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Charlotte Hawkins Brown: How the "First Lady of Social Graces" Uplifted the African American Race

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Abstract

Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown, a black educator and activist, dedicated her career to the advancement of the African American race in the first half of the twentieth century. As a child, Brown expressed an interest in education and by the age of twenty, she had established the Palmer Memorial Institute, a school for African American children. As the "First Lady of Social Graces," Brown devoted herself to her Christian faith, and her ideas of racial progress were centered on educating African Americans in liberal arts, European culture, and social etiquette. These Euro-American-centered values were shared with other middle-class African Americans who believed that respectability was the key to successfully navigating an oppressive white society. In this essay, the black racial uplift strategy and the black public sphere of the early twentieth century are examined through a case study of Charlotte Hawkins Brown, a leader who embodied the black middle-class racial uplift ideology.

1. Body of Paper

In her autobiographical essay "Some Incidents in the Life and Career of Charlotte Hawkins Brown Growing out of Racial Situations," Charlotte Hawkins Brown recalled her most treasured piece of advice from her mother: "Try to make friends of those southern white people, for they can make you or break you."[1] Her mother's advice inspired Brown to pursue partnerships with wealthy whites to achieve equality, and it personified the African American racial uplift movement of the first half of the twentieth century.

During the early twentieth century, African American activists endorsed the practice of dominant Euro-American educational, religious, moral, and cultural values as a strategy to achieve racial progress and receive the acceptance from whites that was key to race survival. To accomplish this goal, middle-class African Americans formed racial uplift ideals with the hope of persuading racist whites to acknowledge their humanity.[2] Charlotte Hawkins Brown, a black educator from North Carolina, was one of the leaders who expressed support of white Euro-American values as a strategy of the racial uplift ideology. Similar to her fellow middle-class African American activists, Brown believed education, religion, and culture were the keys to achieving racial equality. Brown epitomized her designated role as the "First Lady of Social Graces" because she practiced and championed the art of fine manners to ensure not only her own progress, but also the progress of her fellow African Americans.[3]

Throughout her career, Brown exemplified her mother's advice and forged relationships with both Southern and Northern white philanthropists. Brown founded her school, the Palmer Memorial Institute, with financial support from Northern whites. There, she and future school presidents educated and provided advancement opportunities for black students for nearly seventy years. In addition, her relationships with reform-minded whites enabled her to speak about race relations and condemn Jim Crow segregation. Charlotte Hawkins Brown subverted the oppressive system and ensured African American race progress through her exemplification of the racial uplift ideology and her endorsement of education, religious devotion, and traditional Euro-American cultural values.

Historians have identified Charlotte Hawkins Brown as a pivotal figure in black race politics of the early twentieth century. Charles Wadelington and Richard Knapp's book *Charlotte Hawkins Brown and Palmer Memorial Institute: What One Young African American Woman Could Do* is the most recent biography of Brown. In their book, Wadelington and Knapp primarily focus on Brown's life through the lens of her nearly life-long career at Palmer Memorial Institute. In addition, the authors remove Brown from contemporary standards of resistance to provide an objective view of how Brown worked to achieve racial progress in the era of Jim Crow.[4]

More insight into Brown's career and influence as an educator is provided in Katherine C. Reynolds' chapter "Charlotte Hawkins Brown and the Palmer Institute" featured in Alan R. Sadovnik and Susan F. Semel's book *Founding Mothers and Others: Women Educational Leaders During the Progressive Era*. In this chapter, Reynolds details how Brown formed relationships with white benefactors to secure financial aid for the Palmer Institute and how she embedded racial uplift strategies in the Palmer Institute's curriculum.[5]

In her chapter "Charlotte Hawkins Brown: Living the Correct Way" featured in *North Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times* edited by Michele Gillespie and Sally G. McMillen, Ann Short Chirhart analyzes the influences of Euro-American culture such as Christianity and moral traditions in Brown's life. She also discusses how Brown used her appreciation of Euro-American culture and participation in interracial cooperation to fuel her agenda for racial uplift.[6] In contrast to Chirhart, Paula Giddings argues in *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* that Brown's promotion of Euro-American cultural values among African Americans was more of a superficial motivation than a tactic to achieve race progress.[7]

To recognize Brown's contributions to racial uplift, one needs to understand the roots of the racial uplift ideology. In his book *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*, historian Kevin Gaines details the nature of black politics during Brown's lifetime. Gaines explains the black middle-class's racial uplift ideology as the belief that the endorsement of education and compliance with dominant society's cultural values would minimize white racism and provide opportunities for racial progress.[8] In her book, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham discusses the black middle-class racial uplift ideology as it manifested in the Baptist church. Higginbotham also explains the origins of respectability politics, a term she conceived to describe the black middle-class's ideas of behaviors that would help to promote race progress.[9]

Texts about black reform organizations are beneficial to understanding how Brown fits into the dynamic of the black public sphere. Oftentimes, the status-driven black reform organizations were responsible for molding Brown's decisions and actions regarding racial uplift. Historian Deborah Gray White captures the complicated internal structure of black women's reform organizations in *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*.[10] Glenda Gilmore also focuses on black women's organizations in her book *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. In the text, Gilmore discusses Brown's issues of identity as a black woman in the South and concludes in her study that Brown invented her political strategies to avoid the race-related obstacles she faced.[11]

The historical literature engaging Charlotte Hawkins Brown's career acknowledges the political and social factors that influenced her respect for traditional Euro-American values. During a time when respectability dominated black reform organizations and white philanthropists favored well-spoken and well-dressed African American leaders, traditional beliefs afforded opportunity. Black leaders choosing to take on the burden of accepting white demands as a tactic to achieve racial equality shows the complexity of reform and black cultural politics. In contrast to Giddings's argument of the superficial nature of Brown's decision to promote dominant cultural values, Brown's adherence to traditional morals corresponded to her passion for creating more opportunities for African Americans in an oppressive white society. This essay will demonstrate how Charlotte Hawkins Brown, as an embodiment of the black middle-class racial uplift ideology, emulated white Euro-American cultural values to encourage racial progress.

On June 11, 1883 Charlotte Hawkins Brown, whose birth name was Lottie Hawkins, was born in Henderson, North Carolina. Her grandmother Rebecca Hawkins was born into slavery, and she was supposedly the descendant of English navigator, John D. Hawkins.[12] Brown described her grandmother as having fair skin and blue eyes because of her white ancestry.[13] Brown's grandfather Mingo was also enslaved.[14]

Brown's mother Caroline "Carrie" Hawkins was born free, and during her teenage years, she lived with her white half-sister Jane Hawkins who encouraged Carrie to be a "'colored lady'" who was educated and virtuous.[15] The story of Jane Hawkins's challenge for Carrie to be a colored lady made a young Lottie Hawkins realize that there was a difference in races and a distinction in how people of different races were perceived.[16] This revelation encouraged Brown to change her persona so that she would be perceived as someone of importance. When she graduated from high school, Brown changed her name from Lottie Hawkins to Charlotte Eugenia Hawkins to reflect her status as a member of the middle class.[17]

When Brown was five-years-old, she and a number of her family members moved from Henderson, North Carolina to Cambridge, Massachusetts. In Cambridge, she received an education that was not available to her in a rural southern town where educational opportunities were scarce even for white citizens. After graduating from high school, Brown attended a normal institute. A year into her secondary education, a member of the American Missionary Association offered Brown an employment opportunity.[18] Brown accepted the position and began her career as an educator at the Bethany Institute in Sedalia, North Carolina.

Less than a year after Brown began teaching at the Bethany Institute, the American Missionary Association withdrew funding from the school, forcing it to close. Desiring to continue her career in education, Brown aspired to establish her own school, and in 1902, she founded the Alice Freeman Palmer Memorial Institute. Brown named the school after Alice Freeman Palmer, a white woman who influenced her career in education. When Brown established the Palmer Memorial Institute, she joined the ranks of other female African American school founders including Nannie Hellen Burroughs and Mary McLeod Bethune.[19] These women represented a faction of what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham describes as the "Female Talented Tenth," college-educated black women who "disseminated middle-class morals and values among the masses…."[20] Black educators who were members of the "Female Talented Tenth" spread their morals and values through their schools. Other black school founders followed their lead. As ambassadors of the racial uplift ideology, black leaders promoted education because they argued that it was important to race survival.[21]

The "Female Talented Tenth" also spread their values through social clubs that engaged in community action. Brown belonged to several reform organizations such as the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), and the North Carolina Teachers Association (NCTA). She also co-founded the North Carolina Federation of Negro Women's Clubs and was president of the association for twenty years.[22] The Federation was a coalition of several black women's clubs throughout the state. Its motto was "Lifting as we climb."[23] In the Federation's Constitution, Brown and the other co-founders wrote that the purpose of this unification of black women's clubs was to promote "race improvement in general by helping to secure such social, political, and educational advantages as should aid in the development of good citizens."[24] This statement in the Constitution reflects the middle-class racial uplift ideology because it displays the Federation's desire to develop honorable black citizens whom white society would accept.

Like Brown, a majority of the "Female Talented Tenth" were clubwomen, women who were members of organizations, specifically those focused on social reform. The enforcement of racial uplift and social reform in black communities took the form of respectability politics. When promoting respectability politics, black leaders "condemned what they perceived to be negative practices and attitudes among their own people."[25] Black leaders disapproved of behaviors such as frequenting bars, gambling, wearing leisure clothing in public, and being lazy. These actions were usually associated with the working class. To combat these behaviors, middle-class blacks emphasized the importance of religious devotion, morality, and white American social norms.

The seemingly assimilationist qualities of respectability politics were a strategy to reform the structure of American race relations.[26] Black clubwomen used respectability politics to counter the racist stereotypes plaguing their peers. White society painted black women as immoral and sexually deviant. To promote virtuous qualities among black women, Brown and her co-founders advocated for respectability politics in the Constitution of the North Carolina Federation of Negro Women's Clubs. Two fundamental goals of the organization were to raise women to "the highest levels of noble character, in home and community life" and to ensure the "social and spiritual progress of the race."[27] Brown used her club to shape black women into the "colored lad[ies]" that her family encouraged her to be.

Although Brown embodied respectability politics in her dress, speech, and appreciation of dominant culture, she was not the perfect example of a black female leader in regards to respectability. Brown was not wealthy, and she did not have the economic stability required to automatically insert herself into elite social spheres. Also, educated black leaders defined Euro-American familial and patriarchal gender norms as crucial indicators of respectability.[28] Brown and her husband Edward S. Brown divorced after just five years of marriage, and the two shared no children. Because of this, Brown did not have the nuclear family that was significant to women who practiced respectability politics. Although she was not the ideal example of black middle-class standards, Brown strived to make sure members of the African American community were good representations of the race, which would allow them to receive acceptance from whites.

Black school founders and clubwomen believed interracial cooperation was essential to achieving race progress. Well-educated black leaders interacted with reform-minded whites because they acted as "a buffer between white society and the black masses."[29] Black working-class citizens were more prone to heed the advice of leaders from their own race than that of white reformers. Therefore, Northern whites relied on alliances with educated blacks to transform illiterate and impoverished blacks into citizens who "valued education, industriousness, piety, and refined

manners."[30] To fulfill their visions for improving the black race, white philanthropists funded black leaders' reform projects.

Brown possessed the respectable behavior of which whites approved, and this characteristic enabled her to gain their endorsement for her endeavors. The first white Northerner to invest in Brown's career was Alice Freeman Palmer, the namesake of the Palmer Institute. Brown and Palmer became acquainted while Brown was attending high school in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Palmer funded Brown's enrollment at the State Normal School in Salem, Massachusetts, and it was Palmer who inspired Brown to establish her own institution.[31] Inspiration from Alice Palmer and monetary support from Northern white philanthropists enabled Brown to open the Palmer Memorial Institute. The Palmer Institute's supporters included Helen Frances Kimball, Mary Grinnell, and Frances Guthrie, Northern white women who were interested in providing education for the Southern black community.[32] When the Palmer Institute opened, Brown appointed some of Greensboro, North Carolina's most prominent white leaders, including her professional partner and close friend Lula McIver, to serve on the school's board.[33]

Whites who supported African Americans' education endorsed Booker T. Washington's model of instruction at the Tuskegee Institute, and they requested that black educators follow Washington's guide to educating students in domestic and industrial work.[34] In addition, adherents of the racial uplift ideology perceived their colleges as "assimilating apparatuses" that would produce a new generation of black elite who were familiar with white middle-class culture.[35] Brown curated Palmer Institute's curriculum to reflect the desires of her white donors as a strategy to ensure the economic survival of the school.[36] However, Brown also injected her own agenda into the Palmer Institute's curriculum. Along with offering vocational training courses, Brown offered liberal arts courses such as foreign languages, mathematics, literature, and music at the Palmer Institute.[37] Student organizations included student council, a choir, glee clubs, religious clubs, and a drama club. Brown labeled the Palmer Institute "'the only college preparatory school of its type in America for Negro youth'" because of the variety of educational and social pursuits available at the school.[38] Because of her desire to teach spiritual learning, personal morality and etiquette at Palmer, Brown instilled traditional Euro-American cultural values into her students.

Brown further illustrated her involvement with interracial work when she published her book *Mammy: An Appeal to the Heart of the South* in 1919. *Mammy* is a book about a faithful black mammy and her loyalty to her white masters. In the novel, Brown chronicled the story of the mammy and her husband who vowed to stay faithful to their master's family until the master returned from the Civil War. However, he never returned home. Keeping her promise, the mammy continued to serve the family, even though her master did not return from a war that would free her. Despite her loyalty to the family, she did not receive the love and care that she provided them. As the years passed and the mammy continued to live her dead master's property, the condition of her cabin deteriorated. Water leaked through the roof constantly, and the master's family did not repair it because they saw no point in spending money on the mammy's house since she and her husband were old and going to die soon.[39] On a snowy January morning, the mammy made breakfast for her master's family, and when she was on the way to the master's house to deliver the food, an avalanche of snow fell from the roof of her cabin, and she was buried underneath it.[40] After hearing the commotion, the mammy's husband went outside to check on her, and the only sign of his wife was her red bandana peeking through a pile of snow.[41]

Brown's account of the mammy character's unrequited love for her white master and his family was intended to evoke feelings of nostalgia and guilt in white southerners.[42] In the introduction to *Mammy*, Brown wrote that "if there is any word that arouses emotion in the heart of a true Southerner, it is the word, 'Mammy.'"[43] Enslaved black women who were tasked with being the caregivers of white families were called mammies, and because of their roles as maternal figures to white families, mammies were misrepresented as loyal slaves who were content with their lives on plantations. After Emancipation, the grotesque mammy caricature contributed to the distorted perception of black women. [44]

Although several of her contemporaries believed *Mammy* romanticized the faithful black mammy figure, Brown's intention for the publication was deeper than the surface content. The main goal of the publication was to encourage interracial cooperation between white and black leaders. Brown published *Mammy* with the support of her friend and interracial ally Lula McIver who saw the publication as a tool to promote interracial cooperation among women.[45] Therefore, Brown's underlying purpose of the *Mammy* story was to provoke feelings of remorse in white women and persuade them to take action on black reform issues. Aiding in the racial uplift of African Americans allowed white women (and men) to compensate for the neglect black mammies received during the slavery era.

At the same time that Brown utilized the mammy figure to build interracial support, others were using the symbol in a different way. In 1922, North Carolina Congressman Charles Stedman, on behalf of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), introduced a bill in Congress that proposed the erection of a Faithful Mammy Monument in Washington, D.C. According to Stedman, the Mammy Monument was proposed to honor the "faithful colored mammies" who "desired no changes in their condition of life" and lived "free from care and distress."[46] For white

southerners, particularly those who owned black slaves, the mammy figure "represented the success of the paternalistic model of race relations and the supposed contentment, and more importantly, loyalty, of African Americans within that system."[47] Mammy was the symbol of false amiable relationships between enslaved blacks and white slave-owning families in the antebellum South, and the proposed Mammy Monument would perpetuate the myth of those friendly relationships into the twentieth century.

Black clubwomen had visceral reactions to the Mammy Monument proposal and fiercely opposed Stedman's bill. White southerners' memories of black mammies' love and fidelity did not align with black women's memories of their own or their ancestors' experiences as representations of the mammy figure. Although white southerners had fond memories of their mammies, the actual experience of being a mammy was miserable. Mammies could have their enslaved husbands and children sold away from them, or they could be sold away from their families, and masters and overseers sexually assaulted the mammies whenever they desired. Black women knew the reality of being mammies, and they were aware that a monument dedicated to faithful mammies would produce a misrepresentation of black women as non-threatening and inferior. Furthermore, the symbolism of a faithful mammy monument ignored the brutality of slavery.[48] Monuments of the lost cause, such as those dedicated to mammies and other symbols of loyal slaves, perpetuated the imagery of African Americans as slaves.[49] In a racist South, the loyal black slave figure supported whites' defense of slavery as a benevolent institution for both whites and blacks.[50] In addition, faithful slave monuments "sent a message to African Americans that 'good loyal' blacks had nothing to fear from whites."[51]

In a 1923 essay, prominent black clubwoman Mary Church Terrell passionately opposed the proposed Mammy Monument. Terrell argued that the slave woman's existence was so miserable that it was not possible for black women to support a monument that perpetuated the memories of their traumatic lives.[52] When black women looked at the monument, Terrell argued, they would remember instances when they were victims of sexual predation, instances when their children were taken from them, and other instances that made their hearts fill with anguish.[53] Terrell closed her essay with a warning message to the UDC and supporters of the Mammy Monument. She stated, "If the Black Mammy stature is ever erected, which the dear Lord forbid, there are thousands of colored men and women who will fervently pray that on some stormy night the lightning will strike it and the heavenly elements will send it crashing to the ground."[54] With the Mammy Monument shattered on the ground, black women could rejoice knowing that they would not be "reminded of the anguish of heart and the physical suffering which their mothers and grandmothers of the race endured…."[55] Terrell's essay wholeheartedly captured black women's reactions to the potential construction of a monument that would memorialize their adversities.

Charlotte Hawkins Brown also crafted a response in opposition to the proposed Mammy Monument. However, unlike Terrell's, her response was not public, although it was later published in an article in *The New York Age* newspaper. Instead of writing a public essay in opposition to the monument, Brown sent a telegram directly to Congressman Stedman detailing her disapproval. In the telegram to Stedman, Brown suggested that if the UDC truly wanted to honor faithful black mammies, then they should create educational opportunities for the descendants of white southerners' beloved mammies. Specifically, Brown advised that a "'foundation helping Negro girls to acquire a knowledge of home economics would speak volumes more than could gray stones, however beautifully carved.'"[56] This statement symbolizes Brown's strategic usage of the racial uplift ideology. She suggested that a school be built to prepare girls to become domestic workers because white philanthropists supported that kind of education for African American girls. However, just because Brown suggested that type of school be built, it does not mean that she thought instruction in domestic work was the only education African American girls should obtain. Brown believed that cooperation between black and white women was the key to interracial reform.[57] Therefore, she endorsed a type of education that would appease whites. In this sense, she used her response to the proposed Mammy Monument to promote interracial cooperation and racial uplift.

Brown's private response in opposition to the Mammy Monument was more strategic and subversive in nature than Terrell's. Both women had reputations to uphold, but Brown's status in national black reform organizations and among her white peers was more precarious than Terrell's status. Mary Church Terrell was an elite black woman from a wealthy family, and she co-founded and served as the first president of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Therefore, Terrell's status offered her a permanent position at the top of the black social pyramid, allowing her to deliver bold speeches and still maintain her influence. In contrast, Brown was not born into a well-known, elite family whose status could cement her into a top position among black leaders. Also, Brown was a Northern transplant in the South attempting to make changes in the Southern black lifestyle. Because of these factors, Brown had to be careful with how she approached issues concerning the black community.

In addition to her elite status, Terrell's light skin tone enabled her to dominate the black public sphere and weave herself into white society. Terrell was "white passing,"[58] and her near-white skin tone allowed her to "literally step in and out of the white world."[59] For example, Terrell's skin tone so closely resembled that of most whites that she could move from the "Colored" train car to the "Whites Only" car without anyone noticing or forcefully removing her from

the white car.[60] Because she had a deep brown complexion, Brown did not pass as white, therefore, she did not have the privilege to freely move within white society. On several occasions, while Brown was traveling in Pullman Company railway cars, she was forced to move from the white section of the cars into the section reserved African Americans.[61] Because of this, Brown sued the rail company and won her case. However, she did not receive a large sum of money for her grievances because "inconveniencing a Negro woman or humiliating her, in the eyes of the court, was never considered as any great outrage…."[62]

Brown's deep skin tone did not grant her privilege in white society, nor did her skin tone grant her prestige in black society. In the African American community, colorism, or prejudice toward black people with dark skin tones, was used to discriminate against people with complexions similar to Brown's. Darker-skinned African Americans were considered to be "'less fortunate'" and have social "'handicaps.'"[63] However, African Americans with deep skin tones could "pass" if they "'had money or behavior.'"[64] To ensure her entrance into white society, Brown practiced behavior that allowed her to engage in her own form of "passing" that did not require her to have a light skin tone.[65] Brown embraced white culture to legitimize her status among whites, and this acceptance of white culture and embodiment of respectability politics allowed her access to places where she could promote her racial uplift ideology.

To reach the masses of African Americans whom she could not teach at the Palmer Institute, Brown delivered a number of speeches on the importance of developing an appreciation of Euro-American culture. In her 1929 speech "A Quest of Culture," Brown argued that people of a marginalized race should have "at least a conversational knowledge of those things in life which are for the enlightening of one's mind" so that people of that oppressed race could be comfortable in "intelligent society."[66] According to Brown, the art people chose to decorate their homes, the music they chose to listen to, and the books they chose to read "distinguish[ed] the uncultured from the cultured."[67] Those who chose to listen to Beethoven and buy art masterpieces such as the *Last Supper* would have a better opportunity of surviving in dominant society because they had an understanding of traditional Euro-American culture.

At the time Brown delivered the "A Quest of Culture" speech, African Americans were allowed some opportunities to have careers in previously white-only spaces such as Congress.[68] Because of this, Brown thought it imperative to equip African Americans with knowledge of white American culture. Brown was aware that acceptance of the dominant culture's social and intellectual etiquette, though difficult, was the solution to preparing the "Negro men and women who represent the highest intelligence of the race" for their interactions with whites in the professional world.[69]

Brown's belief in instilling Euro-American culture in African American lives, while it aligned with the middle-class racial uplift ideology, differed from the ideology of the rising cultural movements of the 1920s. During the Harlem Renaissance, younger generations of educated and working-class African Americans were focused on redefining what it meant to be black in the era of the "New Negro." This new focus resulted in a culture clash among older middle-class Africans Americans, including Brown, and the new generation of leaders. While new-school African Americans celebrated black cultural achievements in art and music, some members of the older generations desired to maintain the appreciation of Victorian cultural traditions that placed them in the favor of whites.

During an appearance on *Wings Over Jordan*, a religious CBS radio broadcast for African Americans, in 1940, Brown reiterated the importance of following Euro-American social norms in her speech "The Negro and the Social Graces." In the opening of the speech, Brown defined social graces as "doing the courteous thing and making a pleasing appearance," and practicing everyday manners.[70] In addition, Brown argued that practicing social graces did not mean one had to possess an "attitude of cheap servility" because at the time, black youth thought that using manners meant reverting back to "slavery-time performances of the maid and the butler."[71] In an era of reinventing what it meant to be black, using traditional European-inspired manners was thought to be an accommodation to white domination. However, Brown's promotion of manners was not a promotion of accommodation. Brown argued that her desire to instill an appreciation of traditional culture and daily practice of manners into the lives of black youth was a facet of her agenda to establish for them "something superior to Jim Crowism."[72]

When she delivered the speech "The Negro and the Social Graces" in 1940, Brown defended the appreciation of culture and the "art of fine manners" as African Americans' key to climbing the "ladder of success."[73] Brown argued that African Americans must be "more gracious than others, more cultured, more considerate," and more observant than others to receive the recognition they deserved.[74] Again, Brown echoed her belief that African Americans should embrace social graces to receive opportunities that were previously inaccessible to the race. Although Brown defended her social graces as a tactic to provide more opportunities for African Americans, her uplift methods prompted W.E.B. Du Bois to label her a "'voice for the white South.'"[75]

The behaviors Brown encouraged in her speeches on the social graces were enforced at the Palmer Institute. As an educator, Brown was especially concerned with the black youth possessing an appreciation of Euro-American culture and a knowledge of proper conduct because the professional careers she prepared them for may have required cordial interactions with whites. At the Palmer Institute, Brown bound her students to dress codes and strict rules of deportment, and students were required to attend religious observances on a weekly basis.[76] Also, students were

allotted limited time for co-ed socializing. At the beginning of the year, students attended a "Get-Acquainted-Party," and socials were held from four to five p.m. on the first and third Sundays of each month.[77] The rules that Brown implemented at Palmer reflected her belief in instilling dominant views of religious practices, etiquette, and morals into black youth.

The culmination of Brown's ideas of etiquette and social graces are expressed in her book *The Correct Thing To Do—To Say—To Wear,* which she published independently in 1941. Emphasizing her zeal to instill social graces into black children, Brown dedicated the book to the "youth of America."[78] In the "Introduction," Brown stated that she published *The Correct Thing* to answer the plethora of questions her students asked her about social behavior.[79] The book consists of twenty two chapters providing advice on how to behave in various circumstances including "At Home" and "At the Concert, Theatre or Movies."[80] The book also contains chapters exclusively dedicated to female behaviors and chapters specifically related to male behaviors. Brown's purpose for writing *The Correct Thing* was to provide guidance in the art of graciousness, kindness, and expressing one's best self to allow the reader to develop the habit of effortlessly practicing "the correct thing."[81]

In the chapter of *The Correct Thing* "The Earmarks of a Lady," Brown listed the appropriate behaviors of a young woman. When the Palmer Institute was still in operation, printed versions of this list were given to girls upon their entrance to school.[82] In this set of rules, Brown argued that proper ladies were "polite when entering or leaving a room," they passed behind people, and they used "'please,' 'thank you,' 'excuse me,' [and] 'good morning'" as a part of their daily speech.[83] Brown's guidelines were intended to equip girls with a set of manners that would "make the wheels of life run smoothly" for them.[84]

Introducing these practices into the everyday lives of young black women was important in changing whites' negative perception of them. In her book *Writing through Jane Crow: Race and Gender Politics in African American Literature,* Ayesha K. Hardison argues that Brown's "rules of social engagement corrected stereotypes of black women's sexual salaciousness established during slavery."[85] This perception of black women as immoral continued into the twentieth century. In an essay about black women's status in society, an anonymous writer argued that the most successful of black women were not seen as virtuous and were considered to have a status lower than that of white prostitutes.[86] Brown's rules challenged racist stereotypes so that black women would be perceived as legitimate women and were guaranteed the social and legal protections that came with womanhood. Black clubwomen believed black women would save the race, therefore displaying their morality was essential to race advancement.[87] Brown's "Earmarks of a Lady" contributed to black women's respectability codes that helped them obtain legitimacy, which as a result helped to ensure the collective social mobility of African Americans.[88]

In a strategic move to acknowledge Northern white philanthropists in the introduction to *The Correct Thing,* Brown credited her childhood friends in New England whose schools and homes were "teeming with cultural atmosphere" for providing her the opportunity to "observe the fine art of living."[89] Instead of attributing her appreciation of culture to her grandmother and mother's influences, Brown named white Northerners as the source of her exposure to fine culture. White donors already appreciated Brown's efforts to implement Euro-American traditions in black schooling, and this detail she included in *The Correct Thing* displayed her gratitude for their support. Strategically, this dedication was a step toward solidifying relationships with the donors she already had and potentially gaining new supporters. Additional sponsorship from white philanthropists allowed Brown to strengthen her interracial cooperation strategies.

Brown argued that her instruction for African Americans to appreciate Euro-American culture and practice social graces benefited whites and blacks alike.[90] For Brown, promoting culture among African Americans would bring the two races together "under the highest cultural environment that will increase race pride, mutual respect, confidence, sympathetic understanding, and interracial goodwill."[91] Brown's endorsement of culture allowed her to obtain traction in the field of interracial work because a black woman speaking about the significance of Euro-American culture was a language white women were potentially willing to hear. This traction gave Brown a platform to address white and black racial tensions.

Brown's role as an intermediary between the black community and the white-dominated society enabled her to speak about race relations, and she delivered several speeches on the subject. In a 1920 speech "What the Negro Woman asks of the White Women of North Carolina," Brown explained that black and white women had a "lack of mutual understanding" that prevented them from creating an interracial coalition.[92] Brown argued that black and white women did not understand each other because Southern white women had only had interactions with one class of black women, servants.[93] Therefore, white women were not accustomed to dealing with educated black women who had become college graduates, business women, and founders of schools.

According to Brown, these members of the "Female Talented Tenth" had three requests of white women. First, they wanted the same educational opportunities for their children as the white children.[94] The second request was to be rightfully recognized in public for their womanhood and be greeted with the manners afforded a lady.[95] Lastly, black women wanted to form a partnership with white women to reach the number of black women who did domestic work

for them.[96] A partnership between black women and white women would enable black women to provide services such as child care for domestic workers to help improve the workers' lives.[97]

In her speech "Where We Are In Race Relations," Brown detailed the state of racial interactions between blacks and whites in both the North and South. Brown listed a number of the issues of race in North Carolina, such as African Americans' limited access to public transportation. According to Brown, although North Carolina was a state populated with educated African Americans, the state officials kept African Americans prisoner.[98] African Americans' position in North Carolina as "prisoners" meant that they were subjected to second-class citizenship that included riding in Jim Crow cars, living in segregated areas with unpaved streets and inoperable streetlights, and working menial jobs to make a living.[99] In addition, by placing them into physically subordinate positions, Southern whites disrespected African Americans' civil rights. Brown expressed that African Americans' subservient place in society was unacceptable because she did not believe "God intended that any one race should be scullions for another race."[100]

Brown discussed African American women's societal disadvantages in a 1945 speech about how to overcome discrimination against them. In this speech, Brown questioned America's democracy and compared the government's failure to provide equal employment opportunities for black women to "the very Hitlerism" the government was fighting against during World War II.[101] For Brown, the limited number of white businesses and individuals who hired African American women was not enough.[102] In this speech Brown spoke on behalf of African American women on the "outer fringes" of labor and society who demanded freedom to work.[103]

Although Brown used interracial cooperation to create a platform to speak about race relations, she often struggled to keep up appearances for her white donors and reform colleagues. Glenda Gilmore states that black women who chose to pursue interracial work had to be "forever careful, tense, and calculating."[104] A single slip up could ruin their careers.[105] When securing support for the Palmer Institute, Brown had difficulty balancing her values with those of white philanthropists.[106] In a letter to Galen Stone, one of her white contributors, Brown expressed her struggle with accommodating to white philanthropists' demands. Brown wrote, "The question in my heart and mind, and God only knows how it hurts, is just what are they going to ask me to submit to as a negro woman…?"[107] Brown was aware of the need to maintain the support of her white benefactors, but she did not want to sacrifice her own beliefs nor her identity to do so. Although she had reservations about her white peers' intentions, Brown continued to "'wear the mask'" of accommodation, and she obeyed white cultural and social norms so that the Palmer Institute could survive financially.[108] Throughout the course of her career, Brown continued to struggle with whether she should abide by white philanthropists' demands or heed her own instincts. However, as one can see through her speeches, her book publications, and the success of the Palmer Institute, Brown was able to maintain her financial support and her vision for increasing opportunities for African Americans.

Brown's near-life-long career as an educator and advocate for racial uplift earned her four honorary doctorate degrees from schools such as Howard University. Dr. Brown retired from her position as president of Palmer Memorial Institute in 1952. She passed away on January 11, 1961. The Palmer Memorial Institute remained open until 1971, and today, the campus serves as the Charlotte Hawkins Brown Museum in Sedalia, North Carolina. Brown's home on the Palmer campus is completely restored, and it contains most of Brown's original furniture. The piano Brown used to entertain her guests is housed in the home's front room. A picture of Nat King Cole, Brown's nephew-in-law, playing the piano adorns the piano's lid. Upstairs bedrooms where celebrities such as Langston Hughes spent the night are decorated with furniture of the era. The formal dining room where Brown taught her students the proper dinner etiquette is set with Brown's exquisite china dishes.

Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown was an integral aspect of the civil rights process before the modern Civil Rights Movement. Brown represents a unique voice in the fight for African American and female equality. As an embodiment of the black, middle-class racial uplift ideology, the "First Lady of Social Graces," used her education, Christian faith, and appreciation for Euro-American culture to win the favor of impressionable Northern and Southern white philanthropists. Appealing to whites opened a portal for Brown to subvert the oppressive system and make steps towards equality for herself and her fellow African Americans.

In an essay explaining why Dr. Brown was a contender to be the next president of the National Association of Colored Women, William Pickens, an African American journalist and educator, argued that Brown was more than competent to do the job.[109] Pickens explained that Brown was the perfect candidate because she "has made people respect black women all over this country because Brown herself was the embodiment of black womanhood."[110] This statement proves that Brown's strategic use of the racial uplift ideology resonated with her contemporaries and helped to create a new, positive identity for black women. Brown's contributions to racial progress are evident in the opportunities African Americans experience today.

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