registered December 8, 1940.

⁸⁰ Edna received her degree in 1940 but defended in 1938.

⁸¹ Maude to 'Girls,' May 19, 1939. Box 1, Folder 2, ALM Papers, VSU.

lives with architecture that was avant-garde.⁸² Amaza Lee contributes to the story of such women's roles in design and in particular to the history of modernist architecture. Moreover, her life and work complicates the narrative of African American Southern achievement through architectural design and construction, for the construction of a home place, "however fragile, and tenuous; the slave hut, the wooden shack," has historically had a radical political dimension for African Americans. Because "in a world of racial apartheid, of domination, one's 'homeplace' was the site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist." "It was in making homes, where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects," this was "how black women affirmed their resistance to racial oppression."⁸³ The question is, how did Amaza Lee come to these avant-garde ideas about aesthetics and architectural forms, and how did she come to build this remarkable house? Who, in fact, was this extraordinary woman?

Amaza Lee Meredith was not from Petersburg where she built her modern house, but was born in 1895 in Lynchburg, Virginia, to Emma Pink Kenney (1871-1941), an African American woman, and Samuel Meredith (1862-1915), a white man. At the time, Lynchburg was a thriving economy built on tobacco production and processing. Monacan Indians had populated the fertile hilly landscape until white farmers moving west from the depleted soils of the Chesapeake had settled there. Charles Lynch, an Irish indentured servant who married into his master's Quaker family developed a farm high above the river and created a ferry around which a community of Quaker farmers and others soon settled. The Virginia Assembly established Lynchburg as a town in 1786 and in 1852 the Assembly recognized

⁸² Alice T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 24. Friedman discusses a number of modern homes designed by and for unconventional women, including Eileen Gray, Edith Farnsworth, Eleanor Raymond and Edith Kingsbury, and as a footnote, Amaza Lee Meredith!

⁸³ Bell hooks, "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance," in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990)

the growing community as a city.⁸⁴ Located at a transportation nexus of the James River and Kanawha Canal, Lynchburg quickly developed, becoming the “second wealthiest city per capita in the United States in 1840,” and then flourished as a central rail hub of the upper South.⁸⁵ During the Civil War the Battle of Lynchburg left the city relatively unscathed and in the succeeding years the landscape underwent urban development along Federal, Diamond, Garland, College and Daniel hills, the seven hills for which the city became known. A second building boom occurred between 1882 and 1897, as nearby Richmond became the first American city to successfully introduce electric streetcars in 1890, and Lynchburg followed suit in 1891.⁸⁶ Social changes occurred when public education was mandated in 1870 and Lynchburg quickly organized schools according to race; four colleges were also opened, including one, Virginia Seminary and College, for African Americans.⁸⁷

As an industrial center, a transportation hub and educational attraction, Lynchburg in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century presented itself as a magnate of possibilities, demonstrated in the bricks and mortar of fine buildings designed by local and outside architects. By 1895, the year of Amaza Lee’s birth, the city boasted an impressive array of public and private buildings, with architectural styles indicative of the fashions from the early 1800s through the 1890s, including Colonial, Federal, Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Italianate and Queen Anne.⁸⁸ Exterior and interior moldings, trim and decorative details proliferated throughout the periods reflective of their particular styles and indicated the presence of skilled artisans. Amaza Lee’s father, Samuel, was among those skilled artisans who helped construct the city of Lynchburg. Samuel Meredith was descended from

⁸⁴ Clifton W. Potter, and Dorothy Bundy Turner Potter, *Lynchburg: A City Set on Seven Hills* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Press, 2004), 21 -39.

⁸⁵ Quoted from *Summer Resorts of Virginia*, 1884 in S. Allen Chambers, Jr., *Lynchburg, An Architectural History* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1981), 254.

⁸⁶ Potter and Potter, *Lynchburg: A City Set on Seven Hills*, 111-116.

⁸⁷ Clifton W. Potter, and Dorothy Potter, *Lynchburg, 1757-2007* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Press, 2007), 51.

⁸⁸ For a thorough exploration of Lynchburg’s architectural heritage see S. Allen Chambers, Jr., *Lynchburg, An Architectural History* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1981)

generations of carpenters, at least from the 1850s, and land speculators [figure 1-26]. His family owned large numbers of tracts of land in Lynchburg and Bedford County and had been among the first settlers to purchase property from the Lynch family.⁸⁹ Gray's 1877 map of Lynchburg shows a large lot with two buildings, owned by C. M. Meredith, Samuel's father, on Sixth and Monroe Streets and records indicate that the family purchased, then likely improved property, possibly building, finishing, and/or renovating and then moving on [figure 1-27].⁹⁰ Records also suggest the close communal character of those involved in the building trades, even across racial lines, as the Meredith family lived in neighborhoods dominated by carpenters, masons, and 'mechanics.'⁹¹ In 1850 a young white carpenter lodged with the Meredith family for example, and in 1860 the family home accommodated a free black carpenter.⁹² On his father's death ca. 1885 Samuel Meredith lived with his mother who then owned a grocery store: W. B. Snead, a local builder and contractor was a boarder in their home. During the late nineteenth century, Lynchburg embraced the fashionable decorative Queen Anne style, and work was plentiful for the numerous architects in the city, including R.C. Burckholder, W.T. Cave, H. N. Hook, E. J. McCrossin and Walter P. Tinsley, who was active in the southern chapter of the American Institute of Architects established in Atlanta in 1892. Building in the Queen Anne decorative style would have necessitated the contributions of skilled carpenters to complete the ornamented designs. In 1881, Lynchburg was noted for its architecture to the extent that it was listed in the *American Architect and Building News*, under the column "Building Intelligence" as on an equal level with Chicago

⁸⁹ Land records indicate Henry H. Meredith, Samuel's great grandfather, purchased property in 1806, 1810, 1814 and 1816. Succeeding generations are also listed as purchasing property. Index to Real Estate Conveyances, Circuit Court, Records and Archives, Lynchburg, Virginia.

⁹⁰ City of Lynchburg directories indicate the Meredith family residing at several different locations within a short span of years. Property Records also indicate ownership of land.

⁹¹ Mechanics is a catch-all period name for those involved in the building trade.

⁹² See US Department of Census Records for 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880 and Directories of the City of Lynchburg for 1887-1900.

and New York. W.B. Snead is named as the builder of contract for a remarkable home designed by R.C. Burkholder for a Mr. Edmund Schaefer.⁹³

In 1890 Samuel Meredith purchased his own city lot on the corner of Fourth and Monroe Streets. This purchase was clearly a financial stretch for Meredith as he was only able to pay one half of the two hundred dollar cost at the signing of the deed and one half seven months later.⁹⁴ Amaza Lee's mother, Emma Kenney purchased property on Fourth and Monroe in 1893, a lot that ran adjacent to that purchased by Samuel Meredith [figure 1-28]. It is not clear how Amaza Lee's parents met, but it is possible that it was through the building trades, as it appears that members of the Kenney family, who were based in Staunton, Virginia, but appeared to work in Richmond at times, were also builder/artisans.⁹⁵ Emma Kenney first appears in the city of Lynchburg directories in 1887, living with two other unrelated African Americans, a single man and a single woman. However, in 1887, although the directory does not list a child at her residence, Emma Kenney gave birth to a daughter, Maude; in 1889 she had a son, James Leonard, and in 1891 another daughter, Cora Belle. (Birth records list Emma Kenney as the mother; no father is recorded.) With this growing family however, Samuel Meredith and Emma Kenney sought to establish a home in which their children could have some solid semblance of respectability and comfort, despite the fact that their relationship as an interracial couple was illegal.

Monroe Street where it met Fourth Street was situated on the edge of the city, and therefore can be seen as part of the citywide development and growth. Laying aside any

⁹³ *American Architect and Building News* 9, No. 266 (January 29, 1881): 59., cited in Chambers, *Lynchburg, An Architectural History* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1981), 287.

⁹⁴ Samuel P. Meredith to Alfred L. Kelly and wife, deed made August 18, 1890. This tract was "part of one half of lot 428 Corner of Monroe and 4th Street."

⁹⁵ US Department of Census Records 1880 lists Emma P. Kenney as 14 years old living with her father, a laborer and several brothers and sisters, the brothers are later listed in Richmond as bricklayers. It is not clear when Emma Kenney came to live in Lynchburg, but oral history suggests her family was not happy that "their beautiful daughter left Staunton to be with a white man in Lynchburg. (Oral history Interview, May 2009, Elizabeth Dawson, 409 Ridge Street Charlottesville. Mrs. Dawson is originally from Staunton. VA).

whisper of caution, Lynchburg city officials adopted a policy of what they considered to be “wise growth” and forging ahead, parceled up the surrounding countryside, justifying their actions with the thought of increased population and prosperity such a building boom could bring.⁹⁶ The lot which Emma and Samuel struggled to purchase was in an area that was likely considered less desirable as a place of residence, as it was a known Red Light district, with a number of houses occupied by ‘Madams’ and single women of ill repute, or ‘ill-fame,’ as court records described them.⁹⁷ Possibly, as a means to encouraging improvement and a newer residential clientele, the city changed the name of Fourth Street at some junctures. Court records do not mention Emma Kenney, nor is there any other evidence to indicate that she worked as a prostitute. Directories list her at times as a seamstress, sometimes understood as a euphemism for prostitution, however, Samuel Meredith’s mother and sisters had also worked as seamstresses, so perhaps it was he who suggested this employment to her as a way to generate income, as well as a means to earn a living while remaining protected within the home environment.⁹⁸ It is more likely that the two chose the edge of the city neighborhood both because of their illegal status but also for financial reasons.

By 1899, having mortgaged her land in trust a number of times, Emma Kenney was listed in city directories as living at 322 Monroe Street, together with four children.⁹⁹ Emma and Samuel had combined their land and Samuel designed and built a home for them.¹⁰⁰ The security of a solid home for Emma and her children was not easily achieved however, as between 1890 and 1906 Emma and Samuel repeatedly mortgaged their properties until

⁹⁶ Chambers, *Lynchburg, An Architectural History*, p.295.

⁹⁷ Thanks to Nancy Jamerson Weiland, Jones Memorial Library, Lynchburg, Research Assistant, who shared her in-depth research into the Madams and houses of ill-repute in Lynchburg.

⁹⁸ United States Census Records, 1860; and Walsh’s City Directory 1899-

⁹⁹ see Chataigne’s Lynchburg Directory, 1899; United States Census Records, 1900.

¹⁰⁰ Various Deed Books: DB XX:4; DB 66:32; DB 69:322; DB 43: 199; DB 55:282; DB 75: 242-43; DB FF:83; DB 59:43; DB 75:242; DB 75: 244; DB 75:246; DB 54:592; DB 56:176; DB 59:43; DB 65: 146; DB 66:32; DB 69: 327; DB 73:199. Circuit Court Records and Archives, Lynchburg, Virginia.

they were finally able to pay off all liens against them. The house Samuel constructed for his family was clearly a labor of love, reflective of stylistic trends in architectural design of the period. It was a two-and-a half- story wood frame building with a wrap-around porch and plentiful decorative detailing carved in wood, including a heart placed above the main entrance [figure 1-29, 1-30]. Although Samuel Meredith likely learned his trade from his father and grandfather, he also apprenticed to W.B. Snead in 1885, aged 21, honing his carpentry skills. It is possible that Meredith also worked through Snead for Edward G. Frye who was active at the turn of the 19th century, and designed principally in the Queen Anne style [figure 1-31].¹⁰¹ Many of the houses designed in the Queen Anne style with their asymmetrical facades, integrated towers, decorative roof brackets, and spindles along with wrap-around porches and asymmetrical rooflines, presented both geometric, angular patterns and swirling organic lines, ideal work for the carpenter.¹⁰² William B. Snead, alerted potential clients to his knowledge of fashionable details and craftsmanship by employing the decorative details in the typeface of his business advertisement in the Lynchburg directory [figure 1-32]. Samuel Meredith, according to his daughter Amaza Lee, would carve curvilinear forms for staircases and porches during his leisure hours at home. This activity had a lasting affect on the young girl, which she noted much later in life and in addition kept a photograph of one of the curved wood pieces as a memento [figure1-33] Although not in the most desirable part of town and by no means as grand as those architect designed homes on Daniel's or Garland's Hill, the Meredith home nevertheless conformed to the stylistic fashion of the times.

¹⁰¹ Meredith's family also assert that he designed the grand staircase in the Roanoke Hotel, where Frye also had contacts (see Sandberg, 15. For a large body of Frye's built architectural commissions see excerpts from the NPS Rivermont Historic District, Lynchburg, VA, National Register Nomination, online: http://www.livingplaces.com/VA/Independent_Cities/Lynchburg_City/Rivermont_Historic_District.html (accessed March 2011); Also Jeni Sandberg, "Edward Graham Frye and the Jones Memorial Library," (MA Thesis, Architectural History, School of Architecture, University of Virginia, 1994.)

¹⁰² S. Allen Chambers, Jr., *Architectural History of Lynchburg* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), 293.

It is possible that Samuel modeled the design on the drawings of similar homes on which he worked as carpenter, but he may also have been inspired by magazine illustrations. Prominent architects published their designs in the popular and scholarly press. The architect George F. Barber, for example published in *American Homes*, which declared itself suited for those, “planning to build or beautify their homes.” The issue from July 1899 advertised the slogan: “Home is Where the Heart is” and illustrated a number of homes, complete with manuals and brochures with construction details, similar to the one Meredith built at 322 Monroe Street [figure 1-34]¹⁰³ Regardless of the design’s sources, the family proudly called their home “the Mansion,” and yet Samuel did not live at the ‘Mansion’ with his family, or at least his residence was officially listed with his mother and siblings at 1306 Grace Street, possibly a precautionary measure, but he nevertheless spent time there with his children as Amaza Lee would later recount.

Despite the obstacles presented them as a mixed race couple, Amaza Lee’s parents, Emma Kenney and Samuel Meredith aspired to a status that would bring them respect in society. For Emma, an African American woman, the ability to take control of her own identity, as opposed to having it defined in the negative stereotyping that had branded women of African descent since their capture and enslavement, mirrored the goal of most African Americans, particularly after emancipation. Historian Henry Louis Gates Jr., has argued, that during the period leading up to and including the First World War, African Americans worked to “re-present their public selves in order to reconstruct their public reproducible images.”¹⁰⁴ Between 1890 and 1920, with little control over the mass production and dissemination of images in the popular press, African Americans knew that it was possible for middle-class Whites to “repeatedly encounter Sambo and Mammie

¹⁰³ See *American Homes*, George Barber Collection, C.M. McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library, online at <http://cmdc.knoxlib.org/cdm/> (Accessed July 24, 2012).

¹⁰⁴ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Trope of the New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black,” *Representations*, 24, 1988:129.

images of blacks at the breakfast table, in advertisements and in magazines” and that everywhere there was a black image it was likely to be negative.¹⁰⁵ Overturning such images was a strategy through which African Americans could begin to re-imagine themselves and convince others of their individual and group value. At the time, as African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier argued, a number of strategies were necessary to overcome negative stereotypes, and to adapt to mainstream society it was important to develop economic, cultural and social resources. The family was a key aspect of this:

In the competitive life of America, the success of the Negro in achieving a new and more intelligent adaptation to American civilization will depend upon his incorporation into the economic organization at large, upon his own cultural resources, and finally upon the extent to which he is able to incorporate in his own family traditions and heritage the patterns of behavior, requisite for survival.¹⁰⁶

Thus, the owning of land and establishment of residency in one’s own home was integral to African American self-improvement. On a fundamental level it signified stability, safety, and rootedness in community, but property ownership combined with education, and the beginnings of professionalism, also contributed to creating a middle-class social group, and as such was part of the larger issue of working towards the rights that came with full citizenship. Graduates of the first African American institutions of higher education were encouraged to purchase land and build homes, setting an example for others through a display of their success in the alumni publications, as for example at Hampton Institute and Tuskegee Institute, under the guidance of Booker T. Washington [figure1-35]. Such efforts had begun prior to and grown in earnest during the Civil War. Freedmen and women in Virginia had purchased property and established themselves as citizens of their cities. In

¹⁰⁵ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Trope of the New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black*:148.

¹⁰⁶ Frazier, “The Present Status of the Negro Family in the United States”.

Hampton for example, freed people had “attempted to carve communities out of chaos” making do with salvaged materials to build single-story dwellings, each with a small plot of land, and grouped loosely with other dwellings into a place they called Slabtown.¹⁰⁷ If “property and housing defined the African American experience of the transition from slavery to freedom,” it was also important for those who had earned their freedom before the Civil War, and continued to be so, well into the 20th century.¹⁰⁸ Individual property was an important marker of identity and success, but a number of examples exist of entire towns established by and for African Americans, indicating the continued struggle for the right to live free from white constant scrutiny and observation and from Jim Crow racism and oppression. Such examples range from fully incorporated towns consisting of older building stock that was appropriated, as well as entire newly constructed settlements.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, some such towns employed modernist principles in their building design, suggesting the desire on the part of African American architects to represent progress towards a new way of living in both physical and aesthetic terms. These modern utopian towns also indicate African American architect’s thorough knowledge of the latest trends in architectural design and the courage to experiment with them.

As African Americans made incremental gains towards greater autonomy through education, their progress was reflected in their housing. These houses represented the “comfortable, tasty framed cottage” type, advocated by Booker T. Washington, which, he argued, would replace the “one room hovel that had been their abode for a quarter of a

¹⁰⁷ Laura Purvis, “Constructing Freedom: African American Housing in Hampton Roads, Virginia 1830-1910” MA Thesis, Department of Architectural History, University of Virginia), 31; Robert Engs, *The Development of Black Culture and Community in the Emancipation Era: Hampton Roads, Virginia, 1861-1870*, p42-44, 53-56.

¹⁰⁸ See Laura Purvis, ‘Constructing Freedom: African American Housing in Hampton Roads, 1830-1910,’ Master of Architectural History, University of Virginia, 2009,

¹⁰⁹ Today, these towns vie for which town deserves to be given the moniker ‘first.’ In 1885 African Americans incorporated Princeville, North Carolina; in 1887 African Americans incorporated a black town called Mound Bayou in Mississippi; Nicodemus, Kansas was incorporated in 1877; and Eatonville, Florida was also incorporated in 1887.

century.”¹¹⁰ They were the same kinds of houses that conformed to the behavioral code established by early northern supporters of black colleges such as Fisk School for Freedmen, later Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, where African Americans were advised to “strive to deserve the good will of all the white people.”¹¹¹ This, they should do, the behavioral guides suggested, by behaving in a pious, industrious manner, avoiding the vices of “saloons, shows, groceries, concerts and theaters,” and choosing instead to remain at home. Furthermore, the manuals of behavior argued that “you must learn to love home more than any other place on earth,” and “you should always be thinking of how to make it prettier and happier than it is.”¹¹² For a moment at the turn of the twentieth century the two leading African American intellectuals, Booker T. Washington and W.E. B. Du Bois, seemed to agree that self-presentation and housing were significant methods through which to gain legitimacy in the eyes of a society ruled by white behavioral norms.

For all the world to see, W.E. B Du Bois presented a narrative of the progress African Americans had made in the United States at the 1900 Paris Exposition; his exhibit included the photographs of Frances Benjamin Johnston, depicting educated African Americans as models of propriety, but equally as important were the homes these people lived in, which by the turn of the twentieth century were recognizable as sturdy, quality homes [figure 1-36, 1-37].¹¹³ The rough-hewn boards of clapboard cabins had characterized enslaved African American housing, but these two-and three- story handsome brick homes with

¹¹⁰ Booker T. Washington, “A Speech at the Memorial Service for Samual Chapman Armstrong, Hampton, VA, May 25, 1893,” Washington Papers, 3:317, cited in Barbara Burlison Mooney, “The Comfortable Tasty Framed Cottage: An African American Architectural Iconography,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 16. No. 1 (March 2002): 54.

¹¹¹ Clinton B. Fisk, *Plain Counsels for Freedmen in Sixteen Brief Lectures* (Boston: American Tract Society, 1866), 13, cited in Barbara Burlison Mooney, “The Comfortable Tasty Framed Cottage: An African American Architectural Iconography,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 16. No. 1 (March 2002): 52.

¹¹² Clinton B. Fisk, *Plain Counsels for Freedmen in Sixteen Brief Lectures* (Boston: American Tract Society, 1866), 33.

¹¹³ Mabel Wilson, *Negro Building.....*

decorative porches recalled the civilized world of whites, and suggested their owners, African Americans, were indeed contributing constituents to society.

In Lynchburg, Virginia, at the turn of the twentieth century, African Americans were building their way into society. In ca. 1901, William A. Penn, an African American architect/builder, constructed the Petersburg Mount Olive Baptist church.¹¹⁴ In 1903, Edward Spencer built his wife, Anne, a Harlem Renaissance poet, a brick Queen Anne style home in a Lynchburg neighborhood, modifying it over the years to accommodate a growing family [figure 1-38]. He also worked towards creating a separate community within Lynchburg for African Americans, acquiring and improving property in the neighborhood of his and Anne's home to the extent that residents called the area Spencer Place.¹¹⁵ The notion that Edward Spencer was interested in developing housing for African Americans suggests a market for such development, made available only through their own efforts. In 1923, M.J. Bailey of Richmond, an African American builder/contractor, advertised a number of lots for sale in Morgan Park, Richmond, on which he offered to build homes for African Americans. The *Richmond Planet* advertised Bailey as "making the way possible in Morgan Park for hundreds of couples to secure comfortable homes by providing for them choice sites upon which to build." The newspaper clarified, that "these lots are in the best locality and are surrounded by good churches and schools."¹¹⁶ Madison J. Bailey was only the

¹¹⁴ Amina Luqman-Dawson, *African Americans of Petersburg* (Mt Pleasant, SC: Arcadia, 2009), 19.

¹¹⁵ Conversation with Anne Spencer's granddaughter, Shaun Spencer Hester: November 6, 2010, Anne Spencer House, Lynchburg VA). See also Obituary, Edward A. Spencer, *Lynchburg News*, Tuesday May 19, 1964, Anne Spencer Papers, Box 5 Mss 1204 University of Virginia Small Special Collections Library; and Jane B. White, History of the Spencer Home, online at <http://www.annespencermuseum.com/house.php> (visited September 21, 2013)

¹¹⁶ *Richmond Planet*, December 15th, 1923, p. 8. Other examples exist of similar attempts to create separate communities for African Americans across the country. For example, Albert Cassel, a Cornell University trained architect and architecture professor at Howard University from 1920-1938, explored the idea of developing a planned community for African Americans on the Chesapeake Shore in 1938. The project failed to receive adequate funding however and was never built. John Michael Vlach writes of an African American bricklayer in Washington DC who built himself a two-story brick house on Johnson's Hill, leaving the sidewalls of his dwelling blank so that neighboring houses could share his property line." Vlach, "From Slavery to Tenancy: African American Housing in Washington D.C., 1790-1890," in Richard Longstreth ed. *Housing Washington* (Chicago: Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago and University of Chicago Press, 2010), 20-21.

second black contractor to be licensed in Virginia. His daughter Ethel Bailey Furman (1893-1976) began her career as an apprentice to her father, studied architecture with a private tutor in New York and between 1944 and 1946 at Chicago Technical College. She designed over 200 buildings, many of which were small ranch style homes in Goochland County, Virginia, and two were churches in Liberia. Historians have noted, that black women, unlike most white women, were used to negotiating the complex terrain of public spaces “defined by white heteropatriarchal norms,” and, in engaging a number of activities normally considered male, including dealing with house construction.¹¹⁷ Thus it may appear that Ethel Bailey Furman was defying prescribed notions of womanhood in the early twentieth century, when she was the only woman to attend the Negro Contractors’ Conference at Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute in 1928, but these were notions of white womanhood [Figure 1_9, 1_10].¹¹⁸

Amaza Lee Meredith apprenticed in her own way with her father, learning to draw architectural blueprints, observing the delicate geometric beauty in the form of a carved wood staircase, and learning to see spatially in models her father made out of cardboard. She recollected the innovative ideas they pursued together such as designing a motor home complete with built-in cabinetry.¹¹⁹ But when Amaza Lee declared her desire to become an architect Samuel Meredith disapproved, concerned perhaps for the difficulties she would face as a woman and an African American trying to make her way in the profession.¹²⁰ It is not clear at what point Amaza Lee received this advice from her father, but in 1902 her life

¹¹⁷ Heidi J. Nast and Mabel O. Wilson “Lawful Transgressions: The House that Jackie Built,” *Assemblage*, No. 24, Aug, 1995, pp. 49-55. The Anne Spencer House is now a museum and listed in the National Register of Historic Places

¹¹⁸ “Records of Pioneering Architect Donated to Library of Virginia,” *Library of Virginia Newsletter*, Issue 162, March /April 2004; Ethel Bailey Furman Papers, 1928-2003, Accession 4115, Personal Papers Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va.

¹¹⁹ In her memoirs, written for a celebratory retirement event at Virginia State University where she had taught, Amaza notes her father’s cautionary advice not to seek entry into the field of professional architecture. [Amaza Meredith Papers, ALM Papers, VSU, Accession # 1982-20, Box # 5, Folder 52A

¹²⁰ Biographical notes, ALM Papers, VSU, Accession # 1982-20, Box # 5, Folder 52A.

had begun to change. Samuel Meredith married Emma Kenney, likely travelling to Washington, D.C., where interracial marriage was legally possible.¹²¹ Marriage would have contributed to a sense of respectability, which Emma Kenney cultivated for her family, and can be seen as representative of strategies employed to counteract negative stereotypes in reinforcing concepts of bourgeois morality. The home, and the patriarchal family conformed to late nineteenth century conventions: marriage promised security and the domestic realm represented an area over which reform-minded progressive individuals had control because it operated within the private sphere. While a stable home and comfortable, respectable family life may have been a panacea to racial discrimination; it nevertheless eventually presented a problem for the succeeding generation of which the more progressive, liberalized new woman was a key component.¹²² In 1905, Samuel Meredith purchased a four-bedroom house on Monroe and Seventh Streets belonging to an African American physician, Dr. Stepney. B. Hill, a member of the prominent Penn family, living a block away on Polk Street.¹²³ By 1907, Lynchburg City Directories officially listed Meredith, his wife and their four children as residing at 701 Monroe Street. Thus it was that, for a few years, the family seemed to have secured the lifestyle to which they had aspired. Their home was replete with the accoutrements of middle-class respectability: A library with bookcases, a drawing room complete with piano, and four bedrooms with individual suites of furniture.¹²⁴ But this semblance of family bliss and achievement came at a cost it seems. In

¹²¹ Ted Delaney, Archivist, Old City Cemetery, Lynchburg, discovered the Marriage Certificate in Familysearch.org (Accessed July 20, 2012).

¹²² See Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 40.

¹²³ Lynchburg City Courthouse Deed Book 73:198. Irvine Penn (1867-1930) and his wife Anna Belle Rhoades, were teachers and key players in attempts to raise the level of African American life in Lynchburg. Irvine Penn was a journalist, who worked as an editor on the local black newspaper, publishing a history of black newspapers in 1891. He was an activist who together with Ida B. Wells and Frederick Douglas published the controversial pamphlet, titled, "The Reason Why the Colored American is not in the World's Columbian Exposition," recently republished in an edited volume by Robert W. Rydell. (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1999), Penn argued for the advances African Americans had made in education, the professions, and in the accumulation of wealth and in literature," p. 44.

¹²⁴ See Lynchburg City Courthouse Deed Book 108: 244 June 22, 1916 sale of property belonging to Emma Kenney Meredith at 701 Monroe St, Lynchburg Virginia.

aspiring to create for his family a life of middle-class respectability Samuel Meredith had overburdened himself financially. Only two years after purchasing the property, Meredith conveyed it to Emma Kenney for the sum of \$1400.¹²⁵ Interestingly, the deed referred to both Meredith and Kenney as 'Unmarried.' This transaction was likely a precautionary measure similar to those made during the early- and mid- nineteenth century, when economic conditions were unstable and property was a means of protecting livelihoods and family security. When men were afraid of losing property through debt repayments, they often transferred deeds to daughters who would not be liable. Moreover, in small cities in the South it had long been common practice for black women to purchase property and to be the head of a household.¹²⁶ As Suzanne Lebsack argues, property ownership, and transfer was a complicated issue related to employment and changing concepts of marriage, particularly for African American women after emancipation, who were often more steadily employed than black men.¹²⁷ Between 1907 and 1913, clearly suffering from financial duress Emma Kenney mortgaged the property in trust a number of times. Samuel Meredith in transferring his property to Emma Kenney protected both his wife and his assets. But on August 5th 1915, according to newspaper reports, the financial burden overwhelmed him, and putting a revolver to his temple, Samuel Meredith killed himself.¹²⁸ At the time, Amaza Lee was twenty years old. She was absent from home having followed her father's advice, and, joining the traditional route for young African American women of a certain social standing, she had entered the teaching profession.

¹²⁵ Lynchburg City Courthouse, Deed Book 97:470.

¹²⁶ David R. Goldfield, "Black Life in Old South Cities," in *Before Freedom Came: African-American Life in the Antebellum South* Edward D. D. Campbell, Jr., with Kym S. Rice (eds.) Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, VA (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1991),140.

¹²⁷ Suzanne Lebsack argues that free black women outnumbered free black men and tended to be more gainfully employed, earning higher wages...citation. See following comment about Amaza's mother who was *clearly operating along similar lines as other women of the time*. See Suzanne Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and culture in a southern town, 1784-1860* (NY: Norton, 1984).

¹²⁸ *Lynchburg News*, "Killed Himself: Samuel Meredith Killed Himself by his Own Hand Yesterday," August 6, 1915.

Chapter Two

Education and a Cultured Class of Citizens

In the summer of 1915 Amaza Lee went to Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute in Petersburg, Virginia, to review for a teaching certificate. It was there that she began a journey through the system of education for African Americans, training to teach at every level of education open to her, from the most meager rural, one-room school, through urban elementary and high schools, and culminating in the college system.¹

Amaza Lee had graduated with distinction from the three-year Jackson Street High School in Lynchburg, in 1912 age 17. Northern philanthropists had established Jackson Street Methodist Episcopal School as an African American grade school in 1871. In 1881, when white Americans were forming associations to regulate the standards of their schools, colleges, and universities, some supported the need for a comparable education for blacks and Jackson Street with its all white faculty, was established as a high school that boasted a classical humanities curriculum supplemented with manual arts instruction.² Although this was the intention, the actual level of study at the school fell short of requirements for teaching, which Amaza Lee discovered when she enrolled in the summer session of the state teacher-training institute, Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute. Even though Amaza Lee's schooling so far had not been as advanced as was needed for her to become an effective teacher, it was nevertheless far more than many of her generation had received. As a Freedmen's school established during the 1870s, Jackson Street counted as a foundational stone for African American education, when blacks operating as free

¹ Amaza Lee Meredith, Biographical notes, ALM Papers, VSU, Accession # 1982-20, Box # 5, Folder 52A. It is not known what Amaza Lee did in the two years after graduating high school and attending summer school at VNII, but in order to teach in the rural elementary schools the qualification she needed was a Southern Board of Education Teaching Certificate.

² Kelly Miller and Joseph R. Gay, *Progress and Achievements of the Colored People*, originally published 1917, republished Nabu Press, 2012.

laborers and voting citizens “entered into a new social system of capitalism, Republican government and wage labor.”³ The Jackson Street School was an important space in which African Americans were given the opportunity to learn under a system which assumed their potential to eventually participate competitively in mainstream society.⁴ Nevertheless, black schools suffered constantly from lack of funds, which translated into school supplies, teacher’s salaries, and the architecture in which students were taught. Often architects would design very different schools for black students than for white, reflective of the school’s budget. The buildings were visually identifiable by their architectural features such as entryways, which could be very grand or quite simple and undistinguished; their decorative details and ornamentation, and the presence or notable absence of a designed landscape.⁵

In the years after the Civil War, universal public education was still very much a tenuous concept, and as late as 1870, an average of only half of all American school-aged children were actually enrolled. In response to massive campaigns demanding universal public schooling for all white children American legislators had begun seriously considering how to structure such a system around 1830, these discussions continued until 1860. But for African Americans the real drive for universal education began in the first days after the end of the Civil War. At this time, the federal government’s Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, (known as the Freedmen’s Bureau), Northern

³ James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 2

⁴ Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, “Annual Report, Hampton Negro Conference,” Volumes 11-16 (Hampton, VA, 1907), 72. Lynchburg is singled out along with Norfolk as a place in which a good education was assured.

⁵ Architectural historian S. Allen Chambers has noted, the Jackson Street School was a simple structure, markedly different from the Monroe Street School for white boys and the Court Street School for white girls, both of which resembled elaborate private residences. S. Allen Chambers, *Lynchburg: An Architectural History* (1981), 222. The architect of the three schools was William E. Burnham, a former partner in the planing mill of Morgan, Curle and Burnham, who on completing these buildings advertised his services as an architect.

missionary societies, and blacks themselves took responsibility for educating the large numbers who were still illiterate.⁶ Between 1800 and 1835 most southern states had enacted legislation prohibiting the teaching of enslaved children to read or write, an act which left the number of blacks who were illiterate by 1860 at over 90 percent.⁷ Historian Adam Fairclough notes however, that pockets of free blacks of extraordinary resilience whom whites found it difficult to control, did nevertheless exist in certain cities in the South. Such cities included Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, New Orleans, Richmond and Petersburg.⁸ Moreover, undeterred by the absence of schools, many black communities took advantage of available resources, such as newspapers, books, religious publications and literary societies, which were both available and flourishing.⁹

During the post-Civil War reconstruction of the South, Federal aid to education, land redistribution, and civil rights were all critical areas seen as necessary to the physical revitalization of the South and the bolstering of its economy.¹⁰ For the newly freedmen and women, “universal schooling was a necessary function of a free society” and stood as the “token and pledge” of emancipation.”¹¹ African Americans were not entirely dependent on aid from whites, however, and many had established schools prior to the end of the Civil War. Freedmen’s Bureau school superintendents noted in the 1860s the existence of so-

⁶ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 7.

⁷ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 2

⁸ Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 33.

⁹ Evidence of secret schools in Virginia see Lewis C. Lockwood, Mary S. Peake the Colored Teacher at Fortress Monroe (1863 New York: Arno, 1969), 6-15; Alrutheus Ambush Taylor, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia* (Washington: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1926), 138, and Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 54.

¹⁰ Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 8.

¹¹ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, p.18.

called Sabbath schools, which operated in black churches for example.¹² These schools were predominantly run by women in the evenings and included academic as well as industrial training.¹³ Some scholars have noted that of these early church schools a number were integrated, some operated more openly, others more clandestinely, depending on the social climate of the location. Richmond, Virginia, operated a “self-designated African school” as early as 1781, others were located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Cleveland, Ohio, Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington, D.C.¹⁴ In addition to the ‘common’ or grade schools that existed prior to the end of the Civil War and emancipation, there were a number of institutions of higher education, which denominational groups, both black and white, and Northern philanthropic groups had established. Two known private colleges for blacks from the antebellum period included Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, established in 1854 by the Presbyterian Church, and Wilberforce University, Ohio, established in 1865 by the Methodist Episcopal Church. Some schools, although called colleges, also existed, such as for example, Cheney State College, Pennsylvania (later University) despite their name, these actually functioned as elementary and high schools in the early 1830s. A small percentage of African Americans attended the few liberal white colleges such as Oberlin, open to them in the North.¹⁵

It was during the period on the cusp of Reconstruction that the American Missionary Association (AMA) and the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS)

¹² Anderson notes the existence ‘native schools’ run by those barely able to read and write themselves, in for example Goldsborough North Carolina, and those run by black women, examples of which existed in New Orleans, Georgia and Virginia, see Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, pp.6-12.

¹³ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 54.

¹⁴ B. Quarles, “History of Black Education,” United Negro College Fund Archives: A Guide to Index and to the Microfiche, ed. Negro College Fund (New York: University Microfilms, 1985) and I. Berlin, *Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon, 1974) cited in Roebuck and Murty, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Their Place in Higher Education*, 22.

¹⁵ Roebuck and Murty cite a total of 28 African Americans who received baccalaureate degrees from U.S. Colleges and Universities prior to the Civil War. Roebuck and Murty, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Their Place in Higher Education* (Westport, CT: Praeger Press, 1993), 22.

worked with the Freedmen's Bureau to establish what would become the major black colleges and universities. The AMA established Atlanta, GA (1865), Fisk TN (1866), Taladega College, AL (1867), and Tougaloo MS (1869); the ABHMS established Moorehouse College, Atlanta, GA (1867), Shaw University, Raleigh, NC (1865) Benedict College, Columbia, SC (1870), and Virginia Union University, Richmond, VA (1865). With the aid of the AMA, Union General Samuel Chapman Armstrong (1839-1893), founded Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in 1868.

Unlike other AMA supported higher education institutions, Hampton was not intended to function as a college, however, but to train teachers to work in the rural schools and, eschewing the classical college curriculum, which included Greek, Latin and Foreign Languages, Hampton Institute focused on the three 'R's,' geography, history and elementary science. The Institute also had a mandatory manual training program. This distinguishing program taught trade skills, with which students could find employment and the means to pay their tuition, but was also intended to "instill the habits of self-discipline, which slavery had discouraged," and thus, manual training became "industrial education" because it taught blacks to be industrious.¹⁶ Such a pedagogical program was considered a vehicle for the African American masses to "develop the skills and traditional middle-class virtues that would enable them to earn a living and win respect of neighbors."¹⁷ The Hampton system was highly criticized by blacks and some Northern whites for the rudimentary education it permitted African Americans. It nevertheless

¹⁶ Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South*, 120.

¹⁷ Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 7. Shortly after Reconstruction, having realized the potential of blacks to develop an equal footing with whites, Southern legislators began curbing back the rights they had granted, these were known as black codes, and expressed the determination of Southern whites to define the freedmen as rural laborers with inferior rights. See Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 3.

performed a valuable service by training a broad range of public schoolteachers for the much-needed rural schools, as well as for those in cities.

Amaza Lee's two sisters, Maude and Cora Belle trained at Hampton and later taught in Roanoke and Lynchburg respectively. As one of the first major teacher training facilities, Hampton symbolized the first attempts to overcome opposition to educating formerly enslaved people, a sentiment that persisted throughout the South for generations after emancipation. The underlying philosophy of Hampton was that in educating teachers to a lower standard than that offered in the private colleges it paved the way for greater support both political and financial. As some scholars have argued, it "made [black] teachers more acceptable to white superintendents in Virginia and elsewhere," softening white opposition to black public schools.¹⁸ Booker T. Washington would prescribe the same narrow curriculum for students at his Tuskegee Institute in the hopes that through accommodating white supremacy, blacks would be seen as valued contributors to the economy of the South and as a result make gradual individual as well as group progress. A significant distinguishing feature of Tuskegee, however, was that it would have an all-black faculty and all black administrators, affording the school significant autonomy, demonstrating that blacks were fully capable of teaching themselves and managing complex institutions of learning, and most importantly, as time progressed, self-governance made possible curriculum changes away of the watchful eye of whites.¹⁹

At its inauguration, the vision of Washington's Tuskegee Institute was on the illiterate masses, providing training for teachers to be "active agents of rural progress," who could help rural families "dress their children better, save their money, get homes, add to the school term," and perhaps most importantly to transform the lot of the sharecropper

¹⁸ Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South*, 122.

¹⁹ Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South*, 123.

by showing them “how to keep out of debt,” and “how to sacrifice – to live on bread and water if necessary until they could ...begin the buying of a home of their own.” Washington was strongly convinced of this need to own property and to demonstrate the importance of self-determinism and representation in bricks and mortar. In addition to homes, schoolhouses and teacher houses were important physical markers of progress. It was thus the job of rural schoolteachers to cultivate trust within the communities in which they worked, to appeal to them for the funds to construct new school buildings, and to lengthen the school term.²⁰

The type of training offered at Hampton and then at Tuskegee represented Booker T. Washington’s strategies of accommodation. Washington (1856-1915), born into poverty in Virginia, the son of a white man he never knew, is considered a seminal figure in overcoming much reluctance on the part of white Southerners to support black education, and made strides in securing financially underwritten training programs for African Americans.²¹ Washington believed that the best way forward was through accommodating whites, avoiding conflict, and promoting through training in the manual arts, a slow and steady progress through Christian morality, of self-determination and economic advancement. In 1895, at the Atlanta Cotton States and Industrial Exposition, Washington made what would become his famous address regarding the necessity for improved race relations and set out a program for how to achieve them. In what became known as the “Atlanta Address” Washington argued for just treatment from white Southerners, for the recognition that blacks were not interested in social equality, which in the minds of fearful

²⁰ “Proceedings of the Triennial Reunion of the Hampton Alumni Association,” 28 May 1893, and Washington, “The Progress of the Negro,” 16 Jan. 1893, in Harlan, Booker T. Washington Papers, 3:324-325, 284-285, all cited in Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 125. Jacqueline Jones has also written of the role teachers had as social and political activists, see Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 143-144, 146.

²¹ Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 42, 45.

whites, might mean interracial marriage and sexual relations, and for the basic necessity for economic cooperation.²² Washington advocated the type of education for blacks with which most Southern whites could come to terms.²³

W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) on the other hand, had enjoyed the benefit of a liberal arts education, at Fisk, the preeminent southern Black university, at Harvard, and at the University of Berlin. In an address he gave to graduating students of Wilberforce University where he taught classics from 1894 to '96, he declared his belief in the full rounded development of man. Such development or training involved the physical, the moral and the mental. Growing up in the cocoon of a small middle-class New England town where he experienced little racism, Du Bois' youth "prepared him to champion an ideal."²⁴ His family had been free men since at least the 1780s, steeped in a Calvinist tradition of hard work and moral restraint. Du Bois only really began to understand the oppression the majority of his people experienced when he went south to Fisk University and spent a summer teaching in the rural schools of Tennessee.²⁵ This experience led to a number of sociological studies he completed on the condition of African American life in southern rural areas, including Farmville, Virginia; Georgia; and Alabama.²⁶ The purpose of his numerous studies was to bring to the attention of state authorities the economic plight and oppression beneath which most rural African Americans toiled. But Du Bois was also concerned with

²² Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000*, pp.41-42.

²³ Anderson argues that the pedagogy and ideology of education that Armstrong developed was designed to avoid the confrontations inherent in an ideology of education designed by African Americans in "defense of emancipation and one that challenged the social power of the planter regime," Armstrong's approach maintained within the South a social consensus that did not challenge traditional inequalities of wealth and power." James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 33.

²⁴ Arnold Rampersad, *The Art And Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 1.

²⁵ Rampersad, *The Art And Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois*, p.13.

²⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia: A Social Study:" *US Department of Labor Bulletin* 3 (January, 1898): 1-38; "The Negro in the Black Belt, *US Department of Labor Bulletin*, 6 (May, 1899): 401-17.

defining an African American culture and history. In 1897 he wrote that in order for African Americans to attain their place in the world they must be themselves. This would involve not merely imitating and assimilating Anglo-Saxon culture but developing “a stalwart originality, which shall unswervingly follow Negro ideals.”²⁷ It was the publication of his volume, *The Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1910 and an essay “The Talented Tenth,” published that same year, that reinforced Du Bois’ approach to higher education and the development of African American culture, causing a split in the black population between those who supported Du Bois’ aggressive uplift ideology and higher education demands, and Booker T. Washington’s strategies of accommodation.²⁸

Leaving aside the ideological differences among African American leaders, it was necessary, in order to support any kind of curriculum, to create a pool of teachers equipped to provide instruction at various levels, and to finance the higher education institutions to train those teachers. From the 1890s, educational leaders across the country had begun a slow but deliberate process of “professionalizing” education. This involved centralizing control of teacher certification training and qualifications; and developing a tiered structure of teachers, administrators, professors, deans, and state superintendents. Specific levels of training and a structured teacher education curriculum were established to support these different levels of responsibility. The first normal school in the postbellum South was a term applied to any institution from which students, graded by age and ability and instructed by halfway competent teachers, went out to teach. In the 1880s and 1890s the sciences became important aspects of teacher training and the Normal School became a specifically defined place where teaching was a discipline understood in such terms as

²⁷ Du Bois, “The Relation of the Negroes to the Whites in the South,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 18 (July-December 1901):128; Du Bois, ‘Conservation of the Races,’ American Negro Academy, Occasional Papers, No.2 (Washington D.C., 1897) p. 10 cited in Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s*, 23.

²⁸ Rampersad, *The Art And Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois*, 81.

pedagogy, psychology and sociology. Northern teachers eager to impart the European philosophies of Pestalozzi, Froebel and Herbart to southern blacks brought such ideas South.²⁹ It is possible that the vocational training included in schools and colleges established by denominational organizations may have come from the new progressive educational philosophies circulating in Northern normal school training. In other words, the freedmen's bureau teachers who came south to teach, may very well have been exposed to a version of Pestalozzi or Froebel practice.³⁰ The Pestalozzi system of education promoted "learning through active enquiry" rather than passive memorizing; learning by doing rather than learning by rote; relating knowledge to the student's experience of the everyday world; using concrete examples. American champions of the Pestalozzi and Froebelian method argued that children should be educated in "kindly and natural ways," and that they learned best "not through books but through sensory experience and contact with real objects." The nation's leading advocates of manual training argued that it was through working with their hands that many of society's ills, such as industrial alienation and urban violence *could* be avoided. Pestalozzi's method thus became a legitimate tool for teaching African Americans, who, many white supremacists believed, had no need of books.³¹

Not all educators were enamored of the approach to education that was grounded in European Romanticism, however. Emerson E. White, a leading educator in the South, mocked the proponents of Pestalozzi's methods, saying: "I shall not be surprised to hear some enthusiast say that manual training is the only road to heaven. Every other possible

²⁹ Fairclough, *A Class of the Own*, 154.

³⁰ Education professional apparently flocked to the Normal School at Oswego, New York, where Pestalozzi's method had become a Mecca for Progressive teacher training. See William J. Reese, "The Origins of Progressive Education, *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring, 2001), 17.

³¹ Reese, "The Origins of Progressive Education, *History of Education Quarterly*, 17.

claim has been made for it.”³² Superintendent of St. Louis schools, William T. Harris, also expressed skepticism, warning that: “manual training would evolve into a class-based vocational system, anti-intellectual in tone and undemocratic in practice.”³³ Such concerns can be seen to have become reality in the case of African American education, with those who underwent manual or industrial training relegated to the labor force and those, educated under the traditional academic centered system, designated to lead. Whether the pedagogical system advocated by devotees of Pestalozzi and Froebel was truly adopted or more adapted to the southern schools, it nevertheless introduced a new way of thinking about the child, that would lead future educators such as John Dewey to consider the child an active learner, not guided under the mastery of the teacher, and able to adapt to industrial society.³⁴ Foreshadowing future attitudes towards the importance of aesthetics in everyday life, at Hampton Institute, teachers in training were taught that: “a classroom should be a place that combined order, cleanliness, and beauty,” and walls should be hung with “maps, colored pictures, good prints, and illuminated sayings of the good and great, tastefully arranged.” Despite the extreme lack of facilities, particularly in the rural schools where most young teachers would have their first teaching practice, conditions could be improved with a little imagination and ingenuity.³⁵

The level of training teachers received determined their salaries. Many of the early teachers had very little training and earned, as a result, little compensation. But salaries

³² “Manual Training,” *Journal of Education* 35 (March 3, 1892): 134, cited in Reese, “The Origins of Progressive Education,” 19.

³³ William J. Reese, “The Philosopher-king of St. Louis,” in *Curriculum & Consequence: Herbert M. Kliebard and the Promise of Schooling*, ed. Barry M. Franklin (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000), 165, 171-72, cited in Reese, “Origins of Progressive Education,” 19.

³⁴ Reese argues that recent scholars have seen Dewey as in opposition to child-centered learning (see Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 108-109 and Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of American Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 134 in Reese, “The Origins of Progressive Education,” 23. Nevertheless, it would seem that in his “Lessons On Art,” such object-based and child-centered philosophies may have yet had a role.

³⁵ *Southern Workman*, May 1874, cited in Fairclough, “A Class of Their Own,” 154-55.

became a politically charged issue as states seeking to control their budgets saw black teachers salaries as an easy figure to slash. Such discrimination often resulted in less-educated rural schoolteachers because African Americans who had stayed in college looked to other avenues for employment.³⁶ The successful implementation of all of these educational options was tightly connected to sources of funding, which were often precarious and fragile, depending on the political climate of the time.

In contrast, to the manual training of Hampton's pedagogical model, the curriculum at private schools established under the missions and given the college or university moniker, focused on the classical tradition, while still including various levels of teacher training. Even those institutions that were created as grade schools, had, as Lynchburg did, the advantage of an academic curriculum. Nevertheless, Washington's support of manual training was not entirely different from the approach W.E.B. Du Bois developed with regard to educating the black masses. Although just over a decade divided them in age, they were both Victorian in attitude, and both argued for the need for moral and intellectual instruction as a means to improving individual self-worth and representation, that is, manners, morals and certain types of self-presentation, were fundamental aspects of promoting self-respect, while eliciting it from others. In the case of women, it was considered important even if they intended following a path of professional training, and a public career, to be well versed in traditional norms of domesticity that included knowing how to perform mundane domestic tasks well, how to 'dressmake' and 'trim a hat' and bake, for example. Such tasks were crucial to maintaining a semblance of normalcy in a society, which was quick to dismiss African American daily behavior, and personal and

³⁶ Fairclough, *A Class of their Own*, 128.

private relations as amoral, and outside the norm of mainstream society.³⁷ Black Women's colleges such as Hartshorn in Richmond, Virginia, stressed domestic duties as essential to racial uplift, and higher education prepared even the poorest to maintain orderly intelligent homes that would prove a space in which self-disciplined children would learn to read and write and strive for lofty ideals.³⁸ Dubois supported the higher goal of educating blacks to be full participants in society at all levels. He spoke in glowing terms of the opportunity afforded blacks by northern missionaries and government agents prior to and during Reconstruction, saluting their actions as a "crusade of the sixties, that finest thing in American history," when teachers came South, "not to keep Negroes in their place but to raise them out of the defilement of the places where slavery had wallowed them."³⁹ In establishing private black colleges and universities, as well as lower level schools, the denominational bodies typically implemented a classical liberal arts curriculum because they believed that higher education would be necessary to provide a cadre of professional teachers, and would be free to become what they chose, limited only by their own intrinsic worth and effort.⁴⁰ However, even those institutions that appeared to offer a higher form of education, nevertheless still offered industrial training courses. One higher education institution established within the vein of such education ideology was Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute in Petersburg, Virginia.

During a brief utopian period in which African Americans were given the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, Virginia State Republican Delegate Alfred A. Harris, a black

³⁷ Stephanie Shaw relates how one mother, taught her daughter to 'wash on Monday iron on Tuesday, Mend on Wednesday (before putting clothes away). Thursday...begin your cleaning. [and on] Saturday...do your cooking.' (Shaw, *What a Woman or to Be and To Do*), 26. Such mundane tasks became the material of compositions in painting and sculpture: See Jacob Lawrence and Leslie Garland Bolling's domestic scenes.

³⁸ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 28-29.

³⁹ W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of the Training of Black Men," *Atlantic Monthly* 90 (September 1902): 294 cited in Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s*, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 4; Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, p.240.

attorney from Petersburg and resident of Dinwiddie County, put forward a bill in 1882, proposing an institution of higher education for African Americans, complete with a college and teacher training program, and to be presided over by black teaching faculty and a black president. Like the proponents of mission schools, Harris argued that he wanted “a place where our ...girls and boys may go and drink from the fountain of knowledge until their ambition is satiated.” But Harris, mindful of white opposition to black education, understood the need to tread carefully in creating such places and in including practical skills training as a way to assuage such concerns.⁴¹

William Mahone (1826-1895) a white man from Petersburg, Virginia, a railroad magnate and Confederate General who led the Battle of the Crater at Petersburg, in which large numbers of African American soldiers lost their lives, was a sympathetic supporter of education for the formerly enslaved. He demonstrated this concern by selling shares he owned in the AM&O railroad to provide funds for land to be purchased for the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute. Delegate Harris however, also a local man, was no doubt well aware of the city of Petersburg as a place in which African American freedmen had strong roots. Petersburg and its surrounding county was one of those pockets where free blacks of extraordinary resilience existed. They had owned property before Emancipation and, moreover, had long enjoyed significant positive race relations with whites. From the early 19th century, free blacks in Petersburg were skilled craftsmen and seamen prior and the services which they rendered were considered so praiseworthy that in defiance of laws which obligated freed African Americans to leave the state, many local white citizens wrote the state legislature to ask that “they be allowed to stay... notwithstanding the law

⁴¹ Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 139.

forbidding free Negroes to enter.”⁴² Among these freedmen were members of the Colson family. A family deeply invested physically and ideologically in the possibilities of Petersburg, a city in which, despite the constrained circumstances of segregation, blacks did enjoy a kind of agency in determining their lives and those of their community. The Colsons owned property from 1817, and retained ownership of that property until the 20th century.

In the 1850s, another freedman Jack McCray or McCrae, was a well-respected black merchant in Petersburg, he was connected to the families of Colson and Roberts who were all respected merchants and able to travel freely between the North and South.⁴³ This element of freedom enabled them to function unsuspected, as conduits of information, one aspect of which enabled them to connect runaway slaves to the Underground Railway system, which offered the possibility of escape routes North to Canada, where they could live in freedom. McCrae’s wife was an enslaved woman with whom he had two daughters, who according to colonial laws, were deemed enslaved through their mother. Nevertheless, McCrae was able to secure his daughter, Rosetta’s freedom; she subsequently escaped to Canada with her future husband, John Henry Hill, an enslaved man from King and Queen County.⁴⁴ According to records, John Henry Hill was an educated man whose letters to white abolitionists and African American freedmen of the Underground Railroad system, despite his own status as an enslaved man, helped facilitate the freedom of other runaway slaves. John Henry Hill and Rosetta McCrae had seven daughters, while in Canada, and at

⁴² Luther Porter Jackson, *Negro Labor and Property Holding in Virginia, 1830-1860* (London/New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1942).

⁴³ Luther Porter Jackson, a prominent activist and educator at Virginia State College during the early 20th century researched property ownership in the Petersburg area, publishing his findings in the *Petersburg Progress Index* of October 4, 1931. See his Luther Porter Jackson, *Negro Labor and Property Holding in Virginia, 1830-1860* (London/New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1942).

⁴⁴ Marie Tyler- McGraw, “Slavery and the Underground Railroad at the Eppes Plantations, Petersburg National Battlefield Site,” Organization of American Historians for the Northeast Region National Park Service, US Department of the Interior, 2005, p.46-7

the conclusion of the Civil War, when the hopes of emancipation, the presence of kin, community, and property, suggested possibilities for a better future, the family returned to their Petersburg community.⁴⁵

Kate Hill, one of John Henry Hill and Rosetta McCrae Hill's daughters, married James Colson, whose mother taught a private school after the Civil War.⁴⁶ Kate and James were among the first to graduate from Virginia State College and become teachers. As historian Adam Fairclough has argued, the "narrow basis of the black middle class meant that many teachers married other teachers, and that their children became teachers as well." The Colsons were a typical case: James taught at Virginia State College and Kate Hill Colson taught at New Salem College.⁴⁷ Their daughter, Edna Meade Colson, was educated at Fisk University, a private liberal arts college in Nashville, Tennessee, but she returned to Petersburg to teach education, and after achieving an MA and PhD (in 1940) from Columbia University Teachers College, Edna Colson ran the department of education at Virginia State College. By the time of her death in 1985, half of Virginia's black teachers had studied under her tutelage.⁴⁸ For my purposes, Edna Colson is significant because she ran the teacher training session that Amaza Lee took in the summer of 1915 and would become her mentor and greatest influence in many and varied ways throughout her life. But her family's example also illustrates the larger narrative of African American extensive

⁴⁵ Marie Tyler- McGraw, "Slavery and the Underground Railroad at the Eppes Plantations, Petersburg National Battlefield Site," Organization of American Historians for the Northeast Region National Park Service, US Department of the Interior, 2005, p.46-7.

⁴⁶ Adam Fairclough, *A Class of their Own*, 276.

⁴⁷ This narrative is crucial to my exploration of Amaza Lee's decision to return to Petersburg and establish residence as it underscores the existence of a growing black middle class in the smaller commercial centers in the South and a determination among certain elite families to consistently work to improve the lives of African Americans. [Family papers belonging to the Colson family indicate connections to the Underground Railroad and to the family's later interest in helping establish a colony in Liberia, where one of Edna's brothers eventually died. see HBCU online records from Virginia State Archives].

⁴⁸ Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 277.

attempts to create strong, safe and educated communities in a particular place to which they had committed themselves.

Virginia State Normal and Collegiate Institute was established in 1882 under a state government sympathetic to black higher education. Indeed, it was a place intended exclusively for the elite, as the Superintendent's report of 1882 indicates, before any male could be educated to the highest standard, that is, under a liberal arts curriculum relative to that found in white educational establishments, he must first be deemed "morally and mentally qualified."⁴⁹ On opening, Virginia State College proudly advertised itself as the first post-reconstruction institution in the country, established for and managed entirely by African Americans. As the founding papers declared, it was the "first time colored man has been placed in entire control over his own destiny." Virginia State College was also the first four-year black college to be substantially supported by state funds.⁵⁰ In 1883, thirty acres of the original Ettrick Banks were sold to the State of Virginia, and the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (now Virginia State University) was established. From 1883, the Institute subsequently acquired over 600 acres of the original Ettrick Banks and Motoaca Plantations [figure 2-1].⁵¹ On July 4th, 1883, to great pomp and ceremony, the highly conservative Grand Lodge of Colored Masons laid the foundation bricks for a building designed by Harrison Waite, architect under contract with the Board of Education.⁵² Known as Virginia Hall, the building was a three and a half story eclectic style Victorian building with elements of the French chateau and Gothic Revival, surprisingly not too dissimilar from the design by well-known, Beaux-Arts trained, New York architect Richard

⁴⁹ State of Virginia, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction* (Richmond, VA, 1882)

⁵⁰ Edgar Toppin, *Loyal Sons and Daughter: Virginia State University, 1882-1992* (Norfolk, VA: Pictorial Heritage, 1992), 5.

⁵¹ Deed April 21, 1836 at HBCU Alliance, Virginia State University Archives, online database: <http://contentdm.auctr.edu> (accessed September 15, 2011)

⁵² Account records for the Building Fund also indicate that Waite designed the Petersburg "lunatic Asylum" in 1882.

Morris Hunt for Hampton Institute's Virginia Hall, erected in 1874 [figure 2-2, 2-3]⁵³

Under contract as the state architect and buildings superintendent Harrison Waite also designed the building constructed in Petersburg to house a "reception and treatment facility for colored persons of unsound mind," originally opened in Richmond but moved into a larger, purpose-designed building completed in 1885. This monumental Insane Asylum as it was originally called, was of similar design to Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute [figure 2-4].⁵⁴

A Course Catalogue from 1885-86 illustrates the structure of education and the different levels of instruction offered: the Model School, the Normal Preparatory School and the Normal Course, the College Preparatory and the College Course. The Model School comprises the "usual branches of instruction taught in common schools," but with "special attention" given to "Object lessons, drawing and penmanship." The preparatory Normal School was intended for those who were deficient in elementary lessons, and included elocution, orthography, reading and writing, grammar and composition, drawing, mathematics, geography, and Virginia and United States History. Students with a fair understanding of these courses could complete the three year Normal Course. The College Preparatory Course involved a one-year focus on Arithmetic, Algebra, General History, Latin Grammar, Chemistry and Physics. The College Course comprised History of Rome, Greek, Latin, French, History of Rome and Greece, German, Plain Surveying, Trigonometry, Psychology, History of Civilization, Astronomy and International Law. A degree of A.B. was to be conferred on completion of the College program. The Normal School was to train

⁵³ Reports of the Building Committee of Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute to the General Assembly: 1886-87 and 1887-88.

⁵⁴ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Fairmount Historic District, DHR# 127-0814, John Milner Associates, June 29, 2007. The National Register Form does not indicate the architect for the 'Central Lunatic Asylum' but Waite is listed as being paid for such in the Annual Report for Officers, Boards and Institutions of the Commonwealth (Richmond: Superintendent of Public Printing, 1884).

teachers for the public school system; the college course was intended “to give a higher and broader culture to those who are able to remain longer in school or desired to pursue the professions.” In addition to this academic pedagogy, female students were expected to learn through industrial training provided by matrons in their dorms who would instruct them how to do their own laundry, sew, cook and study vocal and instrumental music. They were permitted to wear only “good plain clothing” and were to be monitored at all times. Young men were to receive physical exercise training in order to “bear themselves well,” and “form habits of obedience and deportment.”⁵⁵ Thus, while granted the freedom to develop academically, those who attended Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute were still subjected to what was considered necessary ‘civilizing’ instruction. The collegiate program at VNCI, which received state funding, was also dependent on a sympathetic state government. By 1887, the Superintendent of Instruction had deemed the college a success, and indicated such in his Annual Report submitted in September of that year:

The founders of the Virginia Normal and collegiate Institute had in contemplation and purpose, in their work, the development, educationally, of the best type of manhood and woman hood, so far as regards the class of persons whose interests are cared for at this institution.

In such belief ...the moral and religious, as well as the mental, welfare and progress, of the students have been carefully and assiduously cultivated. With such success has this course been pursued, that ... the students have grown in knowledge and practical wisdom, personal appearance and bearing, the lowest minimum of insubordination, unhandsome behavior and immoral conduct on their part has been reached and maintained. ..it is claimed that the methods adopted for their [students] instruction generally and the methods adopted for their moral improvement and religious culture, have secured not only their intellectual growth, the

⁵⁵ Course of Instruction, Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute, 1885-86, Virginia State University Archives, online at <http://contentdm.auctr.edu> (Accessed July 15, 2012)

development of their understandings, but that appreciation of truth, obligation, and duty not less than personal purity and virtue, so essential to the wise ordering and conduct of their lives.⁵⁶

It is clear from this report that those white supporters of higher education for African Americans were no less paternalistic in their attitude than those who disagreed with the need to educate formerly enslaved people. The rhetoric of this report indicates the negative perceptions African Americans, in particular those leaders who had been educated as free men, were up against. In January 1888 the Board of Education in Richmond had appointed an agent to travel the surrounding area, spread the word of the new college, and attract new students, but, this positive attitude was not to last.⁵⁷

In 1890, the federal government, seeking to promote vocational training for blacks, noted that the Morrill Act of 1862 had made no special provisions for black colleges and only three southern states had been designated as recipients of funding under this program. They then enacted a second Morrill Act that provided annual appropriations for state agricultural and mechanical colleges but stipulated that funds must be “equitably divided between white and colored students,” thus maintaining the segregation of such institutions. Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute received state funding, but the Morrill provision allowed federal money to be used instead of depleting state coffers, even though the college was not a land-grant college at this time.⁵⁸ Virginia State Normal and Collegiate Institute was also a place at which ideological lines were blurred, where the accommodationist

⁵⁶ State of Virginia, Superintendent’s Annual Report, 1887. VSU Archives (online?)

⁵⁷ 1888 Board of Education Meeting Notification re: Chas. H.J. Taylor, Agent, Virginia State University archives, online at <http://contentdm.auctr.edu> (Accessed July 15, 2012).

⁵⁸ See Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 451 FN 11; Bobby L Lovett, *America’s Historically Black Colleges & Universities* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011), 7.

rhetoric of Booker T. Washington often overlapped with the Du Boisean more aggressively progressive approach to racial uplift.⁵⁹

By 1900, teachers were needed in the South in great numbers. According to some statistics, the need was for around 7,000 yet only 2,100 had completed an education above the elementary level. Public investment was crucial for cities and states to train teachers, but southern Democrats declined to invest in black public education, instead, they used their political influence to downgrade the established collegiate institutes, forcing them to focus more on basic teacher training. The school had, between 1886 and 1900, trained 222 teachers and granted forty-nine degrees.⁶⁰ But, in 1887, sending a signal that he disliked and disapproved of Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute graduates' aspirations, the governor of Virginia ousted VNCI's outspoken black president, prominent Republican John Mercer, and reduced the schools funding. Then, in 1890, the governor replaced the interracial board of trustees with an all white board. The positive era of Reconstruction had come to an end and a new era in which Northern supporters allied themselves with Southerners in attempts to unify the country at the expense of African Americans who were no longer seen as the necessary worthy cause they had been immediately after the climax of the war.⁶¹ In April 1902, the newly appointed black president James Hugo Johnston published a carefully scripted announcement regarding the dramatic and devastating changes to the school curriculum. His tone, while remaining respectful and conciliatory, nevertheless retained a hint of suppressed anger:

⁵⁹ This will be discussed in Chapter Three.

⁶⁰ Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 168.

⁶¹ Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 7. Shortly after Reconstruction, having realized the potential of blacks to develop an equal footing with whites, Southern legislators began curbing back the rights they had granted, these were known as black codes, and expressed the determination of Southern whites to define the freedmen as rural laborers with inferior rights. See Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 3.

The Governor of the State in a message to the Legislature recently recommended that our College course be cut off and that an Industrial course be substituted...Of course the colored people generally regret to lose any opportunity for improvement, and especially this, the only one heretofore offered by the State for higher education. The Governor informs us that this was not done because ours is a colored school, but because he is of the opinion that Normal schools, whether white or colored, should be supported exclusively for Normal training. We have always favored the addition of industrial or manual training and have recommended it for fourteen years...While we do not question the sincerity of the Governor's motives in recommending the change of name and change of course of study, we know that every alumnus, whether from the college or normal department, feels sad that "V.N.&C.I." will no longer be the ensign upon our banner, and that the Greek letter society is to be a thing of the past. We hope that none, who have higher ambition than the most honorable calling of teacher, will be discouraged because they may not finish the advanced course here, but that all such may seek other and perhaps wider fields.⁶²

The new chair of the all-white Board of Trustees, Captain C.W. Vawter, a strong supporter of manual training, insisted the school introduce cooking, sewing and other "industrial courses."⁶³ Funds originally intended for the Institute's college curriculum were used to pay for the new industrial training equipment and instructors. The word 'college,' and the academic curriculum it represented, was erased from the school's name; manual training and domestic science became the basis of the new curriculum.⁶⁴ By July 1902, the newly named Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute announced the new courses, which the Board had decided would "fit our graduates to be better teachers." For women, this included learning "various arts by which they might earn a livelihood." For example, it was advised

⁶² "Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute Gazette, July 1902."

⁶³ Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 168.

⁶⁴ See Julian B. Roebuck and Komanduri S. Murty, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Their Place in Higher Education* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 93.

that every girl should “know how to make her own clothes,” and “prepare a meal that will arouse the appetite,” as well as learn the skills that would add greatly to the adornment and comfort of a home.” The system of manual training introduced at Virginia State was the Sloyd system, a program of industrial arts imported from Sweden, which was considered useful in teaching a “love of hard work, inspiring respect for rough honest bodily labor, training in habits of order, exactness, and cleanliness, and dexterity of hand.”⁶⁵

The removal of the collegiate line of academic training occurred in many state-funded institutions across the South, on occasion, African American leaders appeared to support such decisions. For example, the president of Georgia Normal College was said to have argued: “The great mass of our people need to be trained in agriculture, the mechanical arts, the trades and industries, and in the art of homemaking.”⁶⁶ While appearing to agree with Georgia governor, Allan Chandler who in 1901 declared: “I do not believe in the higher education of the darky. He should be taught the trades, but when he is taught the fine arts he gets educated beyond his station and it makes him unhappy.” Such arguments for the mechanical arts, trades, and industries sent a message to white politicians that African Americans were willing to make sacrifices and support the southern economy through their skilled labor, so long as the halls of education remain funded and open.⁶⁷ Thus, African Americans were careful about how they spoke of education, fearing funding for the programs they did have, would be withdrawn. Negative attitudes regarding liberal arts education for blacks when voiced among whites could also be contagious, influencing Northern philanthropic foundations such as John D.

⁶⁵ Gustaf Larssen, *Sloyd, Sloyd Training School*, (Boston, MA, 1902).

⁶⁶ Quoted from John Winthrop Holley, *You can't Build a Chimney from the Top* (New York: William Frederick Press, 1948), 82 cited in Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s*, 6.

⁶⁷ John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 142 and Anderson, *Education of Blacks in the South*, pp. 115-34, quoted in Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000*, p.46.

Rockefeller's General Education Board, a major financial source for black education, to withdraw support.⁶⁸ Not all Southern black educators were willing to make sacrifices however, and on occasion their fierce resistance resulted in violence. At Florida A&M, black President, Nathan B. Young, was ousted for resisting expansion of the manual or vocational training program. As a consequence, the students boycotted classes and two buildings were set on fire.⁶⁹ At Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute, resistance was initially less visible but it existed nevertheless and would, over the years, become more overt.⁷⁰

In response to the new white supremacist antagonism, African Americans leaders, particularly those in education, stepped up attempts to improve conditions for the rural population, and to support their growing cadre of teachers. While southern states failed to finance black education, expanding white public education at their expense, so blacks took matters into their own hands.⁷¹ At a Hampton Conference in 1907, African American leaders established the Negro Organization Society, not dissimilar to the white Cooperative Education Commission. In addition to practical matters such as the need to elevate school attendance, develop high schools, build better school facilities, and create improved conditions for teachers, including pay, African American leaders were concerned with developing interracial relations and establishing ties between Northern and Southern philanthropic organizations in order to guarantee (to the extent that was at all possible) the continued financial support of their education.⁷² The Negro Organization Society, would function as an umbrella group, expanding the so-called 'extension work' of a decade earlier

⁶⁸ Fairclough *Better Day Coming*, pp.46-47.

⁶⁹ Holland, "Nathan B. Young," cited in Fairclough, *A Class of their Own*, 170.

⁷⁰ The following chapter reveals the ways in which VNII continued to teach their students in areas that were outside the 'industrial education' and encouraged deeper critical thinking skills and more sophisticated knowledge.

⁷¹ See James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 111.

⁷² Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, "Annual Report, Hampton Negro Conference," Volumes 11-16 (Hampton, VA, 1907), 66.

in which teachers had gone out into rural communities to teach basic hygiene and home cleanliness habits. They established field agents who would oversee rural areas, documenting progress, advising, and making arrangements to improve living conditions. They would do this by capitalizing on the activities and membership of smaller organizations, which, it was argued, already existed in great numbers in Virginia:

Nearly every colored man and woman is a member of some organization. You can scarcely find a man who is not a member of a church or a Sunday school or a secret society, a business league or an educational association or something of the kind.⁷³

By reaching these existing group structures, the Negro Organization Society could exponentially increase its dues-paying membership, as well as to encourage critical activities intended to uplift the race. First among their priorities was education:

This society has for its purpose the putting forward and pushing of education. We too, want more schools, and we want longer terms. We want better schoolhouses. We want to arouse greater interest on the part of the colored people themselves in education. We want to have that interest so keen and so widespread that it will reach out to the white people of the local communities, and then to the white people of the state at large.⁷⁴

By 1910 the Negro Organization Society was fully formed and had been embraced by large numbers. Robert Moton, who had been asked to lead the formation of such a group, was able to write of its success:

The movement among colored people for better homes, better health, better farms, seems to have made an irresistible appeal to all the people of the

⁷³ Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, "Annual Report, Hampton Negro Conference," Volumes 11-16 (Hampton, VA, 1907), 69.

⁷⁴ Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, "Annual Report, Hampton Negro Conference," Volumes 11-16 (Hampton, VA, 1907), 69.

state. Religious, benevolent, secret, and educational organizations of every character have joined in this movement...The state-wide campaign for clean privies, clean homes, and clean lives has received help and support that was little dreamed of. The two races have been brought together on the ground of common needs of humanity. We have given white people a chance, which they have long desired – chance to help the Negro without compromise or embarrassment. They have met us more than half way.⁷⁵

Members of the faculty of what had now become Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute, including the new president, John Gandy,⁷⁶ a professor of physics, T.C. Erwin, and education department head, Edna Meade Colson, were leaders of this Negro Organization Society in Virginia. While these individuals realized they were fighting an uphill battle in trying to provide a college level humanities-based education, they focused their efforts on improving conditions for poor rural and less educated African Americans. A three-day meeting of the NOS was held at Petersburg in November 1915, at which a number of resolutions were passed. Among these were the need to improve rural teacher salaries, improve school buildings, create better instructional facilities for teachers as well as to offer summer schools, which provided four years of schooling beyond the typical four year high school program.⁷⁷ In order to facilitate improvements on the ground, the faculty of VNII not only trained the teachers that were sent into the countryside, but they developed a system of liaison with local schools in order to recruit the top students. Many of these same students would later return to their own communities to teach in the elementary and high schools.

⁷⁵ “Negro Organization Society,” *Southern Workman*, December 1915. pp. 46-47.

⁷⁶ John Gandy rose out of the poverty of a sharecropping family from Mississippi, attended one-room schoolhouses across the country wherever his parents found work. He later entered Jackson College, Mississippi a Baptist school, then attended Fisk University and after graduating, taught at Virginia State College, serving as its president from 1914 to 1943. See Biographical /Historical Information, in “A Guide to the Papers of John Gandy,” The John M. Gandy Papers, Accession # 1967-2, Johnston Memorial Library, Virginia State University.

⁷⁷ “Negro Organization Society Resolutions,” document in Edna Colson Papers, Colson Family Papers 183-1984, ACC. # 1965-13, box no. 59.

Many black state colleges operated in this way, training an increasing number of black public school teachers and building a loyal membership of the state teachers associations.⁷⁸

Amaza Lee provides a case in which to see the policies and hopes of organizations such as the NOS at work. In 1916, the summer after she had attended the teaching certificate training, she was back in Lynchburg, possibly to spend time with her newly widowed mother, assisting in mortgaging the family home and all its furnishings, but her sojourn also reflects typical circumstances under which the school system struggled to survive.⁷⁹ An outbreak of infant paralysis had closed the schools.⁸⁰ In subsequent years, the community in which Amaza Lee lived also experienced severe influenza and small pox, which caused individual homes to be quarantined.⁸¹ Such health related outbreaks, which likely affected the entire surrounding community, are the kind of circumstances against which organizations such as the Negro Organization Society were battling. With better knowledge and understanding of home cleanliness, food preparation and personal hygiene,

⁷⁸ Dr. Florence Farley, "Petersburg: Voices of Civil Rights: The Oral History," Transcribed by George M. Halasz, Petersburg Public Library, online at <http://www.voicesofpetersburg.org/recordingList.html> (accessed June 2010). Farley explains that the top students would receive state scholarships to go to VPI and their teachers would be sure to tell them which classes to take and how to behave in them so as not to make them feel they had not done their jobs well. See also Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 315. Teachers Association swere formed in 1888 and by 1900 one existed in every state of the South (see Stephanie Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 151.

⁷⁹ Emma Kenney signed a deed granting the family home on Monroe Street, along with all its furnishings, in trust, clearly suffering from financial distress. The personal property listed in this deed indicates the degree to which the family had perhaps been living beyond their means. It included four complete bedroom suites, a parlor suite a library suite, a piano, cooking stove and utensils. Emma Kenney to I.P. Whitehead and W.L. Moore trustees, 22nd June 1916. Lynchburg City Circuit Court Deed Book 108: 244

⁸⁰ Amaza Lee to Edna Colson, Lynchburg, September 9, 1916, ALM Papers. Such epidemics were one of the realities of life in the early 20th century. Infant paralysis, a disease, which was thought to be the result of bacterial microbes in food, entered the blood stream and from there directly to the muscular system. Resulting often in permanent paralysis or weakness. Such epidemics occurred quite frequently even in the cities. In rural areas where access to knowledge and medical help was sporadic, such outbreaks could cause serious damage to an entire community, see *New York Times*, August 29, 1909.

⁸¹ Amaza Lee to Edna Colson, June 21, 1917; Amaza Lee to Edna Colson, Lynchburg, Oct 20, 1918. The Spanish Influenza hit Lynchburg hard, with an estimated 250 dead from the disease in two years. The city government apparently managed to control the outbreak by keeping the sick quarantined and the population well informed about how to avoid contracting the sickness. See Clifton W. Potter, Dorothy Bundy Turner Potter, *Lynchburg: A City Set on Seven Hills* (Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia, 2004), 125.

it was hoped that illnesses such as infant paralysis would be reduced in number. Such outbreaks limited the ability of students to attend school (it was called infant paralysis but could attack young children too), could result in school closings, affected statistics collected about school numbers and consequently influenced funding. Poor building stock for housing, dilapidated and inadequate school buildings, and unhealthy environments, were all considered integral to the teaching profession. Without healthy students and sanitary well-constructed school buildings in which to teach, the process of education was constantly interrupted. Home and school buildings were thus critical spaces on which to focus in order to move the rural population forward in a lifestyle, which included regular attendance at an educational institution.

The NOS' drive to improve school buildings and their surroundings had begun in earnest in 1912 with the result that many schools received improved sanitation facilities. According to the NOS Bulletin of 1915, 300,000 African Americans had received notices regarding ways to improve their home environment and make them more sanitary.⁸² The Negro Organization Society was not alone in attempting to change these circumstances. Other organizations including those of the local government were also active. By 1918, every county in Virginia, for example, had a designated school supervisor whose job it was to urge the people to send their children to school, to request longer school terms, and to build improved school houses.⁸³

⁸² Negro Organization Society Meeting, Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute, November 3,4,5 , 1915, Edna Colson Papers, Colson-Hill Papers...

⁸³ Virginia Department of Education, "Virginia School Report: Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools," (Richmond, 1918), 47. African Americans suffered enormously from lack of access to healthful conditions and medical care, In Richmond, 50% of children died before reaching one year. See "Mortality Among Negroes in Cities," Social and Physical Conditions of Negroes in Cities, Report of an Investigation under the Direction of Atlanta University, and Proceedings, Second Conference for the Study of Problems Concerning Negro City Life, Atlanta, May25/26, 1897. (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta University Press, 1897),

While in Lynchburg, Amaza Lee was visited by Professor Jason Phillips of VNII. It is possible that she knew him from the class he had taught during the summer of 1915 in 'Reading and Literature.' Phillips was president of the Virginia Negro Teachers and Improvement League, an organization suggested by Dr S.C. Mitchell, a Professor of Economics at the University of Richmond and Rector of the new all-white Board of Trustees of VNII.⁸⁴ Mitchell had suggested the usefulness of a League for School Improvement and the VNII student body had taken on the task, spreading the idea to surrounding schools in town and county. The mission of the League for School Improvement was to raise funds to lengthen the school term, and make physical improvements to school buildings and grounds. Because so many graduates of VNII went into teaching, tasking them with social service as part of their teaching obligations was a proactive method for engaging communities in finding solutions for improved education facilities, attendance and teachers, jointly with groups such as a School Improvement League.⁸⁵ Jason Phillips was in Lynchburg to encourage school improvement organizations. Amaza Lee reported that the "home girls who teach county schools have organized a club for country school teachers." A facility Amaza Lee admitted to finding very useful, and in particular, the teacher's institute plan.⁸⁶ Amaza Lee appears to have been occupied with course work while she was home in Lynchburg too. While having taken exams in grammar and mathematics she was also preoccupied with drawing a highly detailed large-scale map of Virginia, which was either part of her examination in geography or was in preparation for decorating the schoolhouse

⁸⁴ Twenty-Third Annual Conference of the Virginia Negro Teachers and School Improvement League, June 23, 24, 25, 1910, Virginia State University Archives, digitized online at <http://hbcudigitallibrary.auctr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/VSUD/id/706/rec/3> (accessed November 22, 2013).

⁸⁵ *The American Negro, His History and Literature*, p. 31.

⁸⁶ Amaza Lee to Edna Colson, Lynchburg, September 9, 1916. ALM Papers.

she would soon occupy.⁸⁷ Although Amaza Lee had completed the Jackson Street School curriculum and graduated at the top of her class, it was still only a three-year diploma rather than the four years, which the NOS recognized as a necessary basic qualification. Between 1916 and 1918 she took examinations in grammar and mathematics and studied geography and European History. Edna Colson sent her books on pedagogical theory, which she avidly read, eventually passing the examinations that granted her the Certificate to teach First Grade.⁸⁸

By January 1917, Amaza Lee had left Lynchburg and was installed in a one-room schoolhouse in the hamlet of Indian Rock, located in the mountainous region of Botetourt County, Virginia [figure 2-5]. It is likely that she had been given this position while at the Summer Session at VNII in 1915. She boarded with a local family and found that among her 110 registered students, ages ranged across the board, including one student who was older than the 20-year old teacher.⁸⁹ On any given day she could expect any number of students, ranging sometimes from forty-two to fifty-two. Unreliable school attendance was often due to the prevalence of outbreaks of illness among the population, as indicated above, but could also be the result of natural conditions of the remote mountainous region and its often extreme weather, which could lead to school closings. In January her first year, Amaza

⁸⁷ Virginia School Report: Annual School Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Bulletin 1915-16 lists a number of courses taught during the summer of 1915, ranging from 'Chair Caning to Basketry,' 'Raffia and Reed Work,' 'Drawing,' 'Cooking,' 'Reading and Literature, Methods in Geography for Grammar Grades,' 'Sewing,' 'Arithmetic and Bookkeeping.'

⁸⁸ Amaza Lee to Edna Colson, Lynchburg, August 14, 1917, Amaza Lee to Edna Colson, Lynchburg, September 9, 1916. ALM Papers. See above for NOS resolutions passed in 1915 to establish summer sessions to make up the four-year high school and supplement those like Jackson Street, which were although top of the pile, still only of three-year duration. For further study see Amaza Lee to Edna Colson, Indian Rock, January 11, 1917; Amaza Lee to Edna Colson, March 1, 1917. Only two grades of certificates were available through examination: grade one and grade two, and both were limited to teachers of elementary school. First grade certificates were valid for five years and could be renewed for an additional five years if the teacher read at least five books from the state reading course and attended summer school for at least 30 days. See John McCrae,

⁸⁹ ALM Biographical notes, ALM Papers, VSU Archives. Also: Amaza Lee to Edna Colson, Indian Rock, January 6 (possibly February, as date added?) 1917.

Lee wrote to Edna Colson: "Cold! Cold! Cold! That isn't the word. And the wind - The temperature has been flirting around zero for a week, I could not hold school yesterday." A couple of weeks later the conditions had shown little improvement: "Today is Thursday, I have not taught school yet. Though the snow is almost knee deep, it is much warmer now. The sun shining and it is beautiful out; I shall teach tomorrow if this continues."⁹⁰ Such conditions, which appear to have been little alleviated by the inadequate building in which she was expected to teach, infuriated Amaza Lee, and so she wrote to Edna:

I can readily assure you, it is a mess. I used to think that it would develop a teacher to have experience in a country school... of course the 'experience' is good, but there are so many disadvantages that the ideal school is too far removed ... No method and management in the world can bring a country school up to par. They are rotten from the beginning to end; they're a disgrace to the State. ...It makes me fighting mad every time I think of it and that is just what I'm doing, Fighting!⁹¹

In March 1917 Amaza Lee had eased into her present conditions and writing to Edna she romanticized a day in her life in this system:

Outside is rain and mud; rain, water and mud; rain, water, mud and dreariness. In my little school-house (room); [which is humble but I have learned to love it very much, be it ever so humble there's no place like 'the scene of your toil,' it is warm and comfortable...⁹²

In addition to studying for her own further education, and teaching numerous young country students, Amaza Lee worked to improve the conditions under which teaching could take place. Three miles away in the hamlet of Buchanan, more young teachers were busy

⁹⁰ Amaza Lee to Edna Colson, January 1, 1917; Amaza Lee to Edna Colson, likely Jan. 21, 1917, although a date of June 21, 1917 has been added afterwards.

⁹¹ Amaza Lee to Edna, Indian Rock, January 6, 1917.

⁹² Amaza Lee to Edna Colson, Indian Rock, March 1, 1917. ALM Papers.

working the country school system, among them, Amaza Lee's friends and sister Cora.

Together the young teachers staged entertainment events for the benefit of the school.⁹³ In Indian Rock it seems Amaza Lee had a visit from VNII professor T.C. Erwin, who, in addition to being a board member of the NOS was a field agent for the organization.⁹⁴ Amaza Lee's was one of many such visits agents like T.C. Erwin made across the country. In November 1915, the *Indianapolis Recorder* published a news item depicting the results of such activity:

Reports from delegates, including many women, showed clearly that hundreds of rural communities are waking up to the possibility of making genuine progress by having people work together for common economic and social interest, regardless of religious or fraternal affiliation.

And in Virginia, VNII President Gandy had indicated that:

... in one year over 45,000 people had been addressed on subjects relating to community improvement, 502 school terms had been lengthened, 604 school leagues had been reached, \$340 had been given to five schools and that these small gifts had inspired the people to raise thousands upon thousands of dollars for their own schools.

For his part, T.C. Erwin reported the following:

...that 347 organizations and 643 individuals had become members of the Negro Organization Society.... He had been at work in thirty-eight Virginia counties and ...carried a message of new hope through organization to thousands of men and women.

According to the *Indianapolis Recorder*, Erwin had reached "school improvement leagues in nineteen counties," and "aroused the people to the necessity of practicing self help and working out a constructive plan."⁹⁵

⁹³ Amaza Lee to Edna Colson, Indian Rock, January 11, 1917.

⁹⁴ 1915 flyer for the meeting of the NOS at VNII, Edna Colson Papers, VSU archives.

⁹⁵ "Results of Cooperation: How the Negro Organization Society Helps Masses in Virginia," *Indianapolis Recorder*, November 27, 1915. Online at <http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu/cdm/ref/collection/IRRecorder/id/36085> (Accessed December 8, 2013).

From her one-room school at Indian Rock, Amaza Lee worked to involve the community in education improvement efforts, organizing a parent teacher association, and soliciting funds from local business people. She wrote to Edna that she “had to go to call upon patrons... went about three miles across the mountains [presumably on foot], through the woods... I had a tramp of about eight miles Sunday...”⁹⁶ All this was in order to secure a pool of funding that would contribute towards a new school. Amaza Lee may have been young but she was not without experience. Her mother Emma Kenney Meredith (1867-1941) had known the significance of networking and of education, and would have had a strong support group as a member of the Eighth Street Baptist Church in Lynchburg, a prominent, religious space, strongly rooted in African American self-determination. Emma’s actions and social circle suggest a progressive attitude, one that prized women’s independence and self-sufficiency, including the promotion of education.⁹⁷ She had white friends who worked in the school system, which suggests that she too may have been involved with a parent teacher association. Amelia Urquart, principal of Dunbar High and Anna LaGrange, a teacher, both corresponded with Emma on terms that suggested close friendship.⁹⁸ Emma had also succeeded in sending all of her four children to school beyond the preliminary

⁹⁶ Amaza Lee to Edna Colson, Indian Rock, January 30, 1917.

⁹⁷ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has written of the importance of the church in providing a physical and discursive public space for African American activism. Higginbotham further argues that the Baptist Church was a site in which members of the black women’s movement worked in a cooperative fashion imagining themselves as member of both the back community and part of an evangelical sisterhood that cut across racial lines. (See Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 13. The online history of Eighth Street Baptist Church indicates its prominence within the elite social circles of African American life in general but in this case also in Lynchburg: <http://www.eighthstreetbc.org/history.html>

⁹⁸ Anna LeGrande a principal at Dunbar High School wrote to Emma Kenney Meredith on learning of the death of her daughter Cora Belle, who suffered an embolism and died in 1936: “ My dear friend, I have thought frequently of you this summer since Mrs Spencer died. ...Cora was one of the best teachers we had, Miss Urquart said she often awakens in the night and wonders how she is going to get on without her...Have missed you so much since you left, but am glad you are located nicely there” Anna LeGrande to Emma Kenney Meredith, July 28, 1936. ALM Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, VSU Archives.

levels; her three daughters became teachers and her son a master mechanic or craftsman.⁹⁹ As we have seen, she was aware of the importance of displaying the identifying characteristics of a stable home life, a sense of good taste, propriety and education, as well as developing relationship with whites. These characteristics which Emma and Samuel had incorporated into their family, are indicative of attempts by African Americans and women, in particular, to create a sense that they belonged to a certain class, one which had similarities with whites and from which they might be seen to easily transition into main stream society. The widely understood ideology represented by Christian homes and a patriarchal family symbolized for African Americans “the freedom, power, and security” to which they aspired, despite the constraints of Jim Crow segregation.¹⁰⁰ Black women whose parents had been born into slavery and thus denied the rights of reading and writing, understood that for their daughters, formal schooling was the vehicle to accessing their aspirations regardless of the limitations others might impose on them because of their race, class, or sex. It was also a means, they hoped, to providing women an escape from the economic and sexual exploitation their grandmothers and their mothers had endured. Emma was likely a product of a woman who, as Zora Neale Hurston expressed it in *Their*

⁹⁹ Little is known about Amaza Lee’s brother James Leonard Meredith except that he attended Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute, he then moved to Washington D.C. to be close to his wife’s family. His granddaughter told me that he committed suicide in later years, likely due to depression. This information suggests that depression may have been a hereditary trait from which Samuel Meredith had initially suffered also. Correspondence with Gail L. Meredith, grand daughter of James L. Meredith and grandniece of Amaza Lee, February 24 2011 to March 3 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 78. Gaines refers to what historian Darlene Clark Hine has called, the “culture of dissemblance” a survival mechanism for black women, who, under Jim Crow, were highly vulnerable no matter their station in life. This ‘culture of dissemblance’ “involved creating the appearance of disclosure, or openness about themselves and their feelings, while actually remaining an enigma to whites.” Such tactics, Hine and Gaines argue, provided a means to survive the suffocating oppression of racism. Gaines extends the meaning of dissemblance however to whites, who for their part, also remained silent on the matter of oppression. In a small town like Lynchburg this kind of complex relationship between blacks and whites was surely prevalent.

Eyes were watching God, succeeded in devising a plan that allowed her to “take a broom and a cook-pot and throw up a highway through de wilderness” for her daughter.”

Amaza Lee, in turn, was of a generation, which understood that individual progress was part of community progress, in other words, she should take responsibility for her own future, while acting simultaneously as an agent of social change.¹⁰¹ Thus Amaza Lee had been well prepared to work towards establishing a network of support among her community members in the agricultural district around Indian Rock. Having established the Parent Teacher Association and received financial support from the Business Leaders of Dillon County, Virginia Teachers Association, and the County School Board she had raised enough for the Rosenwald Fund to agree to build a new schoolhouse.¹⁰²

School buildings were a significant part of developing education programs. Booker T. Washington had initiated a school building program in Macon County, Alabama funded through the Standard Oil Company in 1904. Clinton J. Calloway, an 1895 graduate of Fisk University took charge of the Tuskegee extension program to develop black public schools and provide them with new buildings. Under his plan, funding was sought from a number of private and public sources including the school’s own community, thus reinforcing the understanding that building a new school signaled the community’s commitment to education. In 1909 the Standard Oil funding ceased, and two years later Washington approached Julius Rosenwald, a German Jewish immigrant who had risen from poverty through the retail clothing business to lead Sears Roebuck as the premiere mail-order company. Rosenwald was known to be sympathetic to the African American cause.¹⁰³ He

¹⁰¹ Stephanie, J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 5.

¹⁰² Amaza Lee Meredith Biographical notes, ALM Papers, VSU Archives.

¹⁰³ For a thorough exploration of Rosenwald’s rise to prominence and his philanthropic support of Black education see Peter M. Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald, The Man Who Built Sears Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).

and Booker T Washington struck up a rapport based on mutual commitment to “self-help” and began a partnership that would last until after Washington’s death.¹⁰⁴

Rosenwald had begun support of African American institution building in providing funds to erect the first YMCA building in Chicago followed by a donation of 25,000 dollars for YMCA buildings in other cities that would match his offer with a contribution of 75,000 dollars.¹⁰⁵ The YMCA buildings were significant structures introduced into American cities for the sole purpose of supporting men, and later YWCAs for women, providing a space for meetings, recreation, accommodation and training for newcomers to the cities. Despite being a Christian organization, African Americans were excluded from the YMCA venues. As a result, during Jim Crow, they organized their own YMCA group, and the buildings became spaces in the city which were “safe havens...shielding them from racial humiliation and helping to preserve their dignity.”¹⁰⁶ They were venues in which important political meetings were held, workshops and classes took place, and literary readings and art exhibits were regular events. At the dedication of the Chicago YMCA Julius Rosenwald, who, unlike some so-called progressive whites, was not afraid of racial equality, addressed the gathered crowd:

The Negro should command himself to the highest standard of living and efficiency. This cannot be done by brooding over injustice, nor by declaiming about it, but by living up to the full standard of American citizenship.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), 10.

¹⁰⁵ Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), 27. See also

¹⁰⁶ See Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Dark: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1994). Mjagki provides a history of the various YMCA organizations across the country but her scope does not include attention to the architectural design or construction of the buildings.

¹⁰⁷ Typescript, dedication of Chicago YMCA for Colored Men, 15 June 1913, 8-9 folder 5, box 34, Series I, Rosenwald Papers. Cited in Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), 29.

Rosenwald chose to give African Americans a fair chance in attempting to attain a better environment in which to live, by helping to provide decent school buildings.¹⁰⁸

As soon as Rosenwald had agreed to provide an incentive amount to raise funds for school buildings, Washington set to work to organize the design of building plans. He had Robert R. Taylor, director of industries and staff architect at Tuskegee draw a set of plans; Rosenwald had F.W. Kushel who was in charge of Sears Roebuck's well-known "Modern Homes" department also draw up plans. Kushel suggested using plans from the Sears Roebuck "Ready Made Catalogue," in order to save costs. When sending the plans he had drawn for three different school buildings to house thirty-four, fifty-four and seventy-two students respectively, Robert Taylor was careful to note that they would be more than happy to use the Sears Roebuck materials if it would make costs more efficient.¹⁰⁹ This attempt to assure Rosenwald of their willingness to work with Sears Roebuck to save costs, however, did not go over well with Clinton Calloway, who was put in charge of soliciting funds from community members. If materials were to be used from Sears Roebuck, he argued, it would make local communities less inclined to offer money, when their own lumber, mills and labor could be used to construct the school buildings. Rosenwald responded gallantly to this arguing that it would only be acceptable to use Sears Roebuck materials if this would indeed cut the cost but not the quality of the building, and that it was not in the least necessary to do so. Thus, Calloway and Taylor were able to develop the

¹⁰⁸ Rosenwald's specific support of physical facilities set him apart from other white progressive organizations that chose to help African Americans with schools through supporting teachers or curricula as the Peabody, Slater, and Jeanes Foundations and the southern Education Board and General Education Board did. (See Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), 29.

¹⁰⁹ Hoffschwelle cites a handwritten note scribbled on the letter accompanying drawings sent to Rosenwald attesting to Taylor and Washington's willingness to use Sears Roebuck materials. See Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), 37, Footnote 69.

program in a way that allowed locals to donate lumber and materials as part of contributing to the costs of the building.

The first new schools for African Americans realized with matching funds from Julius Rosenwald were built in Alabama. The program was centralized, with design and administration of awards concentrated initially at Tuskegee. Design of the school building was of great concern to both Rosenwald and Washington. Both were aware that if a bright new building for African American school children outshone that of local white children it would cause jealousy and resentment. Such concerns were not unfounded as during this time, violence and aggression towards African American advancement was palpable in the frequency of horrific lynchings, arson attacks on property, and other forms of intimidation.¹¹⁰

On Washington's death in 1915 Rosenwald worked with a number of other philanthropic education boards, including the General Education Board, led by John D. Rockefeller, the Slater Fund, Jeanes Fund, and Booker T. Washington's widow.¹¹¹ Tuskegee's professionally trained architecture professors Robert R. Taylor and William A. Hazel produced the first designs for school buildings, publishing a number of plan variations, according to the potential size of the school, in a pamphlet, *The Negro Rural School and Its*

¹¹⁰ News articles are rife with violence against African Americans at this time. See Slain on Way to Church," January 1, 1912, *The Washington Post*; "Mob is led by a Woman: Storm Jail, bent on Lynching Five Negro Prisoners," March, 8, 1912, *Washington Post*; For targeting of black schools see John Dittmar, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977); Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Ed Ayers, *Promise of the New South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Leon Litwac, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998); Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, 1890-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

¹¹¹ These other organizations were part of a progressive era's move to build public support for funding, and legislation necessary for expansion and further teacher training. See Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), 20-21.

Relation to the Community.¹¹² The pamphlet, which contributed enormously to the movement to create not only better black but also white schools laid out a number of principles in the consideration of new school buildings, reflecting progressive era ideas about the role of science in aesthetics as well as pedagogy.¹¹³ To begin with, a suitable centrally located site was to be chosen, and to be of sufficient size to accommodate the school building as well as outbuildings, play spaces, and practice gardens for the agricultural classes to be taught. The school buildings themselves projected a functionalist aesthetic “that rendered modernity and progress in light, airy, and hygienic classrooms arranged within simple, symmetrical floor plans and facades.” The rhetoric implied in and used to describe the designs was the same language applied to white schools, suggesting the appearance of a school building reflected its community’s values.¹¹⁴

The Negro Rural School’s designs created a pattern on which numerous schools across the South were built, all based on similar elements, such as the hipped or clipped-gable roof lines, and walls punctuated by lines or “batteries” of four to seven double-hung sash windows, creating almost a wall of glass rather than regularly spaced individual openings [figure 2-6]. These windows were intended to be operable for ventilation and air circulation, at the same time they allowed in light that would fall naturally from the east or the west.¹¹⁵ Interiors received equal attention, with specific spaces including the classroom proper, those designated for hanging coats where they could dry when wet, a workroom for industrial education, a library and a kitchen [figure 2-7]. The main classroom might have sliding doors, which could be manipulated to open up space for community events. The

¹¹² “The Negro Rural School and Its Relation to the Community.” (Tuskegee, AL, 1915).

¹¹³ Alabama State Education Department Negro Schools Agent James L. Sibley had wanted the Tuskegee architects to collaborate with him in producing designs for white schools also.

¹¹⁴ Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), 54-55.

¹¹⁵ *The Negro Rural School and its relation to the community*, (Tuskegee, AL, 1915)

Rosenwald Fund would only provide funding for new schoolhouses if the African American school community could demonstrate a commitment to education by raising matching funds. The land on which the school was built became the property of the local school board, which, while creating some tension among the African American community initially, did nevertheless, assure that the school remained to a degree maintained by local authorities. The program grew exponentially across the South, to the point that by the 1920s, the project became too large for Tuskegee to handle and was transferred to a white supervisor, Samuel L. Smith who was part of the Rosenwald Fund Nashville, Tennessee office.¹¹⁶ The National Trust, however, has recently suggested that the transfer from Tuskegee to Tennessee was the result of Fletcher B. Dresslar, professor of school hygiene and architecture at Nashville's George Peabody College for Teachers, whose inspections of some of the buildings were found wanting. He declared them to be poorly constructed, not conforming to the standards established, and often having evolved under conditions that allowed local laborers who were not skilled carpenters and did not know how to read building plans correctly, to complete the building, and as a result, made mistakes.¹¹⁷ Or was it simply that once again white supremacy insisted on being in control?

Between 1917 and 1932 when funds finally ceased, a total of 364 school buildings had been constructed in Virginia. As most of these were in the rural areas, it is safe to say that every county in Virginia received a new school during this period. In Botetourt County, Amaza Lee had succeeded in raising \$3,200 from the African American school community, \$400 from the white community, and public businesses, and the local board of education had contributed \$2,400, which together with the Rosenwald Fund contribution of \$300

¹¹⁶ US Department of the Interior National Register of Historic Places, Bryan Clark Green, Rosenwald Schools in Virginia Multiple Property Document (012-5041), Section E page 7-9

¹¹⁷ Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), 55.

provided the means to construct a modern two-teacher facility.¹¹⁸ The building constructed was of the community-type, which allowed for local activities to be held in the building [figure 2-8].¹¹⁹

Amaza Lee never got to teach in the new Indian Rock schoolhouse however, by the time it had been completed she had returned to her own community to teach at Lynchburg's Payne Elementary School for African Americans from 1919-1920.¹²⁰ In 1919 she also turned again to VNII where she studied for the Normal Professional Certificate, issued to graduates of a two-year program.¹²¹ As much as Amaza Lee had found success in extending her education, and experience through practice teaching at the rural school and in establishing a new building for Indian Rock, she was likely relieved to return to the city of Lynchburg and exchange the challenges of an isolated life in the mountains for the small but urban center with its "tight-knit group that formed the backbone of the middle class."¹²² With her first real experience creating a more progressive environment for African Americans in the rural area of Virginia behind her, Amaza Lee had established a precedent that she would follow for the rest of her life: combining education with architecture as a means to improving conditions, and forging African American progress.¹²³

¹¹⁸ US Department of the Interior National Register of Historic Places, Bryan Clark Green, "Rosenwald Schools in Virginia Multiple Property Document (012-5041)," Appendix One, p. 4 of 19, and p.14 of 128. See also, Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), 48-85.

¹¹⁹ Correspondence with Fisk University archivist Aisha Johnson re Rosenwald Records Collection, December 4, 2013.

¹²⁰ ALM biographical notes, ALM Papers, VSU archives.

¹²¹ ALM biographical notes, ALM Papers, VSU; Virginia State Bulletin, September 1919, Vol. II, No.2, supplement No. 4, "Vocational Education." Amaza Lee writes in her biographical notes that she taught between 1918 and 1920 and studied between 1918 and 1922 so it is likely that she took classes in the summer and supported herself by teaching during the year to begin with.

¹²² For explanation of the changing nature of teacher certification see Adam Fairclough, *A Class of their Own*, 274.

¹²³ Mary S. Hoffschwelle argues that the Rosenwald school building program could not redress the neglect African American schools had received but it could signal a model for public school architecture in general and provide a beginning for new public institutions in African American community life. See Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville, Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 2006), 2.

Chapter Three

Complicating the Reach of the Harlem Renaissance

While teaching in Lynchburg and also attending VNII in 1919 to study for her Normal Professional Certificate, Amaza Lee encountered college president John Gandy and key faculty working to incorporate higher standards to attain state accreditation, improve the Normal School curriculum, and reinstate the College curriculum. Gandy was a product of the Mission schools established during Reconstruction, including Fisk University.¹ He had learned that the higher purpose of his education was, not for himself alone, but for the benefit of his race. The Mission schools had after all been founded on Christian principles and were intended to produce “dedicated, loving, unselfish” teachers who were “inured to hardship, and self-sacrificing,” for it was “on them that the future of the race depended.”² Since 1902 when the state government had removed the college curriculum, VNII had suffered from reduced funding and an imposed focus on manual or industrial training. At this time, according to one eye-witness, African American educators in the South, and specifically at VNII, consisted, on the one hand, of those who had trained in the South, earned teaching certificates, taught from out-of-date-textbooks, and attempted to impart culture, a sense of propriety, and good manners to their unworldly students, on the other, there were those who had trained in Northern institutions, receiving academic degrees, and returned South to teach what they had learned in the classrooms.³

When Rose Butler, who would become Amaza Lee’s colleague at Virginia State as Dean of Women Students, arrived to take up her position in 1921 she found the school to be

¹ In 1913 the Northern Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools issued the first list of regionally accredited colleges and universities which signaled the movement to define institutions of higher learning by specific, factual mechanical and uniform standards. In the South, no formal accrediting agency took black colleges seriously until 1928, but the presence of such accreditation lists signaled to black

² Arthur M. Cochran, “The Negro at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,” *American Missionary* 55 (Feb. 1901): 99, cited in Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 165.

³ Rose Butler Browne and James W. English, *Love My Children, An Autobiography* (New York: Meredith Press, 1969), 115-118.

offering “a half-baked form of so-called higher education.” Butler had returned south from a period studying at Rhode Island Normal School, and was not impressed by Southern black education.⁴ Butler’s appointment as Dean of Women, however, was a mark of progress that was being etched into the education system at several black colleges. Howard University’s administration had for example, approved such a position in 1920, appointing Lucy Diggs Slowe, Dean of Women in 1922. Such achievements indicated women were forging new identities and claiming their rights to be considered equal in a profession in which they made up the greatest numbers. Howard’s Dean of Women, Lucy Diggs Slowe was a staunch advocate for the rights of her young female student charges, even though such progressive ideas may have countered those of the older generation. She argued that: “Regardless of the wish of many parents that their daughters become adjuncts of men, modern life forces them to be individuals in much the same sense as men are individuals.”⁵ As increasing numbers of women attended higher education, those who were already established sought, and were often charged with, taking responsibility for these newcomers, thus forcing college administrations to create positions in which women had increasingly greater authority and power. The teaching profession was an arena in which women found entry into the middle class and in their increasing numbers discovered the support for greater autonomy and individual responsibility.

Between 1890 and 1920, the numbers of professional black women had risen by 219 percent in contrast to the numbers of black men in professions, which rose by only 52 percent. Indeed, during this period the number of black women employed grew by 107 percent but the numbers of professional black women grew at twice the rate. In 1910 black

⁴ Rose Butler Browne and James W. English, *Love My Children, An Autobiography* (New York: Meredith Press, 1969), 115-118.

⁵ Treva Lindsey, “Climbing the Hilltop: In Search of New Negro Womanhood at Howard University,” in Davarian L. Baldwin and Minkah Makalani, (eds.) *Escape From New York: The New Negro Renaissance Beyond Harlem* (Minneapolis/St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 271.

women made up 43 percent of all black professionals in contrast to 26 percent of 1890. Such changes were directly attributable to the increase in black women teachers and despite low salaries, in comparison to white teachers; black teachers nevertheless found security and respectability within this profession, in a job market that generally denied equal access to blacks and to women.⁶ As mentioned previously, teaching salaries were also hierarchical, those in the rural schools receiving the lowest wages and those in the college system the highest. Many public school teachers worked through the summer in menial jobs or as summer school instructors in order to make ends meet. While teaching public school and before gaining her higher education qualifications, Amaza Lee spent one summer working as a waitress, her sister Cora, also a teacher in the public school system, worked as a garden hand one summer prior to her marriage.⁷ Entering the black middle class indicated these women had achieved higher education, professionalism and culture. It was therefore significant that the colleges strive continuously to impart a sense of culture to their students who in turn would impart such knowledge to their young charges. In doing so, women teachers challenged and re-shaped educational institutions, laying the foundation for new identities that would come to be known as New Negro Womanhood.⁸

When Rose Butler arrived at VNII in the 1920s she noted President Gandy making painstaking efforts to expose his students to culture. For example, in keeping with the more traditional requirements established at the College's opening, attendance at chapel was mandatory for each student. Gandy however succeeded in turning the religious program into a cultural event by inviting speakers, artists, poets and musicians. Distributing the

⁶ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994), 41-42.

⁷ Amaza Lee to Edna Colson, July 3, 1918, Davis Restaurant Hopewell; Regarding her sister Cora, see Amaza to Edna, Lynchburg, May 20, 1918, ALM Papers, Accession #1982-20, VA. Box 29.

⁸ Treva Lindsey, "Climbing the Hilltop: In Search of New Negro Womanhood at Howard University," in Davarian L. Baldwin and Minkah Makalani, (eds.) *Escape From New York: The New Negro Renaissance Beyond Harlem* (Minneapolis/St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 272.

upcoming program in advance through the appropriate department, students attended chapel prepared to analyze the cultural event. For example, at the event at which Marian Anderson, the well-known African American singer performed, students were expected to use their knowledge learned in previous weeks to recognize distinctive features of the musical piece. In this way faculty succeeded in teaching culture, while making it appear they were simply enhancing a mandatory religious program intended to educate a group expected to serve rather than lead.⁹

At Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute, the standard was for men to take courses in industrial training and women to take domestic science, a field of study incorporated into many institutions of higher education, both black and white during the early twentieth century. Within the teacher-training curriculum the skills learned in domestic science were intended to enhance women's role in improving society. As we have seen, many African American leaders subscribed to the Victorian beliefs that women's influence lay in the home, and their ability to create spaces in which children would develop a sense of moral obligation, good manners and social graces, would spill over into influencing the black community at large. Domestic Science became a field of instruction that began to bridge such traditional notions of womanhood with more modern notions of women's right to work outside the home. Nevertheless, Domestic Science has, since the arguments of second wave feminists such as Betty Friedan, developed strong negative connotations suggesting a field in which women were indoctrinated into acquiescing to limited lives as housewives, and turning women with academic potential into "limp,

⁹ Rose Butler Browne and James W. English, *Love My Children, An Autobiography* (New York: Meredith Press, 1969), 118.

jibbering masses of jelly waiting for marriage.”¹⁰ However, as some scholars have written, “Domestic Science had far loftier goals than teaching women how to make fluffier bread and creamier butter.”¹¹ Many women in the late 19th century saw domestic science as a route into professional careers based on courses in bacteriology, nutrition, public health, and nursing, and as such was integral to the efforts to reform society. Ellen Richards, who between 1884 and 1911 taught sanitary science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was widely considered the “Mother of Domestic Science.” She argued that domestic science education might be “the most civilizing factor the nation has,’ she went on to say, if the State is to have good citizens, productive human beings, it must provide for the teaching of the essentials to those who are to become the parents of the next generation.”¹² Thus domestic education was seen as a way to influence both the private realm and the public sphere of the entire nation. It also justified women’s, that is, middle-class white women’s, role in education and social reform. On the other hand it reinforced notions of the cult of true womanhood, which stipulated that women’s role in society should be to produce and nurture the next generation, defining woman through Christian values of “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.”¹³ These values were considered important particularly

¹⁰ “What Robin Morgan said at Denver,” *Journal of Home Economics* 73 (Jan. 1973), 13, cited in Elisa Miller, “In the Name of the Home: Women, Domestic Science and American Higher Education, 1865-1930” (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 2004), 2.

¹¹ Elisa Miller, “In the Name of the Home: Women, Domestic Science and American Higher Education, 1865-1930” (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 2004), 2.

¹² Ellen H. Richards, *Euthenics: The Science of Controllable Environment* (Boston: Whitcomb & Barrows, 1910), 110, cited in Miller, “In the Name of the Home: Women, Domestic Science and American Higher Education, 1865-1930” (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 2004), 8.

¹³ See the seminal article on this topic by Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1966), pp. 151-174, and a response to the ideas expressed in that article in Mary Louise Roberts, “True Womanhood Revisited,” *Journal of Women’s History*, Volume 14, Number 1, Spring 2002, pp. 150-155. Roberts adds a number of scholars to the recent history of domesticity but omits those who have written on African American women and their obligation to racial uplift within the frame of presenting a pious and virtuous domestic front. See Stephanie Shaw, *What a Woman ought to Be and to Do* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993);

for African American women to learn, as it fell to them to convince society that their people were worthy of respect.¹⁴ Such principles and values however could create social divisions, setting apart those who were trained to help from those they were intended to support.

The domestic science curricula taught to Native American, African American and immigrant women however, “differed dramatically in content and motivation from that provided to middle- and upper-class white students.”¹⁵ Some aspects of the domestic science program, such as dressmaking, proved useful as areas in which African American women could find employment without having to leave the home environment, an important consideration for families who were all too aware of the dangers of physical exploitation to which African American women had always been subjected, and the continued vulnerability of their daughters.¹⁶ Domestic science courses nevertheless, were thought to be a means by which women could be integrated into the education system through such schools that came under the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 and its re-enactment of 1890, which provided states with land and funding to establish higher learning focused on practical curricula, defined as:

Such branches of learning as are related to agricultural and mechanical arts, in such a manner as the legislatures of the states may be respectively prescribed, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions of life.¹⁷

Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill; University of North Carolina, 2004).

¹⁴ Stephanie Shaw, *What a Woman ought to Be and To Do* (1997), 81.

¹⁵ Elisa Miller, “In the Name of the Home: Women, Domestic Science and American Higher Education, 1865-1930” (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 2004),

¹⁶ Elisa Miller, *In the Name of the Home: Women, Domestic Science and American Higher Education, 1865-1930* (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 2004)

¹⁷ Morrill Act 1862 cited in Ralph D. Christy and Lionel Williamson, *A Century of Service: Land Grant Colleges and Universities, 1890-1990* (New Brunswick/London: Transaction Publishers, 1992), 3

The only African American institutions to receive funding through the Morrill Act of 1862 were Alcorn State Agricultural and Mechanical College, Mississippi, Claflin, South Carolina, and Hampton, Virginia.¹⁸ The 1890 Morrill Act provided African Americans greater access to funds, which supported the public education system but specifically in agricultural and mechanical programs. At this time, sixteen African American institutions of higher education benefitted from the 1890 land-grant status, including Tuskegee Institute. Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute became a land-grant college in 1920 due to the efforts of President John Gandy.¹⁹ Almost all the country's land-grant schools and even others not designated as such, including VNII, added programs related to industry such as domestic science or as it was sometimes called, home economics, by 1905. Land grant status would have opened up avenues of funding for VNII yet reinforced the practical arts and areas of study. VNII was strongly influenced by mandates regarding education programs made by the state—the main source of its funds—and as such was vulnerable to changing government ideology. Although domestic science appears to have dominated the program intended to train teachers within the Normal School of VNII, it is clear that there were two simultaneously occurring and opposing agendas in practice, suggesting that the Victorian attitude of improving morals and behavior could coexist with notions of the importance of academic training and teaching of culture to individuals who would lead the race.

Although initially a supporter of the training in exemplary moral behavior and manners, Du Bois had raised the issue of culture in 1896 elevating the notion of moral education into something grander, which encompassed the physical, the moral and the

¹⁸ Ralph D. Christy and Lionel Williamson, *A Century of Service: Land Grant Colleges and Universities, 1890-1990* (New Brunswick/London: Transaction Publishers, 1992), 3. Alcorn State University History online at <http://www.alcorn.edu> Claflin added a separate school to the original college, South Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical Institute, enabling accessibility to state and federal funds. Accessed online at <http://www.claflin.edu/about-claflin/claflin-history>, (Jan. 23, 2014).

¹⁹ Adam Fairclough, *A Class of Their Own*, 164-65.

mental but translated into the philosophical stance of the Good the True and the Beautiful. The Beautiful was, he argued, “one of the great ends of life,” and all men can train themselves to “appreciate the beautiful things in life and discover hidden beauties around him.”²⁰ Art, Du Bois offered, is measured by our emotions, and it was therefore critical that perception and appreciation form part of a youth’s training.²¹ Du Bois was looking to train specialized individuals “with intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it.” These individuals would constitute what Du Bois called the ‘Talented Tenth’ and would be “leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people.” Among these ‘Talented Tenth’ would be teachers and the teachers of teachers, whose task would be to eliminate ignorance and to transmit “knowledge of life and its wider meaning,” and to impart the skills necessary to earn a living. It was through these exceptional men that the masses would be guided.²² While Du Bois spoke only of male members of the Talented Tenth the irony was that with increasing numbers of women in the teaching profession it was in fact they who would lead, and they who would be the most visible members of a Talented Tenth. ²³ Amaza Lee and Edna Colson provide tangible proof in support of this argument.

In 1906 Du Bois reiterated his earlier conceived ideas about liberal education, arguing that the way to overcome differences within American society between whites and blacks and dissolve what he called the “color line,” would be, in creating out of black youth “men of power, of thought, of trained and cultivated taste; men who know whither

²⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Art Galleries of Modern Europe (ca. 1896),” in Herbert Aptheker, (ed.) *W.E.B. Du Bois, Against Racism: Unpublished Essays, Papers, Address, 1887-1961* (Amherst, NH: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 33-34.

²¹ Arnold Rampersad, *The Art And Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 1.

²² W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth,” (1903) reprinted in Nathan Huggins, ed. *W.E.B. Du Bois: Writings* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1986), 842-853.

²³ See Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 41.

civilization is tending and what it means.”²⁴ Du Bois was nevertheless convinced of the urgency for a more aggressive approach and in 1905 formalized his dissent from Washington’s program by forming, with a group of like-minded leading intellectuals what was called the Niagara Movement, opposed to racial segregation and disenfranchisement. Members of this group went on to form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the key movement in the vanguard for civil rights activism in 1909.²⁵ Some members of the Niagara Movement, John Hope, for example, Chairman of the Niagara Movement Education Committee, would employ culture as a political tool intended to improve race relations, while creating a class of blacks equipped to compete in the upper echelons of society where culture played a significant role in distinguishing class.²⁶ But as James Weldon Johnson remarked of the Niagara Movement, it created a split between those who continued to push for a cautionary approach and those who believed a more aggressive stance necessary to undermine and eventually eradicate African American oppression. On Washington’s death in 1915, Du Bois praised the leader for “paving the way for an understanding between the white and darker races,” and in helping African Americans accumulate land and property.²⁷ But he argued that Washington’s program for improving race relations and lifting African Americans out of the legacy of slavery was seriously flawed, and now outdated. Du Bois believed that Washington had failed to understand “the

²⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Hampton Idea,” in Herbert Aptheker, ed. *W.E.B. Du Bois, The Education of Black Folk: Ten Critiques, 1906-1930* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973, 2001), 30.

²⁵ LeRoy Davis, *Clashing of the Soul: John Hope and the Dilemma of African American Leadership and Education in the Early Twentieth Century* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 189.

²⁶ For a detailed overview of the movement see Elliott M. Rudwick, “The Niagara Movement,” *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Jul., 1957), pp. 177-200; For the backlash and potentially conspiratory nature of the meeting see Christopher E. Forth, “Booker T. Washington and the 1905 Niagara Movement Conference,” *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 72, No. ¾ (Summer- Autumn, 1987), pp. 45-56; for detailed analysis of individual members and Du Bois’ relationship to them see Dominic J. Capeci, Jr. and Jack C. Knight, “W.E.B. Du Bois’ Southern Front: Georgia “Race Men” and the Niagara Movement, 1905-1907,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 83, No. 3 (Fall 1999), pp. 479-507.

²⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Obituary of Booker T. Washington,” Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 171.

growing bond between politics and industry,” and the importance of a true college education for blacks.²⁸

Amaza Lee was caught up in the ideological tensions that existed between teaching practical skills and preparing intellectual thinkers. She witnessed the changes that John Gandy and his faculty were slowly implementing from 1919 when she was studying for her Professional Teaching Certificate at VNII. In 1923, Gandy convinced the State Board of Governors to re-instate the College Department. Once this had been achieved, the school re-established a student-run newsletter and re-activated the dormant fraternity and sorority chapters, all of which suggested a move towards greater student autonomy.²⁹ He nevertheless walked a fine line between implementing progress and abiding by state mandated requirements for African American education. In 1930 Gandy wrote to the State Board of Education representative Dr. Thomas D. Eason, thanking him for his support in moving Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute towards higher standards. It is clear, however that the standards expected for the education of African Americans leaned in the direction of fulfilling requirements of industry in supplying skilled workers. Gandy sought to assure the Board of Education of his intentions to comply with these expectations by working to improve the courses in mechanical, industrial arts and agricultural training:

We are still happy over the information that your letter of February 7th brought to us regarding the action of the state board of education in listing this institution in the class of standard college. This listing will enable us to make a much stronger appeal to the graduates of the high schools of the state. I want to ensure you that we shall do everything in our power to live up to the standards that are expected of those schools listed in standard colleges. We are now working on plans to improve our work in agriculture,

²⁸ Du Bois, “Obituary of Booker T. Washington,” Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Souls of Black Folk*, 171.

²⁹ See *The Crater Scroll*, June 1924, online at <http://HBCUdigitallibrary.auctr.edu> (accessed October 8, 2012).

trades and industries and home economics...You have always been a great friend to the development of this institution, do accept our very great appreciation for all you have done to bring us up to the present stage of development.³⁰

While president Gandy attempted to balance the need to conform in order to receive continued funding, with the desire to provide African Americans with an education that would raise them above the basic standards of employment, less prominent individuals such as Amaza Lee were freer to demand a better standard of education. She would learn this as she improved her own training. Moving up from teaching elementary school to take up a position as a Math teacher at the newly opened Dunbar High School, a four-year secondary school run predominantly by white teachers in Lynchburg, brought an increase in salary, but more importantly exposed Amaza Lee to new ideologies, as she would teach alongside the newly appointed librarian, Anne Spencer a published Harlem Renaissance poet.³¹ Anne was in fact connected to Amaza Lee through marriage — Anne's husband's brother married Amaza Lee's sister Cora Belle —but she was also an important mentor, introducing her to a wider world of politics and culture and perhaps opening her mind to the possibilities for which women might strive.³² According to her biographer, Anne was a strong-minded independent woman, who, while choosing a traditional female path, marrying and bearing children, also sought to distinguish herself as a modern woman, stepping outside the domestic sphere to fight for local social and civil rights for African Americans and establishing a career.³³ Anne's education had prepared her for such roles.

³⁰ John Gandy to Dr. Thomas D. Eason, Secretary, State Board of Education, Richmond; Feb. 15, 1930. John Gandy Papers, VSU.

³¹ J. Lee Greene, *Time's Unfading Garden: Anne Spencer's Life and Poetry* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 83.

³² Amaza Lee Meredith, biographical notes indicate that Anne Spencer was her mentor. Virginia State Archives

³³ Greene writes that Spencer was active at Jackson High School where many of the teachers were white — the students were black — yet black teachers remained unemployed,. She organized a campaign bombarding

From 1893 to 1899 she had been a student at the Lynchburg Seminary, an institution established by the white Baptist Church in the 1880s. Anne was influenced by the doctrine of the Reverend Gregory Hayes, its second and longest-serving president, who instilled in the students the sentiment of self-help.³⁴ In turn, Anne practiced this ideological position, through her work as a full-time librarian at Dunbar High School, encouraging students to explore the world of books and urging them to study beyond high school. She also volunteered at the Lynchburg Seminary to support student reading, and campaigned to acquire books to establish a self-standing public library for African Americans in Lynchburg.³⁵

The most significant political act Anne Spencer undertook was in helping establish a local division of the NAACP.³⁶ When James Weldon Johnson, a field worker for the NAACP, travelled to Lynchburg in 1919 to organize an affiliation between the national and local groups, it is possible that he came on the recommendation of Eugene Kinkle Jones. Jones was a native of Richmond, close friend of Mary McCrae Hayes of Lynchburg, Anne Spencer, and Amaza Lee Meredith's family.³⁷ Kinkle was also Executive Secretary of the National Urban League under Charles S. Johnson and had helped found the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity

the local paper and public offices with letters demanding removal of white teachers from the black school. See Greene, *Time's Unfading Garden: Anne Spencer's Life and Poetry*, 87. An incident related by Greene refers to Spencer and her sister-in-law, Cora Belle Meredith Spencer— who while dressed in their finery sat in the white section of the trolley and refused to move – much to the anger of the driver who called them “nigger washerwomen.”

³⁴ F. Erik Brooks, Glenn L. Starks, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: An Encyclopedia* p. 105.

³⁵ J. Lee Greene, *Time's Unfading Garden: Anne Spencer's Life and Poetry* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 85-86.

³⁶ It is possible that Anne Spencer's mother and Emma Kenney were known to each other prior to Cora's marriage to Nelson Payne Spencer, Anne's brother-in-law. When Emma Kenney and Samuel Meredith traveled to the World's Fair they may have gone with a group from Lynchburg. According to Anne, when her mother Sarah Bethel registered her at the Lynchburg Seminary, she too, went to the World's Fair." See J. Lee Green, *Times Unfading Garden*, 21.

³⁷ Carrie Allen McCray, *Freedom's Child: The Life of a Confederate General's Black Daughter* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1998), McCray tells the story of her grandmother and her mother who was active in Lynchburg in helping to establish civil rights support networks and together with her close friend Anne Spencer, the local chapter of the NAACP. Eugene Kinkle is mentioned in the biography as a family friend. He is also mentioned in letters to Amaza Lee from her sister Maude Terry. See specifically chapter 19.

chapter at Cornell together with Henry Callis, who later married Myra Colson, Edna Colson's sister. Thus the complex network of black intellectuals working to free African Americans from the continuing oppression of Jim Crow laws, and white prejudice is not surprisingly revealed to be a tight-knit circle. Those who had been educated to a high degree and considered themselves part of an aspiring middle-class were still a relatively small group. Many had studied together or were part of fraternal or sorority networks; some had close family and social ties.

Anne Spencer greeted James W. Johnson on his arrival in Lynchburg, inviting him to stay with her family, which was no doubt gratefully accepted as public accommodation for traveling blacks was prohibited in most southern towns, resulting in a forced reliance on the generosity of strangers. In some instances these places were given the nickname of "Do Drop Inns."³⁸ Two years prior to his trip to Lynchburg, Johnson had published his first book of poetry *Fifty Years and Other Poems* and it was perhaps with this on his mind that during Johnson's stay with the Spencer family, talk turned to poetry and Johnson discovered that Anne too was a poet. On his return to New York, he disseminated some of Anne's poems to those white philanthropists and editors who supported Harlem Renaissance writers. Johnson's visit and the developing friendship with Anne Spencer would lead to the development of her home as a salon for the conduit of political and cultural ideas, and a space for artistic mentoring.³⁹ Other literary and visual artists came to know of Spencer through the salon network as well as through James W. Johnson personally. Alain Locke, and Langston Hughes, in particular became her close friends and stalwart supporters of her

³⁸ Stephanie Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to be and to Do* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), 43.

³⁹ See Michael Krasner, "Dark Tower and the Saturday Nighters: Salons as Themes in African American Drama," *American Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2 Spring/Summer 2008.

work.⁴⁰ In Washington, D.C. the writer and poet Georgia Douglas Johnson also had a salon in which literary and visual artists met. Guests at the “Halfway House” to which it was fondly referred because it was “a place where anyone who would fight to survive could do so,” included Langston Hughes, Alain Locke, W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Richard Bruce Nugent, and Marita Bonner.⁴¹

Anne Spencer’s story provides insight into the reach of African American intellectuals, and members of the Harlem Renaissance across areas not geographically contiguous but connected by networks of individuals and groups. Anne had met W.E.B. Dubois in 1897 while a student at Lynchburg Seminary. She had been visiting a school friend in Farmville, Virginia at the time that Du Bois was completing his study on rural life.⁴² It seems, however, that he did not see her again until the late 1920s, curious about the woman she had become, he had expressed his interest to Georgia Douglas, who wrote to Spencer that “Dr Du Bois was very anxious to see you, he had heard James Johnson talk about you and wants to see you.”⁴³ Many of the leading cultural figures of the Harlem Renaissance came to visit Anne having learned of her through their network.⁴⁴ Although Amaza Lee is a silent figure in the circles of the Harlem Renaissance, they must surely have influenced her through her connection to Anne Spencer. After working only a few years at

⁴⁰ Letters from James W. Johnson are clearly endearing; Langston Hughes’ letters inform her of her works’ publication in Spanish, mention his having seen her daughter Alroy, and send wishes to ‘Woogie’ a family nickname for Edward Spencer. See Anne Spencer Papers, MSS 14204, Box 4, Correspondence: folder 3, 1928-1966. University of Virginia, Special Collections.

⁴¹ Krasner, “Dark Tower and the Saturday Nighters: Salons as Themes in African American Drama,” *American Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2 Spring/Summer 2008, p.81-2.

⁴² J. Lee Green, *Times Unfading Garden*, 33. Du Bois was working on his study later published as *The Negroes of Farmville, Virginia*,” *Bulletin of the Department of Labor* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), III, 1-38.

⁴³ Georgia Douglas Johnson to Anne Spencer, - 1927, Papers of Anne Spencer and the Spencer Family, 1829, 1864-2007, Accession 14204, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

⁴⁴ Letters to Anne Spencer from Charles Johnson, December 31, 1923. Letter to Anne Spencer from Georgia Douglas Johnson, - 1924, Papers of Anne Spencer and the Spencer Family, 1829, 1864-2007, Accession 14204, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

Dunbar High School, Amaza Lee made the decision to go to New York to study for a Bachelor's degree in Fine Art at Columbia Teachers College. It is also possible, however, that the idea had been suggested when Amaza Lee was still at VNII while faculty were looking to increase accreditation and seeking ways to increase teacher qualifications above and beyond the typical high school diploma or teaching certificates.

When Amaza Lee graduated with her BA in Fine Art in 1930, she returned to Petersburg to find that President John Gandy had succeeded in reinstating the college curriculum to Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute and changing its name to Virginia State College for Negroes. The *Chicago Defender* announced that Virginia State College was to begin its forty-seventh academic year with the largest student body in the history of the institution — a freshman class numbered 200 students — and many new faculty appointments arrived from higher education training in northern colleges and universities to take up positions.⁴⁵ Amaza Lee was hired to teach a course in art studio and art appreciation. The introduction of this new course coincided with the construction of a new “Home Economics” building supported by state funds and intended for students to practice the skills needed to work as cooks, seamstresses, and in other areas of domestic service.⁴⁶ The visual message sent by the construction of a new building dedicated to domestic science cannot be understated, in light of Gandy's letter to the State Board of Education assuring them of his commitment to promote the industrial arts, agriculture and home economics for black students. Introducing the instruction of fine art into the curriculum demonstrates the fine line which existed between the type of training Amaza Lee had received in Fine Art at Columbia Teachers College in the School of Practical Arts and the practical application of the arts as a trade. Amaza Lee had written to Edna in 1929

⁴⁵ *Chicago Defender*, “Virginia State Opens with Strong New Faculty,” Oct 4, 1930.

⁴⁶ *The Virginia Statesman*, February 14, 1931 New Buildings on Grounds of Virginia State.”

explaining that she was taking a course in Industrial Arts to “determine the relationship between teaching Fine Art and Industrial Arts.”⁴⁷ Teachers College was one of the educational institutions at which Domestic Science was taught, initially as a subject area from which to develop social reform, but then, in the first decade of the twentieth century the college developed into a two-school system, namely the School of Education and the School of Practical Arts, both of which prepared students for professional employment and included courses in domestic science. The School of Practical Arts’ Department of Household Arts provided courses ranging from Home Economics to Textiles and Clothing Arts, and others that focused on the principles of fine arts and their application in the design of the house, the grounds, furniture, furnishings and clothing. With such preparation, students were expected to enter careers as designers in business and industry.⁴⁸ Amaza Lee took art structure, clay modeling, blackboard drawing, painting, drawing, metalwork and silversmithery, problems in art education, print study in appreciation, costume study and design, advanced painting out of doors, and geometrical and perspectival drawing.⁴⁹ Returning to Virginia, Amaza Lee was given the opportunity to offer courses in studio art under the department of Home Economics, courses, which nevertheless signaled a new educational path intended to open up employment opportunities beyond the typical areas of domestic labor and trades. Her vision was published in the school bulletin in December 1931 in which new courses were announced:

Among several new courses added to the course of study is a class in art, designed to cultivate an appreciation for the aesthetic taught by Amaza Meredith. Miss Meredith is very anxious that students include this subject in

⁴⁷ Amaza Lee to Edna, N.Y.C., Jan 27, 1929. Colson Hill Papers:1834-1984 Box 29 Correspondence, Colson/Meredith folder 5. VSU Archives.

⁴⁸ B.R. Andrews, *Pioneering in Home Economics*, (Teachers College, ca. 1912), 30-33, cited in Elisa Miller, “In the Name of the Home: Women, Domestic Science and American Higher Education, 1865-1930,” (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 2004), 148.

⁴⁹ Amaza Lee Meredith Transcripts, Columbia Teachers College, 1928-1930. Teachers College Archives, New York.

their winter quarter schedule. She feels that through this subject and related Art courses, the student will be given an opportunity to create objects that will be a contribution to the world of Art. She believes further that students at State like other college students have the ability to develop along these lines.⁵⁰

The suggestion here is that Virginia State students could compete, at the least, with students graduating from other black colleges for employment as artists and designers in the new fields of illustration and industrial design. While such employment suggests African Americans were still training for service industries, the new opportunities in industrial design would have been considered as professional rather than manual status. Reinforcing their desire to see training for skilled labor the Board of Education took control of the administration of Virginia State College for Negroes and the State Superintendent wrote the following report:

The state board of education in assuming the direction and control of the Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute at Petersburg, Virginia, which is the Land-grant College for Negroes, desires to record this general policy for the school. The board will emphasize the need for development of agriculture and industrial training. The institution has made very considerable progress in the development of its academic and classical courses. These are of practical service in teacher training, but the institution has not developed the vocational and industrial types of education in harmony with the general idea that the school is the agricultural college for Negroes. The Board therefore desires to encourage particularly the erection of a satisfactory agricultural building, the development of agricultural courses, and the use of the school farm for more practical purposes in connection with agricultural instruction. The Board will emphasis also the immediate development of a trade and industrial program on a sound basis. While the Board views with interest the development of academic and classical instruction at this institution, it is of the opinion that for the larger

⁵⁰ *The Virginia Statesman*, December 19, 1931. Virginia State College for Negroes.

service to the state and for the practical and immediate benefit of Negro students, vocational and industrial training must be distinctly emphasized.⁵¹

Other instructors who had taken a leave of absence to study at Columbia Teachers College or similar Northern institutions of higher education were also returning to develop new courses. Among Amaza Lee's colleagues were Ida Garrison who returned to a post on the faculty of the Education Department, Undine A. Smith who had studied music at Columbia in 1930, returned to Virginia to teach music, later going back to New York to study for an MA in Music Education. Columbia took pride in these students fêting their achievements publicly in the college newsletter in which both their individual graduation and successful employment were announced.⁵² The experience of going north to Columbia Teachers College for those young female African American students from Southern Normal and Industrial Institutes was life changing. For once they were not regarded as in need of 'civilizing,' but as young women on the cusp of professional careers, and as agents of uplift.⁵³ By this time, most states required teachers to possess certificates or degrees in higher education, that is, either a Bachelor's or Master's degree.⁵⁴ But African Americans themselves were acutely aware of the importance of keeping abreast of new trends in education and ensuring that they received the training available. Such concerns had always been at the core of African American efforts towards self-determination through education.

⁵¹ Extract from Minutes, State Board of Education superintendent of Instruction Report, October 23, 1930. Office of the Treasurer/Business Manager, VSU RG 3. Box 31. VSU Archives.

⁵² *The Campus Review*, November 1, 1930. The *Teacher's Record* report from the Bureau of Education Service noted an increase in placement of students: "Amaza Lee Meredith had moved from teaching Math at Dunbar High school, Lynchburg to being Director of Art at Virginia State College," see *Teachers College Record* Vol. 32, No. 5 1930, p. 485.

⁵³ Elisa Miller, "In the Name of the Home: Women, Domestic Science and American Higher Education, 1865-1930," (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 2004), 135.

⁵⁴ National Education Association, *Research Bulletin, January 1932* (Washington D.C.: National Education Association, 1932), 5.

At the turn of the century, for example, faculty at Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (VNCI) had determined that teachers were “not being sufficiently exposed to ‘modern methods.’” One of such methods was training in the language of “picture study.”⁵⁵ It was found for example, that, at the time, no history of art existed in either the college course curriculum or the normal curriculum, and “the young women in the training school were found to be deficient in knowledge of the masterpieces selected for study in the grades.”⁵⁶ The practice of ‘picture study,’ “was a pedagogical approach to art that was in many ways, typically American, an attempt to deal with art in a democratic manner, to take it away from an aristocratic European tradition;” it was an effort to “bring art from the salons of the rich and upper class into the schools, and thus to all Americans.”⁵⁷ First introduced in America by the Boston Public School Art League in the 1890s, and quickly adopted by other organizations as the practice of decorating schoolrooms with reproductions of artworks in order to “promote artistic culture,” picture study in America resembled the efforts of the Art for Schools Association, United Kingdom, led by John Ruskin.⁵⁸ The practice fell out of favor towards the end of the 1920s, most likely due to the diminishing interest in art in education as a spiritual and moral virtue.⁵⁹ Some scholars have argued that picture study developed as a result of new and improved technologies of reproduction and the dissemination of images, an increased interest in art after the Columbian Exposition of 1893, idealism in the philosophy of education and aesthetic theories, an increased number of women teachers, and growing numbers of immigrant children in schools who “understood the language of

⁵⁵ “History of the 1915 Session,” Papers of the Colson-Hill Family, Series VI, Literary, Diaries, Autograph Books, Notebooks, Speeches and Writings, Sub-Series D: Writings and Speeches, Box 63: folder 10.

⁵⁶ “History of the 1915 Session,” Papers of the Colson-Hill Family, Series VI, Literary, Diaries, Autograph Books, Notebooks, Speeches and Writings, Sub-Series D: Writings and Speeches, Box 63: folder 10.

⁵⁷ Peter Smith, *The History of American Art Education: Learning About Art in American Schools* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 80.

⁵⁸ Arthur D. Efland, *The History of Art Education: Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching the Visual Arts* (New York and London: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1990), 146.

⁵⁹ Efland, *History of Art Education: Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching the Visual Arts*, 146.

pictures better than English.”⁶⁰ However, Peter Smith specifically argues for the role of Oscar W. Neale — an early twentieth century director of rural education and a school superintendent in the mid-west — as the foremost promoter of picture study methods. In his work in the rural schools Neale had realized that the public education system’s emphasis on the three ‘R’s,’ was inadequate as a basis for universal education. What was lacking in both teacher training and in children’s education was an introduction to the arts. A specific incident had led to Neale’s realization: In a one-room rural school he had discovered that lacking other aesthetically valuable educational visual aids, a young teacher had covered her classroom walls with “pictures clipped from the pages of a dressmaker’s magazine.” On the basis of this experience, Neale began traveling the country with a set of reproduced images and a phonograph, giving talks about the arts, a practice he continued from ca. 1900 through the 1930’s.⁶¹ Such practices may also have been the result of Hampton Institute’s recommendation to county teachers to improve their classrooms with whatever they might have to hand.⁶² Sociological studies of the conditions in which African Americans lived provided documentation to support requests for improvement, and often mentioned the presence of pictures decorating the interiors in homes and schools.

For example, Charles S. Johnson, sociologist, president of the Urban League and editor of its literary mouthpiece, *Opportunity*, found in a study of tenant farmers in Macon County, Alabama, that the interior of the modest cabins he encountered were decorated with pictures from newspapers, possibly serving to reinforce images from a world that

⁶⁰ Peter Smith cites the widespread use of picture study as illustrated by various scholars see for example J.G. Morrison, *Children’s Preferences for Pictures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935); M.A. Stankiewicz, “The Printed Image and Art Education,” paper presented at the NAEA Conference, Detroit, MI, March 1983; Robert Saunders, *A History of Teaching Art Appreciation in the Public Schools*, in D.W. Ecker (ed.) *Improving the Teaching of Art Appreciation* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, 1966), 1-47; and Stankiewicz, “A Picture Age: Reproductions in Picture Study,” *Studies in Art Education*, 26 (2): 86-92. All in Peter Smith, *The History of American Art Education: Learning About Art in American Schools* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 80.

⁶¹ Smith, *The History of American Art Education: Learning About Art in American Schools*, 81-84.

⁶² See Southern Workman, May 1874 cited in Fairclough, *A Class of their Own*, 154-155.

remained largely out of reach, but also as a means to embellish the meager shelter's interior.⁶³ Johnson writes: "Some pride of home has gone into the effort to select newspapers with colored pictures for the wall covering, and to keep it reasonably fresh."⁶⁴ Author and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, also described a similar practice among the average African American, explaining it as a typical interest in aesthetics, or "a will to adorn," as she called it:

I saw in Mobile a room in which there was an overstuffed mohair living-room suite, an imitation mahogany bed and chifforobe, a console victrola. The walls were gaily papered with Sunday supplements of the *Mobile Register*. There were seven calendars and three wall pockets... It was grotesque, yes. But it indicated the desire for beauty.⁶⁵

Such attempts to 'decorate' the walls of cabins were also documented in 1930s and '40s Farm Administration Photographs of rural blacks and their homes [figure 3-1, 3-2]. It could be argued of course that these so-called decorative efforts might have simply been a practical solution to a lack of insulation, but they nevertheless would have had a visual impact on their inhabitants. Such interior decoration has appeared in the paintings of twentieth century African American artists, such as Eldzier Cortor, whose work is often depicted as representing an intimate portrait of African American life [figure 3-3].

The practice of picture study in the early twentieth century focused on representational content but whereas the academies of art would employ master works for students to mimic, here the use of reproductions of those masterpieces as well as popular images for the general public, including children, complicates the issue of what might be

⁶³ Johnson argued that African American tenant farmers were so economically deprived that they had no possibility of contributing to society. See Johnson, *In the Shadow of the Plantation* (Piscataway, NY: Transaction Publishers, 1934)

⁶⁴ Charles S. Johnson, *In the Shadow of the Plantation* (Piscataway, NY: Transaction Publishers, 1934) 92.

⁶⁵ Zora Neale Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression," in Winston Napier (ed.) *African American Literary Theory: A Reader* (New York; New York University Press, 2000), 32.

valued as art. Clement Greenberg would later dismiss the value of such art calling it a “crude version” extracted from the “academized simulacra of the genuine art of the past,” representing “a constant seepage from top to bottom,” with ‘Kitsch’ the common sewer.”⁶⁶ Greenberg however was writing at a time when popular realist art had come to define both the production and reception of American art. At this earlier moment in the twentieth century, in the absence of access to great art works from history, mass reproductions of such works served a moral and nationalistic purpose. As Oscar Neale argued, picture study served in the grade and high schools and in some instances, colleges, as a means to:

...develop in the children of our schools an appreciation of the great masterpieces of art so that they may know the joy that comes from such an appreciation and so that their ideas may be influenced by the patriotism, the piety and the beauty which the great artists of different ages have given the world.⁶⁷

Studying the canon, even in reproduced form served to teach all Americans the value of art both as a practical tool and on a more intellectual level in the appreciation of culture. Practical application of the knowledge of art occurred in courses of industrial drawing. Even though there were drawbacks to mandated industrial arts studies, as was the case in many African American schools and colleges at this time, because it competed with more academic study, there were nevertheless some advantages too. Industrial drawing had, in fact, been universally introduced into public school curricula through legislative decree in 1870. Lobbied for by local manufacturers, The Massachusetts Free Instruction in Drawing Act of 1870 was intended to support the production of goods of a quality competitive with European manufacturing. Massachusetts’s manufacturers hoped the bill would close the gap in international trade, for, they argued that:

⁶⁶ John O’Brian ed. *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume I, Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), xxii.

⁶⁷ Oscar W. Neale, “Preface,” *Picture Study in the Grades* (1927) quoted in Smith, *The History of American Art Education*, 82.

...in all the manufacturing countries of Europe free provision is made for instructing workmen of all classes in drawing. At this time almost all the best draughts men in our shops are thus trained abroad.

And that:

Changes to the public education system in England produced the result that...boys and girls, by the time they are sixteen years of age, acquire great proficiency in mechanical drawing and in other arts of design.⁶⁸

Thirty years prior to the Free Instructional Drawing Act of 1870, educator Horace Mann had argued that the importance of drawing instruction in schools went far beyond the simple “ability to represent by lines and shadows what no words can depict.” The value in such ability lay in what it taught the individual about observation. Through observing to draw the individual was developing a new talent, or a new sense, “by means of which he is not only better enabled to attend to the common duties of life, and to be more serviceable to his fellow men... but he is more likely to appreciate the beauties of nature...” There was a religious component to this notion of a new “sense” in the individual’s ability to appreciate the “glories of the Creator” as Mann put it, “into his soul.”⁶⁹ Art instruction was regarded as a kind of training that included art appreciation and could be a transformative process affecting the way individuals functioned in society. It is of no small consequence that Amaza Lee would train for her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Fine Art and Art Education at Columbia Teacher’s College where her mentor, Associate Professor Belle Boas, was also Art Director of the Horace Mann School.

In 1901 the year before Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute was renamed

⁶⁸ P. Bolin, “Drawing Interpretation: An Examination of the 1870 Massachusetts Act Relating to Free Instruction in Drawing.” Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR (1986): 74-75, cited in Smith, *The History of American Art Education* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 27-28.

⁶⁹ Horace Mann, “Seventh Annual Report to the Board of Education of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, April 15, 1884, *Common School Journal*, cited in Smith, *The History of American Art Education*, 28.

Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute with the requisite manual arts curriculum, the question had become one of how to supplement or provide a course of study in the teacher-training department that would include art, in order for teachers to gain the knowledge that they could then relay to their charges.⁷⁰ Principal of the Normal School, Della I. Hayden, proposed the creation of an informal art club. The purpose of such a club would be to allow members to “become familiar with masterpieces of artists of all nations.” Thus, Tanner Art Club was officially constituted the following year and continued until at least 1915.⁷¹ The establishment of a club was a subversive attempt to perpetuate a focus on the liberal arts within the newly prescribed manual arts curriculum. Clearly, VNII faculty members were reluctant to relinquish the training of youth suited to a higher standard of living. Moreover, by establishing a ‘club,’ which has the private, elitist connotations of a salon, members of the faculty at VNII imagined themselves as a bourgeois elite executing their duty in providing access to more dignified opportunities than those presented by an industrial course in domestic science or home economics, as it was sometime called. The nature of art education was filled with contradictions at this time: On the one hand it was understood to be necessary to cultivate designers in a climate in which products by skilled artisans had been replaced by poor factory made goods, but for African Americans trying to redefine themselves, a knowledge of fine art could lift them out of the manual labor field and into the professions. This change would take time and a series of dramatic events that would transform American and African American attitudes to society.

World war was a major defining factor in changing American society in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Black soldiers returning in 1919 from fighting the Great

⁷⁰ “History of the 1915 Session,” Papers of the Colson-Hill Family, Series VI, Literary, Diaries, Autograph Books, Notebooks, Speeches and Writings, Sub-Series D: Writings and Speeches, Box 63: folder 10.

⁷¹ It is not clear how long the club operated as no further mention of it in the University archives has been found to this date.

War overseas, quickly grew despondent at finding little change in the way they were treated once home. In the South in particular, they were quickly disabused of any sense of entitlement of equality they may have felt having fought alongside their white countrymen.⁷² Black women too suffered in witnessing the destruction and devastation of their communities as their men returned home wounded and reticent about their experiences, or worse did not return at all. Amaza Lee found the war distressing from several perspectives; her experience drives home the impact the war had on the African American community from which so many men were drafted. Amaza Lee wrote to Edna Colson how distressing the war was for her:

Do you know, this war is just beginning to come home to me? I have read barrels of stuff about it, but not until I went home and saw hundreds of soldiers, did I really realize. And one thing that “got me” was to see the home fellows come in and pull out their papers. That thing “somewhere in France” gets on my nerve; it really goes against the grain. No one even speaks of anything else. And have you noticed the development of race hatred on the part of the Negroes? I think it is becoming very pronounced.⁷³

Racial distrust began before the war had ended and became more pronounced as soldiers returned home. Such tensions and hostility had also produced a powerful new Ku Klux Klan.⁷⁴ Mob violence across the South, resulted in the rampant lynching of black men, and prompting leaders to call for stronger resistance and pull together to fight for democracy. Writing in the official NAACP journal *The Crisis*, W.E.B. Du Bois, declared “we are cowards and jackasses if...we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a

⁷² A student at South Carolina at the time reported that local whites jeered at returning soldiers to: “Take those uniforms off and act like a nigger.” See Benjamin E. Mays, *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 68 cited in Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 102.

⁷³ Amaza Lee to Edna Colson, October 1, 1918, Lynchburg, VA. AML Papers, Accession # 1982-20, Box 29.

⁷⁴ Nina Mjagkil, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 102.

sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land.”⁷⁵ Du

Bois’ fighting words struck a nerve and sparked bloody race riots across the nation, earning the period the moniker “Red Summer.” Government policies towards the riots only served to compound the situation as fears relating to the Russian Bolshevik revolution of a couple of years earlier unleashed federal investigations that targeted individuals presumed to have socialist, communist, anarchist or unionist leanings. African Americans engaged in militant action fell easy prey to the label of subversives or Bolshevik troublemakers.⁷⁶

Across the country African American intellectuals sought ways in which to promote the visibility of a newly educated, more worldly and modern generation, while improving individual and group self-esteem and developing race relations on a footing that demonstrated less of an inclination to accommodate the whims of whites.⁷⁷ By the 1920s many African Americans had joined the “Great Migration” uprooting from their rural Southern homes, to pioneer whole new townships in Oklahoma and Kansas.⁷⁸ Others sought better living conditions free from the Jim Crow legislation, and new economic opportunity in the Northern cities.⁷⁹ This exodus transformed a predominantly rural population into an urban, one providing them with the opportunity to become part of the larger capitalist enterprise, to assume a more prominent role in the social and cultural modernization of

⁷⁵ W.E.B Du Bois, "Returning Soldiers," *The Crisis*, 18 (May, 1919), 13.

⁷⁶ Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 102-103.

⁷⁷ Scholars have recently credited Booker T. Washington’s accommodationist strategies as the foundation for the militant confrontational Civil Rights Movement, of the 1960s. His apparently non-heroic strategies nevertheless “enabled black Southerners to survive and make incremental gains, but also subtly challenged and subverted the principles and foundations of white supremacy.” See Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, p. xiii.

⁷⁸ Nicodemus Kansas is one black town that has recently been revitalized and designated a National Historic Site by the National Park Service.

⁷⁹ Many of the letters from those already established in the North to their fellows back in the South pleaded with them to come North and join them, singing the joys of freedom and possibility in the urban centers. See “Letters from Southern African Americans to the *Chicago Defender* (1917),” and Letters from African Americans Printed in Southern Papers,” in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Jennifer Burton, (eds.) *Call and Response: Key Debates in African American Studies* (New York/London: W. W. Norton, 2011), 251-258.

America, and to find the opportunity to re-imagine themselves.⁸⁰

In the south though, changes were also occurring at African American institutions of higher education, where students began to rebel, refusing to comply any longer with patronizing white supremacist regulations. Having begun to bubble in 1919, riots erupted in 1924 at Fisk University, as students and faculty staunchly opposed their white president who had been thought to sacrifice his integrity by bowing to white donors' demands. In seeking funds McKenzie had told financial backers that the university was not departing too far from the Tuskegee model of industrial education, despite its a liberal arts origins; he also endorsed the notion of segregation as the only solution to the black problem.⁸¹ One of the most vocal challengers to the situation at Fisk was prominent alumnus, W.E. B. Du Bois.⁸² He took a stand against the patriarchal and condescending attitude of philanthropic and governmental organizations whose coffers had funded African American education. A decade or two earlier, Du Bois had agreed that the teaching of Victorian values and adherence to Christian piety was acceptable and even a necessity for the first generation of blacks attending college. But by the 1920s, he argued, the young students at Fisk were "free men not freedmen" and deserved to be accorded the freedom and self-respect that was due them.⁸³ Students vehemently rejected regulations such as requiring attendance at daily

⁸⁰ Fairclough, *Better Day Coming*, 90.

⁸¹ Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s*, 33-34.

⁸² Du Bois had been alerted to the situation by Etnah Rochon Boutte, executive secretary to the Circle for War Relief, a group that monitored the treatment of black soldiers, and was also the wife of Captain Virgil M. Boutte of Louisiana, a Fisk graduate and accompanied Du Bois on trips to France, while attached to the Visitor's Bureau during Armistice, although he likely knew him as an alumnus of Fisk. Etnah Boutte had written to Du Bois explaining that a nephew of hers was currently studying at Fisk and visited her in New York during the holidays. See Etnah Rochon Boutte to W.E.B. Du Bois, May 14, 1924, W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, University of Massachusetts Amherst, online at <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b025-i016> (accessed March 15, 2014). On Captain Boutte see Mark Ellis, *Race, War and Surveillance During World War I* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001), 300 Footnote 128. On Etnah Rochon Boutte see Nina Mjagkij, ed. *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Associations* (London, New York: Routledge, 2013), 129.

⁸³ See W.E. B. Du Bois, "Education," *Crisis* 10 (July 115): 132; Charles S. Johnson, *The Negro College Graduate* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937), cited in Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s*, 13.

chapel, restrictions on social activities, involving gender relations, and highly regimented schedules suggesting that black students were morally inferior, overly libidinous beings unfit to live in white society.⁸⁴ Du Bois, whose own daughter was a student at Fisk at the time, had first hand knowledge of this era's new generation that was only too willing to risk rebelling against these Victorian moral codes and behavioral guidelines.

Women students at Fisk and at other colleges and universities in the south, including Hampton, Howard and Virginia State, had the loudest voices in rebelling against enforced restrictions and the denial of even the slightest freedoms and privileges accorded other young American women.⁸⁵ For example, freedom of sartorial self-expression for black students had been suppressed with strict dress codes, whereas white students across town were wearing flapper skirts and silk or satin stockings in contrast to the high necks, long sleeves, black hats and cotton stockings black women students were obliged to wear.⁸⁶ Such rebellions took the form of strikes and would become a precedent for future forms of militancy that blacks used to erode racial discrimination. In addition to refusing to accept the Victorian moral strictures imposed on them, students demanded greater control over their own education from black teachers to black presidents. So while black administrators continued to walk a fine line between modernizing their institutions and accommodating the desires of those who funded their programs, their students claimed the right to refuse such acquiescence.⁸⁷ Virginia State College students joined the ranks of other student revolts and went on strike in 1934. Despite the curriculum change and new institution name, students blamed President Gandy for not doing enough to combat racist attitudes and

⁸⁴ Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s*, 13.

⁸⁵ For a highly detailed discussion of the individual issues at each college/institute see Raymond Wolters *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* which although published in 1975 remains the leading authoritative history on this aspect of the New Negro protest.

⁸⁶ Coeds to W.E.B. Du Bois, quoted in *Chicago Defender*, 28 February 1925, cited in Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s*, 37.

⁸⁷ LeRoy Davis, *Clashing of the Soul: John Hope and the Dilemma of African American Leadership and Education in the Early Twentieth Century* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 256.

advance conditions at the school. *The Crisis* reported that students were “sickened by the Victorian atmosphere and the convent-like restrictions imposed upon them by that amiable czar, Dr John M. Gandy.”⁸⁸

Calling the strike at a significant moment likely did the students more harm than good. As the *Petersburg Progress-Index* reported, the strike at Virginia State College coincided with the school’s annual concert, at which local dignitaries, including the Governor of Virginia would be in attendance. According to the newspaper, out of the seven hundred students enrolled, only two hundred were involved in the strikes, and President Gandy’s response was to quickly shut down further revolts by suspending twenty-two students.⁸⁹ Yet Gandy did agree to some conciliatory changes, and the college Executive Council, consisting of President Gandy and ten faculty members, including Edna Colson, signed a response to students petitions requesting greater freedom of interaction between the sexes. The concession granted that students could: “meet for informal conferences” in front of the cafeteria and that certain areas would be designated for socials on weekends. However, such permissions or “privileges” as they were called, came “with the understanding that there will be no forming of contacts between the sexes in the halls of buildings or at other places on campus, except at regularly stated social periods.”⁹⁰

These student strikes indicated a desire on the part of the black youth for a new social order. Nevertheless, having experienced the violent repercussions that resistance to or attempts to undermine Jim Crow could elicit, the older generation, persisted in complying with systems that presumed to protect and control their offspring. Parents demonstrated their support of Gandy through letters no doubt recognizing his need to

⁸⁸ Maurice Gates, “Negro Student Challenge Social Forces,” *The Crisis*, August 1935, p.233.

⁸⁹ “22 Students Suspended as Strike Ends,” *Petersburg Progress-Index*, May 26, 1935.

⁹⁰ “Announcement of Adjusted Social Regulations in Response to Petition of the Student Body,” John M. Gandy Papers, Series III, Correspondence, General, Box #3, Folder 3:102, 103; Acc.# 1967-2, Virginia State University Archives.

placate the philanthropic source of his institution's funding while acknowledging his student population's need for recognition.⁹¹ Illustrating another side to the ten year turmoil key African American colleges had experienced, George Streater argued in the *Chicago Defender*, that such efforts could do nothing but perpetuate and in fact increase acceptance of a separate social order for blacks. By agitating for better conditions for segregated schools, churches, and businesses African Americans would always have inferior public social and cultural institutions than if they were integrated into mainstream society.⁹² Streater would argue that academics were simply chipping away at racial oppression when they should have taken a more radical stand.

At Virginia State College faculty sought to create change through developing new courses that would lead to improved employment opportunities and provide the means to aspire to a sophisticated, informed, politically savvy and confident middle class. In 1927, Edna Colson, head of the department of Education, conducted a survey to explore areas in which female students might find suitable employment beyond the realm of domestic service or the trades. Soliciting the input of a number of women active in different professions, in March she wrote to Meta Warrick (Fuller)(1877-1968),⁹³ an artist who had been invited to create the main art exhibit for the Negro Building, the first designed by an African American, at the Jamestown Tercentennial in 1907. Meta Warrick was a classically trained artist who had won a scholarship to study at the Pennsylvania Museum and School for the Industrial Arts (today's University of the Arts, Philadelphia) after her work had been

⁹¹ See letter for example from Carrie E. Spencer, Lynchburg, VA May 1935 to Dr. Gandy, John M. Gandy Papers, Series III, Correspondence, General, Box #3, Folder 3:102, 103; Acc.# 1967-2, Virginia State University Archives.

⁹² George Streater, "Job of Settling Racial Problems up to Students: Writer Wonders if They Can do it," *The Chicago Defender*, Feb. 16, 1935. Streater named Fisk, Howard, Hampton, Tuskegee, Atlanta University Virginia State College and Lincoln University as the key institutions undergoing such rebellions. Streater continued to argue for greater resistance and stronger strategies of full integration – see *New York Times*, Nov. 22, 1946; Nov. 23, 1946, *Chicago Defender*, Dec. 10, 1946; for example.

⁹³ Meta Warrick was unmarried at the time of the Jamestown Tercentennial but is better known by her full name Meta Warrick Fuller.

recognized and displayed at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. She then studied in Paris at the Académie Colarossi and the École des Beaux-Arts, worked with French sculptor Auguste Rodin, and exhibited her work at Samuel Bing's Art Nouveau Gallery in 1900.⁹⁴ For the Jamestown Tercentennial Meta Warrick produced a tableau consisting of thirteen dioramas depicting the history of Americans of African descent from their arrival in Jamestown through to their present modern state. In contrast to white depictions of African Americans Meta Warrick's dioramas "suggested the expansiveness of black abilities, aspirations, and experiences," and "enabled blacks to see themselves as the main actors in their own defined world."⁹⁵ Meta Warrick's work suggested new visual forms in which African Americans could present themselves, and as such she was considered a guiding light in the African American community.⁹⁶

Edna Colson explained her dilemma to Meta Warrick:

My dear friend,

I am having an increasingly large number of calls for help in vocational conferences with girls or advisers of girls. It has occurred to me that it would be a splendid thing to give these young people a personal word from women who are at work in the various professional fields.⁹⁷

Fuller responded that there were few women working as artists but there was a great need for more, "as many as we can supply," she argued, "because the race needs to be represented by its art as well as by its poetry and music." Fuller recommended the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and Boston Museum of Fine Arts as the best institutions

⁹⁴ Renée Ater, *Remaking Race and History: The Sculpture of Meta Warrick Fuller* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

⁹⁵ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, Meta Warrick's 1907 "Negro Tableau and (Re) Presenting African American Historical Memory," *Journal of American History* 89 (4), 2003,

⁹⁶ Unfortunately the dioramas have been lost.

⁹⁷ Edna Colson, Director of Education, VNII, Survey letter to Meta Warrick Fuller March 18, 1927, Colson-Hill Papers, VSU Archives.

at which young African American women might study, and for a minimum of five years.

In addition to completing the survey sent her by Colson, Meta Warrick Fuller wrote a detailed letter expressing her opinion on the urgent need for art to be taught as an integral aspect of the curriculum in the elementary schools. Such courses would “cultivate a love of the beautiful and lay a foundation, which will, where there is true talent or genius, lead to a higher development of artistic culture.” Fuller echoed other African American leaders who argued for the role of black artists in American society if only they were given the opportunity and training. Fuller went suggested that African Americans artists might even have more to offer:

...the race has many whose talent should be developed but for the sake of the race it should be of the very best – we have too much in America which is mediocre as compared with European countries; American art is largely copied or imitated. The Negro race might profit by not making the same mistake.⁹⁸

Furthermore, Fuller suggested that an African American art could be something other than a copy of European or simply American art. And, that African Americans could “contribute on a level more in tune with commercial needs,” suggesting that a shorter training route might lead to such a career, but was also quick to add: “it would be too bad to confine our ideals to merely commercial art.”⁹⁹

It is within the context of such efforts on the part of faculty at Virginia State to implement new courses, as well as the ideas conveyed by Anne Spencer that Amaza Lee chose to study Fine Art at Columbia Teacher’s College. In addition, state accreditation guidelines stipulated that teachers must have an advanced degree. Efforts to enhance the educational opportunities for teachers, were fueled by a number of Northern philanthropic

⁹⁸ Meta Warrick Fuller to Edna Colson, March 21, 1927. VSU Archives, Edna Colson Papers

⁹⁹ Meta Warrick Fuller to Edna Colson, March 21, 1927. VSU Archives, Edna Colson Papers

organizations that funded fellowship programs for study towards Bachelor, Masters and Doctoral degrees in the North. Columbia University Teachers College trained many faculty members employed at Southern colleges and Normal and Industrial Institutes. Having more highly qualified teachers permitted Virginia State to announce its status as a college.¹⁰⁰

Amaza Lee's choice to study art suggests she was likely recruited to go north to study in order to gain the knowledge to provide greater opportunities for African American youth. In this way, she contributed to a much larger movement to bring arts and culture to black colleges of the South. Even though her courses in art were successful on her return in 1930, Amaza Lee would return to Columbia Teacher's College to work over a four-year period towards a Masters degree in art education. In May 1935, in fulfillment of the Master's degree, Amaza Lee submitted a thesis "An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students." The thesis was based on a survey of art courses. A questionnaire was sent out to city and county superintendents in the Virginia education system, intended to document the number of elementary and high schools teaching art, the type of art taught — either Fine Art or Industrial Art — any specializations that might occur in each of the two course types, and the qualification of the teachers. Amaza Lee's overall findings revealed a dearth of courses and teachers trained in art or art appreciation. In fact there was only one fully qualified art teacher in Virginia and she taught in an elementary school. The survey, its conclusions and recommendations, was intended to leverage support for establishing a Department of Art at Virginia State, which Amaza Lee believed would bolster the reputation of the college. Establishing an entire department equipped to offer art to students of all divisions of the college would put an end to a vicious cycle: students were ill-prepared to take art courses at the college level because they had no foundational knowledge, thus

¹⁰⁰ Bobby L. Lovett, *American's Historically Black Colleges and Universities: A narrative History from the Nineteenth Century into the Twenty-first Century* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011), xiii.

training teachers to provide that foundation in the grade schools would “better prepare our graduates to do progressive teaching.”¹⁰¹

Amaza Lee argued for the significance of art in everyday life, in providing a means for African Americans to continue to contribute art to American culture. Furthermore, she argued: “from an economic point of view the student is alive to the fact that in Virginia, Art Education is a field in which “the laborers are few, ” meaning that the kind of work available would go beyond those employment opportunities currently offered. A large number of superintendents to whom Amaza Lee had sent her survey, reported that: “industrial work was done in a “haphazard” way by non-specialists and few if any supervisors of Fine Arts or specialized teachers of fine arts existed. Amaza Lee noted that those students who had had the opportunity to study art and art appreciation had come to the realization that “the Negro is an artist; that the Negro[e]’s greatest contribution to American civilization has been in the arts.”¹⁰² Furthermore, she boldly declared that the Virginia State College administration was “becoming more liberal,” and “The traditional attitude of considering art a frill is swiftly passing.”¹⁰³ Amaza Lee presented her thesis to the Virginia Research Society; an organization established by Edna Colson and other faculty at Virginia State College in February 1932, “dedicated to the promotion of scholarly investigation into the problems that arise as a result of efforts towards social adjustment.”¹⁰⁴ In other words, Amaza Lee’s work built on the efforts Edna Colson had begun in 1927 to determine avenues for new kinds of employment that might assist African Americans in re-imagining their role in society, and in re-fashioning their image in the minds of white Americans.

¹⁰¹ Amaza Meredith, “An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students,” (MA Thesis, Columbia Teachers College, 1935) Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

¹⁰² Amaza Meredith, “An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students,” MA Thesis, Columbia Teachers College, 1935 Columbia University Archives, Rare Book Department.

¹⁰³ Meredith, “An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students,” p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ *The Virginia Statesman*, “College Faculty Head Research Society,” February 13, 1932, VSU archives.

In July 1935, Amaza Lee Meredith wrote to President Gandy urging him to authorize her proposed Orientation Course in Art Appreciation, as a contribution to accreditation regulations, under which the college was reviewing its curriculum. Her goal was to move art out of the Department of Home Economics and into its own department. Gandy retained a cautionary attitude rooted in the Victorian morals and accommodationist values of a bygone era, arguing that he would rather his daughter, a student at Virginia State at the time, learn how to sew on a button than paint a picture.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, he did grant the establishment of an art department, to be housed within the Department of Education, rather than in Domestic Science.¹⁰⁶ Amaza Lee advertised the new art department in a flyer distributed throughout the school in the fall of 1935. She explained that the department offered four years of college work leading to the B.A. degree; that it was considered part of the curriculum of elementary education with a major in art; that the aim was to train in Art Education and teachers of Art; the objective was not just to train artists but to make art function more fully in the lives of students and teachers. Moreover, requirements did not include having a “special ability in art,” but were directed at those with “the intelligence and ambition to be a good teacher.”¹⁰⁷ Gandy was rewarded for granting Amaza Lee an entire department dedicated to art with a portrait painted by star student John Borican, an athlete who was one of Amaza Lee’s first successful art students, and who would later win special notoriety in the African American community for his national record-breaking successes in the field of track.¹⁰⁸ Amaza Lee would train artists and art teachers, many of who went on to

¹⁰⁵ President Gandy response to Amaza Lee....

¹⁰⁶ The new department was advertised in the *Virginia Statesman* as appearing in the course catalogue for 1933-34.

¹⁰⁷ *Virginia Statesman* November 1, 1935

¹⁰⁸ *The Virginia Statesman*, “John M. Borican, Graduate of Art Department and Nationally Recognized Athlete Painted Portrait of President John M. Gandy,” November 1, 1935.

graduate programs at Northern colleges and to enjoy successful careers.¹⁰⁹

Amaza Lee' career trajectory fits a pattern of united efforts to introduce art programs into African American colleges from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While the arts as part of industrial training may have been promoted by white philanthropists eager to supplement the Southern labor force, African American educators saw it as a field in which they could encourage new opportunities beyond blue collar employment and into the arena of an aspiring professional class. Like Amaza Lee Meredith, many African American artists receiving recognition today spent some time teaching in elementary schools before moving into higher education or to developing their own signature style as independent artists. Like Virginia State College, many African American schools and colleges that opened with liberal arts curricula supported by Northern philanthropists or denominational bodies and were then subject to the withdrawal of state and/or local support found ways to continue offering programs in the arts, some would become leading centers for arts education.

In 1870 for example, the federal government established 'The Preparatory High School for Negro Youth,' in Washington, D.C. Mary Patterson, the first African American woman to graduate from Oberlin College, created a foundational program and added a Normal Department with commencement exercises in 1877.¹¹⁰ Another graduate of Oberlin Anna Julia Cooper, an African American activist, author, educator and feminist, was

¹⁰⁹ John Borican a track and field star, who held the 1,000 meter world record in 1938 studied with Amaza Lee and then an MA from Columbia where he was engaged in working on a PhD in art when he died from an illness-induced anemia at the age of 29 (1942). Stafford W. Evans was a favorite student who studied at the Art Students League, New York, after graduating from Virginia State College, See *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, "Artist-Sculptor Exhibits his Work," July 3, 1954. Frederick Kersey was another favorite who went on to teach art, as did Reginia Perry who taught the history of folk art at Virginia Commonwealth University. See ALM biographical notes, ALM Papers, VSU. [Note several efforts to contact Reginia Perry, the only known surviving member of this group and who recently taught at Virginia Commonwealth University Richmond, have been unsuccessful.]

¹¹⁰ Mary C. Terrell, "History of the High School for Negroes in Washington," *Journal of Negro History* 2 (July 1917): 253-56 cited in Henry S. Robinson, "The M Street High School 1891-1916," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Washington, D.C, Volume 51, [the 51st separately bound book] (1984): 119.

recruited to teach at the school in 1887, becoming principal in 1902.¹¹¹ In 1894 the school had moved to new premises and renamed M Street High School, by now it had developed a reputation as an elite establishment, educating children of the aspiring middle class and promoting professional development, including the study of the arts. In 1906, William Tecumseh Sherman Jackson was appointed as principal. Jackson was born in Miller's Tavern, Essex County, Virginia, but migrated north to Alexandria where his family would become successful property owners. Jackson spent time at Virginia State Normal and Collegiate Institute where its first president, John Mercer Langston, introduced him to a United States Senator who would sponsor his education at Amherst from which he graduated in 1892.¹¹² In his role as principal at M Street School, like those before him, Jackson encouraged students to seek higher education in the North; many who followed his advice became successful in business as well as the professions, from medicine to teaching.¹¹³ Jackson also hired teachers at M Street, who would become successful literary and visual artists. Jackson's wife, May Howard (Jackson), was the first African American woman to study art at the Pennsylvania Museum and School for the Industrial Arts (today's Philadelphia College of Art), having won a scholarship in 1895.¹¹⁴ May Howard moved with her husband to Washington, D.C. to teach Latin at the M Street school as a member of a

¹¹¹ Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (Oxford University Press, 1990), xxxiii

¹¹² Gwendolyn Du Bois Shaw, "Creating a New Negro Art in America," *Transition*, No. 108, Boogie Man (2012): 82, (no footnote).

¹¹³ Interesting to note that Principal Jackson encouraged Charles Hamilton Houston to attend Amherst. N graduating Houston became a prominent lawyer and the architect of the legal challenge that resulted in Board Vs Brown to desegregate the public schools. See Evan J. Albright, "A Slice of History," Amherst Magazine, online at http://www3.amherst.edu/magazine/issues/07winter/blazing_trail/slice.html (accessed October 22, 2012). Also, Mary Terrell, "The History of Schools for Negroes in the District of Columbia," *Journal of Negro History* 2(July 1917):253-56, cited in Henry S. Robinson, "The M Street High School 1891-1916," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Washington, D.C, Volume 51, p119.

¹¹⁴ Meta Fuller followed Howard in studying at the Pennsylvania Museum and School for the Industrial Arts, see Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, "May Howard Jackson and Meta Warrick Fuller: Philadelphia Trailblazers," in *3 Generations of African-American Women Sculptors: A Study in Paradox*, ed. Leslie King-Hammond and Tritobia Hayes Benjamin (Philadelphia, PA: Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum, 1996),

distinguished faculty that included Jessie Fausset, a 1905 graduate of Cornell, taught French, and would become an acclaimed writer of the Harlem Renaissance; Angeline Grimké, taught English, and would also become acclaimed as a poet, playwright, and author of first staged play by an African American; and Carter G. Woodson a graduate of Harvard, taught history and would establish the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, becoming known as the “Father of Black History.”¹¹⁵ It is likely that May Howard also taught art, drawing is listed as “prescribed for all pupils of the first and second years; also for Normal School candidates throughout the course.”¹¹⁶ By 1916 however, May Howard had her own studio and was exhibiting her work at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., the National Academy of Design and the Veerhoff Gallery in New York.¹¹⁷ In 1922, Howard was recruited to teach at the newly established art department at Howard University.¹¹⁸ Although she appears to have had some success, Howard was bitterly disappointed that she was unable to achieve greater success in her creative pursuits. In 1928 she wrote: “ I felt no satisfaction! Only a deep sense of injustice, something that has followed me and my efforts all my life. I may be wrong, but that, I cannot help as yet, until I receive more light I am sure that there shall be no more creation from me. I am tired!” Howard died in 1931.¹¹⁹

Amaza Lee’s experience of teaching in the rural schools, continually studying

¹¹⁵ Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, “May Howard Jackson and Meta Warrick Fuller: Philadelphia Trailblazers,” in *3 Generations of African-American Women Sculptors: A Study in Paradox*, ed. Leslie King-Hammond and Tritobia Hayes Benjamin (Philadelphia, PA: Afro-American Historical and Cultural Museum, 1996), 14. See for Carter G. Woodson the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, online at <http://asalh.org/woodsonbiosketch.html> (accessed March 2014).

¹¹⁶ Late nineteenth century course catalogue in Report of the Board of Trustees of public Schools of the District of Columbia, 1898-99 (Washington

¹¹⁷ Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, “May Howard Jackson and Meta Warrick Fuller: Philadelphia Trailblazers,” 20. Howard also exhibited at the ‘War Service and Recreation Center’ of the 127 West, 125th Street YMCA, New York, in 1919 according to the *New-York Tribune*, May 03, 1919 (accessed March 20, 2014).

¹¹⁸ Henry S. Robinson, “The M Street High School 1891-1916,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Washington, D.C, Volume 51, p.124-5

¹¹⁹ Mary Gibson Brewer, “May Howard Could be White, Prefers Colored,” *Afro-American*, Nov. 17, 1928

towards higher education at African American institutions and those in the North, and returning south to teach the next generation, reflects a pattern others followed. This pattern of individual dedication to teaching, while improving their own education in order to return to their communities and share their knowledge and expertise, complicates our understanding of the Great Migration, which has typically been considered a uni-directional process. Numerous examples exist to reinforce Amaza Lee's experience as typical rather than exceptional, with individuals teaching subjects across the course offerings of southern colleges, but particularly in the arts. The arts and culture in general was a subject for study in African American institutions of higher education from the earliest days after Reconstruction through the twentieth century. Cultural capital was seen as integral to enhancing African American identity and therefore was a key strategy in cultivating positive race relations, particularly at moments of violent white backlash in response to African American political or social gain. The arts remained integral to African American efforts towards racial uplift throughout the twentieth century. The typical career trajectory of some of the twentieth century's most notable black educators and artists attests to the significance in bringing art to a developing educated elite as well as to the black public.

Charlotte Hawkins Brown (1883-1961) a native of Henderson, North Carolina, migrated north with her parents to Boston where she received a Northern liberal arts education under the sponsorship of Wellesley's first woman president, Alice Freeman Palmer. Brown trained as a teacher and returned south in 1901 to work in a rural school established by the American Missionary Association (AMA), outside Greensborough, North Carolina. When the AMA withdrew funding and the school was threatened with closure, Brown, supported by her Northern philanthropic friends, rehabilitated the run-down school, naming it Palmer Memorial Institute in honor of her former mentor. Like those who developed other similar elementary schools into high schools and preparatory colleges,

over a period of forty years Brown developed Palmer Memorial Institute from an elementary to a high school and preparatory college for the elite. A skilled and powerful public speaker, she worked aggressively with interracial relations groups, and held official positions in key organizations including the Southern Interracial Committee, the YWCA, the Urban League, the National Council of Colored Women, and the Regional Council on Race Relations.¹²⁰ These organizations brought individuals together such as Edna Colson, who performed similar work to Brown at Virginia State College. Like Gandy at Virginia State, Brown was strongly dependent on the support of white philanthropist, as such, her school curriculum advertised its readiness to “prepare black youth for rural living and for productive work.” Graduates in 1916, for example, became teachers, domestic service workers, mechanics and farmers. Brown’s approach was also intended to instill in her students Victorian social graces, and Christian morals and virtues. She encouraged them to create homes that would be “happy intelligent centers” where the beauty of a “picture, a good book, as well as a field of waving corn “ could be appreciated.”¹²¹ Although the school suffered from sporadic financial support, Brown was fortunate to have the support of one particular Boston philanthropist, Galen L. Stone. Stone, insisted that his contributions to the school were to go towards “making American citizens” and that the students should develop broadly. Brown concurred by offering to provide such an education to “a picked group of Negro youth, who in turn will give out this culture to other groups, “and will inspire youth to seek ideals of truth, beauty and goodness.” She believed that “the Negro race will find his open door to abundant life, through training for appreciation of all that is fine and

¹²⁰ Sandra N. Smith, Charlotte Hawkins Brown,” *Journal of Negro Education* Vol. 51, No.3, Summer 1982: 191-192

¹²¹ Charlotte Hawkins Brown to Galen N. Stone, May 7, 1918, ALS in Charlotte Hawkins Brown MSS Box 1 Folder 31, Schlesinger Library Radcliffe College, cited in Smith, “Charlotte Hawkins Brown,” *Journal of Negro Education*, Vol.51, No.3, Summer, 1982,

beautiful.”¹²²She then traveled widely advocating the importance of the liberal arts in educational programs as a means to racial uplift.¹²³ Having been promised funds to establish scholarships for 25 students for study “beyond the second year of high school in music, oratory, or painting.” While on a lecture tour assignment in Boston, she recruited Lois Mailou Jones who happened to be in the audience.¹²⁴

Lois Mailou Jones (1905-1998) was Boston born, attended the city’s High School of Practical Arts and graduated from Boston Museum of Fine Arts. She gained teaching qualifications from Boston Normal School of the Arts, the Designers Art School, Boston, and, in 1931, from Columbia Teacher’s College, which she attended during the summer sessions.¹²⁵ Jones’ family was part of the first late nineteenth-century African American migration, moving first to New Jersey then to Cambridge, and then Boston. Her father, working a menial job by day and studying by night, obtained a law degree and became part of Boston’s black middle class. Jones’ grandmother, worked originally as a domestic on Martha’s Vineyard where she eventually purchased substantial property alongside other

¹²² Typescript: “Pronouncement of the Ideals for the New Palmer” Charlotte Hawkins Brown Mss, Box 3, Folder 69. (This is estimated to be from ca. 1930, although Jones taught art at Palmer UNTIL 1930 so the department likely began earlier.) Cited in Smith, “Charlotte Hawkins Brown,” *Journal of Negro Education* Vol. 51, No.3, (Summer 1982), 197.

¹²³ Sandra N. Smith, “Charlotte Hawkins Brown,” *Journal of Negro Education* Vol. 51, No.3, (Summer 1982); see also North Carolina Historic Sites, Palmer Memorial Institute Museum, online at <http://www.nchistoricsites.org/chb/chb-pmi.htm> (accessed November 5, 2012).

¹²⁴ J.C. Hyman, Publicity Director, “Palmer Memorial Institute Begins Fine Arts Courses,” typescript in Charlotte Hawkins Brown MSS, Box 3, Folder 69 undated, cited in Smith, “Charlotte Hawkins Brown,” *Journal of Negro Education* Vol. 51, No.3, (Summer 1982), 197; Jones has described the situation as an offer which she extended to Brown, to begin an art department at Palmer Institute, see Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, *The Life and Art of Lois Mailou Jones* (Rohnert Park, CA: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1994), 13; see also *Encyclopedia of Significant People and Places in African American History*, online at <http://www.blackpast.org> (accessed November 12, 2012).

¹²⁵ Jones attended Columbia Teachers College in the same years that Amaza Lee was registered, but perhaps because she attended during the summer their paths did not cross. They must have known of each other the numbers of African Americans in the program were few, nevertheless, no correspondence between the two has been found in either of their collections of papers (at the Morgan-Spingarn Archives at Howard University or at Virginia State archives) has been found. Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, now dean or fine arts at Howard authored Jones biography. She did not recall Jones mentioning Amaza Lee Meredith, nor did she recognize her name. Email communication: December 9, 2011.

socially aspiring African Americans.¹²⁶ At Palmer Memorial Institute, Jones taught drawing, painting, and watercolor within a core program of design from 1927 to 1930. In 1930, bolstered by a BA in Fine Art Jones caught the attention of James Vernon Herring, of Howard University who recruited her to teach at the college level. Jones taught at Howard until her retirement in 1977.¹²⁷

Unlike Amaza Lee, who tried as much as possible to produce art while teaching, but ultimately was more successful as an architect, Lois Mailou Jones successfully developed a signature style as an artist, while teaching. Perhaps this success came from her position in the capital city, which gave her access to a broader artists' network, or perhaps it lay simply in her talent as an artist.¹²⁸ Jones produced commercial textile designs for various manufacturing companies, as well as pursuing training opportunities abroad, spending a sabbatical at the Academie Julien in Paris, and traveling to Haiti and Africa experiences which informed her "syncretic post-impressionist Afro-Caribbean style."¹²⁹

At Howard University, art had been a significant component of the educational program from the earliest days of the university's establishment. The university's third president, General Oliver Otis Howard (1830-1909) created "The Historical Picture Gallery," together with a library and a museum, he seems to have had the method of picture study in mind. Writing in 1870, General Howard explained:

The Picture Gallery embraces portraits of many distinguished men and women, steel plate engravings of flora and fauna, and photographic views of ruins of Roman antiquity. Also, there is a splendid collection of 100 photographic views of the late war generously given by Alexander

¹²⁶ Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, *The Life and Art of Lois Mailou Jones* (Rohnert Park, CA: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1994).

¹²⁷ Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, *The Life and Art of Lois Mailou Jones* (Rohnert Park, CA: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1994).

¹²⁸ Amaza Lee wrote to Edna Colson: "Think of me, majoring in Fine Art after wanting to all these years!" October 7, 1928, New York City. Amaza Lee was thirty-three years old.

¹²⁹ Benjamin, *The Life and Art of Lois Mailou Jones* (Rohnert Park, CA: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1994).

Gardner.¹³⁰

John Cole, financial agent to the University, reported in 1871 to the Board of Trustees the importance of making “music, drawing, and other accomplishments within the reach of all.”¹³¹ Although in 1871 a Miss F.E. Isham was appointed to teach drawing as part of the Normal (teaching) Department, it was noted however, that students had no prior knowledge of the subject and therefore made little progress. This underscores the findings of Amaza Lee’s survey, undertaken for her master’s thesis, of the negligible status of art education in public schools. Nevertheless at Howard, the applicability of drawing to the manual arts was considered significant in learning the craft of tinwork, in which the practice of “surface development” necessitated “a knowledge of drawing.”

Art or more specifically drawing, was shuttled between the Normal and Manual Arts departments over two decades, dependent on approaches to liberal arts education. Drawing finally found an accepted place in industrial arts in 1913, organized as the College of Applied Sciences and encompassing engineering, architecture, art and home economics.¹³² Not unlike the situation at Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute in the first decade of the twentieth century, Howard juggled the industrial courses, including domestic science and trades with attempts to introduce fine art to the curriculum. Although in 1917, a new hire, William N. Bucknor, was to instruct the students in “expressing forms by lines...drawing of historical ornaments; freehand and perspective; drawing from objects; casts in light and shade, and pencil sketching,” it was through the introduction of a Department of

¹³⁰ Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Howard University, Washington D.C., 1867, 37 cited in Scott W. Baker, “From Freedmen to Fine Artists,” Carolyn E. Shuttlesworth, (ed.) *A Proud Continuum: Eight Decades of Art at Howard University* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Gallery of Art, 2005), 2.

¹³¹ Report of John A. Cole, financial agent to Howard University, August 3, 1872, cited in Walter Dyson, *Howard University: Capstone of Negro Education, A History* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Graduate School, 1941), 139.

¹³² Dyson, *Howard University: Capstone of Negro Education, A History* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Graduate School, 1941), 109 & 139. Dyson notes the impending collapse of the more liberal approach to black education as 1873.

Architecture and the approach to architecture as a fine art, that art would become an accepted field of study at Howard.¹³³

Howard University's attempt to develop a fine art program as part of an architecture curriculum was not unusual for the time. Indeed, throughout the 1890s theories of art and design and the question of how best to teach architecture had been percolating in the halls of major academic institutions. Such concerns were part of the discussions centered on how to define a new American architecture. In 1891 the Education Committee of the American Institute of Architects had voiced concerns about how the teaching of architecture was to be framed, considering the mass of information necessary for an architect to practice his calling successfully. In response, existing architects resoundingly reaffirmed architecture as a fine art. Henry van Brunt a Harvard graduate who trained as an architect with George Snell then with the prominent New York architect Richard Morris Hunt, argued for example that: "Americans would not develop an architecture of their own until they understood the value of a line;" the Architectural Institute of America defined architecture as a fine art in 1906.¹³⁴ Thus, when William A. Hazel, as head of the Department of Architecture at Howard, insisted on including the history of architecture, painting and sculpture as essential to architecture as a fine art, he was reinforcing contemporary debates within the art and design field.¹³⁵

With the appointment, in 1920 of academically trained architect Albert I. Casell, who had earned his degree from the Cornell School of Architecture in 1919, the student body increased exponentially. James Vernon Herring, who had studied drawing under the

¹³³ Howard University General Catalogue, 1917-1918, cited in Dyson, *Howard University: Capstone of Negro Education, A History*,

¹³⁴ Henry Van Brunt, "The Education of the Architect," *Technology Architectural Review* 3, No. 7 (1890): 37-38, and 3, No. 6 (1890): 31-33 cited in Marie Frank, *Denman Ross and American Design Theory* Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2011), 176.

¹³⁵ Dyson, *Howard University: Capstone of Negro Education, A History* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Graduate School, 1941), 114.

mechanical arts program led by Bucknor at Howard, returned in 1921 from Syracuse University with a graduate degree to teach the history of architecture, painting and sculpture. At Syracuse James Herring had most likely been influenced by Evelyn Jackman, an instructor, writer, and administrator who taught studio art and art education from 1911 to 1932. Jackman's methods in drawing from observation of models and memory evoked the teachings of Walter Smith, and her design and craft courses continued the legacy of Arthur Wesley Dow. Jackman was also an advocate of less industrial art and more training in art appreciation, for she argued: "it is on the public demand that the future of the arts depends."¹³⁶ The spiritual value of art in daily life was also something Jackman wanted art educators to teach others. Like many of the art educators of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Jackman believed that appreciating the beauty as well as the patriotism in American art was of the highest significance.¹³⁷

On graduating from Syracuse, Herring taught at Wilberforce, Ohio, and at Haven Academy in Meridian, Mississippi, where he became an Education Secretary for the YMCA, first in Mussel Shoals, Alabama, then in Camp Lee, Virginia. As a YMCA employee Herring, like Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Charles S. Johnson, Hale Woodruff and John Hope, traveled throughout the South, seeking to recruit individuals who could serve as teachers and future leaders. It was likely during a speaking tour for the YMCA that Herring met Lois Mailou Jones and later May Howard and Gwendolyn Bennett, all of who he invited to teach at Howard.¹³⁸ Herring never received a graduate degree, but did continue his education during summer sessions offered at Fogg Museum, Harvard University, where he studied Korean, Chinese and Japanese art. Moreover, Herring made his way into the major art communities,

¹³⁶ Rilla Jackman, *American Arts* (New York: Rand McNally, 1928), 27 cited in Mary Ann Stankiewicz, "Rilla Jackman, Pioneer at Syracuse," *Art Education* January 1983.

¹³⁷ Mary Ann Stankiewicz, "Rilla Jackman, Pioneer at Syracuse," *Art Education* January 1983: 14.

¹³⁸ For Gwendolyn Bennett's tenure at Howard see Janet Gail Abbott, "The Barnett Aden Gallery: A Home for Diversity" (PhD Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2008, 34.

by 1924 he belonged to the College Art Association and the American Federation of Arts, becoming a Board Member of CAA in 1931.

Although the trustees of Howard were originally reluctant to approve an art program in the 1920s, Herring's persistent offerings of courses in watercolor, composition, drawing and life sketching for architecture students, eventually led to the formal establishment of a Fine Art Department in 1921.¹³⁹ Herring immediately hired May Howard Jackson to teach classes in sculpture, which she did in the classical method, employing models from the Corcoran Art Gallery to sculpt from life. With the subsequent addition of highly trained educators who had advanced degrees from the University of Chicago, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and Columbia University Teachers College, Howard University Art Department blazed a trail that would infect other black colleges, showcasing the work of their students through travelling exhibits and establishing art collections with public openings [figure 3-4].¹⁴⁰

In 1924, Alma Thomas (1891- 1978) was the first to graduate from Howard University's Art Department, an aphorism beneath her school yearbook photograph read: "What is more far-reaching than beauty?"¹⁴¹ Originally from Columbus, Georgia, Thomas was fortunate to have been born into a middle class family; her grandfather a trained veterinarian and cotton planter who also bred horses, her grandmother a housewife, and aunts who had established cultural clubs in Columbus to which they invited Atlanta intellectuals to give talks ranging from World History to Shakespeare.¹⁴² Nevertheless, Thomas's parents felt the increasingly virulent race relations, lack of access to public

¹³⁹ Walter Dyson, *Howard University: Capstone of Negro Education, A History* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Graduate School, 1941), 141-142

¹⁴⁰ Dyson, *Howard University: Capstone of Negro Education, A History*, 141-142.

¹⁴¹ Howard University, *Bison Yearbook*, 1924, cited in Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, "From Academic Representation to Poetic Abstraction," *Alma Thomas: A Retrospective of the Paintings*, Fort Wayne Museum of Art (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1998), 21.

¹⁴² Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, "From Academic Representation to Poetic Abstraction," *Alma Thomas: A Retrospective of the Paintings*, Fort Wayne Museum of Art (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1998), 18.

centers of learning such as the local library, and inadequate local schooling merited a move north. They settled in Washington D.C. in 1907, where educational opportunities proved more favorable, and a growing middle-class black elite provided a strong support network. Alma was educated at Armstrong Manual Training School which offered architectural drafting, drawing and other related industrial courses, but also the classics, mathematics and science.¹⁴³ In 1913 she received a teaching certificate from Miner Normal School in D. C. and taught for a period in the rural schools.¹⁴⁴ On enrolling at Howard University Thomas opted to take courses in the Department of Home Economics, hoping to pursue a career in theater set design. However, James Herring noticed her talent and enticed her away to the new art program declaring: “You don’t need to be a cook, that’s all black people are!”¹⁴⁵ Although this was two decades earlier than the attempt Amaza Lee made at VNIJ to separate art from Home Economics, it was clearly a trend occurring across black colleges.

Alma Thomas followed a similar trajectory to others in the field of art practice, turning to teaching both as a way to earn a living and to influence the next generation. For the first thirty-five years after graduating from Howard, she taught at Shaw Junior High School in Washington D.C. but nevertheless persisted in her education, studying during the summer sessions from 1930 through 1931 at Columbia University Teacher’s College.¹⁴⁶ Thomas also studied with members of the Washington Color Field School at American

¹⁴³ Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, “From Academic Representation to Poetic Abstraction: The Art of Alma Woodsey Thomas,” *Alma W. Thomas: A Retrospective of the Paintings*, 18.

¹⁴⁴ Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, “From Academic Representation to Poetic Abstraction: The Art of Alma Woodsey Thomas,” *Alma W. Thomas: A Retrospective of the Paintings*, 19.

¹⁴⁵ Judith Wilson, “Teacher, Patron, Pioneer: Alma Thomas, A One-Woman Movement,” *MS 7* (February 1979): 60, cited in Janet Gail Abbott, “The Barnett Aden Gallery: A Home for Diversity” (PhD Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2008), 91.

¹⁴⁶ Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, “From Academic Representation to Poetic Abstraction,” *Alma Thomas: A Retrospective of the Paintings*, Fort Wayne Museum of Art (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1998), 23. No evidence has been found to suggest that Thomas knew Amaza Lee Meredith.

University, where she developed her signature abstract style [figure 3-5].¹⁴⁷ Like Amaza Lee, Thomas studied for an MA in Art Education at Columbia Teachers College. However, where Amaza Lee was more interested in art and education, Alma Thomas was concerned with art practice and submitted an artwork for her thesis. The work emerged from Thomas's time spent at the New York studio of highly regarded puppeteer Tony Sarg, and was series of marionettes sculpted from balsa wood with crafted costumes. Thomas used the pieces and her training to organize shows in DC, many of which she scripted herself, at the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA, Shaw Junior High School and Howard University Art Gallery. These shows provided an alternative theater for African American audiences who were excluded from entry to the National Theater.¹⁴⁸ Perhaps because of her training with and connection to an established movement of white artists, Thomas would become known for her work in Color Field painting. But it was only in 1972 while in her eighties that Alma Thomas succeeded in having her work exhibited in major American museums, at the Corcoran Gallery of Art and as the first African American woman to have a solo at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Critics accorded Thomas rave reviews on her exhibit at the Whitney, expressing astonishment at such quality innovative work produced by an African American female octogenarian. Such response suggests the pervasive ignorance of the long and circuitous route the artist had had to take to overcome the enforced barriers to academic education and privileged patronage in order to realize her artistic goals. Ironically, the pinnacle of her success came to Thomas posthumously, in a new dawn of progress, when a black president selected her work to hang in the White House.

In 1926 the Department of Art at Howard had developed a mission statement which

¹⁴⁷ Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, "From Academic Representation to Poetic Abstraction," *Alma Thomas: A Retrospective of the Paintings*, Fort Wayne Museum of Art (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1998). American University permitted African Americans to enroll in 1937.

¹⁴⁸ Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, "From Academic Representation to Poetic Abstraction," *Alma Thomas: A Retrospective of the Paintings*, Fort Wayne Museum of Art (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1998), 23.

declared it: ‘To offer the broadest foundation in art, through practical and intellectual teaching in aesthetics, resulting in a breadth of view, rendering the student capable for professional careers as painters, illustrators and teachers of art. In 1927 James Herring began organizing traveling exhibits of students’ work. Herring had experienced the importance of art competitions and communities while studying at Syracuse University. He was a member of the Thumb Box Society, winning their first prize “for figures out of doors,” an experience which would influence his work at Howard University.¹⁴⁹ Through his art competitions and communities Herring initiated the idea of a university gallery and succeeded in convincing the administration that such an addition would bring nationwide attention to the University; the Board of Trustees agreed to the Howard University Art Gallery in 1928. Designed by Director of the Architecture Department, Albert Casell, the gallery was installed on the first floor of Rankin Memorial Chapel and formally opened to much fanfare on April 7, 1930. A *New York Times* article noted the uniqueness of the gallery:

Never until now has there been such a place where Negro art students have had the opportunity to study on such a large scale within the walls of their own institution, products of artists of the highest rank both at home and abroad.¹⁵⁰

Open to the public, attendance at Howard Art Gallery reached 17, 576 people in the first year. The exhibits were initially based on loans from private collections until the University was able to establish a collection of its own. The policy established for such a collection was intended to:

...make good works of art available on a permanent basis to the university community; to establish, at least the nucleus of a loan collection to be made

¹⁴⁹ *Crisis* 9 (February 1915): 163 “Along the Color Line.” Cited in Janet Gail Abbott, “The Barnett Aden Gallery: A Home for Diversity” (PhD Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2008), 30.

¹⁵⁰ *New York Times*, Oct 26, 1930. Cited in Abbott p.42.

available for use by reputable cultural and university centers; and to gather into the collection, whenever possible, significant works by contemporary artists without reference to the race, color or creed of the individual artist.¹⁵¹

Having spearheaded this important venture in developing art appreciation among African Americans, James Herring continually traveled south helping to set up other art departments.¹⁵² He knew too well the difficulty African American artists had in accessing formal training and even in learning through visiting public museums and galleries from which, in the South, they were refused admission. Publishing in the *Crisis* he recounted the story of light-skinned Annie E. Walker who had enrolled at the segregated Corcoran Gallery School of Art only to be dismissed from the program on discovery that she was black.¹⁵³ To assist those who had no access to museums and exhibitions, Herring founded the College Art Service, supported with \$6000 from the Carnegie Corporation, and supplied traveling art exhibitions for about a dozen Southern schools. He used the art collection at Howard as well as material borrowed from other collections, including high quality reproductions.¹⁵⁴ Florence Anderson, secretary at the Carnegie Corporation helped Herring in his appeals for funding noting that:

Herring is the only Negro in the South who could operate this sort of thing and after talking with him I have no doubt of his ability to do so successfully. The status of the arts in the Negro colleges today is worse than it was in the white colleges when the Corporation started its program for their benefit

¹⁵¹ Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, "A Proud History in Profile: The Howard University Gallery of Art," in *A Proud Continuum: Eight Decades of Art at Howard University* (Washington D.C.: Howard University Gallery of Art, 2005), 2.

¹⁵² Janet Gail Abbott, "The Barnett Aden Gallery: A Home for Diversity" (PhD Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2008). Abbott does not provide a footnote for this. No evidence has been found to suggest that Herring was at VNI or that he knew Amaza Lee.

¹⁵³ James V. Herring, "The American Negro as Craftsman and Artist," *Crisis* 49 (April 1942), cited in Janet Gail Abbott, "The Barnett Aden Gallery: A Home for Diversity" (PhD Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2008).

¹⁵⁴ Abbot, "The Barnett Aden Gallery: A Home for Diversity" (PhD Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2008), 52.

nearly twenty-five years ago.¹⁵⁵

This service was financially self-sufficient by the third year and Herring continued to operate it even after his retirement in 1953, continuing until 1967.

Further attempts to create a strong community dedicated to art and art appreciation were made by James A. Porter (1905-1970), a 1927 graduate of the Howard art program and subsequent teacher of painting and drawing. Porter created the Daubers Club in 1929, to identify the students of the department and establish a community. He brought visiting speakers, established a lecture series, and held meetings as a means to expanding the reach of students beyond the university campus. President Mordecai Johnson authorized a professional degree for art students, a Bachelor of Science in Art, a Bachelor of Science in Education- Applied Arts, and Bachelor of Science in Education –Fine Arts. Alain Locke provided a course, Principles and Aesthetics of Criticism, “an applied analysis of art, evolution of art forms, theories of art development and the interpretive values of culture.”¹⁵⁶ In 1930, a full-time faculty member was hired to teach in addition to studio art, a program in Art History, named, the art seminar, the faculty member established a “Friends of Art” club. Intimate groups, such as these art clubs, dedicated to art were plentiful within the small community of African Americans who were excluded from similar white groups. These groups were not only a way to feel part of an important community but also to keep up with trends in the art world. Alma Thomas, while working as a high school teacher, kept up to date with artistic trends through the informal artists group, “The Little Paris Studio,”

¹⁵⁵ Florence Anderson, ‘Record of Interview with James Herring.’ (No date, but this was likely around 1947 when Herring, according to Abbott, began his touring exhibits). Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University. Cited in Abbott, p. 53).

¹⁵⁶ James Herring, Annual Report of the Department of Art, Howard University, Washington, D.C. 1924-1926, 123, cited in Scott W. Baker, “From Freedmen to Fine Artists,” Carolyn E. Shuttlesworth, (ed.) *A Proud Continuum: Eight Decades of Art at Howard University* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Gallery of Art, 2005), 6.

which Celine Tabary, a French Professor at Howard, and Lois Mailou Jones had formed in Jones' apartment at 1220 Quincy Street, N.E. Washington, D.C. in 1940.¹⁵⁷ Jones recalled: "We'd chip in for a model or put up a still life and all work together." Many of the artists were teachers; in addition to Alma Thomas, Lucille Robert, Delilah Pierce and Richard Dempsey, were members of the Little Paris Studio, together they exhibited as the 'District of Columbia Art Association.'¹⁵⁸ In her role as an instructor of art at Shaw Junior High School in D. C. Alma Thomas organized a group, the School Arts League, dedicated to promoting art appreciation among the city's junior high school students; they made group visits to the local museums, including Howard's newly established Gallery.¹⁵⁹

The significance of establishing access to art education and to teaching African Americans the value of art appreciation permeated the upper echelons of African American society at a moment when racism was at its height. John Hope (1868- 1936) was of mixed racial heritage and Northern education, he returned to the South to teach in the liberal arts colleges of Nashville, Tennessee and Atlanta, Georgia, where he would eventually become president of Morehouse and Atlanta University, a nexus of the future leading black educational institutions.¹⁶⁰ Hope was a close friend of W.E.B. Du Bois, advocating the kind of education that would develop a leadership class.¹⁶¹ Publically demonstrating his support for a liberal arts education that would provide a leadership class. Hope declared:

¹⁵⁷ Sachi Yanari, et al, *Alma W. Thomas: A Retrospective of the Paintings*, Fort Wayne Museum of Art (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1998), 10.

¹⁵⁸ See Papers of Alma Thomas, Abstract Expressionist and Color Painter, Smithsonian Museum of American art archives.

¹⁵⁹ Yanari, et al, *Alma W. Thomas: A Retrospective of the Paintings*, 22.

¹⁶⁰ In 1906 Hope became the first African American president of Atlanta Baptist College, which would eventually become Atlanta University.

¹⁶¹ John Hope studied at Brown University and after taking summer courses at the University of Chicago, returned south to teach at Roger Williams University in Nashville, Tennessee, a liberal arts college sponsored by the New York-based American Baptist Home Missionary Society. Hope had been offered a position to teach at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, but rejected the thinking of Booker T. Washington and opted for the small liberal arts college instead. See Ridgely Torrence, *The Story of John Hope* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 106.

Now we consider it right and proper that a certain per cent of our people should have such training as will put them on a level with all other races in the quest for higher knowledge in letters and science... The progress, dignity and respectability of our people depend on this...

Moreover, he argued:

Mere honesty, mere wealth will not give us rank among the other peoples of the civilized world; and what is more, we ourselves will never be possessed of conscious self-respect, until we can count on men in our own ranks who are easily the equal of any race.¹⁶²

John Hope worked to cultivate strong alliances among white and black supporters of the higher education institutions in Atlanta and joined forces with W.E.B. Du Bois and others in forming the Niagara Movement. The Atlanta Riots of 1906 served to strengthen his resolve to improve the lives of African Americans through higher education – a determination that resulted in increased attendance at Atlanta College.¹⁶³ In a desperate attempt to attract funding in order to develop the school further, Hope resorted to requesting philanthropic support through Booker T. Washington, which almost cost him his friendship with Du Bois, had he not succeeded in convincing his friend of the necessity of requesting aid from those with different views.¹⁶⁴ The problem, Hope had been told, was that there were too many black colleges in Atlanta, all of which were struggling for financial support: Atlanta Baptist, Atlanta University, Clark and Spelman.

Nevertheless, there were white leaders who believed in the potential of African Americans to become full participants in American life. This small group organized in

¹⁶² Torrence, *The Story of John Hope*, p.114-115. Torrence cites this as a speech called: “The Need of Liberal Education for Us,” which Hope gave in Nashville a year or so after Booker T. Washington’s 1895 Atlanta Address.

¹⁶³ Torrence, *The Story of John Hope*, pp. 155.

¹⁶⁴ Torrence, *The Story of John Hope*, pp. 150.

Atlanta the Commission on Interracial Relations, an organization to which Charles S. Johnson among others, including Edna Colson and John Gandy at VNII, subscribed, and which worked to secure a better life for African Americans in the South.¹⁶⁵ Hope recruited a number of promising faculty members, who would eventually take over the leadership of African American education at Morehouse, but also at other institutions of black higher education. Hope encountered many of these individuals through his work as a Board member of the YMCA.¹⁶⁶ The YMCA for African Americans was a significant organization that worked to support racial uplift, instill race-based community responsibility, and train leaders to be role models.¹⁶⁷ The segregated YMCAs established on college campuses and in urban centers played a highly significant role in the lives and uplift ideology of African Americans from the 1890s.¹⁶⁸ Those liberal minded Southern whites who established the Commission on Interracial Relations (CIC); were members of the YMCA. John Hope, Charles S. Johnson and many other African American leaders worked with this group in connection with the “Colored Department” YMCAs to improve race relations.

Hope contributed to teacher training by adding departments to Morehouse College, with the intention of developing it into a center of leading educational programs. He was a skilled networker who kept in touch with alumni of the college, many of who went on to

¹⁶⁵ The Commission On Interracial Relations had affiliate organizations across the South in African American colleges. It eventually merged with the Southern Regional Council whose mission was similar. Hope’s work for the progress of African American education did not go unnoticed, in 1920 Howard University conferred on him the honorary degree of LLD.

¹⁶⁶ Hope recruited future president Benjamin Mays from the University of Chicago, sociologists E. Franklin Frazier and Walter Chivers, mathematician Claude Dansby, Biologist Samuel Nabrit, economist Brailsford R. Brazeal and theologian Howard Thurman. Thurman and several others were Morehouse graduates and were thus already known to Hope. See Le Roy Davies, *Clashing of the Souls: John Hope and the Dilemma of African American Leadership in Black Higher Education in the Early Twentieth Century* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 259.

¹⁶⁷ Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Dark: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 104. John Hope understood the contradictions inherent in a Christian Organization that was segregated, but nevertheless saw it as an opportunity to provide specific support to underprivileged black males.

¹⁶⁸ Leroy Davis, *A Clashing of the Soul*, p. 186; Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 103,

higher degrees in the North, as well as young people he encountered through his many volunteer organizations such as the YMCA.¹⁶⁹ In 1929, still serving as President of Morehouse College, John Hope signed his name alongside the presidents of Atlanta University and Spelman College to a decree ushering into existence a coalition of colleges, and the formation of the Atlanta University Center, which would share facilities, students and curricula. Like John Gandy in Virginia, Hope oversaw changes in faculty that were to meet the new accreditation regulations stipulating specialty masters degrees and eventually PhD qualifications for teaching at the higher level of education.¹⁷⁰ Hope also began developing his vision to expand the curricula with five-, six-, and ten-year plans. Among changes he envisioned was a graduate school of liberal arts, new programs in teacher education and fine arts; a Coordinated Art Program would anchor a School of Music and Fine Arts.¹⁷¹ Hope employed highly qualified faculty, including in the newly formed department of sociology, Ira Reid who had graduated from Morehouse, before earning a PhD from Columbia, succeeding Charles S. Johnson at the Urban League in New York, and W. E. B. Du Bois.¹⁷²

To advance his vision for the Fine Arts, Hope courted the attention of budding artist Hale Woodruff, whom he had met during his travels on YMCA business. Attempting to support himself while studying at the Herron School of Art, Woodruff had found employment at the Senate Avenue YMCA, Indianapolis, as a membership secretary. During this time, Woodruff met leading members of the educated elite, including W. E. B. Du Bois, Charles S. Johnson and Walter White, as well as educator, author, and civil rights advocate

¹⁶⁹ Leroy Davis, *Clashing of the Souls: John Hope and the Dilemma of African American Leadership in Black Higher Education in the Early Twentieth Century*, p.257

¹⁷⁰ LeRoy Davis, *Clashing of the Souls: John Hope and the Dilemma of African American Leadership in Black Higher Education in the Early Twentieth Century*, p.311.

¹⁷¹ LeRoy Davis, *Hale Woodruff, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet and the Academy*, Spelman College Museum of Fine Art (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 13.

¹⁷² LeRoy Davis, *Hale Woodruff, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet and the Academy*, Spelman College Museum of Fine Art, 331.

William Pickens, poet Countee Cullen, and painter William Edouard Scott (1884-1964) who had studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and spent time in Paris with leading African American expatriate artist Henry Ossawa Tanner. Woodruff had met these leading intellectuals and artists at the YMCA venue at which Executive Director Fayburn E. DeFranz had invited them to speak.¹⁷³ These individuals would contribute to Woodruff's development both as a leader of civil rights for African Americans and as professional artist. Du Bois commissioned cover designs for the *Crisis*, and works for an exhibition at the 135th Street branch of New York Public Library; Scott mentored the artist and encouraged a sojourn in Paris, from which he himself had benefitted.¹⁷⁴

Hale Woodruff's involvement with the YMCA in Indianapolis as "Membership Secretary" was a critical role, involving travel and networking in order to advance the role of the 'Y' in supporting racial equality. It was during a trip with Fayburn E. Frantz to Topeka, Kansas in 1926, that Woodruff was introduced to John Hope. Continuing to pursue a career as an artist, Woodruff was on the brink of journeying to France on September 3, 1927 when Hope offered him the job of teaching art at the Atlanta University Center. Woodruff sailed for France nevertheless, but Hope and Spelman College President Florence M. Read traveled to visit him, repeating the offer of a teaching position.¹⁷⁵ Such was the pressure for talented young people to take a leadership role in the education of future generations, that when Woodruff returned to New York and Indianapolis he felt compelled to take the offer.

Woodruff wrote:

I understand the administration at Atlanta was trying to find out where I

¹⁷³ Donald F. Davis, "Hale Woodruff of Atlanta: Molder of Black Artists," *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 69, No. 3 /4) Summer- Autumn, 1984), pp. 147-154.

¹⁷⁴ Amalia K. Amaki, "Hale Woodruff in Atlanta: Art, Academics, Activism and Africa," in *Hale Woodruff, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet and the Academy*,

¹⁷⁵ Woodruff, letter to Louise Stoelting, December 6, 1974; Brooks interview, Woodruff taped notes, August 28, 1977; "Hale Woodruff Among Georgia Artists," *Atlanta University Bulletin*, Dec. 8, 1938, p. 8 all cited in Stoelting, "Hale Woodruff, Artist and Educator, The Atlanta Years," PhD Dissertation, Emory University, 1978, p. 56.

was. I think classes had begun. They sent a telegram to the “Y” and I went. Indeed classes had begun, but I was not too late.¹⁷⁶

Woodruff taught at the Laboratory High School, established as a demonstration school for student teachers, and at the elementary level at Oglethorpe School on the Atlanta University Campus.¹⁷⁷ Prior to his arrival, art had been taught at the Atlanta schools as craft, he introduced the subject as fine art.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, he extended the teaching of art into the public arena, through establishing a tradition of art exhibitions. These were held in the university library so the public, was to an extent, limited to those who already had an interest in the university and to those who were invited. In other words, the general public was ignorant of the artwork being exhibited in the South.

At the University of Virginia art instruction was offered during summer sessions from 1907, courses included drawing, painting, and architectural design; crafts were offered for students training to be elementary school teachers.¹⁷⁹ In 1919, with funds from Paul Goodloe, the University was able to establish a Department of Fine Arts in which architect and architectural historian Fisk Kimball was hired to teach art.¹⁸⁰ At the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Leslie Cheek hired two former Yale colleagues, one to teach sculpture the other, painting, while he taught art history, and thus in 1935, established what is advertised as the first Department of Fine Arts in the South. Clearly, African Americans were working within the cultural and historical context of the times, fully aware of new trends in education and in the growing importance of the arts. In most cases, the programs

¹⁷⁶ Stoelting, “Hale Woodruff, Artist and Educator, The Atlanta Years,” PhD Dissertation, Emory University, 1978, p. 56.

¹⁷⁷ Florence M. Read, *The Story of Spelman College* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 242, cited in Stoelting, p.57.

¹⁷⁸ Stoelting interview with Jenelsie Walden Hooloway, September 29, 1976, a former elementary school student and professor of art at Spelman (Cited in Stoelting , p. 58).

¹⁷⁹ University of Virginia Record, 1907.

¹⁸⁰ Richard Guy Wilson and Sara A. Butler, *The Campus Guide: University of Virginia* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999),120.

they established were on a par with if not in advance of the trends in the South. Courses in studio art and art appreciation had been officially institutionalized at Howard University in 1922, and at Atlanta University in 1931. At Fisk University they were first offered on a part-time basis in 1937 when Charles S. Johnson, leading a flourishing department of sociology, invited Aaron Douglass to teach painting and drawing one semester per year.¹⁸¹ Douglas had been “drafted” by W.E.B. Du Bois and Johnson on first arriving in New York.¹⁸² After completing a Master’s Degree at Columbia Teacher’s College in 1944, Douglas taught art on a full-time basis at Fisk, and when in 1947 Charles S. Johnson became Fisk University’s first black president he began expanding the school curricula, including offering art as a major, with Aaron Douglas at the helm.¹⁸³

Although some of the colleges focused on art as a unique subject, others, in particular Howard and Hampton, developed their art curricula in tandem with architecture programs. Hampton, as the first Virginia designated Land-grant College, did not offer fine art instruction until the arrival of Viktor Lowenfeld, an Austrian Jewish art teacher whose family had fled Vienna in 1938, arriving in New York via Great Britain one month later. Lowenfeld had studied at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, and the Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Arts). In New York Victor D’Amico of MOMA’s education department hired him to lecture on art and introduced him to a broad academic community.¹⁸⁴ In 1939, Lowenfeld accepted a permanent position at Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute

¹⁸¹ Aaron Douglas memo to Arna Bontemps, November 13, 1951, box 23, folder 2, Arna Bontemps Papers, Fisk University, cited in Susan Earle, Ed. *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 43 footnote 41.

¹⁸² Daniel Schulman, “African American Art and the Julius Rosenwald Fund,” Schulman ed. *A force for Change: African American Art and the Julius Rosenwald Fund* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 52.

¹⁸³ Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson, (eds.) *A History of African American Artists from 1792 to the Present* (New York: Pantheon, 1993), 133; Aaron Douglas memo to Arna Bontemps, November 13, 1951, box 23, folder 2, Arna Bontemps Papers, Fisk University, cited in Susan Earle, Ed. *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 43 footnote 41

¹⁸⁴ Ann Holt, “Lowenfeld at Hampton (1939-1946): Empowerment, Resistance, Activism, and Pedagogy,” *Studies in Art Education*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (2012), 11.

where he was to teach an evening class, which rapidly developed into a fully integrated course in art.¹⁸⁵ A poster advertising the new department noted that art had been an important part of the Hampton environment since the school's founding, but prior to Lowenfeld's arrival it had been "primarily directed to practical vocational applications." Lowenfeld, like Amaza Lee was instrumental in exhibiting student work and drawing on his connections at museums, exhibited student work at the Museum of Modern Art and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.¹⁸⁶ Lowenfeld had met Belle Boas, an instructor of art education at Columbia Teachers College, and it is likely that Belle Boas too, influenced the program at Hampton.¹⁸⁷

At Howard, art had its own degrees and own department, as well as a unique community; it nevertheless remained closely affiliated with architecture. As such it is clear that the interconnectivity of the arts was viewed as having the potential to lead to greater employment opportunities, while simultaneously raising the professional expectations of a student demographic groomed for the middle class. At the National Home Building conference held in December 1929 in Washington D.C., President Herbert Hoover praised the changes occurring at Howard: "The work in the Department of Architecture at Howard University is closely affiliated with that in engineering and art, and the field of opportunities for Negroes is gradually becoming broader."¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Peter Smith, *The History of American Art Education: Learning About Art in American Schools* (Westport CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1996), 153, 172.

¹⁸⁶ Unnamed flyer, single sheet with photograph describes Lowenfeld's legacy at Hampton, Box Art Department, 1930, Hampton University Archives.

¹⁸⁷ Peter Smith, *The History of American Art Education: Learning About Art in American Schools* (Westport, CT, London: Greenwood Press, 1996), 101. An unnamed document, which appears to be the beginnings of a thesis, bears a strong similarity to the thesis written by Amaza Lee Meredith, documenting the paucity of art programs at black schools. Hampton Institute however had a strong interest in the arts underscored in the 1890s by the presence of successful poet, Paul Lawrence Dunbar and the development of a Camera Club. Dunbar's work illustrated by the Hampton Institute Camera Club was published as *Candle-Lightin' Time* by New York firm Dodd Mead and CO, in 1901.

¹⁸⁸ Harrison M. Etheridge, "The Black Architects of Washington, D.C. 1900 to the Present," PhD Dissertation, Catholic University, Washington, D.C., 1979, 52, cited in *A Proud Continuum: Eight Decades*

In their early efforts to offer fine art as a studio subject and as art appreciation African American educational intuitions sought to mirror respected white school systems, teaching a recognized canon of aesthetics, but expanding that canon to include African art. Looking back from today's vantage point at these attempts to broaden the curricula in the arts, African American educators appear far in advance of their time. They may have had their own motives for including African art in their programs, but nevertheless, such efforts are still being considered today as desirable modifications to curricula. The result of studio curricula in African American colleges can be seen to directly reflect theories, which instructors of art had learned at northern colleges. Programs in studio art kept pace with national developments, and served to attract new students. Amaza Lee added ceramics and photography to the Art Department in the 1940s, turning her garage into a dark room in which to develop her own photographs. At Hampton faculty went north to gain further credentials and advanced the curricula on their return. Eleanor S. Kravig for example, returned from a period with Archipenko and Cranbrook Academy to introduce sculpture into the program at Hampton. Joseph W. Giliard introduced innovative methods to working with clay, instructing students in making anatomical and biological models in three dimensions, for example.¹⁸⁹

Amaza Lee and others participated in a conversation that explored the unique position of African American culture. By introducing their student teachers and others to studio art and art appreciation art teachers in black colleges sought to counter prevailing negative assumptions about African American creative capacities, as well as to present a revised image of themselves as a group. They had after all, a long heritage that resulted

of Art at Howard University (Washington D.C.: Howard University Gallery of Art, 2005), 6. (This Dissertation is oddly, only available at Howard University where it is archived.

¹⁸⁹ 'Report of the Membership of the Virginia Art Alliance, Annual Meeting April 10, 1948, Virginia Museum of Fine Art, Richmond, VA 1948, Hampton University Archives, Box_ Art Department.

from adapting to and adopting elements from white European culture, while retaining elements from their own African ancestry; this was a culture “marked by constant, individuating change.”¹⁹⁰ It was hoped that recouping a sense of this culture, would stimulate pride, while generating new ideas about identity. Such methods of re-inventing identity through creative expression have been recognized as characteristic of African American practices, perpetuating traditions of continuous renewal from their first arrivals on slave ships, while also adapting to Euro-American influences.¹⁹¹ Moreover this practice was by necessity, constantly informed by the changing tide of opinion. As early as 1760, African Americans had produced a literary culture, writing and narrating autobiographies, by which they sought to “re-present their public selves in order to reconstruct their public, reproducible images.” After emancipation, this long enduring struggle of “representation as reconstruction” recognized that “anyone who sought to join the public sphere, where one made laws and shaped public opinion,” was expected to show “an appreciation of aesthetic norms grounded in a bourgeois ideology that esteemed ‘highbrow art.’”¹⁹² By the twentieth century, African Americans found themselves once again adapting to demonstrate an understanding of society’s cultural capital by adopting its aesthetic codes.¹⁹³ Through the efforts of teachers of fine art, African Americans could establish their place within the

¹⁹⁰ John Michael Vlach has described African American creative expression as a response to having to constantly adapt to new situations outside their own control. See Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in the Decorative Arts* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 3.

¹⁹¹ This desire on the part of African Americans to both assimilate and to mark themselves as culturally distinct has been explored by a number of scholars whose interests range from examining cultural artifacts to sartorial expression. For a fascinating exploration of sartorial expression see Monica Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

¹⁹² Todd Vogel, *Re-Writing White: Race Class and Cultural Capital in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 9.

¹⁹³ Todd Vogel, *Re-Writing White: Race Class and Cultural Capital in Nineteenth-Century America* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 1. George Hutchinson has argued that the Harlem Renaissance was “in part, an attempt to augment the value of black culture within the national cultural field_ to accrue what Bourdieu terms “cultural capital” as one aspect of the struggle for power and justice.” Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p.12.

nation as connoisseurs, critics, and collectors. As producers of art, African Americans could also explore the possibilities of a more particularized expression, or a unique racial aesthetic.¹⁹⁴ Such strategies, some scholars have argued, are what led to “the concept of the ‘New Negro.’”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ For a thorough exploration of the development of African American artists see Mary Ann Calo, *Distinction and Denial: Race Nation and the Critical Construction of the African American Artist, 1920-1940* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

¹⁹⁵ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Face and Voice of Blackness,” Guy C. McElroy (ed.) *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art 1710-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Bedford Arts Publishers and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1990) xxxi-xlv. Gates argues that the reconstruction of the image of the African American began in earnest in ca. 1831 and climaxed with the New Negro Renaissance in the 1920s, xxxii.

Chapter Four

The New Negro, the New Woman, and the Modern

Amaza Lee arrived in New York City in 1927 as a student of Fine Art in the Bachelors of Arts program at Columbia Teachers College. Her arrival came just two years after Alain Leroy Locke, an internationally known intellectual, cultural critic and Howard University philosophy professor, published an anthology of essays under the title, *The New Negro*. He introduced the volume as aiming “to document the ‘New Negro’ culturally and socially – to register the transformations of the inner and outer life of the Negro in America.” This ‘New Negro,’ Locke argued, “must be seen in the perspective of a ‘New World,’ and especially of a ‘New America.’” In the essay that followed, also called “The New Negro,” Locke declared that African Americans were “shedding the old chrysalis of the Negro problem,” and “achieving something like a spiritual emancipation.” Such transformation, he maintained, had come about as a result of “being transplanted.” The vast movement of people from South to North, known as the Great Migration, Locke argued, should not be understood solely as a “blind flood” begun by “war industry” or due to economic hardship or terrorism, but “primarily in terms of a new vision of opportunity, of social and economic freedom, of a spirit to seize... a chance for the improvement of conditions.” This New Negro had resulted from venturing: “city-ward...to the great centers of industry,” and taking “a deliberate flight, not only from countryside to city, but from medieval America to modern.”¹

Locke was not alone in thinking of America as modern. A decade earlier, Francis Picabia a French artist visiting New York in 1913 while Europe was on the brink of war,

¹ Alain Locke (ed.), *The New Negro* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1925, reprinted by Touchstone, 1997), xxv and 5-6. Locke argues that the migration northward should be understood “in terms of a new vision of opportunity, of social and economic freedom, of a spirit to seize, even in the face of an extortionate and heavy toll, a chance for the improvement of conditions.”

declared that the city “expresses in its architecture, its life, its spirit, the modern thought.” Americans, he remarked optimistically, were “not held back by the past,” but having “passed through the old schools” were now “futurist in work and deed and thought.”² A building boom transformed New York’s streets into a gallery of new architectural style as traditionalism visibly gave way to Modernism. Furthermore, this evolution received careful and prominent documentation in symposia and exhibitions where the latest in foreign and national thought was displayed for professional and lay consumption alike.³ In 1921 the opening of The Art Center was perhaps the first formal marking of New York as the nation’s design capital. The Center included professional organizations such as the Art Alliance; the Art Director’s Club; the American Institute of Graphic Arts; the New York Society of Craftsmen; Pictorial Photographers of America; and the Society of Illustrators. This alliance of creative professionals suggested a cohering of American efforts to energetically compete with European production.

By 1921, American literary artists too, were developing a growing confidence in New York’s role as a center of culture. Writing to Edmund Wilson from London, F. Scott Fitzgerald expressed his dissatisfaction with the old world: “God damn the continent of Europe . . . It is of merely antiquarian interest.” and “in the next quarter of a century at most . . . New York will be the global capital of culture” because “culture follows money.” and “we will be the Romans of the next generations as the English are now.”⁴ No doubt Fitzgerald was referring to the wealth secured through “the great achievement of American technology

² Francis Picabia, “How New York Looks to Me,” *New York American*, March 30, 1913, magazine section, p. 11, cited in Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 53.

³ Robert Stern, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987).19.

⁴ F. Scott Fitzgerald in Christopher Hitchens, *Blood, Class and Empire: The Enduring Anglo-American Relationship* (New York: Nation Books, 2004), 366 cited in John Welch, *Object Relations: Transatlantic Exchanges on Sculpture and Culture, 1945-1975*; see also Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920’s* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1995), 189-194.

and industrialization, from which would arise, not simply a modern style, but an entirely new way of life.”⁵ In fact, cultural critics Martha and Sheldon Cheney saw the new life as resulting from the influence of American technology, which was creating a “machine-age consciousness,” and “an age of machine-implemented culture.”⁶ Thus, some imagined America as holding the key to a future embodied in the vision of technology. As Locke saw it, technology held the promise of employment but also infused the world of culture and it was through culture that African Americans would change their place in society. In *The New Negro*, Locke wrote that it was through creative contributions that African Americans would win approval and make progress towards becoming fully acknowledged participants in American life.⁷ For his part, poet, cultural and political activist James Weldon Johnson declared in his essay in *The New Negro*, that “something approaching a cultural revolution was taking place,” and that “a renaissance of the Negro was occurring.”⁸

In coming to New York to study Fine Art, Amaza Lee positioned herself at the center of these changes, becoming part of this Cultural Revolution. Moreover, conforming to ‘New Negro’ ideation, Amaza presented a vision of new womanhood, which strongly denied the persistence of black female stereotypes lingering in the American imagination [figure 4-1].⁹

⁵ Robert T. Buck, “Foreword,” to Richard Guy Wilson, Diane H. Pilgrim and Dickran Tashjian, *The Machine Age in America, 1918-1941* (New York: The Brooklyn Museum and Harry Abrahms, 1986), 16.

⁶ Sheldon Cheney and Martha Cheney, *Art and the Machine* (New York: Whittlesey House-McGraw-Hill, 1936), pp.8, 26, cited in Wilson, Pilgrim and Tashjian, *The Machine Age in America, 1918-1941*, 23.

⁷ Alain Locke, cited in Mary Schmidt Campbell, “Introduction,” *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America* (New York: Abradale Press, with The Studio Museum in Harlem, 1987 reprinted 1994), 15.

⁸ Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1925, reprinted by Touchstone 1997) It is not known to what extent Amaza may have interacted with Locke, but she would certainly have known him as a close friend to Anne Spencer; For an interpretation of Locke’s *The New Negro*, see Arnold Rampersad, “The Book that Launched the Harlem Renaissance,” in *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, No. 38 (Winter, 2002-2003), pp. 87-91.

⁹ The dominant image of African American women was of two extremes: either of humble servitude or untamed sexuality. Despite determined and often highly public efforts of African American women to establish themselves as progressive, educated and politically active during the interwar years, in the white American imagination black womanhood remained strongly connected to caricatures of

By 1927 at the age of thirty-two, she had explored the possibilities of modern womanhood, she was the product of a generation of black women who had laid the foundation for progress, for women to express themselves freely, act independently, and seek fulfillment outside the constraints of a patriarchal society, white or black. Amaza Lee presented a figure “mediated and mediatized by emerging industries, pulp fiction, advertising, and cinema,” the modern woman who was “pictured as ‘going places...’” at the wheel of an automobile, at the helm of a speedboat, in the cockpit of an airplane.” Like many other young women, she expressed herself in the sartorial and behavioral habits of an independent woman who “wore pants, cropped her hair, smoked in public....” and was unafraid to experience the adventure of outdoor leisure pursuits, the spectacle of social engagement and political activism, and the passion of sexual attraction and desire [figure 4-2, 4-3].¹⁰ Together with key members of her family, Amaza Lee moved into Harlem, the place Elise Johnson McDougald, writing in the *New Negro* anthology, singled out as a “modern city in the world’s metropolis” and where:

laboring domestic servants, most notably visible in the abundance of mass produced advertizing. In the South, in particular, the mammy figure paid homage to a sentimental memory of plantation life, a nostalgic figure that released whites from “a guilty awareness of black women as victims of rape by white men,” and sustained a sentimentalized, romantic notion of the slave woman as a forgiving member of the family. In 1923 a bill was introduced to Congress proposing a monument to commemorate the Black Mammy. Although furious African American leaders succeeded in striking the bill down, many smaller such monuments were erected across the country between this period and the beginning of WWII. By 1936 Margaret Mitchell’s novel presenting on a romantic view of plantation life leading up to the Civil War was fast becoming a best seller and in 1939 became a huge box office success as a Hollywood film.

¹⁰ Whitney Chadwick, Tirza True Latimer, *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars* (London: Rutgers, 2003), 3; see also Laura Doan (ed.) *Sapphic Modernities* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006). Amaza Lee and Edna are very concerned with the way they dress and write frequently of the new fashions they have seen in New York, Amaza Lee experiments with wearing pants and in later life is typically pictured in pants rather than the traditional women’s wear of skirts and dresses. Loran Doan argues that “Women in the 1920s were given the opportunity to experiment with self-expression in their dress, later they may have identified selves as lesbian but in 1920s they were testing the boundaries of sartorial expression.” see Doan, Laura. *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modernist English Lesbian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), xxi.

The Negro woman is free from the cruder handicaps of primitive household hardships and the grosser forms of sex and race subjugation. Here she has considerable opportunity to measure her powers in the intellectual and industrial fields of the great city.¹¹

McDougald, like Locke, saw African American migration to New York City as an opportunity to work alongside and develop relations with whites, and through such proximity, to gradually persist in making the “social adjustments” that would lead to full integration. Amaza Lee was emblematic of the vision of an intricately fused Harlem Renaissance, in which whites went slumming and African Americans mixed freely with whites, similarly enjoying the amusements and intellectual stimulation of urban life.¹² As a light-skinned, middle-class New Negro woman, she belonged to a group of individuals in the early days of modernity, that “stood to gain most from urbanization” and for whom the city offered “an unprecedented and astonishing variety of possibilities, stimuli and wealth.”¹³ Amaza Lee could have been the real life embodiment of author Nella Larsen’s fictional female hero Helga Crane performing the role in *Quicksand* of the New Negro Woman, who had refused the strict dress requirements of Naxo (code for Fisk University), against which women students had so recently publically revolted. Larsen presented the rebel character Helga, as remembering “fragments of a speech” made by the college Dean of Women, which had obviously affected her” “Bright colors are vulgar...Black, gray, brown and navy blue are the most becoming colors for colored people...” “Dark complected [stet] people shouldn’t wear

¹¹ Elsie Johnson McDougald, “The Task of Negro Womanhood,” in Alain Locke (ed.) *The New Negro*, 375.

¹² Jessica Labbe analyses Nella Larsen’s handling of this complex issue of light-skinned African Americans considering the possibilities of passing as whites, but simultaneously succumbing to the overpowering binding of duty to race, in her novel *Quicksand*. See “Too High a Price”: The Terrible Honesty of Black Women’s Work in *Quicksand*,” *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, Volume 10, Number 1, 2009: pp.81-110.

¹³ Elizabeth Wilson “The Invisible *Flâneur*” in *New Left Review*, Vol. 191, 1992: pp.90-110.

yellow or green or red.”¹⁴ In this scene, Larsen demonstrates the changing nature of African American activism in the modern world, and a new approach to the world, which the younger generation was adopting. Describing the fictional dean as “a woman from one of the ‘first families,’ a great race woman,” Larsen suggests the problematic nature of the New Negro, Larsen’s hero Helga Crane, was but “a despised mulatto,” for whom “something intuitive, some unanalyzed driving spirit of loyalty to the inherent racial need for gorgeousness told her that bright colors were fitting and that dark-complexioned people should wear yellow, green, and red.” Larsen positioned her hero Helga to note that “Black brown and gray were ruinous to them, actually the loveliest sights she [Helga] had ever seen had been a sooty black girl decked out in a flaming orange dress, which a horrified matron had next day consigned to the dyer. Why she wondered, didn’t someone write “A Plea for Color?”¹⁵ Unlike the older African American generation that supported integration and a leadership class that was more closely affiliated with whites, Helga suggests the willingness to view a broader definition of African Americans. Like the novel’s hero, Amaza Lee was a mulatta, and demonstrated a progressive attitude from within a cosmopolitan culture, one less hierarchical and more modern. The irony was that the politics of uplift ideology was centered on patriarchal values of respectability, family and the home, which while intended on the one hand to protect black women, was nevertheless constrictive in a world in which women were demanding the right to lead publically active lives.¹⁶

¹⁴ Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* in *The Complete Fiction of Nella Larsen, Passing, Quicksand and The Stories*, intro by Charles R. Larson, foreword by Marita Golden. New York: Anchor Books, 2001),

¹⁵ Nella Larsen, *Quicksand*, in *The Complete Fiction of Nella Larsen, Passing, Quicksand and The Stories*, intro by Charles R. Larson, foreword by Marita Golden. (New York: Anchor Books, 2001), 51. Cherene Sherrard-Johnson argues for the complexity of the Mulatta figure in the modern metropolis in “A Plea for Color”: Nella Larsen’s Iconography of the Mulatta,” *American Literature*, Volume 76, Number 4, December 2004, pp. 833-869. It would seem appropriate to also consider the changing social landscape of which Amaza Lee is a part, including new approaches to cultural production that are less rigidly bourgeois as will be explored in chapter five.

¹⁶ Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 12. Gaines argues that uplift ideology was

However, it is also possible to see that Amaza Lee had more in common with Helga Crane, whose rebellious character may have been the author's attempt to demonstrate the complexity of racial uplift ideology, which encompassed the cultural production of the Harlem Renaissance, particularly for women, and specifically with regard to female sexuality.¹⁷ The most visible leaders of the Harlem Renaissance were men, and predominantly conservative. Their approach to racial uplift involved keeping at arms length anything that did not express morally upright and righteous behavior. Yet this was a moment when men and women were exploring identity, particularly sexual identity. While Harlem Renaissance author Nella Larsen chose to construct what has been criticized as a conservative and unsatisfactory ending for her hero, Helga Crane, which ultimately subverts any remnant of rebellion, she may have done so under pressure to conform to conservative ideology. Yet, as Deborah McDowell notes: "Helga Crane is divided psychically between a desire for sexual fulfillment and a longing for social respectability."¹⁸ The same might be said for Amaza Lee, who clearly enjoyed the freedom of living in New York, expressed passionately romantic and sexual feelings towards Edna in private correspondence, enjoyed discussing the poems of bi-sexual poet E. St. Vincent Millay with friends, but asked Edna to destroy her letters, and in her public life demonstrated a preference for the quieter, more refined recreational and commercial outlets of New York, rather than the audaciously licentious venues sought by newcomers to the city in search of sexual freedom and

"deeply concerned with sexuality." Black leaders worked to transform the negative image of black women as hypersexual beings, an image, which had long served as an excuse for white supremacist violence and rape, but which inevitably black women's ability to control self-determination. See also Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, 78.

¹⁷ See Deborah McDowell, Introduction, in Deborah E. McDowell, ed. *Quicksand; and, Passing by Nella Larsen* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1986, reprinted 2004), xvii

¹⁸ For an interpretation of Nella Larsen's *Passing* and *Quicksand* that addresses the issue of female sexuality see Deborah McDowell, "Introduction," in Deborah E. McDowell, ed. *Quicksand; and, Passing by Nella Larsen* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1986, reprinted 2004), xvii.

excitement.¹⁹

Residing in Harlem and traversing its streets on her way to class Amaza Lee would have felt the novelty of what Alain Locke called the “race capital” in which were brought together in concentrated form for the first time “so many diverse elements of Negro life” and a population for whom the “greatest experience was the finding of one another.”²⁰ It was this “finding of one another,” which Locke and others, attributed to the blossoming of African American culture, in other words it was shared ideas and experiences that bolstered already extant creative expression and opened the way for new possibilities. Amaza Lee’s mind too, was opened to new possibilities, which she embraced and sought to absorb as much as she could from the city, reading the latest novels, attending theatrical performances and viewing museum exhibits, as her correspondence attests:

Have just come from 5th Ave. & roaming around down that way. I was in a mood for going to the theatre – I wanted “A Strange Interlude” – an interlude to happiness! In other words I was lonesome – It was a terrible temptation to cut class & go to the theatre, but I resisted & came to class ...N.Y. is in its spring beauty _ I’m leaving class right now – going out – I don’t know where just going.”²¹

Some scholars have defined modernity, as a “form of experience, an awareness of change and of adaptation to change,” and “the effect of that change on the individual.”²² Amaza Lee

¹⁹ See Amaza Lee and Edna’s correspondence: Amaza to Edna, NYC Aug. 8, 1927; Amaza Lee to Edna, Lynchburg, Feb 19, 1928; Amaza to Edna, New York City, Jan. 13, 1928; Amaza to Edna, NYC Jan 27, 1929. Much has been written about the licentiousness of Harlem nightlife both at the time and since the Harlem Renaissance. See for example Steven Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub Of African American Culture, 1920-1930* (New York: Pantheon, 1995, 136-137.

²⁰ Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 6.

²¹ Amaza Lee to Edna March 22, 1929 (Teachers College). Colson Papers Box # 29, Virginia State University

²² Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Eds.) *Art in Theory: 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (London: Blackwell, 2006), 128.

Meredith was clearly at the center of modernity, adapting to her new life in the city and the stimulation it offered, she resembled the central figure of modernity identified in the *flâneur* of French poet Charles Baudelaire. Most scholars of cultural history agree that it was Baudelaire who “first defined modernity in visual terms.”²³ If the city observer, the *flâneur*, can be said to be an ambiguous figure seeking the meaning of modernity, then Amaza Lee in Harlem, the newly established Mecca of modern culture, could easily be characterized as a prototypical *flâneuse*. With her fluid sexuality, gender and race, she constituted the essential modern figure, and in her role as artist sought out the spaces of modernity in the city.²⁴

Writing to Edna, Amaza Lee described her route:

I, too, walk home some evenings – just for the exercise... Ordinarily I take the Amsterdam Ave car 1½ blocks away from the house, if I’m lucky I’ll get a Broadway Car, if not, transfer on Amsterdam & 125th & get off at Teachers College Broadway & 120 – same back home.²⁵

Nevertheless, there was more to Amaza Lee’s wandering or *flâneuring*. At Columbia Teachers College she was exposed to the most current art theories and practices of the time, a key aspect of which was to learn to discern the value in art by visiting the galleries and museums of the city. Amaza Lee studied under Belle Boas (1884-1953), who had directed the Fine Art Program at Columbia Teachers College from 1917.²⁶ Boas was an active scholar and art educator who attended national conferences, developed her own programs, and published on the subject of art education. She was first editor-in-chief of Columbia Teachers

²³ Chadwick and Latimer, *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), xvi.

²⁴ Keith Tester refers to the ambiguity of the *flâneur* figure and the need to develop, explore and challenge received understandings of Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin’s urban image of modernity into ways of understanding our cultural and social milieu. See Keith Tester, *The Flâneur* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 1-21.

²⁵ Amaza Lee to Edna, (pages missing, date unknown – likely ca. 1929). ALM Papers, VSU Archives.

²⁶ Enid Zimmerman & Mary Ann Stankiewicz, (eds.) “Women Art Educators,” Unpublished paper, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, April 1982, p. 59.

College journal, *Art Education* in 1935, a position she retained until she took employment as Director of Education at the Baltimore Museum of Art in the 1940s. Boas shared ideas about art education with Victor D'Amico, who became Director of Art Education at the Museum of Modern Art, and her brother, Johns Hopkins philosophy professor and scholar extraordinaire, George Boas, to whom she was very close.²⁷ Although she did so after Amaza Lee had already left Teachers College, Belle Boas, taught Summer School at Black Mountain College, where German émigrés Joseph and Anni Albers had established an interdisciplinary educational arts environment, based on the concepts of the Bauhaus. Boas' involvement in Black Mountain College suggests her interest in new methods in art education, in the latest trends in aesthetics, and in particular in modern art and design.²⁸

It was however, Arthur Wesley Dow who most significantly influenced Boas, and who through her would influence Amaza Lee. An artist, landscape painter, printmaker, photographer, and most successfully, an educator, Dow had been made director of Art Education at the Teachers College in 1903. A year later, another highly influential scholar arrived at Columbia University who would also influence Boas. John Dewey, a philosopher and education reformer, was hired to teach at Columbia University in 1904 and stayed until 1930.²⁹ In the late 1920s and beyond he would be instrumental in helping to expand the definition of what aesthetic experience might constitute; his work contributed significantly to changing the way Americans thought about art.³⁰ Dow, a proto-modernist, all but

²⁷ Enid Zimmerman & Mary Ann Stankiewicz, (eds.) "Women Art Educators," Unpublished paper, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, April 1982, p. 59.

²⁸ It is likely that Boas knew of Albers' work "An Homage to the Square," which had ties to Denman Ross and Arthur Wesley Dow's theories of art praxis and art appreciation See Marie Frank, *Denman Ross and American Design Theory* (Lebanon, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2011), 1.

²⁹ John Dewey taught at Columbia University for 25 years, retiring at the age of 70 in 1930, the year Amaza Lee graduated with her BA in Fine Art. "Prof. John Dewey to Quit Columbia," *New York Times*, Mar 20, 1930.

³⁰ A. Joan Saab, *For the Millions: American Art and Culture Between the Wars* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2004), pp.12-13.

forgotten in discussions of modern art, would influence generations of students of studio art and art appreciation both during his lifetime and posthumously through disciples such as Belle Boas.³¹ Dewey and Dow had a mutual interest in “fostering a democratic culture as well as a respect for hands-on artistic experience.”³²

Dow’s guiding principle was that art could only be truly appreciated if its value was learned, and one way to do this was to spend time with collections of good art. Naturally, this art could most easily be found in the city, in the museums, which would have the largest repository of art that has been judged to be valuable and worthy of public presentation. He wrote:

The chief purpose of the museum is education. That education should be in two parts: first, Art Appreciation and second, Knowledge. Knowledge of the things in the museum would be of no use if you did not have an appreciation of their quality. Biography, the stories of the objects where they were produced etc., is interesting too but belongs more to archeology and anthropology, not to art.³³

Dow was critical however, of those who used the museum for entertainment, and when museums were used as such, he argued, the individual would experience “museum fag,”³⁴ As explanation he wrote: “wandering about, looking at this, that, and the other, is fatiguing, and rather stupid: this produces what they call “museum fag.” This was, however the fault of

³¹ Frederick C. Moffat, *Arthur Wesley Dow, 1857-1922* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1977), 104. Moffat is the authority on Arthur Wesley Dow.

³² Joseph Masheck, “Introduction,” In *Arthur Wesley Dow, Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the use of students and Teachers* (Berkeley: University of California, Press, 1997), 29.

³³ A.W. Dow, “Methods of Using the Museum” in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Vol. 11, No. 9, Devoted to the Educational Work of Art Museums (Sept, 1916), pp. 195-197

³⁴ Fag is a synonym for ennui –or fatigue

the visitor, he argued, not that of the museum: "The visitor needs to be told how to study the things and what to look for; he should have some very definite purpose."³⁵

Like all students participating in the Fine Art Program, Amaza Lee was issued with a permanent entry pass to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, as well as other galleries in New York.³⁶ In a letter to Edna Colson from Columbia Teacher's College, Amaza Lee shared the experience of her college courses, while suggesting a purpose in spending time at the museum was to create works that might court Edna's affection:

Taking course "Advanced Studio Work" this means that I may do anything I wish in painting, such as copying masterpieces in the museum. Now, if you wish, I could copy any (one or 2) great masterpieces in the Metropolitan Museum for your dormitory.³⁷

Mimesis, however was not the true purpose of observing museum masterpieces, rather it was to develop the faculties of the mind. Training a student how to judge a work of art, according to Arthur Wesley Dow and Belle Boas, had to precede studio instruction. In his seminal publication, *Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for Use of Students and Teachers*, published in 1899, revised in 1913 and again in 1938, Dow created a method for guiding generations of teachers and students in the making and appreciation of art. His approach to art praxis depended on teaching the faculties how to value art:

Unless appreciation has developed despite the crowding of other things, the chances are that his [the student's] work will lack the one vital element for

³⁵ Dow, "Methods of Using the Museum" in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Vol. 11, No. 9, Devoted to the Educational Work of Art Museums (Sept, 1916), 195.

³⁶ Lois Mailou Jones who attended Columbia Teachers College in the summers, while she taught at Howard University also had a pass to study the art works at the Metropolitan. Lois Mailou Jones papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

³⁷ Amaza Lee Meredith to Edna, Colson, January 20, 1930 New York, ALM Papers. VSU

which art exists, and to which he has yet given the slightest attention – that is Beauty.³⁸

Dow had learned from Ernest Fenellosa, curator of the ‘Oriental Department’ at the Boston Museum of Fine Art, who had studied philosophy at Harvard and, after living in Japan, fused Eastern and Western art principles into a method for training Americans to understand art. Inspired by his own study of Japanese art, Dow began *Composition* with an introduction to materials and tools, followed by exercises based on the “three structural elements” of art, these were: *line* (which refers to the boundaries created by shapes and the interrelations of lines and spaces), *notan* a Japanese word (which refers to the quantity of light reflected, or the massing of tones of different values, and denoted the harmonic relations between darks and lights), and Color. Dow was concerned to explain *notan* as the patterning of lights and darks in harmonies and contrasts, not as light and shadow or chiaroscuro. The purpose of *notan* was to create a harmonious pattern, not to simulate an illusion of three-dimensional depth. The third element in Dow’s art theory was Color, which, he argued: “with its infinity of relations, is baffling; its finer harmonies, like those of music, can be grasped by the appreciations only, not by reasoning or analysis.”³⁹ This method of teaching art deviated from traditional academic art instruction that stressed representation, especially life drawing, as the basis for art. In contrast, Dow recommended exercises for students, such as copying the lines, light-dark patterns, and colors in textiles and rugs, as a way to develop an artistic sensibility. Dow considered architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry the principal fine arts. They were, he argued, “Space arts, taking the various forms of arranging, building, constructing, designing, modeling and picture-painting.” Field work in the form of

³⁸ Dow, *Composition: A Series of Exercises Selected from a New System of Art Education* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1899), 6, 80 cited in Marie Frank, 73.

³⁹ Arthur Wesley Dow, *Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 161.

strolling through art galleries and museums was an integral part of the Fine Art curriculum as evidenced in Amaza Lee's letters regarding the freedom given students to escape from the classroom and explore the art exhibits on display:

Wed A.M. I was out of sorts & didn't feel like painting - I said to Miss Ruffina, 'Do I have to stay and paint if I don't feel like it? I'd rather go to art galleries.' ...' With her permission I went in a hurry. Saw an exhibit of works of Modigliani, an Italian - he distorts the body - much sameness in all his canvases. Also went to Rheinhardts' Galleries, enjoyed that greatly - all modern French paintings.⁴⁰

Amaza Lee was filled with enthusiasm at being immersed in art making in New York, the center of modern art. Writing to Edna she declared:

This education is my whole life...I've 'found' myself, thank God, through my love for you andNow I'm trying to loose myself in my work... Think of my majoring in Fine Art after wanting to all these years! Are you glad, Edna? Do you think it a wise step?⁴¹

She self-consciously absorbed the lessons of modern art and aesthetic theories of the new age in which she found herself. Dow had considered his teaching exercises a means to fostering subjectivity. His concern was for the student of art appreciation to experience seeing and feeling, as a means to developing the creative faculty.⁴² After receiving a long awaited letter from Edna, Amaza Lee responded in terms reflecting a highly subjective response, which she materialized in a dynamic abstract ink drawing [figure 4-4]. In addition to the methods for training the faculties to recognize art subjectively and with emotion,

⁴⁰ Amaza Lee Meredith to Edna Colson, NYC, Nov. 3. 1930, Colson Papers, Correspondence: Colson Meredith, Box #29, folder #5.

⁴¹ Amaza Lee to Edna, October 7, 1928, New York City. ALM Papers, VSU.

⁴² Marie Frank, "The Theory of Pure Design and American Architectural Education in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (June 2008), 252.

Amaza Lee studied a theory developed by Jay Hambidge, 'Dynamic Movement' and 'Dynamic Illumination.' Hambidge's theory was based on the fifth-century Greek system of root rectangles and "whirling squares" to generate proportional areas, which were considered to bring order to the division of space.⁴³ Amaza Lee used Hambidge's theory to express the dynamic romantic and sexual emotions she felt on receiving Edna's letter; the image she drew accompanied this explanation:

Why are you so restless? Who makes you so? Anybody 'doing things' to you? What makes you so? Can you interpret the emotion expressed in Fig. 1? If you can understand it, if it does have a "meaning" for you – then do you "feel restless" like the illustration? If the drawing "moves" you, you are in harmony with the "artist's" feeling; you know how it feels when thrills chase up, down, across, all over one. If I don't stop this you will be accusing me of insanity instead of modernity in Art.⁴⁴

Jay Hambidge had worked closely with Denman Ross, who, like Dow, "directed attention to design elements as a way to train judgment." In 1920 Hambidge published his theory, which maintained that the secret he had sought lay in "measurements of areas" rather than linear measurements [figure 4-4, 4-5, 4-6].⁴⁵ African American artist Aaron Douglas was also exposed to the theories of Jay Hambidge and may have been drawing on these when he created his dynamic signature style his biographer Susan Earle calls "jazz modern or moderne."⁴⁶ Douglas belonged to the group that epitomized the New Negro; it was his work

⁴³ Jay Hambidge, *Dynamic Symmetry: The Greek Vase* (New Haven, 1920); Hambidge, "Dynamic Symmetry and Modern Architecture," *Architect* 44 (November 1921), cited in Marie Frank, "The Theory of Pure Design and American Architectural Education in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (June 2008), 266.

⁴⁴ Letter: Amaza Lee to Edna, NYC, Feb 8, 1930.

⁴⁵ Jay Hambidge, Obituary, *Art News*, Jan 26, 1923

⁴⁶ Susan Earle, *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2007). Earle however, does not suggest the influence of Hambidge as resulting in Douglas' unique style, but it seems likely in comparing Amaza Lee's drawing with Douglas's mural works which are filled with geometric shapes in motion. George Hutchinson, however, does note that

that illustrated Locke's volume of that name.

In February 1930, Amaza Lee attended the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition, "Painting in Paris" which so captivated her interest that she purchased the catalogue. She also noted having finished reading Roger Fry's *Cezanne* and was in the process of enjoying Jan Gordon's *Modern French Painters*.⁴⁷ These visits to the major galleries were of great significance for Amaza Lee, as she would have had little or no access to such venues in the South. She was gaining knowledge and learning to appreciate art through discerning quality in the exhibits. Yet while Amaza Lee sought to learn from the masters hanging in these notable museum collections, she was well aware of the absence of African American art in those galleries. The Harmon Foundation exhibits, which were staged in 'Colored' YWCA's,⁴⁸ public library spaces and other venues frequented by African Americans, were among the few focusing on African American work.⁴⁹ Feeling excited by some recognition she had received from one of her professors, Amaza Lee wrote to Edna of planning to visit the Harmon Foundation exhibit of African American art at International House on the Columbia University campus, adding: "Perhaps by 1932 there will be a piece by A.L.M. there. Who knows? Hope springs eternal, you know."⁵⁰ The public, however, was confused by what they saw in the Harmon Foundation exhibits, as Selma Day commented in the *Pittsburgh Courier*:

A few of the artists are producing what is called 'modern art' by some, 'Negro art' by others, and still another group will name the same

Douglas was influenced by Jay Hambidge but provides no footnote to this comment. See Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 399.

⁴⁷ This may not seem such a significant purchase today, but it is important to remember that Amaza Lee was watchful of her spending, surviving as she was on a tight budget of tuition costs and activities considered part of her education in the city. The purchase of the catalogue was significant enough for her to remark on it to Edna.

⁴⁸ See chapter three for more on the so-called colored YWCA venues and their significance in displaying work by African American artists.

⁴⁹ Mary Ann Calo has recently written about the options African American artists had to exhibit their work at this time. See Calo, *Distinction and Denial: Race, Nation, and the Critical Construction of the African American Artist, 1920-1940* (Uni of Michigan Press, 2009).

⁵⁰ Amaza Lee to Edna, Jan. 13. 1928 N.Y.C, ALM Papers, VSU archives.

paintings 'primitive art.' I imagine that one often wonders where one style ends and the other begins, and more often questions, whether or not any such thing as modern art or Negro art or primitive art really exists.⁵¹

Africa

The culture of Americans of African descent was, however, visible in New York and in other large Northern cities, and was a significant component of a modern American spirit. But the American spirit which Francis Picabia and others had found so potent had become focused on a fleeting desire for the exotic and titillating, rather than on the truly transformative. In the process, the idea of Africa and a long-held derogatory view of African Americans became intricately entwined in the American imagination. It was the popular culture that attracted the French and others to New York, the vaudeville, jazz, popular dances, comic books, and American sports; African Americans, as the purveyors of much of this popular culture, were embroiled in the surge of excitement over novelty and difference.⁵² While some American cultural critics saw the promise of the industrial age, the popular trend was to retreat to a celebration of the exotic 'other,' identifying Africa as a "purportedly non-civilized society that had avoided the alienation of industrialized life," and "was therefore to be celebrated." Such ideas persisted throughout the 1920's in the minds of the general public and even of philanthropic patrons such as Charlotte Mason who, at times supported Zora Neale Hurston and Aaron Douglas, and was a mentor to Alain Locke. She was known to call Locke "Brown Boy;" and encouraged him to "slough off white culture," and to use it "only to clarify the thoughts that surge in your being," suggesting that the emotional aspect of creativity could be most effective when coming from a visceral,

⁵¹ Selma Day, "Harmon Art Exhibit in New York High Class," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 March, 1931, Harmon Foundation Papers, Box 118, cited in Mary Ann Calo, "African American Art and Critical Discourse Between World Wars," *American Quarterly* 51:3 (1999), 600.

⁵² Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935*, 57.

untamed passion, tempered however, by an intellect that could only be white.⁵³

Carl Van Vechten, another staunch advocate of African American literary and visual cultural production, also sought to capture what many believed lay at the core of African American creativity, casting the “sensuous, intuitive natural black as the opposite of the calculating, pragmatic and deeply repressed Caucasian,” a characteristic of black expression that was to “serve the needs of white intellectuals seeking an escape from boredom or an antidote to the soulless materialistic culture of their age.”⁵⁴ In discussing the future of Richmond sculptor Leslie Garland Bolling with local art critic Hunter T. Stagg, for example, Van Vechten leaned towards segregating Bolling from New York’s arts establishment influences, writing: “I am almost certain now that he should be let alone – not prompted or taught or brought to New York.” Van Vechten had discussed Bolling’s work with modernist sculptor Gaston Lachaise who equally advised “leaving the young man entirely alone,” and emphasized that he “should not study or be influenced by any teacher.”⁵⁵ Critical reception of a 1928 exhibit of works by Archibald Motley, hailed as the ‘first Negro one-man show of importance in New York, included a range of paintings revealing the artist’s academic training at the Art Institute of Chicago, yet critics preferred to focus on *Waganda Charm-Makers*, an African scene depicting Voodoo dance rites, and suggested it was Motley’s heritage and essential identity as an artist of African descent that gave the painting its authenticity, *New York Times* critic, Worth Tuttle, reinforced the instinctual, unschooled impulse of African American art, arguing that “the source of a natural muse for these artists

⁵³ Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Noonday Press, 1995), 282; see also David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Penguin, 1979; reprinted 1997), 152.

⁵⁴ Mary Ann Calo, “African American Art and Critical Discourse Between World Wars,” *American Quarterly* 51.3 (1999) 580.

⁵⁵ Carl Van Vechten to Hunter Stagg, April 22, 1931, May 16, 1931, July 1, 1931, July 9, 1931, Box 3 Folder 3, Stagg Papers, Virginia Commonwealth University, quoted in Barbara C. Batson, *Freeing Art from Wood* (Richmond: Library of Virginia, 2006), 5.

lay in their African as well as their plantation, that is, slave, past.”⁵⁶ Such interest in focusing on this particular work expressing a jungle theme may have been a deliberate attempt by the critic to enhance Motley’s public appeal and to encourage sales of his work.⁵⁷ The notion of primitive was related to Africa but could also be applied to what was understood as the folk. Amaza Lee, as a developing artist, does not appear to have infused her creative production with the arts of Africa but as her later works suggest, she took her inspiration from an eclectic range of European precedents and American folk art [figures 4-6, 4-7, 4-8].⁵⁸

But what was the foundation for this theme of the primitive in popular culture? Why was the idea of Africa so prominent in the American and European imagination? Some have seen it as an escape mechanism, occurring in the wake of the carnage and destruction of war, or as a romantic fantasy that sought inspiration in the idea of a perceived “open and healthy psychic nature residing in groups untroubled by the arbitrary restraints of the super-ego, and the constraints of a Puritan ethic.”⁵⁹ Amaza Lee arrived in a city which only one year before had been declared by *New York Times* travel writer Miriam Beard, a “Wild Urban Jungle.”⁶⁰ This moniker infused the city with images of the untamed, the raw, the feared, and yet anachronistically modern and implicitly sophisticated, urban. With a strongly ironic tone, the author described what awaited the masses of migrating peoples fleeing “the unnatural restraints and complexities of an agricultural existence,” exchanging a

⁵⁶ See “Negro Artists are Developing True Racial Art,” *New York Times*, September 9, 1928, p.120, in Proquest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* (1851-2007).

⁵⁷ Patricia Hills, *Modern Art in the USA: Issues and Controversies of the 20th Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 65-69.

⁵⁸ Despite repeated efforts none of the work Amaza Lee executed in this period has been found, however, Amaza Lee took photographs of some of her paintings from the 1970s, experimenting with various colored lenses, and created slides of these images. Although somewhat difficult to discern the paintings demonstrate a continuing interest in early European modern, abstract and folk art.

⁵⁹ See Sidney J. Lemelle and Robin D.G. Kelley (eds.) *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora* (London/New York: Verso, 1994), 25; and Nathan Irvin Huggins, “Introduction,” *Voices From the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 7.

⁶⁰ Miriam Beard, *New York Times*, March 14th, 1926, p.2.

“cumbersome slow routine, early rise and late toil” for a world in which “limbs ache from the rough exercise of the ‘Charleston’ and the daily perils of crossing Broadway.” Beard’s reference to agricultural labor and the Charleston implicitly identified those migrating to the city as African American. Indeed, as historian Ann Douglas has argued: “A good part of New York’s cultural preeminence and power in the 1920s came from the simple fact that New York was chief Mecca to the hundreds of thousands of Negroes emigrating South to North in the Great War years and bringing their ‘gift of story and song’ with them.” Douglas noted, however, the degree to which blacks and whites worked together in New York’s art and entertainment business, calling it a “mongrel city.”⁶¹

It was only in reference to African American cultural production however that an image of the untamed temperament occurred, in, for example, the number of dances brought to the city — many of which bore animalistic names such as the Turkey Trot, the Fox Trot and the Monkey Glide — and of the increasing notoriety of their star performer, Josephine Baker, who was finding stardom as an ex-patriot in Paris.⁶² Those individuals who were newly arrived would encounter a different pace of life in the metropolis; a life characterized by decadent dynamism, and although free of the “ache of physical labor,” nevertheless equally exhausting. Furthermore, life in the city was nomadic, governed by the lore of the wild, with unfamiliar sounds and sights, and habitats that could potentially resemble “a tiny nest, perched on the eighteenth crag of some gigantic cliff-dwelling...unstable and fleeting.”⁶³ And yet, this metaphoric wilderness, while transporting one to a geographically and temporally primordial place, simultaneously lured one to the temptations of modern capitalism, where women, in particular, went slumming in the exotic

⁶¹ Ann Douglas *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Noonday Press, 1995), 5.

⁶² Ann Douglas *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Noonday Press, 1995), 52; 79-90

⁶³ Beard, *New York Times*, March 14th, 1926, p.2.

wonderland offered in department store and glossy magazine displays.⁶⁴

Color, noise, nerve-stimulation surround the city man, as they must have enveloped his primitive ancestors. Shop-windows and magazine stands contain tropical color in brilliance and profusion. Women stroll the Avenue, ornamented to suit the taste of Sandwich Island royalty. They wear the slave bracelets and the abbreviated skirts whose fashion was set by the Congo long before Paris ever heard of it.⁶⁵

The display of Africa in public spaces had originated in admiration for its sculptural forms that were seen as potential sources to be drawn on by modern artists in the search for a new aesthetic. Yet, while Alfred Stieglitz' 291 exhibit of African tribal collections in 1914 was intended to elevate the works to the field of fine art, a subsequent exhibit by Stewart Culin "Primitive Negro Art," at the Brooklyn Museum, filtered into mainstream popular venues by means of publicity in trade and home-design magazines such as *Art & Decoration*, *Good Furniture*, and *Women's Wear Daily*. The popularity of this phenomenon of the 'primitive' was not peculiar to the early twentieth century, but can be traceable to antiquity and appeared at moments when it becomes necessary to facilitate escape from a present, which in some way or form is seen as unsatisfactory.⁶⁶ Cullen turned this

⁶⁴ The term slumming is used in this context to denote white delight in participating in another world that appeared exotic and on the wild side which included ethnic as well as sexual alterity, see for example in contemporary literature see Rudolph Fisher, "The Caucasian Storms Harlem," in David Levering Lewis, *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 110; also for scholarly reference to slumming see Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8; and Henry Louis Gates, "New Negroes, Migration and Cultural Exchange," in Elizabeth Hutton Turner, ed. *Jacob Lawrence: The Migration Series* (Washington D.C. in association with the Philips Collection, 1993), 19.

⁶⁵ Beard, *New York Times*, March 14th, 1926, p.2.

⁶⁶ Sieglinde Lemke in *Primitivist Modernism* defines the current usage of primitivism from between 1906 when artists in Paris began considering African sculpture as a source of inspiration for their own art, and 1934, the date of Nancy Cunard's *Negro Anthology* and the birth of the Negritude movement. See Sieglinde Lemke, *Primitivist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7. However, Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, argue for a more complex understanding of the notion of the primitive and for its extended use. See Lovejoy and Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, vol. 1. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935, reprinted 1995), ix

popularity into production and profit potential in a series of designs intended for the commercial decorative arts, furniture and the market for women's fashions.⁶⁷ The commercial market spread internationally, influencing, Culin claimed, the decorative arts as exhibited in the 1925 Paris *Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, and catapulting a whole new area of design, which evoked the idea of Africa. Culin argued that: "The new art of the Paris exposition revolved about Negro design, not the sculpture, but the textiles."⁶⁸ Influential high society individuals such as shipping heiress Nancy Cunard and Elizabeth Rubenstein further popularized the fascination with African designs, publishing photographs of themselves in fashion magazines such as Paris *Vogue*, and thus blurring the boundaries between ethnography, art and popular design culture. Such strategies paralleled more serious attempts to elevate African objects, formerly regarded as ethnographic, to the status of art, but nevertheless decontextualized African art and set it up in a Western hierarchy.⁶⁹ This was problematic for African Americans attempting to re-define themselves with a cultural past that connected to the great civilizations of the African continent, because it suggested this cultural heritage was at a less developed stage than Western culture, and less deserving of serious attention. Sadly, the predictions of Charles S. Johnson, race leader, cultural avatar, sociologist and editor of *Opportunity*, that "interest in the submerged voices of dark Americans" had indeed "catapulted itself into something very much like a fad," seemed to pervade the metropolis.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Helen Marie Shannon, "From 'African Savages' to 'Ancestral Legacy': Race and Cultural nationalism in the American Modernist Reception of African Art" (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1999), 146.

⁶⁸ Shannon, "From 'African Savages' to 'Ancestral Legacy': Race and Cultural Nationalism in the American Modernist Reception of African Art," 146.

⁶⁹ Wendy A. Grossman, *Man Ray, African Art and the Modernist Lens* produced by International Art and Artists (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 140-141; Grossman argues that a number of international photographers were involved in such exercises, promoting a specific art historical agenda, which decontextualized African objects and repositioned them within Western artistic hierarchies. See Grossman, *Man Ray, African Art and the Modernist Lens*, p.76

⁷⁰ Charles S. Johnson, "Some Perils of the Renaissance," in *Opportunity*, 5 (March 1927), 68.

Nevertheless, as examination of Amaza Lee's experience suggests, the presence of Africa in Harlem, and the role of African art in developing a sense strong of identity built on historical allusions, and in providing a source of influence for African American culture was complex and multidimensional.

Amaza Lee was plunged into the iconographic reality of an African presence through her residence in Harlem. When she arrived in New York to take up her studies, she relied, like many who headed north, on kinship for physical and financial support, joining her older sister Maude, who had recently established herself in a large brownstone apartment at 416, West 146th Street, a neighborhood on the north side of Harlem. Amaza Lee was close to her eldest sibling, yet her brother, who might have been a likely choice to head the family after the father's death, appears to have had far less of an influence or connection to the three sisters. He settled in Washington D.C. with his wife and her mother, rather than joining the rest of his family in New York, and seems to have had little further contact.⁷¹ This alliance with his wife's family rather than his sisters and mother, and the gathering of the women in the family around the older sister, Maude, when Amaza Lee and their mother moved north, reinforces understandings of the female's role in patterns and characteristics of migration. In African American tradition, women were the primary kin keepers; from the first days of Reconstruction, it had fallen to the women to uphold two primary goals: to dismantle negative gender stereotypes through education and professionalism, and uplift the racial

⁷¹ In a plethora of correspondence from her sister and other female members of the family, there is not a single letter from her brother. My correspondence with Gail L. Meredith in March 2011, however, revealed that Amaza Lee's brother had had manic-depressive tendencies and eventually, like their father, also committed suicide. Gail Meredith is James Leonard Meredith's granddaughter. Initial correspondence was facilitated through Ancestry .com, the online heritage archive, where I discovered that Gail Meredith had been collecting and posting information about her family. We corresponded by email, sharing what we had learned. Gail then put me in touch with Colson Whitehead, the novelist of Sag Harbor (see chapter five).

group by keeping family together.⁷² Amaza Lee's sister Maude had gone north to work as a special education teacher in Brooklyn, and as such the two sisters could be "counted among the most praiseworthy" of the New Negro women, due to their commitment to developing a body of new students in whom, as Elise McDougald wrote, the "hope of the race" resides.⁷³

The brownstone apartment in which Amaza Lee initially lived in New York, was typical for the times, housing extended family as well as lodgers. The demographics of the neighborhood reflected the dramatic changes occurring, with immigrants from the West Indies, Puerto Rico, Portugal, France, Belgium, Brazil, Italy, Spain, Panama, Cuba, and Canada, creating in Harlem a racially and ethnically mixed community, while dominated by black migrants from the South.⁷⁴ Harlem had indeed undergone a 'revolution' or at least a dramatic upheaval in the 1920's. As newly arrived African Americans moved into the neighborhood whites left in large numbers, with as many as "118,792 leaving the area" as "87,417 Negroes arrived."⁷⁵ James Weldon Johnson described Harlem of the 1920s as "a city

⁷² Joe Trotter, "The Great Migration," *OAH*, Magazine of history Vol. 17. No.1, World War I (Oct. 2002) p.32; see also Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); for the most recent exploration of the migrations of black Americans see Ira Berlin, *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations* (London: Penguin, 2010).

⁷³ Elise Johnson McDougald, "The Task of Negro Womanhood," Alain Locke, (ed.) *The New Negro* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1925, reprinted by Touchstone, 1997), 369.

⁷⁴ United States Census Records for New York City, 1930 indicate the composition of Amaza Lee's household which included one lodger from Maryland and one from Puerto Rico, the census record also indicates the demographic composition of the neighborhood; for migration statistics see Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*, p.129; Further United States Census Records and directories indicate that Maude, her husband and young daughter, who would become a Harlem Hospital doctor, probably arrived in New York between 1920 and 1930, which corresponds to what Darlene Clark Hine has suggested is one of the "peaks" of the Great Migration (1916-1919 and 1924-1925). Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1915-1945," in *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Reconstruction of American History* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1994) 88; According to Gilbert Osofsky, the population of New York increased from 1920 to 1930 by 115 percent see Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 128.

⁷⁵ Winfred B. Nathan, *Health Conditions in North Harlem, 1923-1927* (New York, 1932), 13-14, cited in Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890-1930* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 130.

within a city” in which “from One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street north, the passers-by, shoppers, those sitting in restaurants, coming out of theaters, standing in doorways and looking out of windows,” were “practically all Negroes.”⁷⁶ By 1930, in addition to the newly settled southern African Americans, large numbers arrived from the Caribbean, and formed twenty-five percent of the population of Harlem, significantly complicating the demographic landscape.⁷⁷

While the idea of Africa was prevalent iconographically in the numbers living in Harlem, and in popular culture, African American intelligentsia embraced Africa ideologically in terms of a familiar thread that constituted a diasporic identity “based on a commonality of fate imposed by the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its aftermath.”⁷⁸ Three specific strategies can be discerned that distinguished the complex relationship African Americans had with Africa, its people and culture. They can be distinguished as making a tangible connection to, mediating between, and/or finding a detachment from Africa.⁷⁹ Essays in Alain Locke’s *New Negro* anthology reflect each one of these strategies. In identifying Harlem as the center of modern life Locke suggested that it held the promise not only for African Americans, but also for “the African and the West Indian,” indeed, with “the

⁷⁶ Not only did African Americans simply live in Harlem, they bought property. Between 1920-21 the height of development in Harlem, people of all classes had come to Harlem and saved to eventually purchase property and establish roots. As white residents left the area en masse when blacks began to move in, property prices plummeted allowing good housing stock to be bought up cheaply see James Weldon Johnson, “Harlem: The Culture Capital,” in *The New Negro*, 302, 306. A block of houses designed by McKim Mead and White were eventually sold to the Equitable Life Assurance Company who in turn sold them to individual blacks. ‘Strivers Row’ as the group of houses became known, was at times occupied by the most well-known and successful individuals of the Harlem Renaissance, one of whom was Vertner Tandy an architect. See *New York Times*, April 16, 1981, [Accessed November 13, 2011]

⁷⁷ Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census, 1930: population* (Washington D.C. 1933), pp.248-249.

⁷⁸ Joseph E. Harris, ed., *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora* (Washington D.C., 1982), 9, cited in Sidney Lemelle and Robin D.G. Kelley, *Imagining Home: Class Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora* (London, New York: Verso, 1994), 4.

⁷⁹ Kathy J. Ogren, “What is Africa to Me? African Strategies in the Harlem Renaissance,” in Sidney Lemelle and Robin D.G. Kelley (eds.) *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora* (London: Verso, 1994), 20.

largest Negro community in the world” Harlem was the place where, Locke argued, “African Americans can act as the “advance-guard of the African peoples in their contact with twentieth-century civilization,” and in Harlem would unfold the “mission of rehabilitating the race” to regain the world’s esteem wrenched from them through enslavement. Harlem, Locke declared, “is the home of the Negro’s Zionism.”⁸⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, as the leader in Pan-African support, concluded *The New Negro* anthology with “The Negro Mind Reaches Out,” in which he argued that black American intellectuals should direct Africa out of the mire of colonial control and capitalist domination and extend to the African people the benefits of modern life.⁸¹ In yet a further essay in *The New Negro* anthology, Arthur Schomburg in “The Negro Digs Up His Past,” argued for a reconstruction of African history as dynamic and ‘civilized’ and for reclaiming it as central to African American heritage. In the “Legacy of the Ancestral Arts,” Alain Locke supported the promotion of African history, and argued for Africa as a valuable source for African American artistic expression, mediated, however, through European culture. Rather than aligning African Americans artists directly with Africa, Locke suggested they might learn from Africa, as had the Europeans, and that a new form of African American artistic expression might develop out of this lesson.⁸²

The essays presented in the *New Negro* together with the philosophy behind this new identity raise serious questions about what it was that African Americans really wanted. On the one hand they saw connecting to African art as an opportunity to construct a diasporic identity and draw attention to cultural continuities in the African artistic tradition newly celebrated by the European avant-garde. But on the other hand, some saw the

⁸⁰ Locke (ed.), *The New Negro* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1925, reprinted by Touchstone, 1997), 6 and 14.

⁸¹ Du Bois, “The Negro Mind Reaches Out,” Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (Albert & Charles Boni, 1925; reprinted by Simon and Schuster, 1992), 358-414.

⁸² Ogren, “What is Africa to Me? African Strategies in the Harlem Renaissance,” p. 23.

perpetuation of a notion that cultural practices may have survived the middle passage unchanged, as a romanticized notion of African culture conveniently exploited by those attempting to connect to a timeless ‘unchanging’ folk, a descendant of the traditional, which at this moment in the early twentieth century was sought after as the sole expression of authenticity.⁸³

Locke and Du Bois were connected with Pan-African ideals through African elites who would become the postcolonial leaders of their countries; they were less interested in the common man, whether African or African American, this extended to a deliberate rejection of popular culture expressed in such forms as the Blues and minstrelsy shows. It was those “Eurocentric images and ideals of respectability that were central to elite black’s aesthetic tastes.” Moreover, it is significant to recognize that African American elites “dreamed of a universalizing fusion of black and European forms, in a manner that nonetheless privileged nonblack aesthetic criteria.”⁸⁴ As editor of the *Crisis*, Du Bois was able to publically express a disdain for African American cultural expressions such as jazz, the blues and popular gospel song, while occasionally praising popular entertainers, yet “seldom questioned the artistic criteria of the white world.”⁸⁵ Historians of the New Negro and its cultural blossoming in the Harlem Renaissance have often argued that this refusal to recognize possibilities for African Americans beyond the assimilationist bourgeois view focusing on acceptance by whites, caused, what some saw, as its eventual failure. Cultural

⁸³ Sidney Lemelle and Robin D.G. Kelley, Introduction, *Imagining Home: Pan-Africanism Revisited* in Lemelle and Kelley (eds.) *Imagining Home: Class, Culture and Nationalism in the African Diaspora*, 9.

⁸⁴ Locke and Du Bois, were both of middle class background, had been educated in the Ivy League system and abroad, and had close ties to international intellectuals. For Locke and his ideas about cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism see Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth, *Alain Locke: Biography of a Philosopher* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 67-78. Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 76-77.

⁸⁵ Arnold Rampersad, *Art and Imagination of W. E. B. Du Bois* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 188

critic Harold Cruse, in his seminal essay *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* of 1967 argued that: “the interracial integrationist character of the Harlem Renaissance emasculated and inhibited the emergence of an independent ethnic cultural movement.”⁸⁶ At the time, some critics also argued that there was little difference between African American culture and white culture anyway and it is telling of Locke’s position that he included in *The New Negro* anthology Melville Herskovits’ essay “The Negro’s Americanism,” which stipulated that African Americans’ experience of industrial capitalism and modern culture made them more American than African, only of a “different shade.”⁸⁷ Herskovits would later be credited, however, with establishing the continued presence of Africanisms in African American culture, a development, which begins to suggest the complexity of determining cultural identity, at this time.⁸⁸ George Schuyler also argued against “a Negro exceptionalism,” writing that African American cultural production was no different from that of white Americans, whereas Langston Hughes saw no reason why African Americans should wish to imitate white culture when their own was so rich, declaring: “Why should I want to be white? I am Negro – and Beautiful.”⁸⁹

Ideologically, Africa was also seen as a place of retreat represented in the form of Jamaican born Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Movement (UNIA), which argued for repatriation in Africa as a solution to the stymied campaign for

⁸⁶ Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York: William Morrow, 1967), 38, cited in George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 16-17

⁸⁷ See Melville J. Herskovits, “The Negro’s Americanism,” in Alain Locke (ed.) *The New Negro* pp. 353-360; and cited here in Kathy Ogren, “What is Africa to Me? African Strategies in the Harlem Renaissance,” p. 26.

⁸⁸ For a detailed discussion of African traditions in African American material culture and Herskovits’ contribution to these explorations and discoveries see John Michael Vlach, *By the Work of Their hands: Studies in Afro-American Life* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1991).

⁸⁹ See George Schuyler, “The Negro-Art Hokum,” in *The Nation*, June 16, 1926 and Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” in *The Nation*, June 23, 1926. For a brief discussion of these two articles see Patricia Hills, *Modern Art in the USA: Issues and Controversies of the 20th Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 76.

racial equality. Although Garvey was headquartered in Harlem, it is interesting to note that his influence reached, through active leaders of UNIA, as well as supporters, to the corners of southern towns. The UNIA is perhaps best known for its “back to Africa” movement but was also an active supporter of blacks in business and education. Moreover, the UNIA functioned as a spiritual organization, which worked through both the church and fraternal groups. As historian Christie Farnham has written, several leading UNIA theologians were trained in Virginia, at the Virginia Theologian Seminary and College, Lynchburg, where Anne Spencer had studied and indeed, perhaps indicative of the strong women’s movement in Virginia, many of the most active members of the organization were women. Although Anne Spencer’s relationship to Garveyism has yet to be explored, it is likely that she would have had some connection to the group in Lynchburg. In nearby Petersburg, Edna Colson’s brother was involved with the organization. He traveled to Liberia to help establish a place for settlement, but his efforts were cut short when he contracted a fatal illness.⁹⁰ For Edna Colson and Amaza Lee the anticipatory visions of liberation and promise of a new life in the colony of Liberia were not an option.⁹¹

But just as the relationship towards African culture was complex, the line between advocating or rejecting Garveyism was also no straight trajectory. Africans who migrated to the United States from other colonial countries significantly affected the way African Americans thought about race, providing an international and more complex perspective based on distinctions in their experience of imperialism. Locke seems to have desired to at least acknowledge a broader cultural perspective by including in his *New Negro* anthology contributions by Africans of other colonies, such as Jamaicans Claude McKay, Joel A. Rogers,

⁹⁰ Luther Porter Jackson, *Negro Labor and Property Holding in Virginia, 1830-1860* (London/New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1942).

⁹¹ This will be further explored in Chapter Five in relation to the black resort Amaza Lee and her sister Maude created on Long Island’s Sag Harbor.

and Wilfred A. Domingo; Eric Walrond from British Guiana and Barbados, and Arthur Schomburg from Puerto Rico.⁹² These intellectuals and artists of African descent from outside the United States introduced into the Harlem Renaissance dialectic the issue of class and color, complicating identity politics for the leading African American light-skinned elite and their assumptions about culture and status. It is significant to note that literary figures such as Claude McKay received little recognition in the United States but in French African circles it was a different matter. Harlem Renaissance writers have been identified as influencing Caribbean and African students in Paris during their visits in the 1920s and '30s, and contributing to the creation of *Négritude*.⁹³ A discussion of Harlem Renaissance artists in France beyond their successful reception and admiration on the part of the French, to their influence on black francophone artists, or for that matter African American artists in other parts of Europe, goes beyond the scope of this project but deserves raising both to demonstrate the complexity of the role of Africa in African American cultural and identity politics, and to suggest a bookmark for future reference.

Alain Locke was deeply invested in the arts of Africa, most likely in part due to the influence of Alfred C. Barnes. Indeed, it was Barnes who brought a different perspective to African art than the popular fashion for all things primitive. Barnes' role in promoting African art was key to its dissemination as a serious area of study. His relationship with Paul Guillaume, a Parisian dealer who had shared his African art with the modernist painters, was also significant. Barnes introduced a number of Americans to Guillaume, including

⁹² Robert Phillipson, "The Harlem Renaissance as Postcolonial Phenomenon," in *African American Review*, Vol. 40. No. 1 (Spring 2006), 153.

⁹³ Lilyan Kesteloot, *Black Writers in French* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1974); Robert Phillipson argues for the recognition of the folk and African sensibilities of some Harlem Renaissance writers and their influence on the Negritude movement and a positive, unified black consciousness, taken up by Léopold Senghor, Léon Dumas, and Aimé Césaire. See Phillipson, "The Harlem Renaissance as Postcolonial Phenomenon," in *African American Review*, Vol. 40. No. 1.(Spring 2006), 153.

Locke and Stewart Culin. Barnes had grown impatient with Culin, however, arguing that despite his advice to purchase from Paul Guillaume, the curator had bought lesser quality African items from a dealer in London to display in his Brooklyn Museum exhibition. In a letter to the African American writer and national NAACP secretary Walter White, Barnes was critical and apologetic, describing Culin as: “one of the most loveable, other-world souls that I know; he is also a mental cripple, a hopeless doddering old ignoramus in anything which resembles art.”⁹⁴ In a letter to Locke, Barnes called Culin a “sentimental boob with a penchant for lime-lighting.”⁹⁵ Barnes, on the other hand, was concerned with African art as a high form of cultural expression and as such a useful tool in supporting new representations of African American identity. Writing to White, he emphasized his (Barnes) commitment to supporting African Americans in their quest for equal rights and recognition:

You know I am in the game to stay – I mean the game of giving the Negro a square deal through accurate representation of what his mind and soul have produced of value to civilization. I have worked with him for twenty years and have found that, on the average, he is higher class than the white man. He doesn't need to be misrepresented or lied about nor is he to be game for cheap four-flushing writers like Culin, DeZayas, Einstein or Bell who would exploit him to their own egoistic aggrandizement. At the moment I am especially interested in getting a square deal for the work of his African Ancestors...⁹⁶

In contrast to the exploitation of African art in which Barnes saw others involved, he sought to bring these newly discovered works to the public attention through “modern educational

⁹⁴ Alfred C. Barnes to Walter White, March 25, 1924, Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-33, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.

⁹⁵ Alfred C. Barnes to Alain Locke March 26, 1924. Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-33, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.

⁹⁶ Alfred C. Barnes to Walter White, March 25, 1924, Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-33, Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.

methods.”⁹⁷ Barnes’ methods were in fact held in high regard by many of those intellectuals working towards racial uplift, as Edna Colson’s sister Myra, a sociologist, attests. Writing to fellow sociologist Charles S. Johnson from the Alpha Phi Alpha “Go to College Week” event in Philadelphia, Myra reported Barnes’ public acknowledgement of both Johnson and Locke’s influence on his opinions, she also applauded Barnes’ “passion for our cause.”⁹⁸

It was to this cause that Amaza Lee was committed and to the “modern educational methods” noted by Barnes. When Amaza Lee returned to teach art at Virginia State College in 1930 Alain Locke was invited to give a talk, “The Negro’s Place in American Culture.” It is not clear who of the faculty had invited him, but his ideas informed the thesis Amaza Lee would write on returning once more to New York for her Masters degree in Art Education, completed in 1935. In a section dedicated to “The Negro and Art,” which combined African American art teaching tools with a syllabus for African Art, Amaza Lee championed the significance of African art, claiming it as a unique and valuable heritage for African American artists. She wove her knowledge of the discourses surrounding African art of the time, into her thesis, opening “The Negro and Art” section with a quote from John Louis Hill’s “Negro: National Asset or Liability?”

And thus, we have as our greatest national asset in the artistic sense, the Negro in the United States. With their unlimited artistic attributes, as they increase in knowledge and enjoy larger opportunity of self expression, within the next few generations Negroes will make the very largest contribution to the national art of the United States.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Alfred C. Barnes to Charles S. Johnson March 22, 1924, Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-33, Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.

⁹⁸ Myra H. Colson to Charles S. Johnson May 11, 1924. Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-33, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C

⁹⁹ John Louis Hill, “Negro, National Asset or Liability?” (New York Literary Association, 1930), Chapter ix: 194.

Amaza Lee's work as an instructor in the history of African Art reveals that she undertook Locke's "mission of rehabilitating the race" and deliberately created for her students, a tangible connection to Africa through the arts. Specific themes and issues for study suggested in Amaza Lee's thesis, which would develop into a course on art history, included the "Classic period of Congo Arts and Crafts," "Bantu and Bushmen," as well as details from what Amaza Lee termed 'tribal divisions' from numerous African countries. Detailed study was to focus on subjects including ceremonial masks, household utensils, implements, weapons, and textiles. Amaza Lee devised reading lists for the syllabi she would create, including catalogues of exhibitions, which she had attended or at least knew of from her tenure as a student in New York. These included Stieglitz '291' exhibit in 1914, Marius de Zayas' Modern Gallery, the Brooklyn Museum's *Modern Negro Art* exhibit of 1923, The Blondiau Theatre Arts Collection of 1927 (organized by Alain Locke together with various others including Sheldon Cheney), and the Schomburg Collection of the 135th Street Public Library.¹⁰⁰

While echoing Locke, Barnes and others in acknowledging the place of African art in serious study, when it came to African American cultural expression, Amaza Lee deviated from the prescribed highbrow contours of Du Bois and Locke's notions and embraced the popular arts of African American expression, which others have argued as belonging to vernacular forms. The first items on her syllabus for the study of "The Negro and Art" were the Minstrel, the Cakewalk, the Blues, Jazz and Folksongs, all of which departed from what Du Bois would consider elements suitable to evoking "race pride."¹⁰¹ Amaza Lee conflated African American art to some extent with African art, but only insofar as she suggested they

¹⁰⁰ Amaza Lee Meredith, "An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students" (MA Thesis, Columbia University Teachers College, 1935), Gottlieb Library, Columbia University.

¹⁰¹ Nathaniel Huggins argued in 1971 that the promoters of the Harlem Renaissance were so fixed on a vision of high culture that they did not look very hard or well at jazz" See Nathaniel Huggins, *The Harlem Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, reprinted in 2007), 10.

were related, while remaining simultaneously separate. By including in the syllabus Du Bois' *The Negro* (1915), Amaza Lee presented Africa itself as a diverse continent, with people from individual nations worthy of further study. This, of course, contrasted strongly with the abstract notion prevalent in American popular imaginary of Africans as a homogenous group of unsophisticated exotic beings.

As part of her teaching strategy at Virginia State in the 1930s, Amaza Lee likely also welcomed the arrival in October 1935, of a travelling exhibit, "Photographs of African Negro Art" by Walker Evans. The exhibit consisted of a set of enlargements, called the "poster exhibition" which had resulted from a General Education Board grant in collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art, and was intended to support an educational component of the exhibition, true to Museum of Modern Art policy. The travelling exhibit was displayed at Virginia State College in the Music Room.¹⁰² At this time, Amaza Lee had, as yet, had little impact on the student's understanding of African art as *The Virginia Statesman* reported that general response to the African art exhibit was one of bewilderment, with the Matoacan School children appearing to appreciate the art the most:

It was the kindergarten that caught the spirit of the representations and gave them life. They saw faces, heads, expressions, and read meanings into the crudely wrought bits of art that the others had viewed apathetically.¹⁰³

As a faculty member at Virginia State College Amaza Lee's work in highlighting the importance of African art also responded to Arthur Schomburg's call to help the 'Negro' "remake his past in order to make his future." Schomburg had noted the damage done to African American identity as rooted in the absence of a recognized historical past. In

¹⁰² It is significant that the talk was held "in the music room" because the art courses that Amaza Lee were taught in part of the Domestic Science Department, which had its own building; music was taught in the Department of Education.

¹⁰³ "African Negro Art Exhibit Draws 300 Spectators," *The Virginia Statesman*, November 16, 1935.

combining the study of African art and society with study of African American art, Amaza Lee sought to redress the issue of the 'Negro in America' as "a man without a history because he has been considered a man without a worthy culture."¹⁰⁴ She assigned readings from Roger Fry's *Vision and Design* and Paul Guillaume's *Primitive Negro Sculpture*, each of which praised the newly discovered African art, even though Fry and Guillaume still considered Africans as socially and intellectually inferior.¹⁰⁵

Universal Art Appreciation and the Theory of Pure Design

In teaching African art as a component of a broader study of art history, Amaza Lee was not alone. Other art department directors at African American colleges would also identify African art, together with Asian art, as equal to the Western canon. James Herring reported in a Howard University Art Bulletin: "We agree that sound constructive lessons may be gained from the best examples of African art, as well as from Greek, Chinese or Indian..." He declared a determination not to perpetuate the longstanding notions of difference and bias for the western canon: "our policy has been to leave the discovery of racial and nationalistic artists to our chauvinistic friends. We have preferred to exhibit the

¹⁰⁴ Arthur A. Schomburg, "The Negro Digs Up His Past," in Alain Locke, (ed.) *The New Negro* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1925, reprinted Simon and Schuster, 1997), 231-237. Schomburg argued for the wide dissemination of a well-documented, and inspiring, history would have a restorative effect, and bolster self-confidence. Schomburg saw this fact being revised with the acclaim given by Europeans to the art of Africa, permitting African Americans to see themselves against an inspiring and valued backdrop of achievement For Amaza Lee's thesis see "An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students" (MA Thesis, Columbia University Teachers College, 1935), Gottlieb Library, Columbia University.

¹⁰⁵ Roger Fry for example, remained ambivalent, expressing appreciation for African artists' ability "to express plastic form in three dimensions and with complete freedom," and for their "exquisite taste in handling material" while simultaneously denigrating their lack of sophistication and cultural development: "It is for want of a conscious critical sense and the intellectual powers of comparison and classification that the Negro has failed to create one of the great cultures of the world." For Fry, the African, despite an admirable artistic ability and 'exquisite taste' remained the 'Noble Savage.' Roger Fry, "Negro Sculpture," in Jason Gaiger and Paul Wood (eds.) *Art of the Twentieth Century: A Reader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 7-10.

works of all schools and trends regardless of ideology or any designated sphere.”¹⁰⁶

This universalizing approach to the history of art drew on the work of Arthur Wesley Dow and Denman Ross, an interest which in similar ways can also be seen to have preoccupied European scholars of the time, such as Walter Crane in Britain.¹⁰⁷ Such attempts to find the universal principles of design would allow anyone to inclusively and comprehensively appreciate all art from all periods and all places.”¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Ross’s pure design theory, which he formulated in the 1890s, provided a way to think about and understand art, which could lead to both appreciation and technical ability. Most importantly, Ross “promoted his design theory as part of a comprehensive liberal education, not simply a set of skills for art students.”¹⁰⁹ While the curriculum at Teacher’s College was based on Dow’s principals, those of Ross were also taught, as can be recognized in Amaza Lee’s insistence on providing instruction to all students at Virginia State rather than simply to the handful that opted for studio courses.¹¹⁰ Conforming to ideas espoused by Dow and Ross, Amaza Lee suggested that anyone could learn to look and appreciate good art, and that significantly, such exercises would contribute to developing the individual as a whole, strengthening the faculties of the mind, permitting a more focused sense of judgment and taste, and to liberating artists from slavish mimesis. Such a universal approach had obvious advantages in a world marked by racial discrimination as it allowed consideration of all art on equal terms, provided the work itself had quality and merit. Consideration of art in order to understand it was to “begin with the object itself, the visual observation of its form, its

¹⁰⁶ James V. Herring, “Foreword,” *Tenth Anniversary Exhibition* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Art Gallery, 1940). Herring had studied under Evelyn Jackson at Syracuse whose methods drew on Walter Smith and Arthur Wesley Dow (see chapter three).

¹⁰⁷ Marie Frank, *Denman Ross and American Design Theory* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2011), 7. Frank mentions the work of German architect Gottfried Semper and Austrian Alois Rigl as also seeking the universal principles in art and design.

¹⁰⁸ Frank, *Denman Ross and American Design Theory*, 4

¹⁰⁹ Frank, *Denman Ross and American Design Theory*, 4.

¹¹⁰ See chapter three.

composition of line, shape and color.”¹¹¹ This formalist approach by definition should eliminate consideration of historical or literary associations.

Amaza Lee reiterated Ross’s educational approach as aiding the ordinary individual in daily choices of their lives. Quoting Belle Boas, Amaza Lee wrote that:

Art education today must meet the growing realization that, intellectual training and the acquisition of facts are not sufficient to produce an individual of strength and of ability to meet adequately the problems which confront him in the modern world... art is an integral part of the life of the average individual, not only in school but in adult life. ¹¹²

Amaza Lee’s approach to teaching a generation of African Americans how to understand and appreciate works of art belongs to the history of decades of aesthetic thought that had developed in American academic circles, from the influence of British critic John Ruskin’s writings through to the teachings of Charles Norton and the eventual impact of European Bauhaus instructors. All taught students how to look at a work of art and to understand the value within the object itself. Harvard can be seen as the epicenter in developing the thought that influenced generations in new ways of understanding aesthetics through the adoption of scientific methods, much of which came from the work of German scientists and psychologists. Scholars such as William James, George Santayana and Hugo Munsterberg disseminated these ideas, building on earlier generations of scholars such as Josiah Royce, a noted pragmatist and philosopher, under whose tutelage Santayana had studied. ¹¹³ It was

¹¹¹ Frank, *Denman Ross and American Design Theory*, 3.

¹¹² This is most likely a quote from Belle Boas’ *Art in the School*, which Amaza Lee mentions a number of times as being of significance. She does not, however, provide a citation. See her MA thesis: “An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students” (MA Thesis, Columbia University Teachers College, 1935): 11.

¹¹³ See Scott L. Pratt & Shannon Sullivan (eds.) *Josiah Royce: Race Questions, Provincialism and Other American Problems* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009) available online through Ebcocost, University of Virginia Libraries. Accessed February 16, 2012. Marie Frank notes that it was Santayana who had studied physiological psychology in Germany and then taught a course between 1892 and

also at Harvard that Ross learned to think in terms of physiological psychology, or the way in which mind and body interact, specifically that of mental judgment and visual perception, to produce an aesthetic judgment. This approach to thinking about aesthetics began in the mid-nineteenth-century and would continue through the beginning of the twentieth century. Psychologist and educator, G. Stanley Hall's claim that "Americans in general were visual learners," suggests the impact physiological psychology had on the education system, and underscores the validity of the early Picture Study method noted as prevalent throughout the country, and, as demonstrated earlier, at Virginia State College in 1915 on which Amaza Lee would eventually build her new department of art.¹¹⁴

W.E.B. Du Bois, and Alain Locke had both studied with Josiah Royce at Harvard, but so had Belle Boas' brother, George Boas (1891-1980) a philosopher of whom it has been said: "no American philosopher wrote on as many subjects as he did" and whose areas of specialization included intellectual history, aesthetics and art criticism.¹¹⁵ Boas had also studied at the Rhode Island School of Design under Henry Hunt Clark, who had been Denman Ross's Teaching Assistant and therefore familiar with the 'Pure Design' method of art appreciation.¹¹⁶ George Boas was highly involved in the establishment of the Baltimore Museum of Fine Art, one of the few large city museums to exhibit African art and with the Horace Mann Elementary School, New York, where John Dewey developed many of his

1912 that resulted in a publication, *The Sense of Beauty*, which argued that "beauty depended on the perception of form not historical association or knowledge. Hugo Munsterberg, also studied in Germany, taught at Harvard, and published a report, which argued for the direct correlation between lines, space division and curves and psychological sensation of eye movement. See Marie Frank, "The Theory of Pure Design and American Architectural Education in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (June 2008), 256.

¹¹⁴ Marie Frank, *Denman Ross and American Design Theory* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2011), 6.

¹¹⁵ Boas (George) Papers 1920-1980: "Biographical Note" Special Collections, The Milton S. Eisenhower Library. The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.

¹¹⁶ Marie Frank notes that Henry Hunt Clark was a Teaching Assistant to Ross during his time at RISD, see *Denman Ross and American Design Theory* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2011),

ideas. Although a philosophy professor at the Johns Hopkins University, George Boas was strongly interested in aesthetics and both published on the subject and corresponded with others interested in new developments. His work clearly influenced his sister Belle in her work at Teachers College.¹¹⁷ What is remarkable and has been virtually ignored, is that these key ideas filtered into broader discussion of the significance of the arts and would develop the critical judgment of generations of African American youth, despite their marginalization through forced segregation. Using the formalist theories espoused by Dow and Ross to teach art and introducing the study of African art to their students, teachers such as Amaza Lee were among the avant-garde in their pedagogical methods, far in advance of teachers in white schools and colleges where even today discussions regarding the importance of expanding the canon of art and design history continue to languish unresolved.¹¹⁸

The universal formal approach to art appreciation legitimized a way for African Americans to demonstrate the value of African art alongside the western canon, and would

¹¹⁷ For example, Boas corresponded with Leo Stein and applauded his efforts in clarifying for the public the significance of modern art. In a *Journal of Philosophy* article, Boas declared: When the history of modern painting is written, it will be incomplete unless Leo Stein is given a chapter to himself, or at least shares a long one with Roger Fry. Those of us in America who grew conscious of modern art during and after the famous Armory Show found that consciousness awakened for the most part by his various articles in the *New Republic*, which almost alone among the papers written on the subject seemed clear and intelligible. Although he is not a painter, he has made modern painting reasonable and furnished its admirers with a vocabulary for discussing it. See George Boas, "The Esthetics of Leo Stein," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 25, No. 11 (May 24, 1928), pp. 287-293.

¹¹⁸ African American and African Art continue to be taught separately in Art History and Architectural History Surveys. African American colleges and universities however begun collecting African artifacts and had exhibited African American craft products in regional and state expositions, most notably since the Tercentennial at Jamestown, which had its own 'Negro Exhibit.' Much of the literature on exhibits and the role of African American arts in the early nineteenth century is reproduced in education literature such as Giles B. Jackson and D. Webster Davis, *The Industrial History of the Negro Race* (Richmond, VA: Negro Educational Association, 1911); Hampton Institute (now University) began collecting and designed a curriculum for the study of American Indian artifacts from ca. 1878. The university collected African artifacts from 1870, and African American art from 1894. See Hampton University Museum, Collections, online at <http://museum.hamptonu.edu/collections.cfm> (accessed September 2012).

prompt questions about the possibilities for a unique modern black aesthetic. Du Bois' notion of the double-consciousness added a layer to African American history and identity, complicating the issue of regaining some clarity of self-identity through knowledge of their past. On the one hand, it was argued that the recognition by Europeans of the significance of Africa would improve African Americans' image, on the other it would have to be recognized that their past was intertwined directly with that of white America, a concession few whites were prepared to make. As a people with a 'double-consciousness' as W.E.B. Du Bois so eloquently put it, an African American "ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."¹¹⁹ Du Bois was nevertheless cautious in promoting recognition of the historical value of African Americans as participants in American culture, arguing that they did not in any way mean to "Africanize America..." or conversely for the African American to "bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism." This understanding of black culture, black history, and "black labor and racist oppression," suggests the influence of William James' pragmatism, which Du Bois made "central to American civilization," by expressing a position of cultural pluralism.¹²⁰ Du Bois argued that: "Negro blood has a message for the world," and hoped that the African American might be a "co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius."¹²¹ Could it be that

¹¹⁹ These sentiments continued to be echoed in the 1950s by novelists such as Ralph Ellison in his *Invisible Man*.

¹²⁰ George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 37.

¹²¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," (originally published as "Strivings of the Negro People," in *Atlantic Monthly* (August 1897): 194-98 and revised by Du Bois for publication in *The Souls Of Black Folks*, 1903, here reprinted with annotations in Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Terri Hulme, (eds.) *W. E. B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 11. See also George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 78.

African art might still play a part in influencing African American aesthetic practices?

Europeans had adopted the designs of Africa for a modern aesthetic, was it not appropriate for African Americans to declare themselves modern and employ such strategies too?

Charles S. Johnson joined Du Bois in arguing for the potential for their race to contribute a unique aesthetic to American culture, although his notion of a unique African American aesthetic was more in line with Alain Locke's than with Du Bois' and even Locke could never quite pull himself away from his desire for a black culture representative of a certain class.¹²² Johnson was well aware of the current of dissatisfaction running through the discourses of American cultural production and urged black youth to be bold in their contribution to a new national aesthetic, by self-consciously re-imagining themselves through recognition of their own heritage and artistic temperament:

It was the dull lack of some idealism...that held America in a suspended cultural animation until it sought freedom thru self-criticism and its own native sources of beauty... American Negroes, born into a culture, which they did not wholly share, have responded falsely to the dominant patterns. Their expression has been, to borrow a term which Lewis Mumford employs in referring to America in relation to Europe, 'sickly and derivative, a mere echo of old notes.'¹²³

The question, of what constituted African American modern expression was multifarious, involving a range of productivity and a serious lack of consensus.¹²⁴ However, looking back

¹²² Jeffrey C. Stewart argues that Locke's notion of the function of art was to "liberate man from provincialism." Locke argues for education as the key to culture: "The man of culture is the man of trained sensibilities, whose mind expresses itself in keenness of discrimination and, therefore in cultivated interests and tastes." See Stewart, *The Critical Temper of Alain Locke* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983), p. 397, p.416-7.

¹²³ Charles S. Johnson Address to graduating students of Virginia Union University, and Hartshorn College, Richmond, VA, June 6, 1928 Fisk University library, Johnson papers, 9-10 cited in Pearson, Review, "Combating Racism with Art," *American Studies*, 18, No.1 (1977), 123.

¹²⁴ See George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 17. The jury is still out on what constitutes a black aesthetic, most

from a position of distance, one thing appears clear, that whatever the terms under which the modern project was defined in the early twentieth century, African Americans could hardly be excluded, as whichever way their work was viewed, it had a definite part in the development of a new American aesthetic.¹²⁵ As African Americans sought to define a unique aesthetic, white Americans too, struggled with what might represent a national creative expression. Art in the New World had been deeply entangled with the art of Europe and as a result lacked, so many felt, authenticity. How could Americans hope to disengage themselves from European ideas when they had no significant heritage on which to draw? What was missing in American culture was, as Van Wyck Brooks coined it, “a useable past.”¹²⁶

Brooks and many of his colleagues, Waldo Frank, Constance Rourke, and Paul Rosenfeld, among them, lamented what they perceived as the poverty of American culture, in contrast to the rich heritage of Europe. This notion of a ‘useable past’ prompted an exploration of the nation’s roots in order to reconstruct or even invent a past on which to build future creative endeavors.¹²⁷ Art and architecture critic Lewis Mumford took up the

likely any reference to Africa or African derived traditions such as the mixed media quilt and painting works of Faith Ringgold or even the collage work of Romare Bearden could be conceived of as demonstrating a uniquely African American idiom.. Much of this work has a craft-like feel to it, which might be said to draw on African American artisan work of the colonial era.

¹²⁵ Mary Ann Calo has argued that the reason African American art has been relegated to the margins of art history has to do with “a refusal of its essential modernity and its claim to occupy a vital place in the process of national self-definition.” See Mary Ann Calo, “African American Art and Critical Discourse Between World Wars,” in *American Quarterly* 51.3 (1999), 583.

¹²⁶ For a comprehensive discussion of this idea see Patricia Hill, *Modern Art in the USA: Issues and Controversies of the 20th Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 53-63; Van Wyck Brooks, ‘On creating a Usable Past,’ *The Dial*, 64, No. 764 (April 1918): 337-341.

¹²⁷ The notion of an invented past has been explored by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Hobsbawm explains that an invented tradition is a “set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature which week to inculcate certain values and norms or behaviors by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. By arguing that the ‘folk’ or crafts tradition of early colonial America could form a continuity of creative expression American cultural critics and intellectuals were treading on shaky ground as much of that craft tradition actually came from European countries. An analogy could be made here with the arts of Africa as a continuous

term in 1923. Exploring the American past through a number of books published between the years 1924 and 1931, he approached the subject from an interdisciplinary perspective, emphasizing the interrelationship between architecture, art, literature, philosophy, economics and religion, and in the realm of architecture, “analyzing the broad social movements that had shaped the built environment.”¹²⁸ Mumford believed American culture was not simply a European offshoot, but was just in need of rehabilitation and reevaluation, in order to be recognized both nationally and internationally.¹²⁹ In *Sticks and Stones* he commented on the need to reconsider the past in order to better understand the present, and thus find solutions to the future:

The past is ours to the extent that we are affected by it: the future is ours to the extent that we affect it. Neither the past nor the future, in architecture or in anything else, is determined completely for us by external forces; they exist, they play a part in our conduct, to the extent that, in the broadest sense, we take them in.¹³⁰

Ironically, dissatisfaction with contemporary culture prompted nations across Europe too to look to the past in order to create anew. In Western Europe, artists looked to Eastern European folk. In Britain for example, the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, inspired artists to explore the “beauty of native arts that had hitherto been little noticed.” In Russia, *The Ballet Russes*, considered the foremost dance company of the early

tradition for African Americans, and yet African Americans also adapted to an American tradition, which to some extent was imposed on them.

¹²⁸ Robert Wojtowicz, *Lewis Mumford and American Modernism: Eutopian Theories for Architecture and Urban Planning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 44.

¹²⁹ Wojtowicz, *Lewis Mumford and American Modernism: Eutopian Theories for Architecture and Urban Planning*, 54.

¹³⁰ Lewis Mumford, unpublished introduction to *Sticks and Stones*, Mumford Papers, Special Collections, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, folder 6512, cited in Wojtowicz, *Lewis Mumford and American Modernism: Eutopian Theories for Architecture and Urban Planning*, p. 49.

modern period, also performed in costumes inspired by native folk art.¹³¹ Innovative abstract designs created by American artists such as Sonia Delauney, and marketed for the New Woman, also drew on the arts of groups considered less developed, including African and Navajo tribes, whose textiles were seen as sources of inspiration.¹³² In Finland, 'Eliel Saarinen's organic architecture and *ryijy* rug designs were considered key components in attempting to forge a Finnish cultural identity.¹³³ American's desire to discover a unique aesthetic based on a past that was intrinsically American, resulted in the promotion of folk culture. The notion of the folk at times resembled the impulse of the so-called primitive, by which was meant unschooled or unself-conscious, but was also intertwined with the notion of craft or in opposition to the machine and technology, as in detailed, carefully crafted products made by hand. The work of self-taught artists easily resulted from new methods of appreciating art "because the expression unhampered by a complex painting culture is so direct and close to the surface that the functioning of psychological processes in general may be readily examined, and as such may lead directly to the creative process itself."¹³⁴

Nevertheless, the reception of this newly appreciated unschooled or primitive art resulted in a problematic assessment of African American art. Alfred Barnes championed the spirit Picasso found in African Negro sculpture as an authentic creative expression, and found the unschooled work of African American artist Horace Pippin, newly discovered in 1937, as exhibiting the language of "homely poetry with the charm, simplicity, sincerity and

¹³¹ See Alan Powers, *Modern Block Print Textiles* (London, 1992) cited in Gillian Naylor, "Modernism and Memory," Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward and Jeremy Aynsley, (eds.) *Material Memories* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 98.

¹³² Patricia Hills, *Modern Art in the USA: Issues and Controversies of the 20th Century* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 64-65; See Sherry Buckberrrough, "Delauney, Design: Aesthetics, Immigration and the New Woman," *Art Journal*, Vol. 54, N. 1. (Spring 1995).

¹³³ See Wendy Kaplan, (ed.) *Designing Modernity: The Arts of Reform and Persuasion, 1885-1945*, London, 1995, cited in Erika Doss, "American Folk Art's Distinctive Character: The Index of American Design and New Deal Notions of Cultural Nationalism," in *Drawing on America's Past: Folk Art, Modernism, and the Index of American Design*, p. 67.

¹³⁴ Alfred H. Barr, "Forward," in Sidney Janis, *They Taught Themselves: American Primitive Painters of the 20th Century* (New York: Dial Press, 1942), 8.

naiveté characteristic of all authentic folk art.¹³⁵ Moreover Barnes argued, its ruggedness, vivid drama, stark simplicity, picturesqueness and accentuated rhythms, had their musical counterparts in the Spirituals of the American Negro.¹³⁶ However, as Cornel West has argued, lack of training “does not mean there is no quality in Pippin’s painting. But his work can easily be tarred with the brush of exoticism or primitivism.” West, on the other hand interpreted Pippin’s sensibility as aligned with an Emersonian, and therefore strong American spirit. Pippin’s recognition by a white establishment eager for “untainted” creative expression occurring outside the restraints of a sophisticated system, came at a cost to himself and to other black artists, whose work has always been “suspect for not measuring up to rigorous standards.”¹³⁷ But African American artists exhibiting in the northern urban centers such as New York and Chicago were not ‘unschooled.’ The majority of artists often had studied at Northern Universities and Colleges, including Columbia, New York University, Philadelphia, Cornell, and Chicago.¹³⁸ The desire for art to exhibit a new spirit, untainted by a contemporary society dominated by technology and capitalism infused much of the aesthetic and cultural discourse circulating among both black and white intellectuals of the early twentieth century, but often served, paradoxically, to further marginalize black culture.

Art that might represent a true American spirit or sensibility, otherwise known as ‘folk art’ began to be exhibited in mainstream art museums in the early 1930s. Holger Cahill was one of the foremost supporters (together with Edith Halpert who opened the first New

¹³⁵ Pippin had turned to painting on returning from war having lost the use of one arm.

¹³⁶ Sidney Janis, *They Taught Themselves: American Primitive Painters of the 20th Century*, no citation, 187.

¹³⁷ Cornel West, “Horace Pipin’s Challenge to Art Criticism,” in Kimberly N. Pinder ed. *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History* (New York, London: Routledge, 2002), 324.

¹³⁸ For a tentative list of African American artists who studied in Northern colleges and universities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century see the Appendix.

York Gallery devoted to contemporary and folk art) of folk expression.¹³⁹ Organizing *American Folk Art: The Art of the Common Man in America 1750-1900*, as interim director of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in 1932, Cahill reinforced Van Wyck Brooks notion of folk art as the “commonplace companions to daily life” and resulting from in the “limbo of the non-elect.”¹⁴⁰ Moreover, by suggesting to the public, who came in vast numbers to the exhibit, that what they were viewing was the “unconventional side of the American tradition in the fine arts,” Cahill offered a new approach to aesthetic judgment, which was open to all who cared to look. He presented the items as the work of “common people” and “intended for their use and enjoyment,” coming not out of an academic tradition but of craft traditions, plus that “personal something of the rare craftsman who is an artist.” Cahill described the utilitarian nature of the work produced by these craftsmen and of the workshops under which artists identified themselves as the carriage-painters and ship’s painters. He compared such artists with “aboriginal primitive painters of Africa whose work, he argued, was supported by a long tradition of craft.”¹⁴¹ The place of such works in the Museum of Modern Art may have appeared anachronistic, but Cahill argued for the comparative practice of folk artists with that of experimental modern artists. Singling out the work of Joseph Pickett in an oil-and-sand-on-canvas composition in *Manchester Valley* he likened the interest in texture and inverted perspective to that of modernist tendencies.¹⁴² Furthermore, looking back from the perspective of twenty-first century art

¹³⁹ For a comprehensive discussion of Holger, his biographical journey to Art History, the discovery of the importance of folk art from his visits to Scandinavia, and his eventual directorship of the Federal Arts Project of the Works Progress Administration, see John Michael Vlach, “Holger Cahill as Folklorist,” in *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 98, No. 388, Apr. – June 1985.

¹⁴⁰ Van Wyck Brooks, “On Creating a Usable Past,” *The Dial*, 64, No. 764 (11 April 1918), 337-341, cited in Virginia Tuttle Clayton, “Picturing a Usable Past,” in *Drawing on America’s Past: Folk Art*, 1.

¹⁴¹ Holger Cahill, “Folk Art: Its Place in the American Tradition,” *Parnassus*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Mar.1932), pp.1-4.

¹⁴² See Jennifer Marshall, “Common Goods: American Folk Crafts as Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York City, 1932-33, in *Prospects*, Vol. 27 (September 2002), 449.

criticism, Cahill can be considered as far ahead of his time. Craft as a field of fine art would be explored by modernists at the Bauhaus and subsequently in American universities to the point where it has since grown exponentially, with supporters of this trend making connections between the “haptic” quality of objects to “elicit certain emotions and memories,” as a route to aesthetic appreciation.¹⁴³ What is interesting is that Amaza Lee Meredith, who may have seen Cahill’s exhibit as she was in New York at the time, continued through the 1960s, ‘70s and ‘80s to express a folk idiom in her own work. She produced paintings with sand, and on black velvet, some of which resemble landscapes of the Florida Highwaymen artists, whose work from the 1950s through the 1980s depicted painted exotic Florida landscapes on velvet, but simultaneously echo the mourning paintings of the colonial era exhibited in the *American Folk Art* exhibit [figure 4-9, 4-10, 4-11, 4-12].¹⁴⁴ The crafts, folk or outsider art evocations of such work suggests an explicit engagement with the issues that motivated early modernists, and Amaza Lee’s continued exploration of these ideas suggests attempts to perpetuate a sense of cultural heritage in her own creative work.

Through promoting the understanding of folk objects in terms of their formal properties, similar to the way in which abstract modern art was understood, Cahill blurred the aesthetic distinction between high and low art and made it accessible to the general public.¹⁴⁵ While some scholars have argued for the romanticism inherent in the focus on the folk, others have argued that folk enthusiasts “disdained nostalgia...instead rooting their

¹⁴³ See Edward S. Cooke, Jr. “Modern Craft and the American Experience,” *American Art* Volume 21, No. 1, 2007: 6.

¹⁴⁴ Painting on black velvet as a popular art form in America can be traced to approximately between 1800 and 1840. Numerous sources document the exhibition of such paintings in local and regional fairs for example the New York State Agricultural Society Proceedings of the Annual Meeting, of 1896 states the earliest reference to painting on black velvet as 1813. In the 1970’s the Florida Roadside artists popularized the art form influencing a kind of resurrection in the form of pop art and kitsch memorabilia of 1960’s and 1970’s individuals and events; in the postmodern re-appearance of craft as a significant category of art making, artists such as Julian Schnabel has been lauded for his references to African arts in his Kuba raffia designs on velvet.

¹⁴⁵ See Jennifer Marshall, “Common Goods: American Folk Crafts as Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York City, 1932-33, in *Prospects*, Vol. 27 (September 2002): 449.

sympathies in folk art's spare, non-mimetic formal principles and declared an atemporal affinity on the basis of beauty." Indeed, Cahill's exhibit was intended to demonstrate that modern art and American folk art "displayed timeless qualities of beauty," and as Suzanne La Follette wrote in a *Nation* article, republished in *Vogue* at the time, these items were not intended to be regarded as "curios of Americana, but for their value as art."¹⁴⁶ This was a different sentiment from the conservative nostalgia of the Americana craftsmanship of the Colonial Revivalism, which persisted in some circles as a manifestation of resistance to industrial change and modernity.¹⁴⁷ Emphasizing the formal qualities of folk art also underscored the notion advanced by Mumford and Brooks, that it was not their intention to perpetuate the past but to use it as a way to develop new forms in which to represent American design.

Promotion of such ideas came from both white and black Americans. In addition to the MOMA exhibit, as director of Franklin D. Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration Federal Arts Projects, Cahill oversaw the documentation of an immense pictorial archive of American art or craft, beginning in 1935 and ending in 1942, and published as the *Index of American Design*. In light of Cahill's work and attempts to draw on folk or vernacular art and design to express a new modern aesthetic, it is worth revisiting Howard University artist and art historian James A. Porter's work, *Modern Negro Art*, published in 1943. Taking the lead from his wife Dorothy, a librarian at the Harlem branch of New York Public Library, who had collected and documented African American literary production, James Porter

¹⁴⁶ Suzanne LaFollette, "American Folk Art in a Current Exhibition," *Vogue*, December 1932, [Museum of Modern Art Public Information Scrapbooks, 5064, Archives of American Art] cited in Marshall, "Common Goods: American Folk Crafts as Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York City, 1932-33, in *Prospects*, Vol. 27 (September 2002), 453.

¹⁴⁷ Marshall, "Common Good: American Folk Crafts as Sculpture at the MOMA, 1932-33, *Prospects* Vol. 27 (Sept. 2002), 454; for insight into the Colonial Revival see *Re-Creating the American Past: Essays on the Colonial Revival*, Richard Guy Wilson, Shaun Eyring and Kenny Marotta (eds.) (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 7.

focused on the visual artists. He argued for the evidence and value of African American artistic production from the colonial period and urged artists to “look to their past as crafts people rather than to Africa, which might result in a sterile art lacking the crucial exigency associated with the arts of the African tribes.”¹⁴⁸

Porter suggested the interconnectivity between African American and white cultural production, illustrating that African American artists were as equally qualified and talented as recognized whites, and that on occasion, whites had even learned from blacks.¹⁴⁹ As the first comprehensive account of African American artists in the United States, the book evoked commentary from contemporary cultural critics.¹⁵⁰ Walter Pach, for example, praised the book as being of extreme importance in providing: “testimony to the fact that the Negro does not stand apart in the civilization of the United States, but has an inherent share in it. The evolution of the Negro artist in America carries on the pattern of his white contemporaries.”¹⁵¹ Whether Porter was simply cataloguing African American contributions to American art, or whether he, too, fully advocated the development of a new aesthetic based on traditional forms, for which African Americans were equally responsible, is unclear. The *Index* however, clearly represented the ideals of a moment in American aesthetic discourse at which it “seemed possible that folk art, modernism, and industrial design might join to form a new art that was not only recognizably American and modern

¹⁴⁸ Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson, *A History of African American Artists, From 1792 to the Present* (New York: Pantheon, 1993), 376.

¹⁴⁹ Porter and his wife Dorothy, who had already begun researching the writings of African Americans while a professional librarian at the Harlem branch of the New York Public Library, found in Peterson’s *History of Rhode Island* for example, that Gilbert Stuart “First learned to sketch by watching a talented slave draw portraits on the heads of casks.” Cited in Bearden and Henderson, *A History of African American Artists*, p. 374.

¹⁵⁰ Bearden and Henderson, *A History of African American Artists*, p376.

¹⁵¹ Walter Pach, in Porter, *Modern Negro Art*, p. 9 cited in Bearden and Henderson, *A History of African American art, from 1792 to the Present*, 376.

but also an integral, gratifying part of everyone's routine life."¹⁵²

Holger Cahill's goal was to provide a vision from which to develop a body of products that would be well-designed, mass-producible and utilitarian, and would serve "as modern art for the lives and homes of all people – from "the shaping of a teacup to the building of a city."¹⁵³ Such sentiments appear to have little to differentiate them from the ideas of William Morris, and in fact similarly struggled with the inconsistencies of Morris' aims at utopian practices, which were incongruous and unsustainable. Nevertheless, as Morris "underscored the study of the past as a way of learning principles that could be used to develop an expanded field of craft production," so too, individuals such as Cahill, Mumford, Pach and Van Wyck Brooks, recognized in the folk, or craft or primitive, (Cahill acknowledged the difficulty in knowing what to call these forms), the possibilities for informing a new modern aesthetic.¹⁵⁴ Cahill identified specifically, the modern artists' interest in the folk as its "refusal of surface realism." Furthermore, he indicated that modern artists discovered in folk art a "plastic quality, a sense of design, good arrangement, and space division, and a grasp of essentials, which create a unity that is not always found in the work of the acclaimed masters."¹⁵⁵ Despite the many obvious signs from his approach to art and craft as 'design,' based on specific elements of formal composition, scholars have missed the connection between Cahill and Dow.¹⁵⁶ The very language Cahill used to describe

¹⁵² Virginia Tuttle Clayton, "Picturing a Usable Past," in *Drawing on America's Past: Folk Art, Modernism, and the Index of American Design*, p. 3.

¹⁵³ Holger Cahill, 1941, Archives of American Art, 5, cited in Virginia Tuttle Clayton, "Picturing a Usable Past," 27. Cahill had learned from his mentor, John Dewey.

¹⁵⁴ In defining the notion of folk art, Holger Cahill admits that there is difficulty, "Various names have been suggested - American primitives, folk art, provincial art, naïve art, and whatnot." Cahill, "Folk Art: Its Place in the American Tradition," *Parnassus*, p. 2.

¹⁵⁵ Cahill, "Folk Art: Its Place in the American Tradition," *Parnassus*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁶ For all his independent study in various regions of the United States and in Europe, in 1905, Cahill also took classes at the New School for Social Research, where he encountered John Dewey and Thorstein Veblen, who would "stimulate [Cahill's] sense of public service" and he took classes in aesthetics and art history at Columbia University, under Arthur Wesley Dow. See John Michael Vlach,

craft or everyday works of art was reiterated by others who were equally influenced by Dow, such as the artist Georgia O'Keefe who first encountered Dow's methods in 1912, at a University of Virginia summer session taught by Alon Bement (1876-1954). Bement had studied under Dow and O'Keefe was so impressed that she too went to work with Dow at Columbia between 1914 and 1916; it was after studying with Dow that O'Keefe produced the work that Alfred Stieglitz would promote as the "purest, finest most sincere things that have entered Studio 291," in other words, the epitome of a new approach to aesthetics that resulted in a truly authentic expression.¹⁵⁷ O'Keefe remarked of Dow:

This man had one dominating idea: to fill a space in a beautiful way — and that interested me. After all, everyone has to do just this, make choices —in his daily life, even when buying a cup and saucer.¹⁵⁸

While those interested in aesthetics focused on such notions as the formal qualities in an American art of the past, others, more interested in American economics, saw the value in popularizing good design to develop a discerning consumer. As Jennifer Marshall has argued with respect to Cahill's MOMA exhibit, it sought to teach the principles of good design, and appreciation, to help the general public develop a sense of taste rooted in appropriately American design, but it also "presumed to teach the proper things to consume and the manner by which to do so." By reinforcing the notion of good taste represented in American craftsmanship, MOMA served the commercial production of American goods, which, although made by the machine, could nevertheless, exhibit "sound principles of

"Holger Cahill as Folklorist," in *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 98, No. 388, (Apr. - Jun, 1985): 149.

¹⁵⁷ Georgia O'Keefe, *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New series, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Autumn, 1984), 7.

¹⁵⁸ Georgia O'Keefe in Katherine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 190, cited in Nanyoung Kim "A History of Design Theory in Art Education," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 40, No. 2 Summer 2006, p.15. O'Keefe first trained in conventional European methods of drawing from casts,, life-drawing and still-life painting.

design,” “sturdy utility,” and “timeless beauty.”¹⁵⁹ Cahill had argued, that the artifacts were also a reminder, of the need to imbue artwork with “human traits,” in contrast to artists who have been “trained so rigidly in their professions that they give forth nothing of their individual experiences with life.”¹⁶⁰

By 1935, Amaza Lee was espousing these same principles, suggesting the applicability of such ideas to the problem of unemployment brought about by the Depression. Amaza Lee hoped to teach her students to appreciate art so that “...it might function in all phases of the student’s life, both in college and out...” and which she was careful to identify as:

not this pseudo art appreciation that has as its criterion a glib though limited parlor conversational ability to discuss what is termed “Kultur.” No, it is a dynamic art appreciation that will function in the student’s whole life.¹⁶¹

She cited the increased role of art in industry, which had implications for the student as both eventual producer and consumer. Art, she argued was also seen as a necessity for the professions, particularly as the Board of Education and the Federal Government had both expressed the need for art teachers. Amaza Lee was also interested in providing students with vocations in which they could practically employ their leisure, which this “machine age with its attendant social problems of higher wages and fewer hours,” is presenting as a challenge.” She suggested that “a hobby is good for the mind, soul, body. It gives physical, mental and emotional release.”¹⁶² Such sentiments echoed Dewey who argued that work had become overly mechanical and in being divorced from the rest of experience had

¹⁵⁹ Marshall, “Common Good: American Folk Crafts as Sculpture at the MOMA, 1932-33, *Prospects* Vol. 27 (Sept. 2002), 458-459; Cahill,

¹⁶⁰ Cahill, “Folk Art: Its Place in the American Tradition,” *Parnassus*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Mar. 1932)

¹⁶¹ Amaza Lee Meredith, “An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students” (MA Thesis, Columbia University Teachers College, 1935): 13-14.

¹⁶² Amaza Lee Meredith, “An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students” (MA Thesis, Columbia University Teachers College, 1935): 14.

become the opposite of a “life well lived.”¹⁶³ Amaza Lee wished to see “art function vitally” in society, as a way to assuage the detrimental effects of unemployment but more importantly she believed that providing citizens with worthwhile art activities with which to fill their leisure time, would make “a more worthy citizenship.”¹⁶⁴

In 1918 Dow had perhaps expressed these sentiments most clearly in an essay published in the College Art Association *Bulletin* arguing that:

The poison of the Renaissance nature-imitating academy permeates not only the schools, but the public mind, and creates a prejudice against art. There is a traditional idea that art belongs to a special class, that art is not useful but only a luxury, that the artist is not practical. The art academies still teach what is nicknamed “high art” — the drawing of nude models, casts and still life — and put down the handicrafts, the poster, and the advertisement as “industrial art.” In fact they take art away from the people and yet expect the people to be interested in it.¹⁶⁵

Dow then argued for the “leaders of the public to see that art is a living force in the everyday life of all, not a sort of traditional ornament for the few.”¹⁶⁶

Amaza Lee acknowledged Dow’s influence on her teaching in a review of methods under the section of her thesis called, “Fundamental Principles of Progressive Methods in Modern art education, she wrote: “...in mentioning any system or method of teaching art one should not fail to name Arthur Wesley Dow as a pioneer in art education.” But it was to her teacher, Belle Boas to whom Amaza Lee gave the most credit. Boas, paid tribute to her

¹⁶³ Peter Smith, *The History of American Art Education: Learning About Art in American Schools* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 17-18. Amaza’s thesis repeatedly argues for the use of art in leisure time and for its use as a source of employment.

¹⁶⁴ Amaza Meredith, “An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students” (MA Thesis, Columbia University Teachers College, 1935),

¹⁶⁵ Arthur Wesley Dow, “A Course in Fine Arts for Candidates for the Higher Degree,” in *The Bulletin of the College Art Association of America*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (Sept. 1918): 115.

¹⁶⁶ Dow, “A Course in Fine Arts for Candidates for the Higher Degree,” in *The Bulletin of the College Art Association of America*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (Sept. 1918),

mentor, Dow, in a 1924 volume, *Art in the School*, published by Columbia Teachers College. Although much of the book appears to be little more than a re-iteration of Dow's theories, a key difference lay in the introduction, written by John Dewey, suggesting society's latest concern: "Education has no more serious responsibility than making adequate provision for enjoyment of recreational leisure."¹⁶⁷ Dewey had argued that through industrialization, the work of the artist or craftsman had become "fragmented," consisting in repetition of the process of making, and hence "devoid of an enlivening quality and completeness of experience, which was divorced from the rest of experience," and it was in the "residual aspects of life once work was over, that an aesthetic experience was to be found."¹⁶⁸ Such concerns with leisure became useful, for underscoring a platform for the programs of the New Deal, during which the federal government provided the unemployed with the opportunity to imbue their lives with meaning through art, as Amaza Lee noted:

Administrations [she refers here to both the administration of the State of Virginia as well as the federal administration] are beginning to swing from materialism to things spiritual. Even the Government of the land perceives that art is possibly one way out of our dilemma.¹⁶⁹

The place of art in everyday life was more important now than ever before, and could provide an opportunity for African American participation, Amaza Lee argued, "in the New Deal program of home, public, and park construction, in which those who appreciate art should participate." In other words, studying art, understanding how to value good art, developing a sense of taste, as well as the ability to practice art in leisure and work, would

¹⁶⁷ John Dewey in Belle Boas, *Art in the School* (New York: Columbia Teacher's College, 1924).

¹⁶⁸ Peter Smith, *The History of American Art Education: Learning About Art in American Schools* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 17-18.

¹⁶⁹ Amaza Lee Meredith, "An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students" (MA Thesis, Columbia University Teachers College, 1935): 7.

allow African Americans to participate more fully in society.¹⁷⁰ Such an approach to art production and appreciation suggests a more practical and comprehensive perspective than to regard art as Amaza Lee refused to do simply “as an opiate for social ills.”

In May 1935, returning to Virginia State with her MA in Art Education, Amaza Lee set to work to create artists out of her students and bring them into public view, through campus-wide, as well as traveling exhibitions. The *Virginia Statesman* reported:

One of the most interesting, unusual and educational activities of the commencement period will be initiated Sunday at 2pm: Selective creative art pieces of the student body will be on display for benefit of visitors. The exhibit has been arranged under the direction of Miss A. L. Meredith head of the art department and will include work from classes in art projects, fine arts and methods, art crafts, metal crafts and jewelry and composition and painting. Of special interest to *The Virginia Statesman* is a mural depicting the history and present status of our College. One may see the lone house of Fleet Farm, live again on the campus as it was in 1888 or recognize familiar landmarks be it a particular silver birch of lover’s lane or the shadows of the sun dial, book ends, plaques, jewelry, metal work and other forms, which bear in many instances the motif of Virginia Hall or other State symbols.¹⁷¹

Amaza Lee opened up opportunities for students to connect with those from other colleges, inviting an exhibit of artwork by students of Langston Agricultural and Normal Institute, Langston, Ohio, and took her students to display their work at the Annual Congress of Parent Teachers at West Virginia College, where they won the highest awards.¹⁷² Closer to home, she organized an exhibit of student work at the department store, Miller and Rhoads

¹⁷⁰ Meredith, “An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students,” p. 13-15.

¹⁷¹ *The Virginia Statesman*, “Creative Art Work of Student Body on Display Sunday,” May 23, 1935.

¹⁷² Interestingly the judges at this competition were Alain Locke of Howard University, Hilda Brown of Miner Teachers College Washington D.C., and Mrs. Rose Hampton, supervisor of art in Washington DC Public Schools. See *The Virginia Statesman*, October 18, 1941.

in Richmond during National Art Week, and further afield in Norfolk, Lynchburg, Roanoke, and Danville.¹⁷³ Amaza Lee also exhibited her own work, as *The Virginia Statesman* reported:

Amaza Lee Meredith head of the art department has the honor and distinction of being the only Negro to display paintings at the “Art Exhibition by Art Teachers in Virginia Colleges,” at Sweet Briar College - Jan 24, 1938 to Feb 4, 1939. Mr. C. Conner, President of Friends of Art Club, was pleased to be able to present the exhibit and announced that it would be held elsewhere. Miss Meredith’s paintings are called “Grand Piano” and “Iron Pot.”¹⁷⁴

At every opportunity, Amaza Lee inserted the practice of art into external college conferences and meetings, demonstrating through student artwork that this was an area in which African Americans could represent the race proudly and simultaneously earn a living.¹⁷⁵ By the 1940s a number of students were declaring studio art as their major, and Amaza Lee assisted them in demonstrating their talent as often as possible. In the campus Simms Industrial Building she oversaw a series of student murals depicting a history of the trades taught at Virginia State.¹⁷⁶ She formed a club for majors consisting at the time of 26 individuals, called “Le Circle des Artists,” clearly referencing Paris as the historical center of art production, and intended to:

Stimulate the students creative imagination and appreciation for beauty as well as to serve as a means of outlet for those who are especially talented in

¹⁷³ *The Virginia Statesman*, November 15, 1941.

¹⁷⁴ *The Virginia Statesman* “Local Instructor Displays Art Work.” February 18, 1939.

¹⁷⁵ The overriding perception during the late 19th and early 20th century is of African American artists as crafts people, due in part to their employment in the applied arts, many were in fact academically trained and talented fine artists. See Joseph Kertner, *The Emergence of the African American Artist: Robert S. Duncanson, 1821-1872* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1993) cited in Sachi Yanari, Judith Wilson, Tritobia Hayes Benjamin et al, *Alma W. Thomas: A Retrospective of the Paintings*, Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Indiana (Essex, UK: Pomegranate Communications, 1998), 9.

¹⁷⁶ “Murals Begun in Simms Industrial Building,” *The Virginia Statesman*, February 22, 1941.

one or more of the fine arts, painting sculpture, design etc.¹⁷⁷

Furthermore, Amaza Lee created a gallery in one of the college buildings in which students regularly exhibited their work, and established an annual competition for high school students extending an invitation to compete to all Virginia schools and colleges. She also took her students into the community to present programs such as one at a local chapel, likely Gillfield Baptist Church, in which they demonstrated their knowledge of art appreciation by interpreting the work of famous French painters and sculptors to the public.¹⁷⁸ Amaza Lee also contributed her services creating artwork that advertised events and highlighted community projects at the Gillfield Baptist Church, to which Edna and she belonged.

Amaza Lee would find an outlet for the practical application of art study in her role as a board member and instructor in the interracial administered programs of the WPA organized in Richmond by Virginia Museum of Fine Art Chief Curator, Thomas Parker. She offered her services as an occasional instructor at The Craig Art House, which advertised “free courses in music, dramatics, drawing, painting, clay-modeling, costume designing, sewing and crafts,” shared her expertise and knowledge with other black artists such as Leslie Garland Bolling, Richmond Barthé and George Ben Johnson.¹⁷⁹ As a board member, Amaza Lee served with notable individual Richmond elites, many of who were from the First Families of Virginia. She would also have associated with visiting dignitaries such as President Roosevelt’s wife Eleanor, who was a strong supporter of African American causes,

¹⁷⁷ *The Virginia Statesman*, May 10, 1941.

¹⁷⁸ Competition flyer found in Hampton Art Program Archives; *The Virginia Statesman*, November 4, 1941.

¹⁷⁹ Annual Report of The Craig Art Center, 1940, C. Braxton Valentine, Valentine Museum Archives.

Alain Locke who was often invited to speak at events, and highly regarded visiting artists.¹⁸⁰ In 1943 Amaza Lee's sister Maude, wrote in support of her dedicated efforts in the community and the college:

We are very proud of the work you and everybody else at Virginia State are doing. It seems so worthwhile especially in the light of the dire necessity of our group making a fine showing in fundamentals when so many are hazy as to what should be done now. It seems that you have developed the right techniques and grown in steadfastness in holding to your principles- doing with dignity and efficiency your burdensome duties.

The 'group' to which Maude referred in this letter most likely was the developing middle-class of African Americans, and is a reference to E. Franklin Frazier's exhortation to black intellectuals to actively engage in helping others to become educated. Frazier talked about the importance of "raising the general economic level of our group" rather than aspiring to "peaks of affluence to dazzle the mob."¹⁸¹ As a sociologist who took an informed and insightful view of the current situation, he was disturbed by the amount of time the aspiring middle-class frittered away on leisure pursuits once they had found some relative success. Such a perspective adds another layer to the incentives Amaza Lee would have had in bringing the subject of art to her people, providing them with more noble activities with which to fill their spare time. Amaza Lee knew Frazier's writings and owned a signed copy of his seminal work, *Black Bourgeoisie*, which, as a scathing study of the rising middle-class had shocked African Americans into reassessing the purpose of their newly found freedom

¹⁸⁰ Guide to Exhibit of Productions by Negro Artists," Virginia Union University, May 18-June 8, 1938; "Craig Art House Opens Sunday, The Richmond News Leader, October 7, 1939; "Archer to Speak Sunday at Craig House Center," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, March 2, 1939; "Variety of Public Classes is Held at Craig House, *Richmond News Leader*, November 1, 1939; "Thre One-Man Shows to Prsent Art Work by Negro Artists: Leslie Garland Bolling, George Ben Johnson, Josiah Robinson, All of Whose Work has won National Attention," *Richmond Times, Dispatch*, Oct. 10, 1939, MSS3 C 8443a Notes, Clippings, misc. Craig Art House, Virginia Histoircal Society Architeves.

¹⁸¹ E. Franklin Frazier, "Aspects of Negro Business," 293-97 cited in James E. Teele, (ed.) *E. F. Frazier and Black Bourgeoisie* (Columbia MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 76

and success, no matter how limited it might have been in relation to society as a whole.

Amaza Lee was, therefore, among the small group of ‘talented tenth’ who made the sacrifice in committing to help raise a better educated and more sophisticated generation of African Americans whose knowledge included valuing design in their everyday lives, providing a sign of their readiness to compete in mainstream society. Amaza Lee’s knowledge of modern aesthetic discourses, her absorption of the creative productions of New York’s cultural milieu, and her dedication to her duty as an educator demonstrates the pregnancy of New Negro and Harlem Renaissance ideas and their diasporic impact outside the confines of the “race capital.”¹⁸²

¹⁸² James Weldon Johnson, “Harlem: The Culture Capital,” in Alain Locke (ed.) *The New Negro* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1925, reprinted by Touchstone, 1997).

Chapter Five

A Living Laboratory of Design

Despite the allure of all that New York City had to offer, Amaza Lee returned to Petersburg, Virginia, committed to educating future generations of African American youth to become leaders of their communities. Her return was also significant in solidifying her long attachment to her friend, mentor, and lover, Edna Colson, through designing and building a home to share. In a transaction that combined work accessibility with domestic privacy, Amaza and Edna chose to establish their residence on Boisseau Street on the western edge of Virginia State College. The land bordered property, which during the 18th and 19th centuries had been agricultural, serving as Ettrick Banks Plantation and Matoaca Plantation, and later industrial, as John C. Griffin's Fleets Mill and Manufacturing and in 1836, transferred to Boisseau and Smith, to become a foundry where iron, steel, brass, and other metals were manufactured.¹ The plot had been part of a larger division of land, which was incorporated into a mid-nineteenth century town created for Appomattox mill workers and as part of reconstruction efforts after the devastating damage incurred in the city of Petersburg and its environs during the Civil War. Most extant dwellings in the area when Amaza Lee and Edna purchased land were typically one and two stories with weatherboard siding, dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, they were of a range of styles from the Colonial Revival, Italianate, and Queen Anne, as well as some later twentieth century bungalows. The construction of the college had brought economic support to the area, changing the possibilities for employment for those African Americans who were qualified.² Social and cultural uses of the land were reinforced in visual resources such as

¹ Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, African American Historic Sites Database, online at

² Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Historic District Bridge Mill Worker District, p. 3, online at http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/registers/Counties/Chesterfield/020-5567_CampbellsBrdgeMillWorkerHD_2011_PIF.pdf

maps, on which the names of ownership were inscribed [figure 5-1] Yet the names of those who worked the land, or dedicated their lives to the small industries that supported the town remained ghostly traces visible only to those who knew their intimate histories. When Amaza Lee and Edna purchased their plot they re-inscribed this land with a different mark, which would challenge the patriarchal tradition and establish new paths. Amaza Lee documented the construction of the home she and Edna named *Azurest South*, preserving the black and white photographs in a leather-bound scrapbook, which bears a carefully hand-written inscription [figure 5-2]:

Spring 1939,
In the Beginning, Azurest South
89 Boisseau Street, Ettrick VA³

In addition to a number of photos that show the house under construction and completed [figures 5-3, 5-4] others depict interior views. Some show part of a lacquered dressing table with a matching chair, light reflecting off surfaces, flowers in a vase, and a handsome clock; a corner shot shows light streaming through the glass bricks, which constitute the rounded ends of the south façade, and reflecting light off a shiny satin bedspread, the window sill has small decorative bowls and vases carefully arranged at intervals, a framed picture hangs on the wall and the barely visible corner of a lacquered chest hints at tasteful storage space [figures 5-5, 5-6]. But there's more to these images than first meets the eye: what appear to be randomly selected items of furniture and decorative arts arranged oddly in a photo composition, are in fact the experimentation with forms according to Arthur Wesley Dow's theories. While the house provided a place of quiet beauty and comfort for the two women, it was also a laboratory in which Amaza Lee worked

³ Amaza Lee Meredith Papers, Series VI: Scrapbook, Acc.#1982-20 Box # 15, VSU Archives.

out various aesthetic and composition theories, subscribed to New Negro ideas of racial uplift, and demonstrated the characteristics and aspirations of New Womanhood.⁴

Arthur Wesley Dow was primarily known for his pedagogical and aesthetic theories, but his artistic work has received little attention, recently, however, James L. Enyeart has argued that it is in photography that Dow's artistic contribution should be recognized, in particular his attempt through photography to establish a modernist vision. In an 1899 analysis of Gertrude Käsebier's work in *Camera Notes*, for example, Dow promoted the relatively new medium of photography as having the ability to express fine art. He wrote that:

...a picture is a work of fine art... that art exists only for the purpose of creating beauty: that a picture is not merely a record or memorandum kept for reference, but something beautiful in itself. A picture is indeed a representation of something, but when produced by a real artist it has more than representation...Its tones, colors, shapes, its composition and style, the power and grace of its execution, all combine to make it a work of beauty, a work of fine art.⁵

In the act of documenting her house, Amaza Lee explored similar notions of photography as art, experimented with composition, and through these exercises, re-imagined the space she had created. Of particular interest was the play of light on surfaces and the formula of time or speed combined with light exposure, and its ability to transform an image into an artistic

⁴ Carol Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Knopf, 1985) "The New Woman constituted a revolutionary demographic and political phenomenon. Eschewing marriage, she fought for professional visibility, espoused innovative, often radical economic and social reform, and wielded real political power. At the same time, as a member of an affluent new bourgeoisie, most frequently a child of small-town America, she felt herself part of the grass roots of her country. Her quintessentially American identity, her economic resources and her social standing permitted her to defy proprieties, pioneer new roles, and still insist upon a rightful place within the genteel world."

⁵ James L. Enyeart, *Harmony of Reflected Light: The Photographs of Arthur Wesley Dow* (Santa Fe, NM: Museum of New Mexico in Association with the Anne and John Marion Center for Photographic Arts, 2001), 70.

expression [figures 5-7, 5-8, 5-9].⁶ Amaza Lee experimented with elements of Dow's theory that, in addition to the line, spacing and proportion were important in creating a harmony of composition. These five main principles were opposition, transition, subordination, repetition and symmetry.⁷ The principle of 'opposition' might be similar to contrast, exemplified by "horizontal and vertical lines meeting at a ninety-degree angle, showing 'severe harmony.'" On the other hand, the notion of transition is understood as a way of "softening this severe harmony" such as in a rounded line tucked under the angle of the two lines, examples of which might be found in the details of architecture, such as doorframes and molding.⁸ Evidence of these ideas can be found in Amaza Lee's photographs of furnishings. The transitions of doorframes and windows align with the geometric shapes of furniture and depict interior examples of Dow's understanding of the 'severe harmony,' whereas the curved corner of a bedroom suggests the 'softening of harmony' in less angular forms. Annotations written in Amaza Lee's hand beneath the images indicate other the elements of the composition, lines, *notan*, and color here play a significant part in the harmony of the composition [figures 5-10, 5-11, 5-12] Similar exercises can be seen to be at work in landscape scenes, where tree trunks form straight lines that rise to intersect at right angles with the line of the horizon, or where shadows create what appears to be a deep division in the spatial composition [figures 5-13, 5-14]. Some landscape scenes are more poetic renditions of a particular moment or are annotated with prose, evoking a private memory or emotion, and adding a new dimension of creative sensibility to the photographs [figures 5-15, 5-16, 5-17]. These experiments all reflect the exercises published in Dow's

⁶ According to Amaza Lee's grand-nephew Terry Richards, she would carry a notebook with her at all times to document the time of day and light speed used in a photograph she had taken.

⁷ Nanyoung Kim, "A History of Design Theory in Art Education," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Summer 2006), 14.

⁸ Kim, "A History of Design Theory in Art Education," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Summer 2006), 14.

Composition: Theory and Practice in which the significance of line, *notan* and color are represented [figure 5-18, 5-19, 5-20].⁹ Amaza Lee would experiment further with photography and eventually turned her garage into a dark room. She developed a course for her students, and was rarely seen without her 35 mm Kodak, cataloguing each photograph carefully with annotations such as the time, day, month and light exposure and their affect on the image.¹⁰

Amaza Lee used photography to experiment with Dow's theories, re-imagining interior features and furnishings as well as the landscape details around the house, but it is possible to consider that she also applied these theories in her architectural drawings as a way of working through her design. Close scrutiny of a full sheet reveals evidence of the "structural elements of art," eschewing the representational in preference for pattern making.¹¹ As already noted, critical to Dow's method was the line. Line permitted the artist or designer to sketch out a composition, through the division of space within a square. This method translated into architecture as horizontal and vertical lines intersecting at ninety-degree angles that divide the wall plane into sections. The frame of the composition is the envelope of the house, the walls dividing rooms, and specific divisions within those rooms. In spring 1928, Amaza Lee took a course at Teachers College called 'Art Structure' based on Dow's *Composition, Theory and Practice*. In winter of 1929 she took 'Geometrical and Perspective Drawing' described as "A combination course correlating mechanical drawing with other fine arts courses, in art structure, design and interior decoration." The spring session Amaza Lee took was intended to "meet the needs of students of interior decoration,

⁹ Discussion of Dow and Denman Ross' theories of line *notan* and color occur in chapter four.

¹⁰ According to Amaza Lee's grandnephew Terry Richards, she was enthralled by the possibilities of photography and carried her camera on every outing. Conversation with Terry Richards, June 18, 2013.

¹¹ Walter Sargent Review: *Theory and Practice of Teaching Art by Arthur Wesley Dow*," in *The Elementary School Teacher*, Vol. 13, No. 9 (May, 1913), pp. 455-456

furniture, design and simple domestic architecture.”¹² Comparison of Amaza Lee’s drawings with exercises in Dow’s textbook *Composition*, suggests that she followed instructions and took as her starting point, the blank space; she then sketched out the main lines of her composition, dividing the space within individual squares that together made up the volumes of the building. This method was taken to the micro level as Amaza Lee then used the elevation drawing to divide wall plane into windows, doorways, built-in shelving, and storage spaces [figures 5-21, 5-22]. Thus where one might typically find isometric drawings, Amaza Lee used elevation drawings depicting flat planes divided into squares and rectangles, and presenting a spatial composition dependent on forms, which are inevitably geometric; these reflect the exercises in Dow’s *Composition* [figures 5-23, 5-24]. Dow in fact called this exercise, “Examples of Rectangular Design.” He argued that: “The most important fact about a great creative work is that it is beautiful; and the best way to see this is to study the art-structure of it, — the way it is built up as Line, *Notan*, Color.” He was convinced that:

This method of approach will involve a new classification of the world’s art, cutting across the historical, topical and geographical lines of development. ...The beauty of simple spacing is found in things great and small, from a cathedral tower to a cupboard shelf.¹³

Interestingly, the image in the center right of the page, showing a square framed by trapezoidal sides is labeled “Side of Japanese Room (traced from an ancient book),” and resembles what in Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye becomes a framed view of the landscape, creating a dialog between inside and outside, and in Amaza Lee’s *Azurest South* is a ‘picture window,’ photographed and preserved in her scrapbook [figure 5-25]. The dividing of spaces by lines creating geometric shapes, can be seen throughout Amaza Lee’s drawings

¹² Amaza Lee Meredith: Transcript, Columbia Teachers College, 1928.

¹³ Joseph Masheck, ed. *Arthur Wesley Dow, Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the use of Students and Teachers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 98.

and in practical applications such as the parquet floor tiles of the living room, kitchen linoleum flooring, ceramic kitchen countertop and ceiling tiles, and bathroom floor and wall tiles [figures 5-26, 5-27, 5-28].

Further photographs in the scrapbook reveal a living room with highly modern furnishings: comfortable seating set before a streamlined, art moderne fireplace, a large radio, framed photos, a small West African statue and decorative objects on the mantle, newspapers piled on a side table. Another image shows, at one end of the room, a dining table with matching chairs, a bowl of fruit and a silver pot, a painting hung between two wall sconces and a standing lamp nearby; just visible in the foreground is a side table with a 1930s stoneware pitcher [figure 5-29] These images of the rooms with their furnishings and everyday objects reveal trends in contemporary interior design, while simultaneously illustrating a middle-class intellectual ambience, comfortable and secure. There is also sensuousness to the light-reflecting furniture, shiny satin fabrics and subdued lighting from both natural and electric sources, which underscore a desire for glamour. This exciting, alluring aura was a look or feeling to be aspired to in the 1920s, spread through the visual images of magazine advertising, fashion photography and film.¹⁴ The popular press had been influential in disseminating new design ideas since the 1870s when the *American Builder* began circulating plans and elevations coupled with domestic advice to its readers.¹⁵ By the 1920s women's magazines had succeeded in creating a niche in the popular press market, publishing the advice of domestic science and interior design experts such as Martha van Rensselaer and Christine Frederick. Women architects too, used the magazine

¹⁴ Alice T. Freidman, "A Sense of The Past," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (December 2010),

¹⁵ See Gwendolyn Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago, 1873-1913* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), Wright argues that "Editors of builders journals, authors of pattern books and writers of domestic advice all claimed that they were leading a crucial national reform by focusing on the housing needs of middle class Americans." P. 23.

outlet as a way to disseminate the most current scientific ideas about homemaking to other women. Eleanor Raymond, who had trained at the Cambridge School, advertised the modern home she designed for her sister Rachel in *House Beautiful*, the magazine her partner, Ethel Power edited.¹⁶ Using popular magazine culture to inform architectural design was a common practice particularly for those who worked in relative isolation from the public sphere of the world of design and its attendant professional organizations, forums and networks. William Moses borrowed from *Ladies Home Journal* for some of his modern private architectural commissions.¹⁷ In the late 1930s, unlike *American Builder*, *Ladies Home Journal* focused specifically on women as potential clients for new homes, thanks to managing editor, Mary Bass Gibson who launched a series that made a powerful impact both within and without the women's magazine world. Intending to appeal to a wide audience, the series, "How America Lives" (HAL), profiled a different family each month, describing the members' lifestyle and beliefs. Amaza Lee had no doubt been influenced by such ideas in popular publications, as it was to these that she had turned in order to choose the design of her fireplace.

Anne Spencer was a subscriber to magazines and when Amaza Lee's contractor had misplaced the photograph she had given him to work from Amaza Lee called on her in the hope that she still owned a copy of the particular *American Home* issue from 1936 [figure 5-

¹⁶ Ellen Zuckerman, *A History of Popular Women's Magazines in the United States, 1792-1995* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1995). See also Kristina Wilson, *The Modern Eye* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) Wilson states that the "public was exposed to modern art through many venues besides formal exhibitions in the interwar years and modernist aesthetics infiltrated magazine film and advertisements. P. 3. See Nancy Gruskin, "Designing Woman: Writing about Eleanor Raymond," in Kristen Frederickson and Sarah E. Webb, (eds.) *Singular Women: Writing the Artist* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 146-148. Amaza Lee knew of Ethel Power and likely too of Eleanor Raymond, as she used Power's *Small Houses* book in her Architecture syllabus for Virginia State College.

¹⁷ A drawing in Moses' papers at Hampton University Archives bears the title, "A residence for Earnest H. Hayes, Hampton VA, From LHJ (*Ladies Home Journal*)– 1238, # 1409, revised by W.H. Moses Jr. Hampton VA, Feb. 1931." William H. Moses Collection, Biographical Material, Photographs, Newspaper Articles, Miscellaneous, Hampton University Archives.

30].¹⁸ The modern home in which the moderne fireplace was featured in a two-page spread, described the home's aesthetic as: "...a style not incompatible with old tradition yet one wearing the fresh glamour of the new vogue in design and decoration." And "In this example of *American Modern* a rational adaptation of ultra modernism embodies the best elements of both classic and modern," suggesting a tentative transition into the modern style. Interiors were of a rich sumptuous assortment of colors and fabrics: "coral, red and purple velvet in chairs," and "soft canary yellow, leather textile covered chairs" [figure 5-31].¹⁹ A photograph of Amaza Lee's living room closely mimics the image in the *American Home* magazine [figure 5-32, 5-33].

But Amaza Lee had also absorbed the visual images of this glamorous modern aesthetic, the lush fabrics of which both complimented and clashed with notions of the machine age, in the department stores of New York, to which Belle Boas had encouraged her students to look in seeking to develop art and design appreciation. While Dow had recommended learning to discern taste from the art hung in galleries and museums, Belle Boas took this to a different level, recommending the department stores as a place to learn from good design. In addition, a course in 'Home Decoration' was offered at Teacher's college as a way to infuse good design principles into student's private lives. Practical aspects of this course included "Lectures, discussion, experiments, and studio work – trips to shops, museums, civic buildings and centers;" Dow's influence however, can still be felt in the course on interior design which focused on elements of composition:

¹⁸ Postcard: Amaza Meredith to Anne Spencer, July 23, 1939: Amaza writes: "S.O.S The contractor has misplaced the picture of a cement-plaster living room fireplace with metal bands running around its curved face. ...Is in "American Home" magazine – August 1936. If you can locate that number, please send me the page by return mail. You are my last hope! Thanks a million. Azurest - coming slowly, but surely. Love Amaza" (Papers of Ann Spencer and the Spencer Family, 1829, 1864-2007, Accession 14204, Box 1. Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.)

¹⁹ "American Modern - A Rationalized Type in Scarsdale New York," in *American Home*, August 1936.

Home decoration and furnishing will be treated through the study of line, tone, color, and the use of these elements through the great historic periods of interior decoration to the present. The plan of the house together with the use of hand and machine processes in furnishing and decoration will be developed in conjunction with trips to shops, museums etc.²⁰

In June 1927, the trade press praised Macy's department store for presenting Modernism to the general public: "Macy's has finally commercialized this modern art, but based upon the soundest of foundations: the demand of the consumer."²¹ Later in 1927 Wannamaker's department store also established a permanent department devoted to Modernist furniture and decorative objects. In 1928, Lord & Taylor's followed suit and Abraham & Strauss hired architectural designer Paul T. Frankl to "transform its "livable house," an area dedicated to furnishings, from an American Colonial cottage into a sophisticated Modernist Villa."²² Not to be outdone by the commercial venues, in March 1929, the Metropolitan Museum built on its first exposition of 1926, which showed furniture by Jacques-Emile Ruhlman, purchased at the Paris *Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, exposing to the American public for the first time, the significance of the new Modernist mode in home furnishings. In 1934 the Metropolitan Museum hosted the Exhibition of Contemporary American Industrial Art and while their exhibition of 1929 was noted for its lavishness, the later show purported to provide "affordable luxury." Images of the "Young Woman's Room" by Eliel Saarinen, suggested the extent to which young modern architects were using their design skills for interiors as well as buildings and the Metropolitan's exhibits, a result of an initiative from

²⁰ Dow, "Methods of Using the Museum" in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Vol. 11, No. 9, Devoted to the Educational Work of Art Museums (Sept, 1916), 195.

²¹ "Modern Art in a Furniture Store," *Good Furniture*, 30 (January, 1928), cited in Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, Thomas Mellins (eds.) *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 336.

²² Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, Thomas Mellins (eds.) *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 337.

1917, which promised to further the “application of the arts to manufacture and practical life,” reveals the widespread application of John Dewey and Arthur Wesley Dow’s theories advocating art in everyday life.²³ The Architectural League held an exhibition organized by Raymond Hood, which for the first time showed the work of architects and interior designers side by side. Amaza Lee visited this show and used the catalogue in her syllabus for Architecture [figures 5-34, 5-35, 5-36]. She also attended the highly progressive exhibit held at Park Avenue and 29th Street in an all-steel modern house designed by William van Allen and built for the purpose by the ‘Modernage Company,’ the “House of the Modern Age” staged imaginary rooms arranged with modern furniture and decorative items produced for display [Figure 5-37]. Amaza Lee kept her ticket to this show along with other memorabilia from her sojourn in New York. Thus, by the late 1920s and early ‘30s, architectural and machine age modern was displayed in museum and department store alike, often with museum curators collaborating with department store officials.²⁴ In 1931 the American Union of Decorative Artists and Craftsmen (AUDAC) held an exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum and in 1932 the Museum of Modern Art held its seminal International Architecture Exhibition [figure 5-38, 5-39]. A show, which highlighted European architectural experiments in modern housing, together with a small selection of American designs, and suggested a new internationalism in architectural style, had begun to spread throughout the western world.

In addition to the presence of staged rooms displaying desirable interior furnishings for the modern consumer, modern architectural spaces were thought of as active, not

²³ Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, Thomas Mellins (eds.) *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 338.

²⁴ See Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, Thomas Mellins (eds.) *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987); A. Joan Saab, who argues that increased cooperation between museums and department stores during the 1930s demonstrates not only how these institutions blurred art and commerce but also how they collapsed the lines between education and consumption, see Saab, *For the Millions: American Art and Culture Between the Wars*, 86.

simply passive backdrops to domestic life. In 1928 French architect Mallet-Stevens, who published theoretical writings on set design and whose own home became the stage set for a number of Hollywood films, had argued that “modern architecture becomes a central element of a film’s *mise-en-scène*, not simply providing a background for the action, but rather playing a central role within it.” In other words, he wrote: ‘L’Architecture joue,’ by which he meant that: “film architecture was energized by the same forces that motivated the performer.” Mallet-Stevens wrote of the psychic rather than the functional agenda that architecture was to fulfill.²⁵ He would argue that architecture was suited to the camera, in that it was *photogénique*, intended to provoke or seduce the viewer, as images in a magazine.²⁶ In this sense, Mallet-Stevens architecture blurred the distinctions between stage sets for movies as well as the sets for fashion shows. One architectural commission included a showroom on Fifth Avenue, New York, which he designed for the couturier Marie Paquin.²⁷ Amaza Lee’s architecture and interior design depicted as artistic black and white still photographs suggest the possibility of new ways of living and prompts the question: who was the intended audience? Is it possible to consider Amaza Lee’s architectural work in terms recently expressed by architectural theorist Bernard Tschumi who has taken Mallet-Stevens theory one step further by arguing that “architecture ceases to be the backdrop for actions, becoming the action itself.”²⁸ The interior spaces of *Azurest South*, captured in black and white photographs suggest a series of *mis-èn* scenes in which the lives of the occupants

²⁵ Richard Becherer, “Picturing Architecture Otherwise: The Voguing of the Maison Mallet-Stevens,” in *Art History*, Vol. 23, No. 4 November 2000): 560; Mallet-Stevens, *Le Cinema et les arts: l’architecture, Les Cahiers du Mois Cinema*, 16, 17 (1925) cited in Kim Knowles, “From Mallarme to Mallet-Stevens: Reading Architectural Space in Man Ray’s *Les Mystères du Chateau du De*,” *French Studies*, Vol. LXV, No. 4, 459-470.

²⁶ Becherer argues that while photographs of Mallet-Stevens architecture were intended to thrill or seduce, the architect, nevertheless, strove to “present his work as monumental...with artistic claims to immutable iconicity and timelessness.” Becherer, “Picturing Architecture Otherwise: The Voguing of the Maison Mallet-Stevens,” P.565.

²⁷ Becherer, “Picturing Architecture Otherwise: The Voguing of the Maison Mallet-Stevens,” 567.

²⁸ Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 149.

play out an idealized narrative of modern middle-class existence. This view of the scrapbook images are valorized when taken in relation to the significant role Amaza Lee played in bringing the reality of a national campaign for home ownership to African Americans. Was Amaza Lee's scrapbook of interiors an agent in promoting change, and was her home in fact a propaganda tool?

In 1922 the question of home ownership in the United States had taken on new meaning, responding to the devastating statistic from the 1920 census that fewer than fifty percent of the American population owned their own home. The 1930 census revealed that African Americans owned only twenty-three percent of the homes occupied by them throughout the United States. Most, such as those in Virginia, lived in tenements that were little more than squalid shacks.²⁹ This statistic was shocking to those who believed that "American freedom and safety rested with a home-owning democratic population." Some also believed that despite women's forays into the workplace during the shortage of male labor of World War I, the home was still the prescribed place for women. Marie Meloney, editor of *The Delineator*, a magazine with a circulation of over one million female readers, became principal founder of a campaign to "cure the domestic neglect" that was imagined to exist in the American home. Federal and state officials initially endorsed the program, but then seeing a way to reach the newly enfranchised women, they claimed the campaign, incorporating it into a national educational organization complete with an executive board and advisory council.

A massive publicity stunt launched the Better Homes Campaign, with the 'National Better Home,' a custom-built modern replica of the seventeenth-century birthplace of John Howard Payne, author of the famous song, "Home Sweet Home," written in 1822.

²⁹ Virginia Writer's Project, *Virginia: A Guide to the Old Dominion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940, reprint, Richmond, VA, Virginia State Library and Archives, 1992), 83.

Constructed on the Capitol Mall in Washington D.C. the house celebrated the song's centennial, evoking a historicized idyllic image of American culture and home. While the exterior mimicked the seventeenth century in Colonial Revival forms, the house interior was however, a modern design, using new materials and technology, and boasting an updated interior plan. Visitors were expected to understand the importance of culture demonstrated in the presence of books, a piano, a phonograph and copies of masterpieces. In addition, allusions to American history appeared in a reproduction portrait of Abraham Lincoln and a mahogany sofa similar to that owned by George Washington.³⁰ Not unlike Amaza Lee's kitchen, this model home kitchen conveyed an image expressing the rules of modern domestic science: order and standardization, sanitation, efficiency and convenience..." Having served its initial purpose in launching the Better Homes Campaign, the house was moved to a new site across from the Corcoran Gallery where it was used to teach Girl Scout groups housekeeping skills. Nevertheless, the campaign continued, sponsoring annual countrywide contests of model demonstration homes, planned by local committees. Committee members decorated these homes to instruct visitors in tasteful aesthetics, thrift, and proper housekeeping. During Better Homes Week, the best houses were opened to the public and national winners selected. By 1925 it was clear that the campaign was strongly directed at immigrants, those of the less educated class, and blacks. The campaign exemplified its goals by demonstrating a recently immigrated Italian woman's response to a demonstration home. The woman was said to have declared to her husband "That's the fireplace to sit around and talk all together, not stand on the sidewalks..." On entering the kitchen the woman was said to have declared:" No grease! No

³⁰ Janet Hutchinson, "The Cure for Domestic Neglect in America, 1922-1935," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, Vol. 2 (1986), 168.

Smells! We must learn to live like that!"³¹ In other words these houses were pure propaganda extolling the Christian virtues the American government felt were appropriate for its citizens.

In 1927 newspapers were reporting that there was a "drive" on for better homes for African Americans, with headquarters of committee located in Washington, D.C. and regional committees in most states. In Delaware, for example, a Citizens Housing Corporation's professed intent was to: "buy and improve properties and also to build new houses to be occupied by Negroes...." And that the stress was on "better and happier homes" rather than "returns on investments."³² The *Southern Workman* reported that:

Over five thousand men and women led their communities in a campaign for home improvement... Of these five thousand Better Homes in America chairmen, 229 were Negro leaders...[and these leaders] ...are realizing more and more the need for beauty to replace ugliness, the need for more wisely spent money rather than the spending of more money, the need for furnishings that are both useful and artistic, and that good homes are fundamental in acquiring the art of useful living.³³

In June 1931, *Opportunity* published an article detailing the development of the Better Homes movement and African Americans' role in it. At the head of the list of the movement's goals was to "make accessible to all citizens knowledge of high standards in house building, home furnishing and home life;" further along the list, a somewhat utopian aim of the movement was to "extend ways of making home life happier, through the development of home music, home play, home arts and credits and the home library."

³¹ Hutchinson, "The Cure for Domestic Neglect in America, 1922-1935," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, Vol. 2 (1986), 178.

³² *The Delmarvia Star*, Wilmington, Delaware, July 10, 1927; *Delmarvia Star*, Sunday Morning Star, July 10, 1927.

³³ Blanch Halbert, "Why America Will Have Better Homes," *The Southern Workman* Vol. 58, No. 5. (May 1929), 216-223

Committees of “interested citizens... with the help of specialists,” carried out the mission of the movement and moreover, “prominent colored citizens in all parts of the country” served on these committees, “carrying out programs which are resulting in improved conditions of housing for the members of their communities.”³⁴ Amaza Lee served as “an advisor of interior decoration” on the Virginia Better Homes Committee.³⁵ In her capacity as an art teacher and architect, she actively promoted the possibilities for better living for African Americans, privately and publically: she hosted friends, faculty events, women’s church groups, and student activities at her home. On such occasions her the photographs she made together with the house itself, demonstrated to others in visual terms how, with a little attention to interior design, and specifically to the new ideas of modern living, their lives might be changed for the better [figures 5-40, 5-41, 5-42, 5-43].³⁶ In addition to the more visually enticing images of room ensembles, some photographs in Amaza Lee’s scrapbook advertise the more progressive details of the home, not unlike images that appeared in articles in the black press, which demonstrated the features of modern housing. Amaza Lee’s home trumped the economic dwellings in which laundry was done in a modern kitchen, by having a separate utility room complete with twin tubs, to which a chute from the neighboring room sends items to be laundered; a floor-to-ceiling tiled bathroom complete with built-in fixtures, a medicine chest and wall-to-wall mirrors. Many of these ideas reflect innovations in buildings designed for African Americans such as the Michigan Boulevard Garden Apartments described by Robert R. Taylor, director of the Architecture program at Tuskegee [figure 5-44]. With noticeable enthusiasm, Taylor described in great

³⁴ Helen Storrow, “Better Homes for Negroes in America,” *Opportunity*, June 1931: 174.

³⁵ “Wm. Cooper Heads Va. Homes Drive,” *The Chicago Defender*, Dec. 14, 1935 (Proquest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Defender (1910-1975), 10.

³⁶ Correspondence reveals many visitors who came from far and wide, church correspondence regarding hosting women’s groups and students reported having spent time studying the house and creating drawings and models. See ALM Correspondence, and interview with alumnus,

detail the features this new building offered, suggesting the novelty of such conveniences for most African Americans:

All kitchens are provided with modern gas stoves, combination sinks and laundry tubs, built-in cabinets, electric refrigeration, ventilating fans, airtight garbage containers, and outlets for electrical household utilities. The bathrooms have marble floors and are equipped with built-in bathtubs, medicine cabinets and shower baths.³⁷

In addition to such architectural and interior design features Taylor noted the wonder of an “ample supply of hot water ...twenty-four hours a day,” that each apartment was “flooded with sunlight,” and had “an abundance of fresh air.” Further in accordance with such healthful features was the presence of a “half-mile roof promenade where members of the community could enjoy walking,” and a “small roof garden used in warm weather for outdoor parties.” This “solarium” as Taylor called it had a “bird’s eye view of the entire development” as well as the city. Such modern living was entirely new for most African Americans, particularly those who had arrived in the cities in the early twentieth century and like Amaza Lee had lived in traditional cramped brownstone apartments, sharing space with relatives and paying lodgers. The praiseworthy features Taylor highlighted as distinct to the Michigan Boulevard Garden Apartments and which were similar to those found in Amaza Lee’s Azurest South, echoed innovations in architectural design espoused by the modern architects of the early 1920s.

³⁷ Robert R. Taylor, “A Demonstration in Modern Housing,” *Opportunity*, March, 1931: 82-83.

Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (1887–1965) better known by his sobriquet,³⁸ Le Corbusier, argued in his seminal work *Vers une Architecture (Towards a New Architecture)* published in France in 1923 and in translation in the 1930s, for a specifically stripped down new architecture for living in the modern world. He called this highly efficient form of home a “*machine a habiter*” a ‘machine for living.’ In a section of *Towards a New Architecture* on the beauty, efficiency, and appropriateness of the airplane form as a model for modern design, Le Corbusier argued that:

The lesson of the airplane lies in the logic, which governed the statement of the problem and its realization. The problem of the house has not yet been stated. Nevertheless, there do exist standards for the dwelling-house. Machinery contains in itself the factor of economy, which makes for selection.³⁹

The house as a machine for living he said, should reflect the many types of windows now available to admit light, into a home either “a little, much, or not at all,”⁴⁰ Creating a *Manual of the Dwelling*,” Le Corbusier further advised the homeowner to:

...Demand concealed or diffused lighting... demand ventilating panes to the windows in every room... teach your children that a house is only habitable when it is full of light and air, and when the floors and walls are clear... demand built in fittings to take the place of much of the furniture... put the kitchen at the top of your house to avoid smells...the gramophone or pianola or wireless will give you exact interpretations of first-rate music, and you will avoid catching cold in the concert hall and the frenzy of the

³⁸ Le Corbusier’s biographer calls the name a sobriquet as the architect intended it to express his character rather than to disguise his identity, see Nicholas Fox Weber, *Le Corbusier, A Life* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 178.

³⁹ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1986, originally published London: J. Rodker, 1931), 119.

⁴⁰ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1986, originally published London: J. Rodker, 1931), 120.

virtuoso... and (he argued) to demand a separate garage to your dwelling.⁴¹

The machine in the modern world should be embraced because:

Every modern man has the mechanical sense. The feeling for mechanics is justified by our daily activities. The feeling in regard to machinery is one of respect, gratitude and esteem.⁴²

Examination of Amaza Lee's plan for *Azurest South* and images of interior fixtures suggest the influence of Le Corbusier: Sources of light include a large picture window in the living room (mentioned previously), and in the kitchen, a row of glass bricks allowing light onto the countertop at waist height, all of which suggest attention to health, hygiene, and individual wellbeing through design and materials; and the garage, although attached to part of the north facing wall of the house where the kitchen was located, projects away from the main envelope of the building [figures 5-45, 5-46].

Amaza Lee's approach to the aesthetics of her design is also similar to that of other modern architects. Amaza Lee knew of Le Corbusier's writings and visited the Museum of Modern Art International Architecture Exhibition of 1932, (or at least had seen the catalogue). The exhibit featured images and models of the new European architecture which Philip Johnson and Henry Russell-Hitchcock had assembled, including Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye, and which, they argued, represented a new architectural idiom they called the International Style.⁴³ As Marie Frank has illustrated, Henry Russell-Hitchcock was influenced by Dow's method of formal analysis intended to facilitate the appreciation of

⁴¹ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 123. Interestingly, one of Le Corbusier's most admired domestic designs is the Villa Savoye which has a garage built beneath the house itself. See Villa Savoye, constructed between 1928 and 1931.

⁴² Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 126-7.

⁴³ Amaza Lee assigned readings from Le Corbusier and the Museum of Modern Art International Architecture Exhibition Catalogue. See Amaza Lee Meredith Thesis, *An Orientation Course in Art Appreciation for College Students*, p.71.

architectural design. Dow wrote that: “if a child can appreciate the fine spacing in a rectangle he can appreciate the façade of McKim Meade and White’s Boston Public Library.” Thus, appreciation of the library rested not in recognizing its knowledgeable use of historical precedents, its choice of the classical tradition, its cultural equation with the Italian Renaissance, or its social contribution as a people’s palace, but solely in apprehending its composition of line.⁴⁴ Similarly, Amaza Lee would have appreciated the International Style architecture through a formal analysis of its lines, and it was in focusing on the line, as espoused by Dow, that she created her own design.

Modern architecture was slow to catch on in the United States however, as Catherine Bauer, architecture critic and city planner, reported in 1928. She was clearly referencing Le Corbusier when she noted in a *New York Times* article that the French were in the vanguard in envisioning new ways of living, specifically in the way they “looked to the house as a machine.” Bauer commented that: “Americans were still living in their Colonial Revival homes, surrounded by the bric-a-brac of a bygone age.”⁴⁵ But Amaza Lee was among a select few who did embrace modernism, demonstrating her knowledge of the new architectural forms in the building of her home. The interior furnishings however, indicate that while interior and exterior were considered as compliments the interior décor suggested the importance of expressing individual subject and experience. The presence of a more humanizing quality in building design complicates common understandings of Modern Architecture as focused on reductive abstract forms. Amaza Lee was not alone in

⁴⁴ Dow, *Theory and Practice, 4 and Composition*, 44, cited in Frank, “The Theory of Pure Design and American Architectural Education in the Early Twentieth Century,” in *JSAH* Vol. 67 No 2, (June 2008).

⁴⁵ Catherine Bauer, “Machine-Age Mansions or Ultra Moderns: French Builders apply ideals of the Steel and Concrete Era in Domestic Architecture,” *New York Times*, April 15, 1928 [Proquest Historical Newspapers, Accessed August 14, 2012].

demonstrating the emotional sensibility that could also be part of modern architecture.⁴⁶

In France, Eileen Gray, a promising Irish-born designer had organized together with French architects Robert Mallet-Stevens and Charlotte Perriand, to support a modern aesthetic.

Gray designed a number of fully integrated spaces, which at the time confused scholars and critics, and recently have forced a re-assessment of modern architecture. Many of the ideas expressed in Gray and Perriand's furnishings were illustrated in international magazines and have a strong affinity with the design ideas pictured in Amaza Lee's own home.

One room originally intended to serve as Amaza Lee's studio was then transformed, once the building was completed, into a space for Edna. It is pictured in the photographs with the title, "My Lady's Boudoir." The image reveals a simple intimate space with a single divan or chaise-lounge, spread with a satin cover; a shiny metallic wall hanging, with embossed motifs of the female nude; a glass side table with steel legs, a telephone, and an ashtray, all accoutrements of the new modern independent woman, evocative of the furnishings exhibited in department stores and museums. But the photo's title, the sensuous reflective fabrics and materials of the interior design also suggest the smoky allure of a setting of sexual intrigue [figure 5-47]. This room echoes an entire room Eileen Gray designed called the "Boudoir de Monte Carlo," which was shown at the Salon des Artistes Decorateurs of 1923 [figure 5-48]. The room explored issues associated with a minimal living environment, a concern among architects confronting the era's changing social milieu. In this installation Gray sought to "engage both the senses and entice the imagination." Similarities exist between Gray's design concept and Amaza Lee's Boudoir, in the sensuous luxuriant ambience created by the furnishings and artistic features, but also in the concept of a space, which supports a diverse array of uses, a space of intimacy, a space of private

⁴⁶ See Caroline Constant, "The Non-Heroic Modernism of Eileen Gray," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 53, No. 3, (September 1994), 265.

pensiveness, and incongruously, a workspace. In other words, it's a "room of one's own" and symbolizes everything the modern woman hoped to be: intellectually independent, sexually liberated, and financially self-sufficient.⁴⁷ Gray's installation was published in both *L'Architecture Vivante* and *Interieurs Français*, where Amaza Lee may have seen it, or perhaps the concept of such a space was simply common to those of like minds.⁴⁸ In 1925 Gray designed a house with Jean Badovici at Roquebrun, close to the French Riviera in the South of France; they called it E.1027 an anagram symbolizing their two names [figure 5-49]. E.1027 has recently been analyzed from the perspective of Eileen Gray's "sliding sexuality" and "non-normative lifestyle" and as such provides a way into understanding Amaza Lee's *Azurest South*.⁴⁹

The plan of Amaza Lee's house centers on a large living room with subsidiary spaces around the periphery [figure 5-50]. The only two spaces suggested by the plan as being of equal importance to the living room, are the bedrooms. In this house there is no "master bedroom" but two separate and equally sized bedrooms, one as significant as the other, suggesting, in stark contrast to the traditional patriarchal hierarchy implied in the presence of a "master bedroom," a partnership between the occupants. Eileen Gray's E.1027 too,

⁴⁷ Virginia Woolf put the longings of the modern woman into words, and first suggested the need for a particular space, which she could inhabit freely, away from the patriarchal constraints of traditional expectations of womanhood. See Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (

⁴⁸ Caroline Constant, *Eileen Gray* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 236. Constant argued that Gray's installation exhibited the elusive sensual qualities noted in an eighteenth-century description of the first domestic space devoted exclusively to female use, quoting the author of the French architectural dictionary, Nicholas le Camus de Mezieres: "The boudoir is regarded as the abode of sensual pleasure; here [the woman] seems to reflect on her plans or yield to her inclinations. Her ideas direct our customs...This delightful lair must produce only sweet emotions, impart serenity to the spirit, pleasure in every way." Nicholas le Camus de Mezieres, *Le Genie de L'architecture et l'analogie de cet art avec nos sensations* (1780).

⁴⁹ Although correspondence between Amaza Lee and Edna Colson suggests an intimate relationship, both women also had relationships with men. Edna was engaged to be married at one point but broke off the engagement in order to be with Amaza Lee. (see her correspondence) Katarina Bonnevier, "A Queer Analysis of Eileen Gray's E.1027," in Hilde Heynen and Gulsum Baydar (eds.) *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), 165.

centers on the living room. But whereas photographs of Amaza Lee and Edna's home depict a cozy sofa and armchairs arranged before a fireplace and a dining room table, suggestive of a comfortable communal living space, Gray's living room is dominated by a large bed which, as architectural historian Katerina Bonnevier argues, can be understood as a development of the 'Boudoir de Monte Carlo' installation of 1923 [figure 5-51, 5-52]. Designing the living room as a boudoir adds to the ambiguity of Gray's sexuality, as this typically communal room becomes simultaneously a private, intimate, and a public space. Amaza Lee designed her and Edna's home as a space that could accommodate a couple living on equal terms, sharing a living space as well as their own separate private spaces. As such she demonstrated their equality publically, while keeping their sexuality private. Reception of the two women's relationship appears to have been without issue, as little evidence has been found to indicate that Amaza Lee and Edna met discrimination, at least from within their work and social circles, Amaza Lee's family and the majority of Edna's family appear to have openly accepted the two women's intimate relationship, as did their friends, expressing interest in, concern and affection for both women equally in correspondence. The faculty at Virginia State must have been well aware of their relationship, as was their church. Some evidence exists to suggest Amaza Lee had problems with some members of the faculty, but this did not affect her standing in the department or college at large, teaching as she did until her retirement. The Gillfield Baptist Church where Amaza Lee and Edna were members of the congregation, also accepted their relationship, although there was definite curiosity, directed mostly towards Amaza Lee, who of the two women, challenged female traditional norms in her dress and her manner.⁵⁰ Early

⁵⁰ Much of Amaza Lee's correspondence with family demonstrates how readily they embraced Edna. Edna's brother is said to have objected to Amaza Lee, but otherwise she had a good relationship with Edna's sister and extended family. Some correspondence with the building business manager indicates that certain faculty had petty issues with Amaza Lee, but that she vehemently challenged

correspondence between Amaza Lee and Edna suggests that at the outset of their relationship they were equally as confused about their feelings for each other as outsiders may have been. In one of her first letters Amaza Lee had written to Edna:

I wonder if any girl has thought or rather felt towards another as I feel towards you. Perhaps you do like me some, do you? Our friendship has been a strange one, and it may seem strange to you if I were to write and tell you how I feel, but I shall not do that. But Edna, have you the least idea how much you mean to me?⁵¹

Amaza and Edna's relationship is significant in shedding light on same sex relationships in the early twentieth century. As they explored their feelings it became clear that in many ways a life together could offer so much more than the unsatisfactory relationships they had had with men in which they spoke of a lack of true understanding. Over the time Edna and Amaza Lee lived apart their affection and passion only grew stronger as it became clear that they were extremely compatible. The construction of *Azurest South* signified in many ways a resolution of any doubts they may have had regarding feelings towards one another, cementing (literally in concrete blocks) a commitment to one another, which they enjoyed for the next forty-five years.

Amaza Lee did not write about her architecture, but the photographs in her scrapbook and correspondence with friends and family suggest she saw *Azurest South* in emotional terms; as a haven of safety and comfort, designed and furnished with the aim to

them, this may have had more to do with her strong personality than with any sexual discrimination: see L.H. Foster, Treasurer/Business Manager, VSC to Amaza Lee Meredith, Jan 23, 1940, regarding complaints from the French Department for monopolization of the typewriter in the office. Student alumni interviewed suggested Amaza Lee was well-thought of as a teacher but some found her a little "strange." Interview with Starrie Jordan, alumnus, and conversation with Pastor Emeritus, Grady W. Powell of the Gillfield Baptist Church indicated a curiosity but no discrimination towards the couple (Interview with Pastor Emeritus, Grady W. Powell, November 15, 2010); Interview with Alumnus Starry Jordan, November 15, 2010.

⁵¹ Amaza Lee to Edna, June 21 1918.

please the eye, while pleasuring the senses. While the exterior of the house was painted bright white, edging around the building was etched in colors that according to Dow's theory provided a strong contrast. Around the main trim of the building Amaza Lee painted a blue/green/ azure color, the underside of the door overhang was painted bright fuchsia, as were the back and front stoops [figure 5-53, 5-54]. Plans indicate that surface colors such as bright apple green, yellow and black were designed to contrast with grey and white, enlivening walls, floors and ceilings [figure 5-55]. Although it is not possible to know if Amaza Lee was aware of Eileen Gray's stance towards architectural design, it is likely she would have empathized. Visitors to Amaza Lee's *Azurest South* often commented on the house suggesting it was a place of refuge that provided comfort, a pleasurable experience and safety.⁵² Eileen Gray called her E.1027 "un organisme vivant," a living organisme, which "could change at will with the occupant," suggesting that it gave each individual what they needed in the way of comfort or pleasure.⁵³ This was in stark contrast to the notion of a 'machine for living,' advocated by Le Corbusier. With the significance of interior design and décor in mind, Gray pleaded for the habitability of a building, and challenged contemporary male design professionals, arguing that: "

External architecture seems to have absorbed avant-garde architects at the expense of the interior, as if a house should be conceived for the pleasure of the eye more than for the well-being of its occupants... instead it should ensure calm and intimacy.⁵⁴

⁵² In May 1939 Amaza Lee's sister Maude wrote: "Dear Girls, So happy that you are "safe, happy and really beginning to live...we are rejoicing in your success and aims." Visitors always mentioned the house as well as the company in correspondence. While Amaza Lee and Edna were away in Europe, Edna's brother Major looked in on the house reporting back that it was "safe, sound, and clean." Jean M. Capers, Councilwoman, City of Cleveland, reminisced about "one of the most delightful weekends I have ever enjoyed in my life! " Your warm and magnanimous hospitality, o your perfectly beautiful yet "homey' home, I sha;; never forget." April 20, 1953.

⁵³ Gray and Badovici, "Description," in "Maison en bord de mer, " in *L'architecture Vivante* (Winter 1929), 28, cited in Bonnevier, "A Queer Analysis of Eileen Gray's E.1027," 167.

⁵⁴ Eileen Gray, "De l'eclecticisme au doute" (from eclecticism to doubt) and 'Description" in "Maison en bord de mer, " in *L'architecture Vivante* (Winter 1929): 17-35, cited in Constant, *Eileen Gray*, 240.

Understandings of modern architecture have predominantly remained committed to the formal machine aesthetic; however, the human aspect of this architecture has been and continues to be much debated. In the Museum of Modern Art's International Architecture Exhibition of 1932, which espoused the formal approach to architecture, Lewis Mumford argued nevertheless for science and technology to 'benefit human living':

"...it is only during the last generation that we have begun to conceive of a new domestic environment which will utilize our technical and scientific achievements for the benefit of human living, The laying down of a new basis for housing has been, since 1914, one of the chief triumphs of modern architecture."⁵⁵

The task of modern architecture was to contribute to a radical change in the structure of society, and thus to be modern meant to participate in the quest for self-improvement and the improvement of one's environment.⁵⁶ This did not mean through visual forms alone. Even German architect Mies van der Rohe whose designs would become emblematic of a modern aesthetic was not solely concerned with beauty. In a 1927 call for entries to a Deutscher Werkbund exhibition he argued for the relevancy of life in its spiritual as well as physical manifestations: "Life is for us the decisive factor."⁵⁷ This call for designs resulted in a built exhibit that became known as the 'Weissenhof Siedlung,' noted for its range of architectural responses to modern living, and so-called due to its collection or community of white volumes, which produced a new modern aesthetic. But Van der Rohe argued that:

I do not oppose form, but only form as a goal...Form as a goal always ends in

⁵⁵ Lewis Mumford, "The Need for a New Domestic Environment," in Museum of Modern Art *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1932) 179.

⁵⁶ Hilde Heynen, Gulsum Baydar eds *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 1.

⁵⁷ Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, "On Form in Architecture," in *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th Century Architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrad, trans. Michael Bullock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970), 526, quoted in Anderson, *The Problem of the House: French Domestic Life and the Rise of Modern Architecture*, 8.

formalism. For this striving is directed not towards an inside, but towards an outside. But only a living inside has a living outside. Only intensity of life has intensity of form.⁵⁸

Selden Cheney, whose book, *Survey of World Architecture* (1935), Amaza Lee used in her course on architecture, demonstrated that the issue of form versus something resembling an emotional response to architectural design had still not been resolved. He lamented:

What I miss, in a sense, is an individualism of expression... my whole conception of the coming age, is based on this: that man, as the machine lifts more and more of routine labor from him, will progressively come free for imaginative flights, for spiritual adventure, for individual creativeness in the field of the arts. The human soul is the great central creative fact in a universe which is slowly being conquered by science.⁵⁹

Recently, architectural historian Alice Friedman has argued for the significance of women as forces of social and architectural change, maintaining that these newly independent women, the New Women, were “catalysts for innovation in domestic projects.” For as women came together to discuss their values and visions for change, they redefined the fundamentals of domesticity in spatial and physical terms,” and “given the opportunity to act as clients in their own right, [they] would seek out new architectural solutions to accommodate unconventional ways of living.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, Friedman points out that in the early twentieth century, the most successful works of European and American modern architects, Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Mies van der Rohe, lay in their designs for

⁵⁸ Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe, “On Form in Architecture,” (1927) in Ulrich Conrad, (ed.) *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th Century Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 102.

⁵⁹ Sheldon Cheney, *The New World Architecture* (New York: Longman Green & Company, 1930), 265.

⁶⁰ Alice T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 16.

women heads of households.⁶¹ Women also transformed what had been the male-dominated profession of interior design; a result some have argued, of the Arts and Crafts movement which welcomed women, giving them a legitimate space in which to be creatively active professionals. Interior decorating was also an easy transition for women traditionally considered home-makers, as it was thought of as an amateur or genteel pastime.⁶² The most high profile of this new occupation for women occurred at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, in 1893 when a woman architect designed the Woman's Building and a woman "color director" managed the interior décor.⁶³ By the inter-war years, many women who chose to remain unmarried found interior decorating to be a highly lucrative and rewarding occupation. Amaza Lee can be counted as among these New Women, who were independent creative professionals. She simultaneously operated as an innovative designer and client of modern architectural space and forms. Like Eileen Gray and others she created a house that was an ensemble of building and interior, that had more to do with a sensibility of emotions rather than the "over-intellectualizing of architecture caused by the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or new objectivity," and that explored new spatial forms representative of equality in a gendered partnership.⁶⁴

Although they operated publically as a couple, it does not appear that Amaza Lee and Edna were part of a demonstrably open lesbian group, as other New Women or many

⁶¹ Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House*, 15.

⁶² Peter McNeil, "Designing Women: Gender, Sexuality and the Interior Decorator, c. 1890-1940," *Art History* Vol. 17 No. 4 (December 1944): 631-657.

⁶³ Candace Wheeler, a prominent feminist who established the Society of Decorative Art of New York City and worked with L.C. Tiffany, directed the interior décor of the Women's Building, designed by Sophia Hayden. See Peter McNeil, "Designing Women: Gender, Sexuality and the Interior Decorator, c. 1890-1940," *Art History* Vol. 17 No. 4 (December 1944): 631-657.

⁶⁴ Joseph Rykwert's argument that Gray's architecture was an ensemble can be applied to Amaza Lee too, even though she did not design the interior furnishings, she incorporated modern elements and purchased furniture that would create a harmony between the interior space and the building's envelope. See Rykwert, "Eileen Gray: Two Houses and an Interior," *Perspecta*, Vol. 13 (1971): 69.

Harlem Renaissance personalities were.⁶⁵ They did, however, have many guests and, as mentioned above, invited various groups into their home, providing an opportunity for others to take account of a non-traditional lifestyle. *Azurest South* evokes parallels with those domestic spaces in which individuals known for their openly lesbian lifestyle met to share ideas, such as the notable 20 rue Jacob Salon, in Paris, where Natalie Barney's intimate circle, including designer Eileen Gray, often met. In transforming a private home into the public site of group discussion, Barney's 20 rue Jacob has been described as a setting for "the intersection of sexuality, persona, and performance," and as such both challenged the norms of traditional domesticity and counteracted the invisibility of lesbians in everyday life.⁶⁶ In challenging society's norms of gender relations Amaza Lee and Edna took a great risk in opening the home they shared to inquisitive eyes. And yet as correspondence attests, they did not shy from public knowledge of their domestic arrangement or in any way try to hide their relationship.

In the African American communities of the United States conformity to orthodox notions of domesticity and the home as a site of bourgeois respectability was strongly promoted by those involved in racial uplift. Nevertheless, just as some African American artists eschewed the prescribed notions of respectability in favor of more creative expressions indicative of a more authentic black response — exemplified by the work of the

⁶⁵ Much has been written on the homosexual and lesbian relationships of individuals associated with the Harlem Renaissance, see specifically Steven Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African American Culture, 1920-1930* (New York: Pantheon, 1995); Shane Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, George Chauncey, (eds.) *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), specifically pp. 67-79.

⁶⁶ See Bonnevier, "A Queer Analysis of Eileen Gray's E.1027," in Hilde Heynen and Gulsum Baydar (eds.) *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender* (London: Routledge, 2005): 174. For further discussion of the way in which architecture, performance identity and sexuality intersect see Sheila Crane, "Mapping the Amazon's Salon: Symbolic Landscapes and topographies of identity in Natalie Clifford Barney's literary salon," in Josephine Carubia, Lorraine Dowler, Bonj Szczygiel (eds.), *Gender and Landscape* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013).

edited volume of short stories and illustrations, *Ebony and Topaz* and in the short-lived magazine *Fire!!* — some also challenged traditional forms of domesticity.⁶⁷ Amaza Lee designed in a style that was in stark contrast to most of those domestic buildings in the area, she painted it in colors that demanded attention, responding to Charles S. Johnson's 1927 call to black artists to "tap into their history, their life's experiences," and offer a rich spring of "full strong colors, of passions, deep and fierce, of struggle, disillusion—the whole gamut of life free from the wrapping of intricate sophistication."⁶⁸ In Washington, D.C. director of the Howard University Art Program James Herring co-habited with his partner Alonzo Aden from 1929. The two men lived first at 2201 2nd St NW, then, in 1934, the couple moved into a much larger home on Randolph Place. Aden, an experienced museum curator ran the Howard University Gallery of Art but in 1943 resigned his position and he and Herring opened the Barnett-Aden Gallery in their home. The domestic venue of the gallery provided a "non-threatening space for African Americans to develop an appreciation of art and to bolster the recognition that art was an inherent part of African American history and life."⁶⁹ Exhibiting work by blacks as well as recognized and lesser-known white artists, Aden and Herring sent a strong message that African American artists should be valued alongside all other artists of a similar caliber. Moreover, finding themselves in a modern space infused with the sound of classical music playing, visitors to the gallery/home were forced to re-

⁶⁷ Charles S. Johnson, "Introduction," *Ebony and Topaz* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1927, reprinted 1981) and for a discussion of the opposition to homogeneity expressed in works appearing in *Fire!!* see David Krasner, "Dark Tower and the Saturday Nighters; Salons as Themes in African American Drama," in *American Studies*, Vol. 49, No.1-2 (Spring/Summer 2008); see also, Caroline Goesser, "The Case of *Ebony and Topaz*: Racial and Sexual Hybridity in Harlem Renaissance Illustrations," in *American Periodicals, A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2005: 86-111.

⁶⁸ "Introduction," Charles S. Johnson, (ed.) *Ebony and Topaz; A Collectanea* (New York, 1927), 11-13, cited in Pearson, Review, "Combating Racism with Art," *American Studies*, 18, No.1 (1977), 126.

⁶⁹ Janet Gail Abbott, "The Barnett Aden Gallery: A Home for Diversity" (PhD Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2008).

assess essentialized understandings of African American identity and cultural values. Aden and Herring's courage and willingness to open their private space to a select public reveals the urge to demonstrate the possibility of new ways of living and to the significance of the interior to modern life.⁷⁰ Amaza Lee and Edna too, challenged prescribed notions of domesticity through their open co-habitation and obvious intimate relationship [figure 5-55].⁷¹ While using their home to explore modern art theories and experiment with new forms, Amaza Lee boldly declared alternative possibilities for racial uplift that went beyond the bourgeois ideals promoted by those who rigidly held onto patriarchal and sexist traditions. As historian Kevin Gaines has noted, this 'racial uplift' ideology was problematic. While it no doubt involved, "intensive soul-searching, ambivalence, and dissension on the objectives of black leadership and on the meaning of black progress," as black leaders deemed the promotion of bourgeois morality, patriarchal authority and a culture of self-improvement essential to enfranchisement and survival as a class, there were those who did not agree with patriarchal authority and had their own ideas about progress.⁷²

A Space Apart

Amaza Lee worked towards transforming the way African Americans saw themselves, and were seen by others. She constantly improved her education in order to better teach others. She was active on committees that promoted art in life, art in the schools, and demonstrated domestic space improvements for African Americans. All this she did while under the watchful eye of a society unsympathetic to the black cause; needless

⁷⁰ For a complete discussion of Herring and Aden's home and gallery see Janet Gail Abbott, "The Barnett Aden Gallery: A Home for Diversity" (PhD Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 2008).

⁷¹ While Amaza Lee and Edna did not flaunt their sexuality, they openly demonstrated their commitment to each other, sharing work as well as social activities and sporting rings designed and made by Amaza Lee, which symbolized their union.

⁷² Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 78.

to say, life was exhausting.⁷³ In the late 1930s, Amaza Lee's sister Maude, also an educator, began to seek some escape from the all-consuming commitment of teaching and racial uplift in Brooklyn [figure 5-56]. She began making visits to the rather remote, and idyllic sands of Sag Harbor, a small coastal town on Long Island, known as a port from which African American whaling crews had sailed in the mid 1800s [figure 5-57]. It is most likely that Maude visited Sag Harbor on the recommendation of James Harris, a fellow teacher at the Brooklyn Technical High School. Harris was a co-founder of the Black professional organization, the Comus Club, and as an aspiring member of the middle-class was among a select few who succeeded in owning not just one but two homes; he purchased property in Sag Harbor in 1937.⁷⁴ At that time, a branch of the Long Island Railroad, established in 1869, provided access to the small coastal town. But by 1939, this route was abandoned in favor of developing the line along the southern shore, leaving Sag Harbor relatively inaccessible and isolated [figure 5-58, 5-59] On her visits, Maude wandered the traces of former American Indian trails, witnessing tranquil views and experiencing the natural beauty, calm and serenity of this place that was, as yet, no place. Struck by the location's potential, Maude had a vision to purchase land and establish a community. For help in realizing this vision, she naturally turned to her younger sister, the architect, Amaza Lee.⁷⁵

In 1939, Maude wrote to Amaza Lee and Edna, that she, her daughter Iris and her husband, Frederick Richards, both doctors at Harlem Hospital, had pooled their funds to

⁷³ Amaza Lee, Maude, and Edna talk of being exhausted by the constant striving to improve themselves and others.

⁷⁴ Nina Tobier, (Ed.) *Voices of Sag Harbor* (New York: UNET, 2, 2007), 52-53.

⁷⁵ Amaza Lee, "Eulogy for Maude Kennney Meredith Terry," ALM Papers.

purchase land.⁷⁶ The white landowners from whom the lot was purchased, Elsie B. Gale and her son, Daniel, had struggled to sell the remaining property as most locals were poor farm laborers and in no position to pay the asking price. Maude and Amaza Lee developed a plan to purchase more than a couple of lots, and struck a deal with the Gales, offering to sell the land for them.⁷⁷

The surveys were made, and Amaza Lee began designing a single-story cottage for the family on the beachfront lot [figure 5-61, 5-62, 5-63]. Maude then invited two friends, James P. Smith, a New York City Housing official, and Dorothy Spaulding, a New York Lawyer, to join them in incorporating what they called a “syndicate” to manage the purchase, distribution and development of plots of land into a secluded and highly select subdivision.⁷⁸ If they could purchase lots from the landowner and sell them off to their friends and family, they could develop an entire enclave of “our kind of people.”⁷⁹ Maude sent literature illustrating the potential of Sag Harbor as a place of recreation to friends such as colleagues at Brooklyn Technical High School, the President of Virginia State College, and those in the medical profession. Through the 1950s the group identified a large number of subscribers who would agree to pay a monthly contribution towards owning a lot: beachfront lots were priced at \$1000, while inland lots ranged from \$750 to \$900. Occasionally, subscribers dropped out, finding difficulty in keeping up payments, in which

⁷⁶ Maude to Amaza Lee May 19, 1939: “At last we signed the contract for the Sag Harbor land and feel quite satisfied about it. Iris and Fred fifty-fifty with us. Closing June 10th, 1939.” ALM Papers, Acc. 1982-20, Box 1, Folder 2. VSU Archives.

⁷⁷ Azurest Property Owners Association, History, online at <http://azurest.net/history> (Accessed August 2013).

⁷⁸ Amaza Lee Meredith Papers, Acc. 1982-20 box 9, Azurest North.

⁷⁹ This quote comes from the title of Lawrence Otis Graham’s exploration of the black upper class, *Our Kind of People: Inside America’s Black Upper Class* (New York: Harper, 1999), Graham argued that: “When vacationing among our own, in places that have been embraced by us for so long, there is a comfort – and a sanctity – that makes it possible to forget that there is a white power structure touching our lives at all.” Amaza Lee and her family and friends were well aware of themselves as a distinct group, educated, sophisticated and aspiring, and reflective of W.E.B. Du Bois’ notion of the Talented Tenth.

case new members were found who would buy into the landowning scheme. In addition to her own family's cottage Amaza Lee designed and built a second cottage for Dorothy Spaulding's neighboring lot, while Maude painted walls and laid kitchen and bathroom tile to finish the cottage in time for the summer.⁸⁰ Other members built similar wood framed and concrete block cottages, which were small, compact places intended for short-term accommodation [figure figures 5-64, 5-65].

They called the summer community *Azurest*, because in Maude's imagination, "this place became "Heavenly Peace, Blue Rest, Blue Haven, Azure Rest." It was then from these descriptions and phrases, the name "*Azurest*" was coined."⁸¹ As interest in the property grew, Amaza Lee designed further cottages, these had interiors that with such detailed attention to utilitarian efficiency they reflect an interest in standardization, typical of the modern movement, and highly appropriate for homes that would be lived in for short bursts of time [5-66, 5-67, 5-68, 5-69]. The standardization techniques of Taylorism and Fordism prevalent among American and European exponents of modern architecture were intended to facilitate a transcendence of class conflict and social division.⁸² But such egalitarian concerns did not affect Amaza Lee and her peers; the notions of standardization translated here into an economy of necessity, providing material and labor as efficiently as possible in order to create a community a distance away from home and in a location far removed from building suppliers, but also on an affordable scale intended for short-term use. On a larger scale, features such as well-tended green lawns, gardens filled with evergreen shrubs, and beds for flowering plants, sheds constructed to house equipment and garden furniture, and wood stairs leading to the beach front on Long Island Sound, created a sense of

⁸⁰ Amaza Lee Meredith Papers, Acc. 1982-20 box 9, *Azurest* North

⁸¹ Maude Kenney Meredith Terry, Obituary, Acc. 1982-20 box 9, *Azurest* North

⁸² Mary McLeod, "Le Corbusier and Algiers," in *Oppositions Reader* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 489, originally published in *Oppositions*, 19/20).

permanence [figures 5-70, 5-71]. Such features suggest the desire to create a home away from home.

In this sense, the community of Azurest resonates with the early twentieth century literary expressions of utopian speculation, fulfilling, in the face of social anxiety and trauma, a yearning for “a better place.”⁸³ Such literature expresses imaginary alternative societies. As members of the ‘Talented Tenth’ Amaza Lee and her group thought of themselves as the advance guard, advocating a way forward to integration through demonstrating intellectual achievement, cultural currency, and refined taste. Yet as predominantly light-complexioned individuals their privilege also came from genealogy built on paradox. Whiteness conferred social meaning and class, yet simultaneously reflected the oppressive nature of racism and miscegenation; Mulatta characters are, after all, symbolic of the traumatic histories of enslavement, they embody uncomfortable oppositions and as a result must live a constant anxiety of identity. As the more privileged class, members of the Talented Tenth were also morally bound to live in constant proximity to their less educated and often darker-skinned brethren, a condition, which provoked internal race-consciousness.⁸⁴ So in creating a haven for herself and her group away from the racialized world in which they lived, Amaza Lee and her peers removed themselves

⁸³ Jean Pfaelzer, *The Utopian Novel in America, 1886-1896: The Politics of Form* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1984), 3.

⁸⁴ Cynthia Neverdon Morton argues that women, who were in the majority as teachers, bore the brunt of having to work with their less educated sisters in the rural areas and struggled with the tensions that arose in creating what were inevitable divisions between the educated and ignorant. See Neverdon-Morton, *Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race 1895-1925* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989); see also Stephanie, J. Shaw *What a Woman Ought to be and to do* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996) Nella Larsen’s Helga Crane (*Quicksand*) expressed the tension inherent in being light-skinned: “Of that white world, so distant, so near, she asked only indifference. No, not at all did she crave, from those pale and powerful people awareness. Sinister folk, she considered them., who had stolen her birthright.” (p. 77) And: “She didn’t in spite of her racial marking, belong with the these dark segregated people. She was different. She felt it. It wasn’t merely a matter of color. It was something broader, deeper, that made folk kin.”(p. 86).

from class as well as race. One of the determining factors for the syndicate, so Amaza Lee wrote, was not necessarily in making a profit, but more, in keeping control over the development: who could join and who was excluded. This, in this unique space, surrounded by their own kind, the owners of Azurest property could relax and for a short period, overcome difference and the stress resulting from the complexities and injustices of a segregated society, they could bond through a sense of common identity and purpose. Long-term property owner, Helen Logue Aubry, while describing the superficial excuse for making the journey to Sag Harbor, nevertheless implied the deeper sense of experiencing comfort in commonality of group identity:

We came so our children could have summer out of New York City. It was close enough for husbands to commute....This was really a community of women and children from Monday through Friday; then on Friday the husbands came. We all knew each other from the city. If there was one mother on the beach, we knew that every child, regardless of whose family it was, was well taken care of. The women chatted, read and knitted. On Friday night it took on a different atmosphere. There were no invitations to parties then, as long as you saw lights and heard music, you knew all were welcome.⁸⁵

Amaza Lee created this restorative resort in modernist terms; it was a “good place” for her group,⁸⁶ a place that looked to the future perhaps? Her designs for this unique place, recall African American utopian novels such as those that Sutton E. Griggs and W.E.B. Du Bois produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Publishing *Imperium in Imperio* in 1899, Sutton E. Griggs offered his readers the possibility of imagining the transcendence or toppling of white imperialist hegemony. His characters sought social

⁸⁵ Jane Gross, “A Black Enclave in the Hamptons Offering Comfort & Refuge,” *New York Times*, July 16 2002; Helen Logue Aubry, Obituary: *Jet*, Nov. 19, 2007

⁸⁶ Mary Ellen Snodgrass writes in the *Encyclopedia of Utopian Literature*, that the utopian is the “good place.”

amelioration and racial affirmation in a new political system within the United States. In his *Dark Princess*, published in 1928, W.E.B. Du Bois took the more international approach, in which African and African American revolutionary groups united to overthrow white supremacy and create a new social order outside the United States. But as an architect not a novelist, Amaza Lee's thoughts were likely in line with those of Le Corbusier, who, while professing himself to be an apolitical man, governed only by aesthetic considerations and an all-embracing humanism,⁸⁷ nevertheless argued that: "Things are not revolutionized by making revolutions. The real revolution lies in the solution of existing problems."⁸⁸

Within the social context he inhabited, Le Corbusier believed that the architect had a responsibility to create harmony, by designing mass-produced housing and "radiant cities" that would extend the "essential joys" of the new era to everyone. The harmony of society he argued, becomes a question of building, and he called his fellow professionals to action declaring: "Architecture or Revolution, Revolution can be avoided."⁸⁹ Thus, it was through architecture that Le Corbusier believed the living situation of his fellow men could be ameliorated. Amaza Lee was interested in improving individual housing for African Americans, as is demonstrated in her role as committee member of the Better Homes

⁸⁷Maximilian Gauthier, *Le Corbusier ou l'architecture au service de l'homme* (Paris: Editions Denoel, 1944); Stephen Gardner, *Le Corbusier* (New York: Viking Press, 1974); Peter Blake, *The Master Builders* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1960), cited in Mary McLeod, "Architecture or Revolution": Taylorism, Technocracy and Social Change," *Art Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 2, Revising Modernist History: The Architecture of the 1920s and 1930s (Summer, 1983), 132.

⁸⁸ Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme* (Paris: Editions Cres, 1925; Reprinted in Paris: Vincent Real, 1966). Translated into English by Frederick Etchells in *Le Corbusier, The City of Tomorrow and its Planning* (London, 1929) reprinted in Cambridge, MA, 1971): 301. The other side to this argument is one expressed by architectural historian and critic Manfred Tafuri who argues that since architecture has been employed as a tool for the development of capitalism, it is unable to be used as an instrument for social transformation.

⁸⁹ Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme* (Paris: Editions Cres, 1925; Reprinted in Paris: Vincent Real, 1966). Translated into English by Frederick Etchells in *Le Corbusier, The City of Tomorrow and its Planning* (London, 1929) reprinted in Cambridge, MA, 1971): 301.

Movement but more tangibly in the homes she designed and on occasion built for friends and colleagues. Like many modern architects she likely supported the possibility of mass production, in order that house ownership could have been made available to the majority rather than the few.

As has been argued, Amaza Lee also believed in art and design as a means to improving everyday life. But while the architecture Amaza Lee designed and built at Azurest North served a specific pragmatic purpose, providing shelter for friends and family in a unique place, there is evidence that she also imagined spaces more fanciful, expressive of contemporary modernist aesthetics and in highly elaborate form. One such design was a residence she envisioned for her niece Iris and husband Frederick Richards. The design of this imaginary space, rendered in 1946 in ink on tracing paper reflects a conviction in the possibilities of the new machine age. On paper the building took the form of an ocean liner, three-stories high and facing the ocean. Elevations suggest a rounded façade punctuated by bands of glass, offering panoramic views across the sands and sound. A three-tiered terrace with curved metal railings evoked the experience of standing starboard, riding the waves [figures 5-69, 5-70]. Anticipating modern entertainment, but also reflecting the desirable accoutrements of modern middle-class living, the house boasted a movie projector fitted inside a wall cabinet [figure 5-73]. Typical of Amaza Lee's attention to the details of modern interior décor the living area was drawn complete with furniture. Drawings depict a semi-circular sitting room with a comfy modular sofa, soft lounge chairs, a built-in radio, phonograph, and television, and, beneath the windows, benches with built-in storage. Beyond this space, a long galley kitchen with sliding pocket doors to screen it at will from the living room, is shown nestled at the far end of the building. From here, steps lead down to a bar and wine cellar below. At the opposite end, more cabinets and wide, built-in storage bins suggest space for games, folding chairs and card tables [figures 5-74, 5-75].

Reference to Le Corbusier's nautical imagery in architectural design, and Amaza Lee's choice of language in calling the group intended to lead and manage this venture a 'syndicate,' merits further investigation. Amaza Lee knew of Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse, which espoused a certain idiosyncratic view of syndicalism, and which was based in part on the utopian belief that "harmony could be found within industrialism, through creating a balance between individual, family and the state, between built form and open space, between city and nature."⁹⁰ She was clearly interested in the possibilities of the machine age, using the forms of industry in her architectural design and employing notions of standardization in interior details, no doubt she also would have agreed with notions of creating a balance between individual and state, built form and open space and city and nature. However these are all points of conjecture, as Amaza Lee left no written evidence of her thoughts on such matters. The ocean liner design suggests she dreamed of a utopian space in modern architectural forms, or envisioned it capable of transporting her community to a better place, but such romantic notions remain unclaimed. Amaza Lee's ocean liner however, also recalls Marcus Garvey's Black Star Line, a shipping company, which provided the Universal Negro Improvement Association a vehicle of hope for a global black economy. As a venture in black entrepreneurship the Black Star failed, but was nevertheless a powerful propaganda tool symbolizing black potential.⁹¹ Was Amaza Lee simply playing on the nautical theme, or was she imagining an economic possibility, a utopian space in which to relax and feel free for a while, or was she anticipating the future she and her group were working hard to create? These elite individuals who purchased land at Azurest North were committed to continuing the fight, here in the United States, to

⁹⁰ William J.R. Curtis, *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms* (London, New York: Phaidon, 1986, reprint 2006), 119.

⁹¹"Marcus Garvey's Back to Africa Movement," Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Jennifer Burton (eds.) *Call and Response: Key Debates in African American Studies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), 259.

educating, building, and persevering until they could achieve full integration. Rather than envisioning a new place, overthrowing the political state and developing a substitute society Amaza Lee created a haven, “a good place,” in which the vanguard of African American intellectuals could take refuge for a moment. Unlike the dramatic utopian communities of popular literary forms, or even the late 19th century southern residential localities such as Mound Bayou, Mississippi, or Eatonville, Florida, which provided permanent towns for African Americans, Azurest offered instead a temporary community space. Here, a self-selected group could remove itself before heading back into the fray. They were committed to social justice, to destabilizing the claims of white supremacy, and, while faced with daily assaults to their dignity, they continued to work in support of those African Americans who were less able. Such activism demanded energy and commitment, and could easily result in paralysis of despair. *Azurest North* could ameliorate the struggle, fortify resolve, and inspire renewed enthusiasm. While it may appear utopian for some, it nevertheless perpetuated codes of exclusion not unlike the garden city subdivisions, which grew in popularity during the post-World War II-era of home ownership expansion. These subdivisions, while providing for many the first possibility for home ownership, nevertheless, came with strict covenants that homogenized communities, and most significantly, excluded African American participation.⁹² *Azurest North* developed a Homeowners Association intended to provide a basis for community maintenance, but demanded owners observe strict rules of membership and reinforced class difference.

Similar resorts to *Azurest North* did (and still do) exist, such as Oak’s Bluff on Martha’s Vineyard, where African Americans had initially spent vacations working as the

⁹² Dianne Harris has recently written on the exclusion of non-whites from post- World War II suburban development. Harris, *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 33, 35, 37.

domestic servants to white families.⁹³ Artist Lois Mailou Jones' grandmother, for example, had gone to the island as a young domestic worker for the Hatch family, but gradually accumulated enough money to purchase her own property.⁹⁴ *Azurest North* differs from Oak's Bluff in having been constructed by African Americans as a planned community rather than growing out of existing property, and significantly, as such, its occupants felt the power of domination: white developers who considered building on the same sands, turned away once they realized the land was owned by African Americans. As a result, *Azurest North* became neighbor to two further African American resorts along the same coastline, making the area truly racially exclusive.⁹⁵ Today, families of many of the original property owners remain in full possession of the land and cottages they built. Extending across twenty acres between Hampton Street and Route 114, the community boasts beachfront and inland property comprising over one hundred summer homes dating from the 1940s to 1990s, only a handful of the earliest cottages have been demolished to make way for more prestigious summer homes.

In 2009, award winning author, and Pulitzer-prize finalist, Colson Whitehead, set the scene of his popular coming of age novel *Sag Harbor* in this very landscape. The protagonist, a vacationer at the *Azurest North* resort, opens the novel with a question posed to a recent arrival from New York: "When did you get out?"

⁹³ Andrew W. Kahrl, an assistant professor at Marquette University, has just published *The Land Was Ours: African American Beaches from Jim Crow to the Sunbelt South*, (Harvard University Press, 2012), which explores a number of beaches and coastal real estate owned by blacks during the Jim Crow period, and illustrates the struggles encountered as they tried to hold onto this land.

⁹⁴ Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, *The Life and Art of Lois Mailou Jones* (San Francisco: Pomegranate ArtBooks, 1995).

⁹⁵ According to Terry Richards, one consortium took steps to develop a Tennis Club adjacent to the land Maude and Amaza Lee had purchased, but when they discovered that African Americans owned the neighboring land they relinquished their contract and moved elsewhere. See also Nina Tobier, (ed.) *Voices of Sag Harbor* (New York: UNET, 2, 2007),

As Whitehead explains, asking this question was a way of situating the newcomer into the summer schedule. But it was also much more than that, it was:

...a form of showing off, even though anyone you could brag to have received the same gift and had come by it the same way you did. Same sun wrapped in shiny paper, same soft benevolent sky, same gravel road that sooner or later skinned you. It was hard not to believe it belonged to you more than anyone else, made for you and waiting all these years for you to come along. Everyone felt that way. We were grateful just to be standing there in that heat after such a long bleak year in the city.⁹⁶

Amaza Lee and Maude could only scarcely have imagined, or even dared hope, that the place they established for a select few, would one day provide rest and recuperation for generations of African American elites, respected professionals at the top of their fields. Ironically, they may have been ambivalent about the continued future existence of the place for all the hard work they undertook in trying to create a better future for African Americans and all their efforts to improve race relations should have eliminated the need for a racially exclusive place such as *Azurest North*. Its sustained existence speaks volumes about the continuing fragile state of race relations in the United States.

For Amaza Lee, *Azurest North* provided a place in which she could relax with her family, but also an opportunity to practice architectural design away from her duties as a teacher at Virginia State College. At her drafting table in the small bedroom she shared with Edna in the family cottage Amaza Lee worked out various small plans for housing for current and future members of the resort community, as well as elsewhere. It is not clear if she was paid for the house plans she made but she did design and build a number of residences. These include the cottage in *Azurest North* for her family, a second cottage in

⁹⁶ Colson Whitehead, *Sag Harbor, A Novel* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 1.

Azurst North (now demolished) for Edward and Dorothy Spaulding; a single-story brick dwelling on Third Street in Ettric, Petersburg for James H. Johnson; and a single-story ranch style brick residence in Prairie View, Texas, for Ann Preston [figure 5-76]. Each of the buildings Amaza Lee designed were forward-looking modern houses, with their carefully worked out spatial arrangements and built-in cabinetry, window-seating and closets, they suggest an abiding interest in living comfortably in an environment that was efficient, while tailored to individual needs. Her designs drew on the theories she had learned in the curricula at Teacher's College but took stylistic innovation from the popular and architectural press, contemporary exhibitions and discourses. As such Amaza Lee introduced ideological as well as iconographical notions of modern living into the lives of African Americans who historically had been excluded from such possibilities. As the most stylistically and spatially dramatic or avant-garde design, Amaza Lee's *Azurest South* symbolized a refusal to acquiesce to imposed standards and expectations of a marginalized group, and instead boldly demonstrated a determination not only to be included, but also to lead.

Conclusion

Amaza Lee Meredith directed the art program at Virginia State College until her retirement in 1958, celebrated with a banquet to honor her dedication and commitment. At the November 1983 centennial to commemorate the founding of Virginia State Normal and Collegiate Institute, Amaza Lee was again recognized for her extensive service. She had spent her life involved in education, since first arriving in 1915 at Virginia State Normal and Industrial Institute, as it was called at the time, earning various teaching certificates, a Normal School diploma, and a Bachelor and Masters degree. As she herself explained to the centennial committee interested in a retrospective account of her years at the college, much had changed since that first day. The college had undergone dramatic changes in its curricula — with related name changes— from its founding as an institute whose mission was to provide teacher training and a liberal arts college education, through a state mandated focus on industrial programs, to specialized industrial training and the reinstatement of the college curriculum as befitted a land-grant institution, and finally, with the addition of departments and graduate programs in 1979, the college became recognized as a university. Although Amaza Lee was no longer teaching by 1979, she had remained involved with the college community, working with students to create a mural, “America the Beautiful” in 1966, and among other volunteer efforts, had designed a new college insignia.

Azurest South, which Amaza Lee had conceived of as a home for herself and Edna, remained their primary residence until the end.¹ In her will, Amaza Lee deeded her half interest in the property to Virginia State University Alumni Association “to become a

¹ Edna spent a short time in a nursing home before she died.

nucleus for an 'Azurest Alumni House.'"² Edna Colson deeded her ownership in the *Azurest South* property to Amaza Lee.

During *Azurest South's* early life, the building was perceived as "an oddity" and little understood in architectural terms.³ But when architectural historians discovered the building in the 1980's it was recognized as a remarkable feat of architectural sophistication revealing knowledge of "the most advanced art currents of the period," in particular, "the principles of the International Style," visible in the building as a whole.⁴ In 1993 the house was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In this listing significance resides in the building's singular expression of "one of the Commonwealth's few mature examples of the International Style: a style that espoused a complete break with architectural traditions," and "the characteristics embedded in the house and its landscape, which suggest the tenets of the International Style, rarely expressed in Virginia's residential architecture."⁵

Amaza Lee began her entry into the world of fine art in the late 1920s, but continued her studies through the mid-1930s. This meant that she straddled the period during which the strong urge to focus on the Colonial Revival and recall a romanticized view of the colonial past predominated. The 1930s however, had begun to see some changes. Indeed, by 1939 the New York Worlds Fair boldly declared the arrival of a new and exciting modernism, but in reality, only a few were prepared to fully embrace in art and

² Amaza Lee Meredith, Last Will and Testament, July 17, 1980. Will Book 134:318, Chesterfield County Circuit Court. Amaza Lee died January 2, 1984. Edna Colson, Last Will and Testament, January 29, 1975. Will Book 137: 206 Chesterfield County Circuit Court. Edna died January 17, 1985 (at the age of 96).

³ Interview with VSU alumnus and Secretary to the Alumni Association, November 2010.

⁴ Richard Guy Wilson, in *The Making of Virginia Architecture*, Charles Brownell, Calder Loth, William S. Rasmussen and Richard Guy Wilson, (eds.) Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1992;

⁵ United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service: National Register Nomination, Virginia Department of Historic Resources 020-5583. November 9, 1993: Section 8 page 5.

architectural forms a modern identity divorced from the past. In retrospect it is ironic that an African American woman architect was one who did fully embrace modernism. It is ironic, not because she lacked academic qualifications or artistic talent, but because the discourses of modernism had relegated African American cultural production to the margins. It is only recently that a re-examination of the connection between the folk, craft and primitive have brought African American work into a different light, tying it in more closely to a modernist impulse. Even the recognized outpouring of African American culture by members of the Harlem Renaissance did not receive entry into the canon of modern artistic production at the time, and has remained relatively confined to a category of "racial art history."⁶ While some acknowledged the interracial cooperation between white and African American literary artists in creating a modern American literature, however, few have attributed credit to the lead role African Americans took in pushing a new cultural expression forward. Recently however, scholars such as Hazel Carby have identified an interest in modern aesthetics on the part of the black artistic community as occurring much earlier than the 1920s, the peak period of the Harlem Renaissance. Geoffrey Jacques also more recently argues that if and when the Harlem Renaissance is regarded as a blossoming of modern artistic expression, it must nevertheless be understood as the result of a longer germination rather than a sudden awakening.⁷ Jacques thus raises the question of African American cultural production "not as 'raw material' but as a co-determinate agent

⁶ Mary Ann Calo reiterates Mary Schmidt Campbell's lament in *The Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America*, (1987) that "the historical legacy of the Harlem Renaissance has been contained within the limiting conditions of cultural separatism." This lament she says is echoed in 1996 by George Hutchinson in *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (New York: Belknap Press, 1996), see Mary Ann Calo, "African American Art and Critical Discourse Between World Wars," in *American Quarterly* 51.3 (1999); such concerns continue to haunt Mary Ann Calo, see her "Recovery and Reclamation: A Continuing Project," in *American Art*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 2003), pp. 10-13

⁷ Geoffrey Jacques, *A Change in the Weather: Modernist Imagination, African American Imaginary* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 7.

of the modernist project.”⁸ As my project demonstrates, a small cadre of African Americans was well aware of the currents of modern discourse, moreover they committed themselves to participating in the dialogues circulating at the best educational institutions, and in networks of the metropolis in which their own experiences were shaped and which shaped others.

Amaza Lee was remarkable and yet also typical of a small group of educated individuals who were in positions to take advantage of new trends and further translate such knowledge in their own spaces. In architecture many who taught at or who had connections with key black colleges grasped the opportunity to explore new ideas such as architectural modernism. Although the architectural production of African Americans remains little explored, some scholars, as they dig into marginalized archives and probe the records of small architectural firms seldom known outside the black community, are beginning to recognize the innovation of these new professionals. A handful of dissertations and popular publications have recently paid scholarly attention to the work of Hilyard Robinson, Professor of Architecture at Howard University, and designer of Langston Terrace, D.C.’s first modern style public housing.⁹ Literature is growing on architects such as Paul Williams, who designed for Hollywood stars in a range of styles, including modern Art Deco. Other black architects such as Vertner Tandy who designed a low-rise art moderne apartment building in Harlem, are also being researched. It is becoming increasingly clear that as African Americans fought their way towards inclusion in the higher echelons of

⁸ Geoffrey Jacques, *A Change in the Weather: Modernist Imagination, African American Imaginary* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 9.

⁹ See Elizabeth Milnarik, “The Federally Funded American Dream: Public Housing as an Engine for Social Improvement, 1933-1937” (PhD Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2009) and Kelly Quinn, “Making Modern Homes: A History of Langston Terrace Dwellings, A New Deal Housing Program in Washington, D.C.” (PhD Dissertation, University of Maryland, 2007).

education, where new ideas were circulated, they molded and shaped these ideas for their own purposes. Closer examination of African American architects such as Amaza Lee can only enrich our understanding of modernism. Other African American architects embraced the modern style of volumes, glass brick windows and streamlined shapes. In Washington William D. Nixon, a Dunbar High School art teacher, designed a home on University Terrace, North West Washington DC in such an idiom, and William Moses completed several homes for African American clients, in the style that rejected historic precedent and signaled a new way forward.¹⁰

While the forms of Amaza Lee's *Azurest South* might suggest a connection to the International Style, such comparisons complicate our understanding of such a stylistic category. In the 1960's, Scholars began questioning the definition of the International Style established by Philip Johnson and Henry Russell-Hitchcock in 1932. William Jordy argued that the moment of blossoming was the 1930s, but shortly after, variations in architectural expression began to appear from the most iconic architects associated with the style. Furthermore, Jordy argued that regional and vernacular traditions began to influence the Style, imbuing it with denser meanings.¹¹ As a means to identifying modern architecture, style has remained a rigid category, but what if style were to become a less significant conceptual framework and the socio-ethical intentions more so? Social action seems to be more of an appropriate term to define modernist architecture. Where Le Corbusier insisted

¹⁰ John Kelly, "A Snapshot of D.C.'s Segregated Past Comes to Light in a Roundabout Way," *Washington Post*, February 8, p20.

¹¹ William H. Jordy, "The International Style in the 1930s," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Mar. 1965), 11, 13. Richard Guy Wilson and Robert A.M. Stern also explored the International Style further in the February edition of *Progressive Architecture*. See Richard Guy Wilson. "The International Style: The MOMA Exhibition" in *Progressive Architecture*, Feb. 1982, pp.92-104; Robert A.M. Stern, "The International Style: Immediate Effects," in *Progressive Architecture*, Feb. 1982

on the moral aspect of architecture and many Germanic architects imbued modern architecture with a social ethos.¹² Amaza Lee appears to have had similar concerns in mind. Her building may resemble the forms of the International Style but *Azurest South* can be read as modern in other more significant ways. As a comprehensive expression of a progressive way of life, which included activities such as appreciation of art (including the decorative arts), literature, and music; healthful and social activities made possible by the building's relationship to the outdoors; and the accommodation of same sex relationships which in the plan of the building eschewed patriarchal norms. Moreover, as a laboratory for exploring theories of design composition, Amaza Lee's *Azurest South* can be understood as existing in a constant state of evolution and therefore always modern, changing to accommodate new ideas – the transformation of the studio into a private space for Edna, or the renovation of the garage into a film processing dark-room and art studio. Modernism as a discourse meant something very specific to African Americans; it was a way to redefine identity, to open up possibilities for greater assimilation, and a way to bolster self-confidence. Through active demonstrations of themselves as modern, African Americans forced an understanding and recognition of the New Negro. Furthermore such action through creative expression complicates and enriches understandings of modernism. In other words, African American modernism can contribute to the notion of modernism as a discourse.¹³ *Azurest South* can be seen as an exploration of “how the built environment should be constructed to grapple with and respond to, rather than reject or ignore the complex phenomenon of modernity.” It contributes to understandings of modern

¹² Sarah Williams Goldhagen, “Something to Talk About: Modernism, Discourse, Style,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 64, No.2, 2005: 144-167.

¹³ Sarah Williams Goldhagen, “Something to Talk About: Modernism, Discourse, Style,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 64, No.2, 2005: 162.

architecture as more than just a style, but as a “set of arguments that cohere around a core cluster of propositions,” producing “a plurality of patterned difference in the answers given, the ends sought and the architecture proposed and built.”¹⁴ Understood in such terms, *Azurest South* and indeed the modern imaginary of her ocean liner building on *Azurest North* suggest Amaza Lee envisioned through architecture the potential for new possibilities, in life as in art.

Amaza Lee learned much about modernism during her sojourn in New York, but the fact that she returned to the South is of great significance. Much has been written on the importance of the great Migration and the resulting impact of large numbers of people converging in the northern metropolis, to the extent that it was this coming together that allowed a new cultural phenomenon to occur. But as my project illustrates, many African Americans went north in order to gain a new level of higher education credential, and in doing so could not help but influence those they encountered. Indeed many of these individuals also worked systematically, as did Amaza Lee and Edna, to change the way African Americans were perceived and to provide opportunities to better understand them. It was under such circumstances that new ideas about life, society and culture were exchanged and developed. The Great Migration was never a one-way system. Even though it has often been presented as a way for African Americans in general to improve their lot in life, many absorbed, participated and contributed, then returned home to the south. The South was certainly a site of trauma, economic and social constraint for many African Americans, but many did have strong positive connections to the South, many had established a certain possibility through property and networks of kin. If many did travel

¹⁴ Sarah Williams Goldhagen, “Something to Talk About: Modernism, Discourse, Style,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 64, No.2, 2005: 162.

north in the hopes of finding new economic and social possibilities, they nevertheless retained, as much African American literature suggests, a simultaneously occurring nostalgia for a past wrapped up in a sense of rootedness and connection to place. Richard Wright's poem *Black Boy*, for example suggests this sense of willingness to make a change, while not totally forsaking the roots of the South, and moreover in not totally discarding that which distinguished him, his southern roots:

I was leaving the South
 To fling myself into the unknown...
 I was taking a part of the South
 To transplant in alien soil,
 To see if it could grow differently,
 If it could drink of new and cool rains,
 Bend in strange winds,
 Respond to the warmth of other suns
 And, perhaps, to bloom.¹⁵

Most histories of African American migration, in particular the Great Migration, focus on the positive aspects of possibilities in the North, ignoring the narrative that might reveal the deep connection and investment that many African Americans had in the South.¹⁶ What has been little studied is the fact that despite the fear of lynching, rape, the constant derogatory insults and attacks supported by Jim Crow laws, coupled with growing employment, many African Americans never left the South, many returned on frequent

¹⁵ Richard Wright, *Black Boy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1937) reprinted in Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Sons: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010) frontispiece.

¹⁶ For a thorough bibliography of scholarship on the Great Migration see Joe William Trotter, Jr., *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class and Gender* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991). Trotter calls for new studies of African American migration that are more interdisciplinary, and inclusive of continuities as well as discontinuities in black population movement over time as a means to better understanding black community in urban America.

visits, and some returned for good. The importance of kinship, property ownership, and place, remained of paramount importance for some African Americans in the South, for where such networks of community and support existed, then opportunity likely also existed, notwithstanding Northern industrialization and modern possibilities.¹⁷ A history of possibility found in Southern cities continued to resonate with many African American families who had found a better life and built the foundation for future generations. Intellectual leaders, Booker T. Washington and a decade before him, Frederic Douglass, cautioned against leaving the South, arguing that it was their right to claim what they had invested in helping develop the land and what they would lose if they left.¹⁸ Ironically, perhaps, it was in the South that opportunity to “form black community, with fellowship and institutions” had existed and, although precarious during the uncertain period after Reconstruction, continued to serve as crucial foundations for building a black life. As some scholars have argued, it was this sense of attachment to place, investment in institutions, property and community in which the “core of black leadership, protest, and intellect emerged from the urban South after 1865,” and should therefore not be surprising that the South became the “well-spring of the Civil Rights movement a century later.”¹⁹

Amaza Lee and Edna were among those who took advantage of the opportunities to be had in the North, but brought their new ideas home to share with a new generation. They

¹⁷ Dylan C. Penningroth provides a thorough analysis of the interconnectedness of property ownership and kinship ties, which were often fluid but strengthened by mutual property ownership. Property ownership also reinforced kinship ties and allowed slaves to carve out a degree of autonomy. (See: Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

¹⁸ Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Sons: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Random House, 2010) 42.

¹⁹ David R. Goldfield, “Black Life in Old South Cities,” *Before Freedom Came: African American Life in the Antebellum South*, Edward D.C. Campbell, Jr. with Kym S. Rice (eds.) Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, VA (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1991),153.

also shared their ideas with those they met while in the North. For example, Amaza Lee was invited to join a group of faculty and students at Columbia who were exploring ways in which to shape higher education.²⁰ Such efforts on the part of Columbia Teachers College faculty were significant in developing trust and respect among individuals who, although divided through a legalized segregated system, could nevertheless work towards a new system through sharing ideas and friendship.²¹ Edna's PhD research, on which she worked intensely from 1934 to 1939, was highly regarded by both Columbia Teachers College pedagogical experts and her own college peers, who supported her travel throughout the country to give talks. Her dissertation investigated the concept of race and the way in which race was taught in public schools. It investigated the text-books and classroom materials necessary for developing "understanding and goodwill toward other races, including the extent to which black teachers were prepared for using and selecting such materials." Edna had been working on such ideas since at least 1933, when Luther Porter Jackson, taking a sabbatical from Virginia State College to study at Chicago had discussed with her the need to develop materials with which to teach the history and was interested in the place of "the negro in the school curriculum."²²

Edna and Amaza Lee were also involved with the Virginia Commission on Interracial Relations, whose mission stated that:

²⁰ Sallie B. Tannahill, to Amaza Lee Meredith, Columbia Teachers College, Feb 16, 1935. Tannahill invited Amza Lee to "join a small group of advanced students who are interested in advanced problems of Art Education. ...We shall be glad to have you join us." ALM Papers, Virginia State University Archives, Scrapbooks - Family 1982, box 13 folder 175.

²¹ Maude, who also studied at Teachers College wrote to Amaza Lee in 1938 that: "Miss Tannahill sends love." Maude to Amaza Lee, New York, Jan 12, 1938.

²² Luther Porter Jackson to Edna Colson, "I trust that your work is going well, and regards to Miss Meredith." Box 45 Colson Hill Papers.

1. Whites need to know more facts about Negroes, their achievements and ideals.
2. Negroes need to know more about the basis on which white people have come to think and feel and act as they do.
3. Both races need to study the causes of conflict and the conditions that favor constructive cooperation.²³

Included among the various methods identified for disseminating greater information about African Americans in order to cultivate trust and respect were the home improvement programs. While Edna worked to expand educational opportunities and change the curricula of public schools in order to develop greater understanding, Amaza Lee used her creativity in fostering artists and in demonstrating possibilities of better living through her architecture.

Amaza Lee also continued to develop knowledge of other forms of architectural expression, taking a trip with Edna to Europe in 1955, on which they were the lone African American couple, a situation, which no doubt encouraged great discussion and intellectual exchange.²⁴ In requesting permission for a leave of absence Amaza Lee argued for the immense effect the travel would have on her personal knowledge of art and architecture but she also constructed the appeal in terms of the potential it held for working towards decreasing disparity between black and white schools. In 1957 Amaza Lee was appointed by new Virginia State College President R.P. Daniel to work with a committee of five faculty in preparing materials to document evidence of eligibility in the college's application to the American Association of University Women, an application approved 1957.

²³ Virginia Commission on Interracial Relations undated document. Colson Hill Papers box 59, Virginia State College Archives.

²⁴ Amaza Lee to President John Gandy requesting leave of absence to travel to Europe on a fellowship received from Temple University. See documentation and photographs, Amaza Lee Papers, Virginia State Archives, Acc# 1982-20 box #9.

Amaza Lee was an educator, an artist, and an architect. Through her work in these often overlapping fields, she contributed to racial uplift for members of her community, a remarkable achievement in itself. But in preserving these efforts in tangible form, in her papers, her scrapbook and her buildings, she provided a glimpse into the highly complex world she inhabited, and into the efforts of African Americans in the early twentieth century in creating a unique sense of themselves as a group determined to forge a progressive way forward,

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Figure 1-1



Figure 1-2



Figure 1-3



Figure 1-4



Figure 1-5



Figure 1-6



Figure 1-7

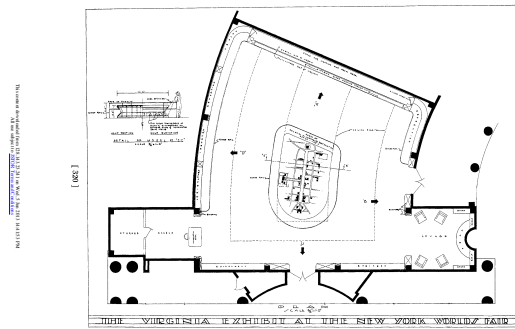


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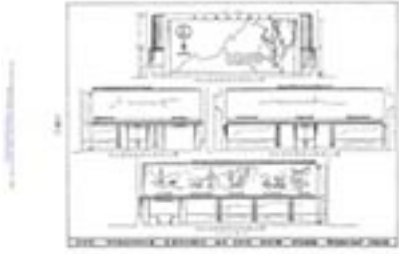


Figure 1-9



Figure 1-10



Figure 1-11



Figure 1-12



Figure 1-13



Figure 1-14



Figure 1-15



Figure 1-16



Figure 1-17



Figure 1-18



Figure 1-19



Figure 1-20



Figure 1-21



Figure 1-22



Figure 1-23



Figure 1-24

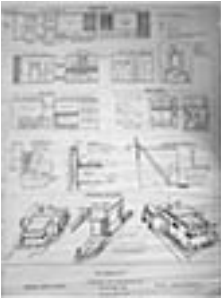


Figure 1-25



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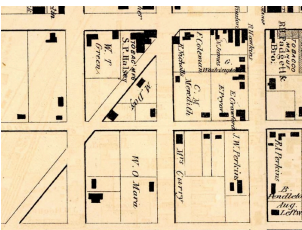


Figure 1-27



Figure 1-28



Figure 1-29



Figure 1-30



Figure 1-31



Figure 1-32



Figure 1-33



Figure 1-34



Figure 1-35



Figure 1-36



Figure 1-37



Figure 1-38



Figure 1-39



Figure 1-40



Figure 2-1



Figure 2-2



Figure 2-3



Figure 2-4



Figure 2-5



Figure 3-1



Figure 3-2



Figure 3-3



Figure 3-4



Figure 3-5



Figure 4-1



Figure 4-2



Figure 4-3



Figure 4-4



Figure 4-5

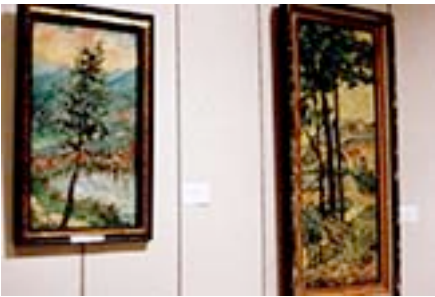


Figure 4-6



Figure 4-7



Figure 4-8



Figure 4-9



Figure 4-10



Figure 4-11



Figure 4-12

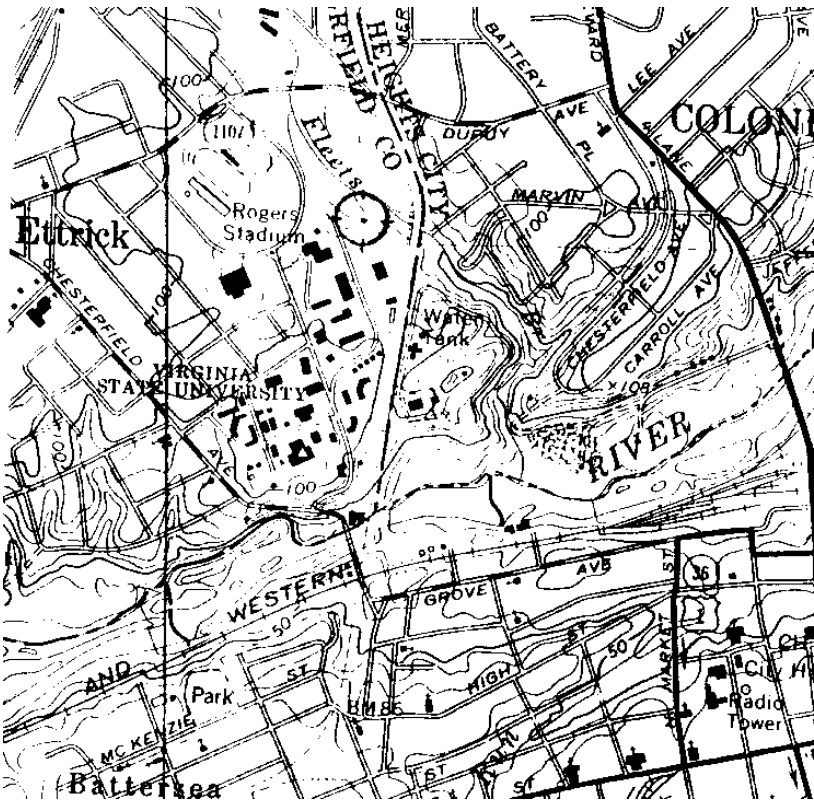
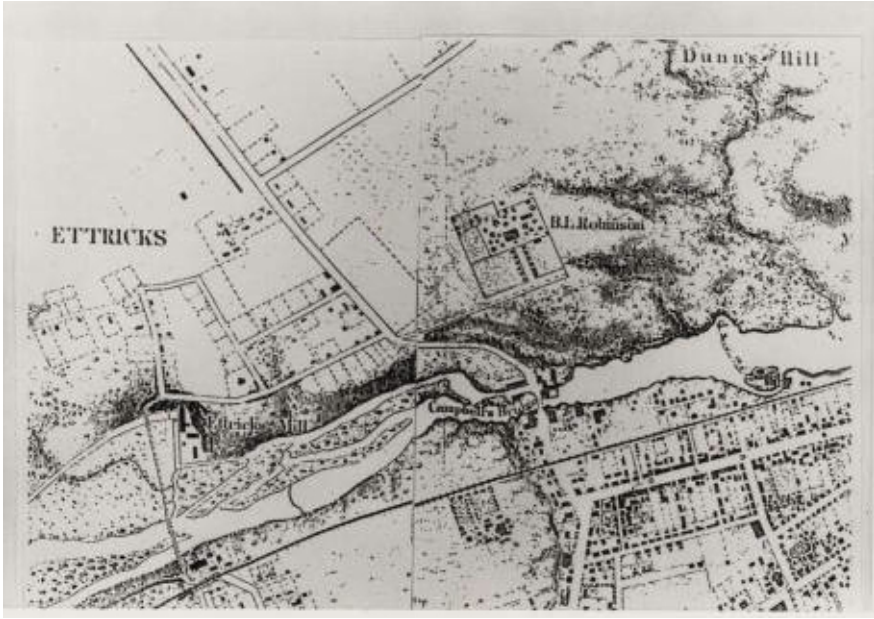


Figure 5-1



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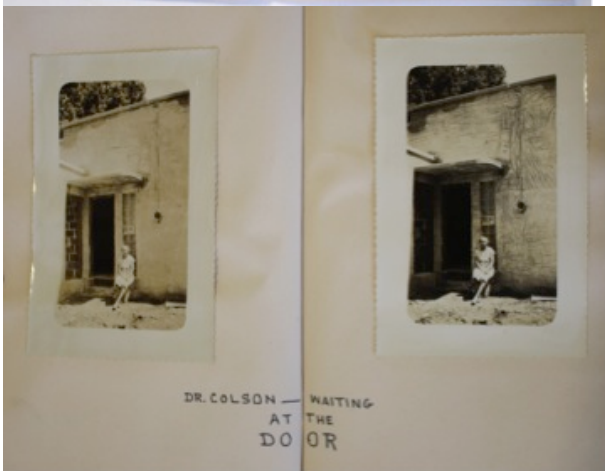


Figure 5-3



Figure 5-4



Figure 5-5



Figure 5-6



Figure 5-7



Figure 5-8



Figure 5-9



Figure 5-10



Figure 5-11



Figure 5-12



Figure 5-13



Figure 5-14

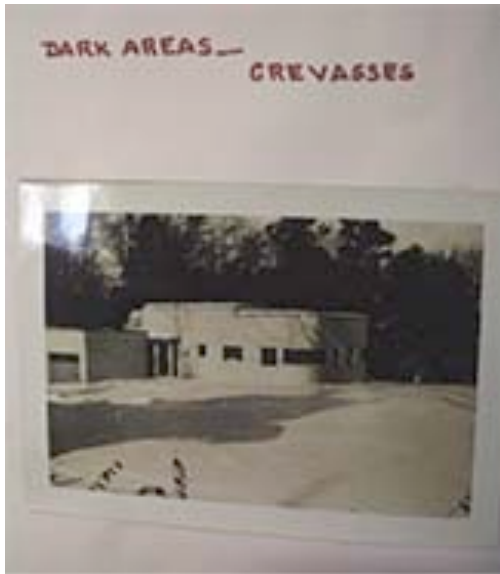


Figure 5-15



Figure 5-16



Figure 5-17

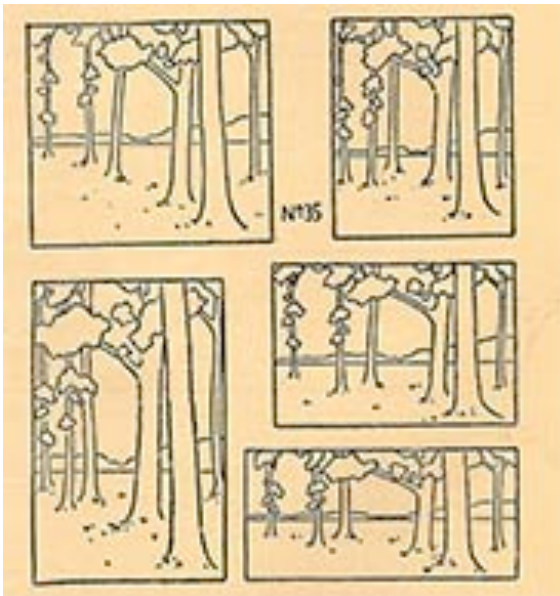


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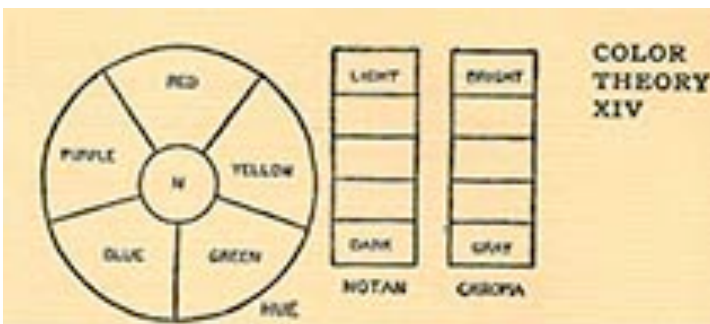


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Figure 5-20

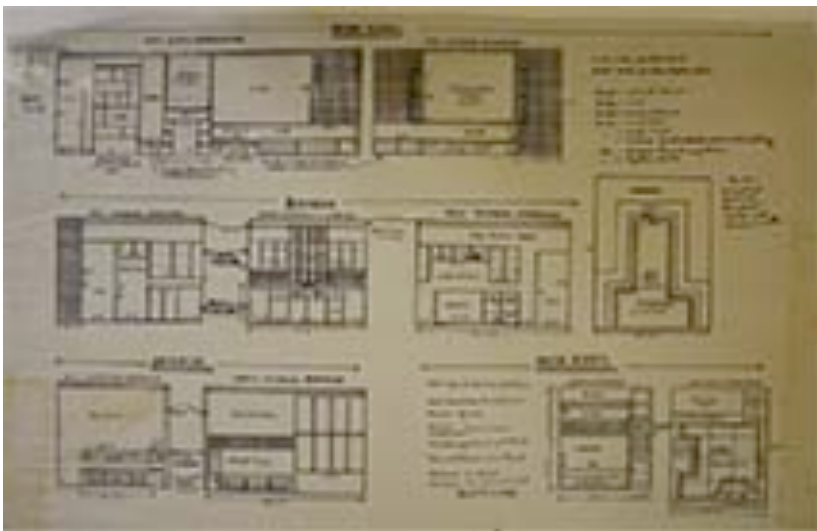


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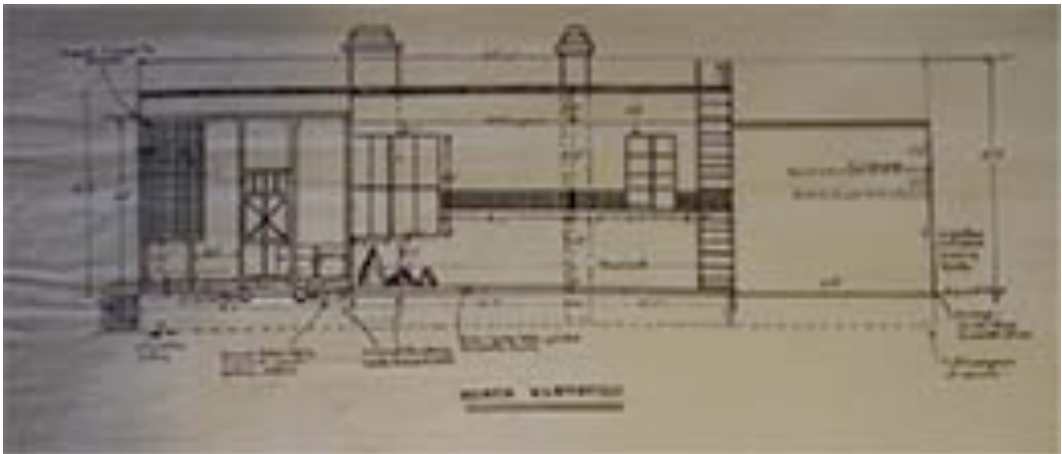
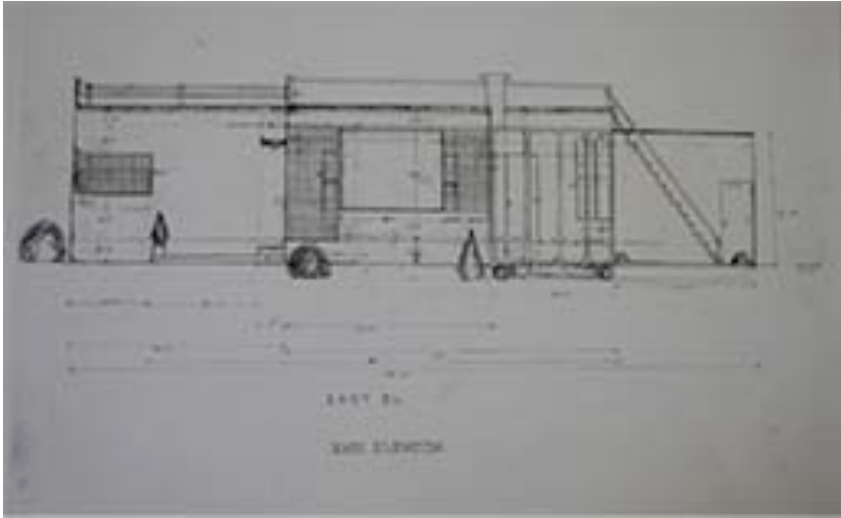


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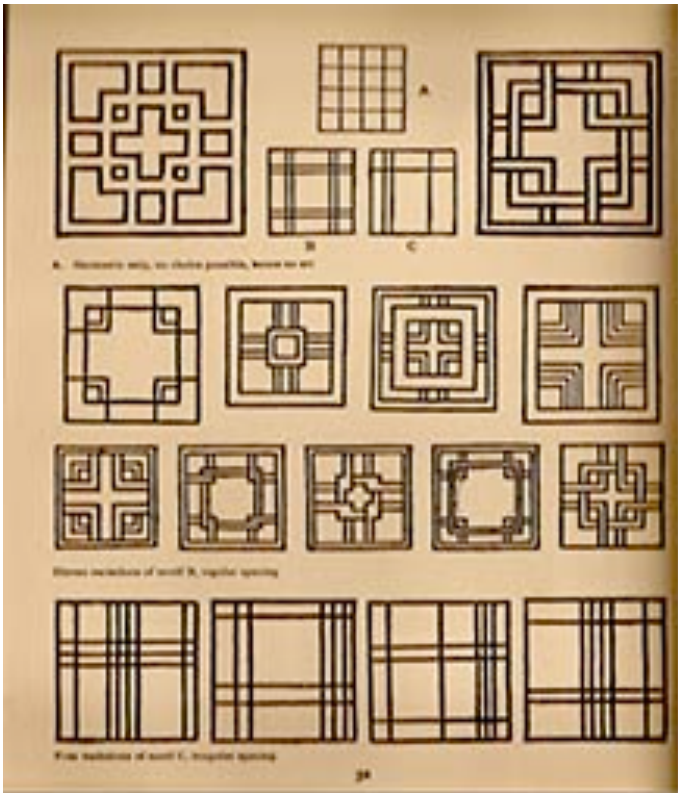


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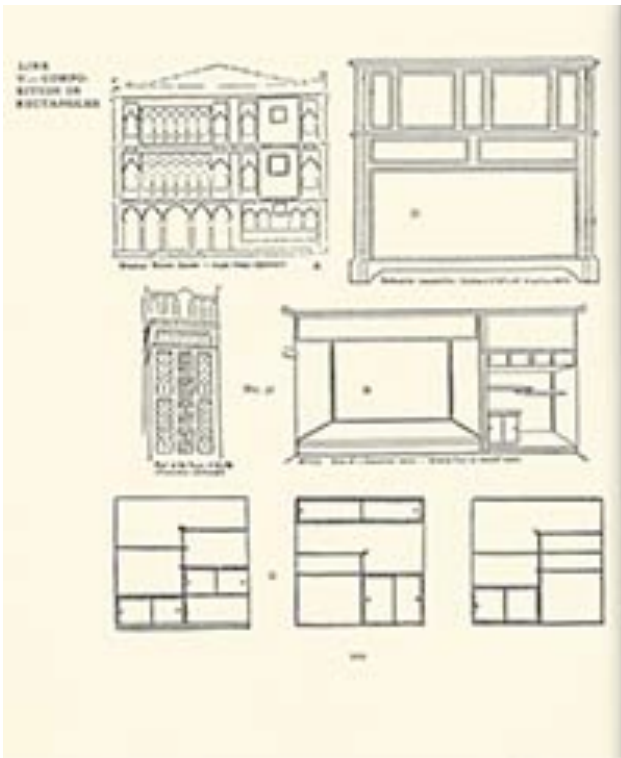
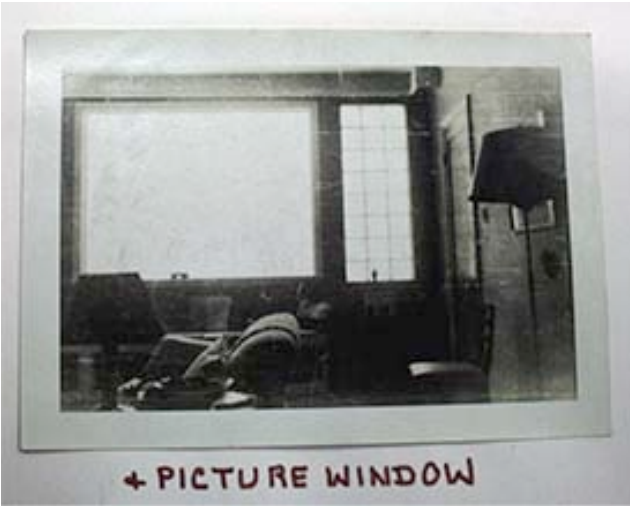


Figure 5-24



+ PICTURE WINDOW



Figure 5-26



Figure 5-27



Figure



Figure 5-29



Figure 5-30



Figure 5-31



Figure 5-32



Figure 5-33



Figure 5-34



Figure 5-35



Figure 5-36



Figure 5-37



Figure 5-38



Figure 5-39



Figure 5-40



Figure 5-41



REFRESHMENTS.

Figure 5-42



GUEST ON SUN DECK

Figure 5-43



Kitchen and Breakfast Room, Michigan Executive Garden Apartments, Chicago





Figure 5-45

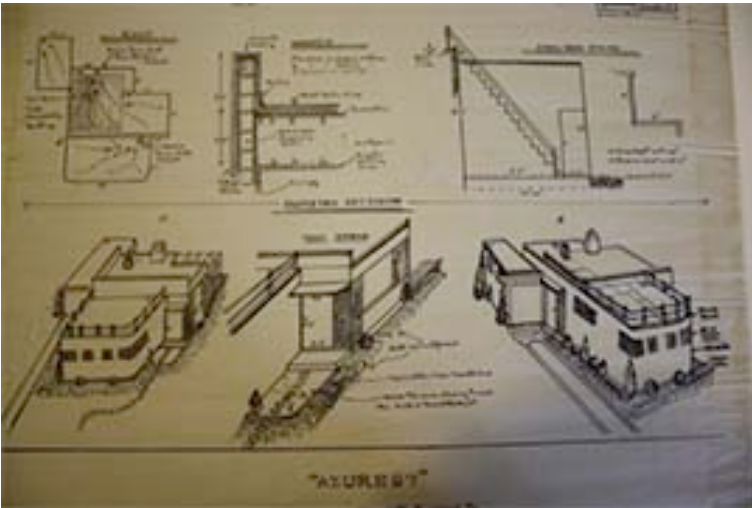


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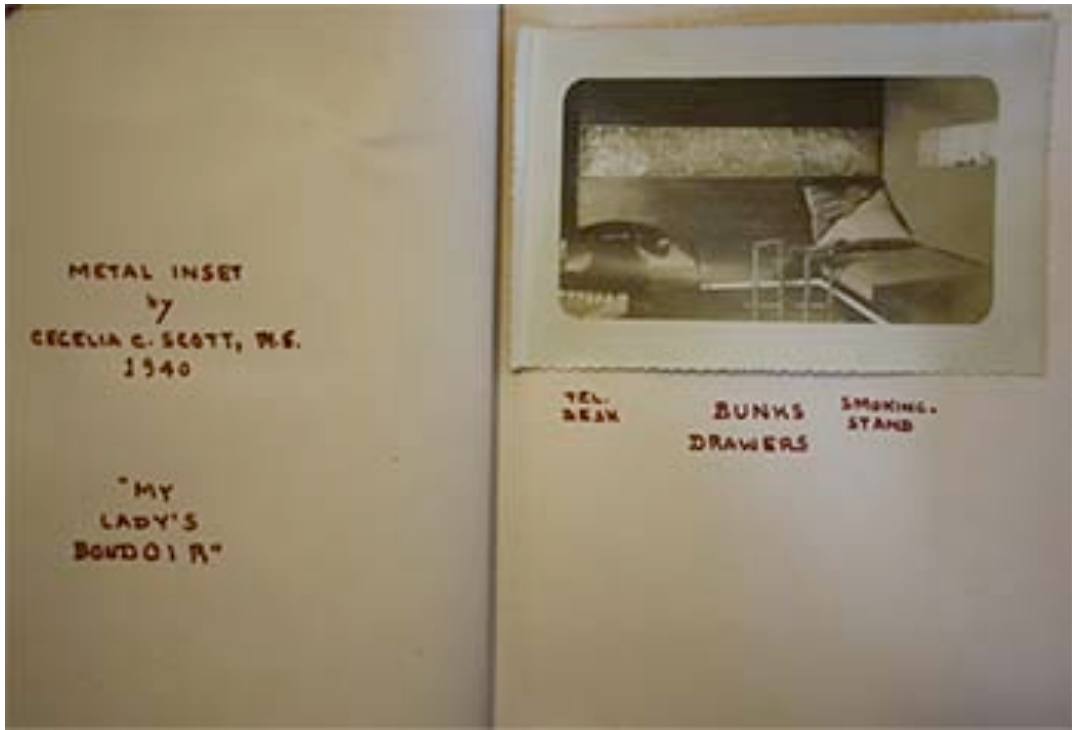


Figure 5-47



Figure 5-48



Figure 5-49

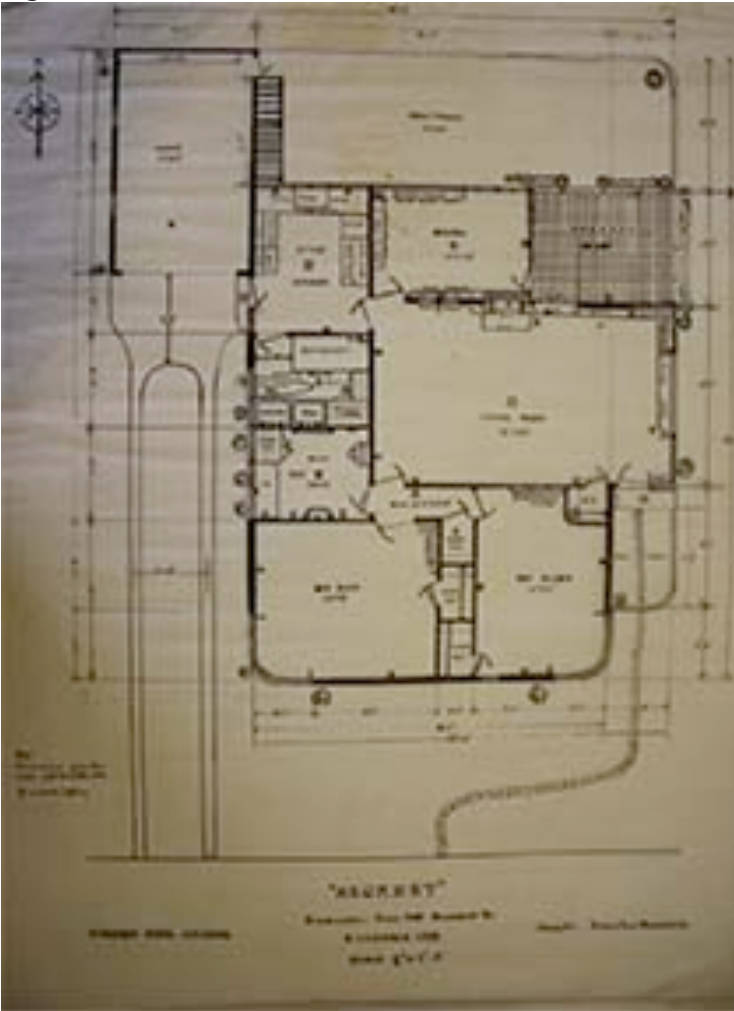


Figure 5-50



Figure 5-51



Figure 5-52





Figure 5-53



Figure 5-54



Figure 5-55



Figure 5-56



Figure 5-57

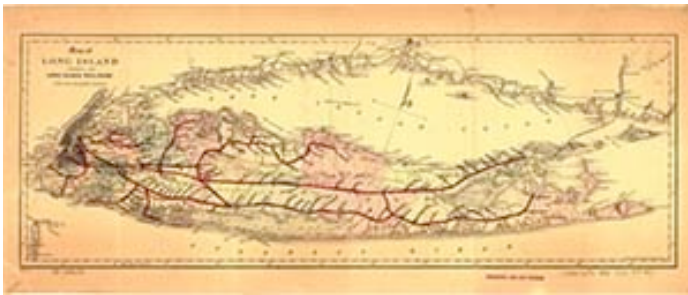


Figure 5-58



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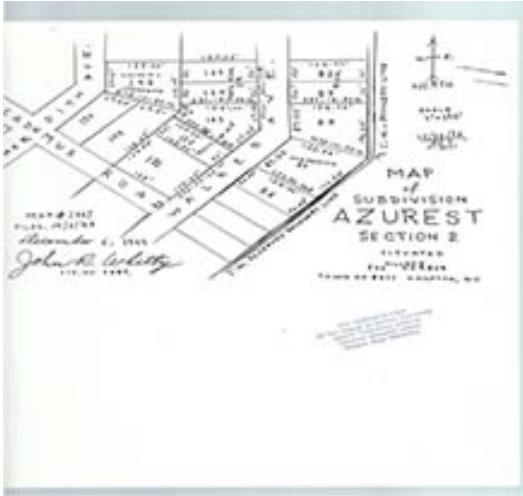


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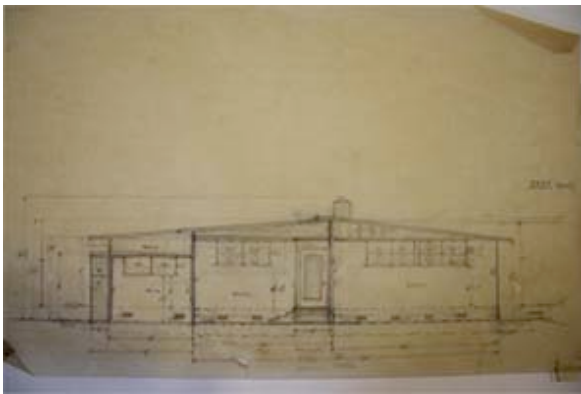


Figure 5-61



Figure 5-62



Figure 5-63



Figure 5-64



Figure 5-65

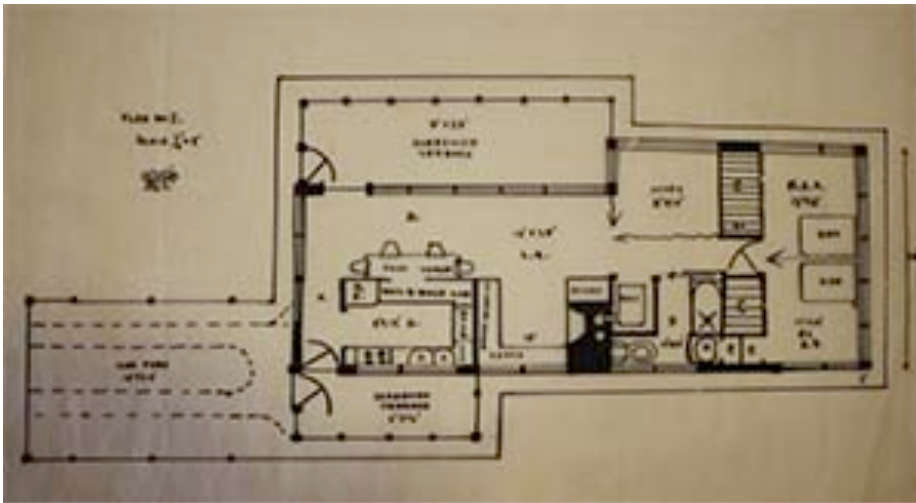


Figure 5-66



Figure 5-67



Figure 5-68

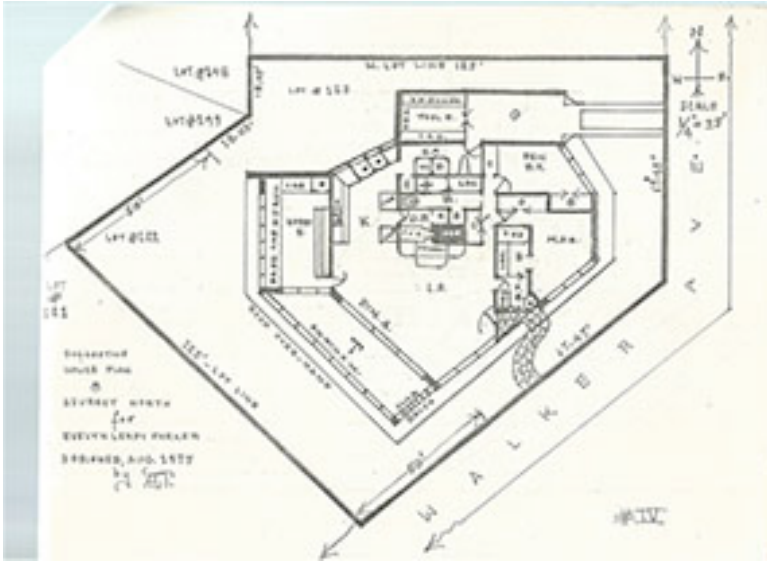


Figure 5-69



Figure 5-70



Figure 5-71

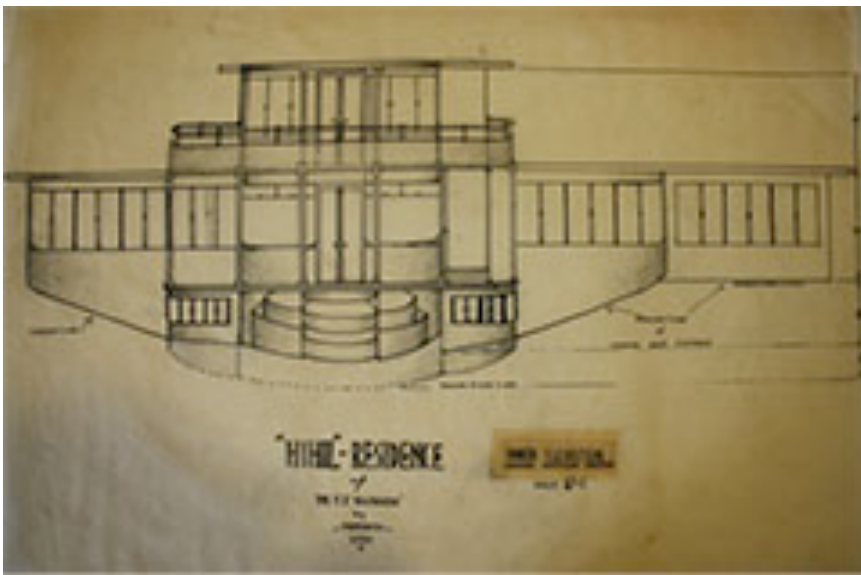
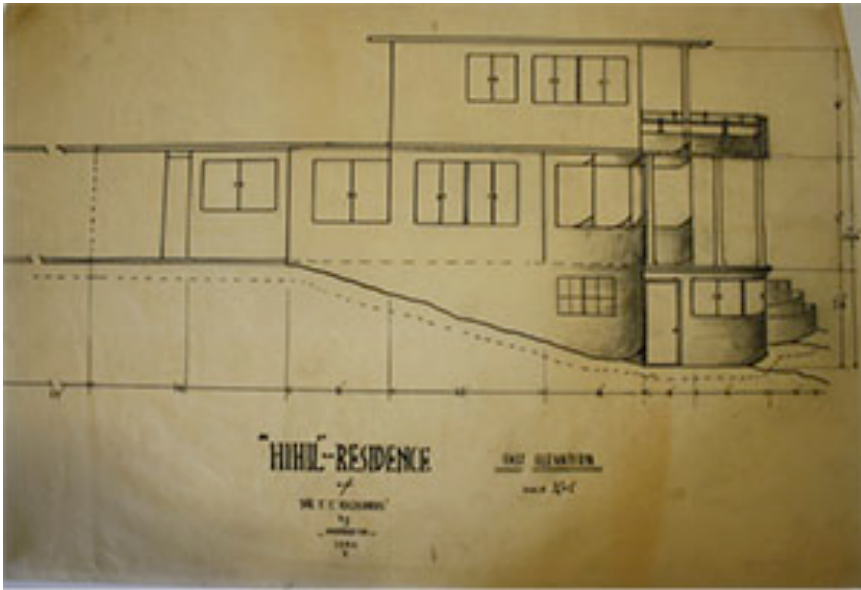


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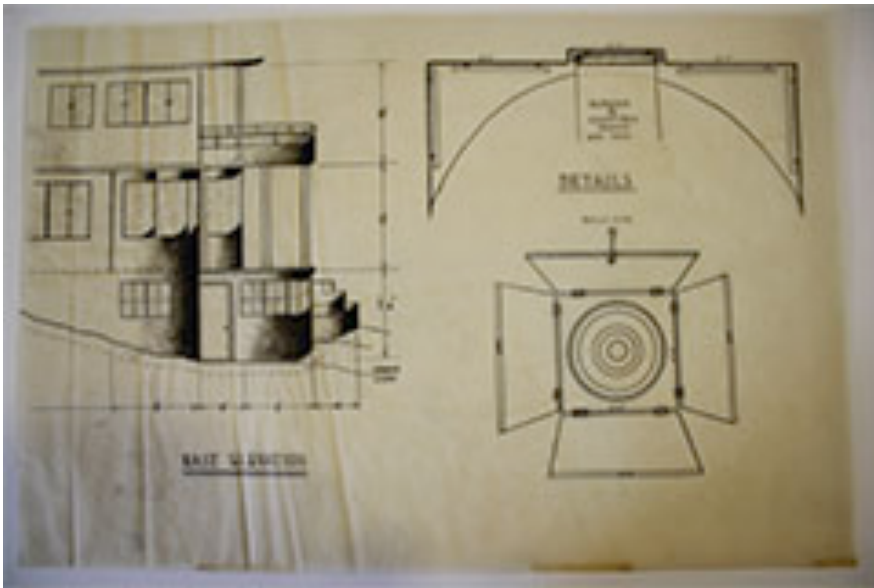


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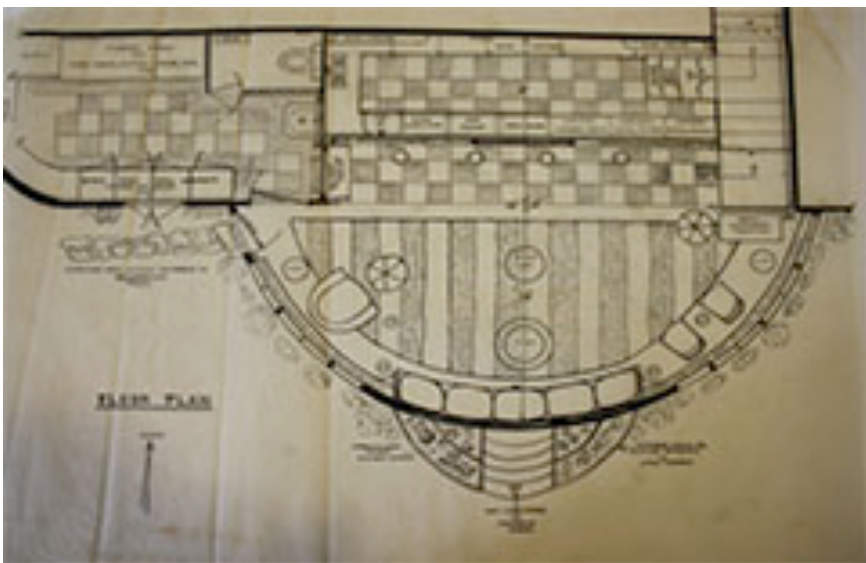


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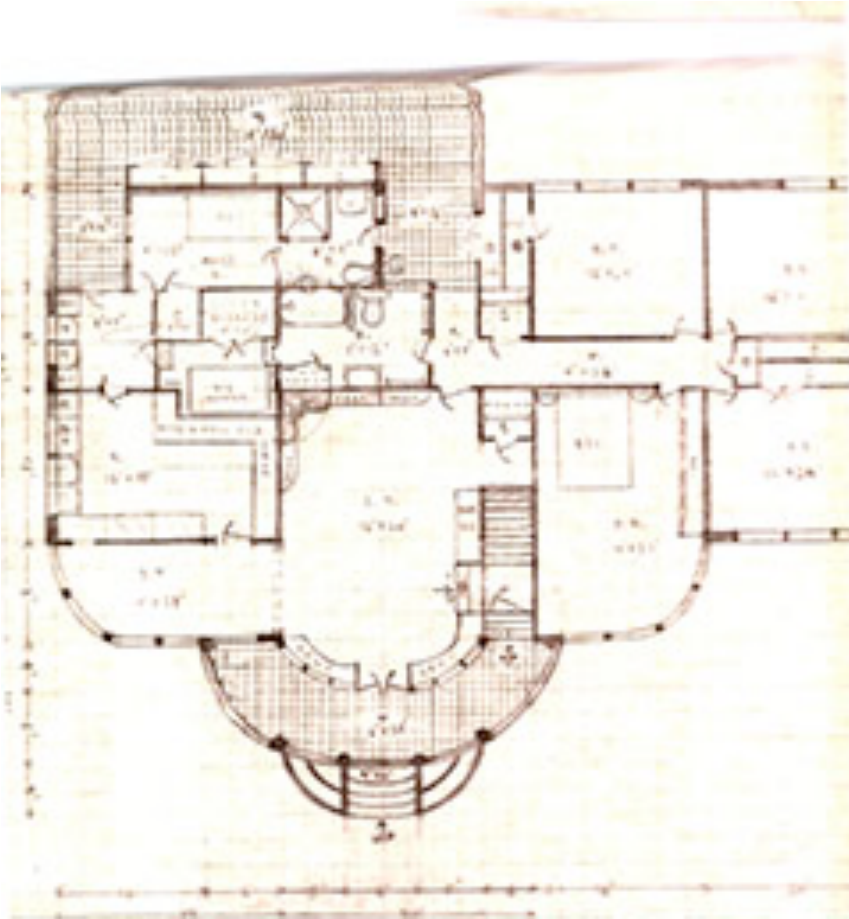


Figure 5-75



Figure 5-76