Life Stories

Exploring Issues in Educational History
Through Biography
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Edited by

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CONTENTS

Preface
   Linda C. Morice and Laurel Puchner ........................................ vii

Introduction
   Linda C. Morice and Laurel Puchner ........................................ ix

PART I: THE SCOPE AND NATURE OF EDUCATION

1. Racially Integrated Education: The Antebellum Thought
   of Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Frederick Douglass
   Carol B. Conaway ............................................................... 3

2. Company Schooling in the New South: Lawrence Peter
   Hollis and the Parker Mill Schools in South Carolina
   Bart Dredge ................................................................. 23

3. Dreams Deferred: White Reaction to Langston Hughes’
   Depression-Era Educational Tour of the South
   Bart Dredge and Cayce Tabor ............................................. 45

PART II: ADVANCING AN EDUCATIONAL AGENDA

4. Education and Politics in Texas: The Legacies
   of Laurine C. Anderson and Edward L. Blackshear
   Jared R. Stallones ......................................................... 67

5. Adventitiously Blind, Advantageously Political:
   John Eldred Swearingen and Social Definitions
   of Disability in Progressive-Era South Carolina
   Edward A. Janak ............................................................. 85
6. Correspondence Study and the “Crime of the Century”:
Helen Williams, Nathan Leopold, and the
Stateville Correspondence School
Von Pittman ................................................................. 107

PART III: EDUCATIONAL REFORM

7. The Second Great Awakening and American Educational
Reform: Insights From the Biography of John Milton Gregory
John F. Wakefield ......................................................... 133

8. More Valuable Than Even Radium: Christine Ladd-
Franklin’s Perspective on Intellect and the Life of the Mind
Andrea Walton ............................................................ 155

9. Lucy Spence Morice: Working Toward a Just Society
Via the Education of Citizens and Socialist Feminist
Collective Action
Lynne Trethewey .......................................................... 177

10. George S. Counts: Leading Social Reconstructionist
Bruce Romanish ......................................................... 197

PART IV: INTERPRETING EDUCATORS’ LIVES

11. Beyond Life Writing: Reflections on Biography
and Historiography
A. J. Angulo ................................................................. 217

12. Contextualizing and Contesting National Identities:
Lillian de Lissa, 1885-1967
Kay Whitehead ........................................................... 233

13. Necessary Betrayals: Reflections on Biographical Work
on a Racist Ancestor
Lucy E. Bailey ............................................................. 253

About the Editors/Authors ........................................... 273
PREFACE

Linda C. Morice and Laurel Puchner

Life Stories: Exploring Issues in Educational History Through Biography grew out of the 2012 conference of the International Society for Educational Biography (ISEB) in St. Louis, MO. At the meeting, ISEB Executive Committee members discussed ways of commemorating the 30th anniversary of an organization with a rich history. ISEB was founded in 1983 at Iowa State University when L. Glenn Smith invited colleagues to participate in an educational biography conference. Smith proposed publishing the conference proceedings in a new journal called Vitae Scholasticae: The Bulletin of Educational Biography. Over the years, Vitae Scholasticae evolved from a bulletin to a refereed journal published once a year, to a biannual journal with a blind peer review process. Today Vitae features a variety of methodological approaches to studying educators’ lives, and its editorial advisory board includes scholars from North America, Europe, and Australia. Given the staying power of ISEB and its journal, members of the executive committee felt the 30th anniversary could best be marked by an edited book with selected articles from Vitae.

As editors of Vitae Scholasticae, we looked for articles that clustered around important questions in the lives of educators. We found them in the writing of educational historians whose published essays in Vitae merit the attention of scholars and practitioners alike. Perhaps most important, the articles we chose for Life Stories illustrate the important contributions that biographers and historians can make to each other’s work.

We thank the ISEB for providing, over a period of 3 decades, what former president Lucy E. Bailey calls “generative spaces to explore diverse
interactions among lives and education that have expanded the contours of educational research."¹ In particular, we thank members who submitted manuscripts to *Vitae* and who reviewed submissions to aid us in the selection process and provide helpful feedback to both established and emerging scholars. Finally, we thank the authors of the 13 essays in this volume for their exemplary scholarship. We hope the essays in this anniversary publication will encourage more people to “expand the contours” of an interesting field of research.

**NOTE**

INTRODUCTION

Linda C. Morice and Laurel Puchner

Barbara Finkelstein wrote that for the educational historian, biographical studies are not just individual chronicles.

Taken together … [t]hey provide a documentary context within which to judge the relative power of material and ideological circumstances, the meaning of education policy, the utility of schooling, the definition of literacy and the relationship between teaching and learning and policy and practice.”¹

It is with this recognition that we present 13 essays, each of which offers perspective on at least one of four key questions that have long drawn scholarly attention: What should schools teach? Who gets to decide? How should educators adapt to a changing world to provide opportunity for all students? How should educators’ experiences be interpreted for future audiences?

Life Stories: Exploring Issues in Educational History Through Biography commemorates the thirtieth anniversary of the International Society for Educational Biography and of its journal, Vitae Scholasticae. As editors of the journal, we have been privileged to work with scholars who research and write about people who shape the future by teaching others. The essays, all of which have appeared in Vitae Scholasticae, are set in a variety of educational environments that span 174 years. The essays appear as individual chapters and are organized into four parts.

Part I, “The Scope and Nature of Education,” addresses the “what” of teaching, a subject of discussion in the United States from colonial times
to the present. Part I presents three contexts in which historical figures addressed what schools should teach. Chapter 1 explores the scope and nature of Black education, a subject well documented by Anderson, Lewis, Norrell, and Smock, particularly in their presentations of the views of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois. However, Carol B. Conaway shows that during the Antebellum period—long before Washington and DuBois aired their famous differences—Frederick Douglass and Mary Ann Shadd Cary disagreed on the relative merits of job training versus an intellectual education for Black students. Finkelstein stressed the importance of understanding the “material and ideological circumstances” under which biographical figures acted, and Conaway illustrates these circumstances for Douglass and Shadd Cary, and eventually Washington and DuBois. In Chapter 2, Bart Dredge further contextualizes the idea of education-as-training by studying schools for children of White mill workers in South Carolina. Many educational historians have explored efforts to promote what Finkelstein calls “the utility of schooling” as, for example, in Herbert M. Kleinbard’s discussion of vocational education in the seminal work, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893–1958*. However, Dredge’s description of Lawrence Peter Hollis and the way the mill used schools in the Parker District provides an alarming and detailed example of schools serving a purely corporate agenda. The final chapter in Part I supports an expansive view of education by illustrating how a policy of academic freedom helped to mitigate against expressions of racial hostility during Black poet Langston Hughes’ Depression-era visit to the University of North Carolina. In this chapter, authors Bart Dredge and Cayce Tabor give readers a context for what Finkelstein calls “the meaning of educational policy” as well as “the relationship between teaching and learning and policy and practice.”

Part II explores what Finkelstein calls “relative power” and the contexts in which it is used to advance an educational agenda. According to historian Joel Spring, the U.S. education system has long been characterized by the interplay of bureaucrats, interest groups, elected officials, and knowledge brokers who try to promote their own self-interests; this interaction occurs in a climate of expectation in which individuals and groups look to schools to help meet their needs and goals. In Part II, the types of political forces observed by Spring are contextualized in three historical examples of advancement of an educational agenda. In Chapter 4, Jared R. Stallones introduces readers to two Texas school leaders during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Laurine C. Anderson (Principal of Prairie Normal Institute) and Edward L. Blackshear (Superintendent of Colored Schools in Austin) discovered that they needed to become skilled politicians to procure adequate funding for their Black students. Although they regarded themselves as educators rather than
politicians, the circumstances in which the two men found themselves required them to play both roles. In Chapter 5, Edward A. Janak presents John Eldred Swearingen, who lost his sight at age 13. Although his disability made him a member of a marginalized group, Swearingen gained agency through his election as South Carolina’s State Superintendent of Education. He went on to advance educational opportunity for children in the state, regardless of disability, race, or socioeconomic status. Chapter 6, "Correspondence Study and the ‘Crime of the Century’: Helen Williams, Nathan Leopold, and the Stateville Correspondence School," presents unlikely figures who advanced an educational agenda from inside the walls of an Illinois state prison. Von Pittman details how convicted murderer Nathan Leopold worked through officials in the Illinois penal system and with a little-known administrator at the State University of Iowa Bureau of Correspondence Study to create a statewide secondary education program for incarcerated adults whom Illinois had previously ignored. As the de facto director of the Stateville Correspondence School (knowledge of which was kept from the press), Leopold not only realized an educational vision but improved the quality of his prison life by achieving personal goals such as having sweet rolls delivered to his cell each morning and having access to an office with a washroom and shower.

Part III deals with the question, “How should educators adapt to a changing world to provide opportunity for all students?” Finkelstein contended that biography provides an opportunity to envision new educational possibilities as well as to observe the nature of social change. While she pointed to the biography of reformer Horace Mann as one example, educational historians have created other lenses through which to study promulgators of new ideas, as in Sam F. Stack’s biography of progressive educator Elsie Ripley Clapp and Kate Rousmaniere’s biography of teacher leader Margaret Haley. In Chapter 7 of this volume, John F. Wakefield portrays the life of educational leader John Milton Gregory to illustrate how the new idea of democratic education spread throughout the United States during the nineteenth century. Democratic education was promoted by evangelical millennialists like Gregory, but eventually his views became outdated because he was unable to adapt to a changing world in which public education was progressive but not religious. In the next chapter, Andrea Walton describes how scientist and reformer Christine Ladd-Franklin tried to break down gender barriers in higher education. During her life (1847–1930), Ladd-Franklin set an example of a distinguished lecturer and excellent scholar, an effort she hoped would stir the consciences of Columbia University men and allow the advancement of women on campus and in the academy. Another strategy for a woman educational reformer is seen in Chapter 9, as Lynne Tretheway details the work of Australian Lucy Spence Morice
L. C. MORICE and L. PUCHNER

(1859–1951). Trethewey discusses Morice’s use of informal social ties, as well as progressive professional networks, to effect reforms through citizen education and collective, non-party political activism. Part III ends with “George S. Counts: Leading Social Reconstructionist.” Author Bruce Romanish looks at the life of an educational luminary who, in the depths of the Great Depression, wrote Dare the School Build a New Social Order? The chapter gives context to Counts’ work as a social reconstructionist and leading scholar at Teachers College at Columbia University.

Part IV addresses the question, “How should educators’ experiences be interpreted for future audiences?” In discussing this issue, Finkelstein contended that biography can contribute to educational history by correcting “a persistent fallacy in historical reasoning.” She wrote that historians have a “tendency to promulgate interpretive schemes or sense-making myths” that reveal historical developments and social change while deemphasizing “both human agency and historical processes.” Finkelstein argued, “No matter how grand or elegant or how evocative or compelling their schemes, grand historical interpretations never become complex enough to integrate the whole of history.” In Chapter 11, A. J. Angulo contends with the issue of historical interpretation by examining the relationship between biography and history, juxtaposed against the life story of scientist William Barton Rogers (1804–1882), the conceptual founder of Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Angulo urges biographers and historians to be mindful of the relationships that exist between their respective fields. Biographers should understand the need to read the historical scholarship relating to a particular life, and historians should know that sweeping scholarly claims don’t always align to the lives of individuals. In Chapter 12, Kay Whitehead illustrates the problem of fitting educators’ lives into broad categories or interpretations. Whitehead discusses the difficulty of assigning a national identity that encompasses the national and international prominence of Lillian de Lissa, principal of the Gipsy Hill Training College in England. De Lissa was born in colonial New South Wales which, by the time her career began, made her a citizen of the newly federated Australia. She was a British subject by virtue of Australia’s membership in the British Empire, and traveled extensively in Europe and the United States. She lived in England for 50 years until her death in 1967. Whitehead shows that de Lissa’s national identity was never fixed; rather, it was constructed in context. Finally, in Chapter 13, Lucy E. Bailey discusses the challenges of accurately portraying the life of a single historical figure in “Necessary Betrayals: Reflections on Biographical Work with a Racist Ancestor.” Bailey reminds readers that biographies are not always heroic narratives. She cautions that the biographical genre “welcomes subjects cast in a romantic
Introduction xiii

glow…. Yet our connections to the past are constructed, complex, and fraught with darkness as well as light.”

We hope these essays, taken together, will demonstrate the important contributions biography can make to educational history. Whether the subject is what to teach, who makes educational decisions, how schools change, or how educators’ lives are interpreted, biography can serve as a powerful lens for educational historians. In Finkelstein’s words, “Biography is to history what a telescope is to the stars.” May Life Stories provide insights that will stimulate your scholarly work in ways that will benefit both biography and educational history!

NOTES

12. Finkelstein, 46.
15. Finkelstein, 58.
18. Finkelstein, 45.
PART I

THE SCOPE AND NATURE OF EDUCATION
Approximately 100 years before the landmark case *Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregated schools were unconstitutional, two Black activist-journalists, Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Frederick Douglass, published articles advocating racially integrated education. While they agreed that such schools constituted the ideal educational setting for Black students, they disagreed on the type of education these students should acquire. Their differing ideas were shaped by the complex relationships of gender, race, and class in antebellum African American and Afro Canadian communities. Their views of these relationships are reflected in the curricula they proposed for racially integrated schools. This essay explores the contours and complexities of their lives and their thoughts on Black education as revealed between 1852 and 1857 in their abolitionist newspapers, the *Provincial Freeman* and *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*.1
Shadd Cary, editor of the *Provincial Freeman* (1854–1861), published her newspaper in what is now the province of Ontario, Canada. Douglass published his from 1851 to 1860 in Rochester, New York. The *Provincial Freeman* was the first newspaper Shadd Cary owned and edited, though many of her letters to the editor, as well as a small pamphlet, had been published in the newspapers of Douglass and other African Americans. Douglass had significant journalistic experience before founding the *Frederick Douglass’s Paper*. From 1847 to 1851, he published a Black abolitionist weekly called the *North Star*. Shadd Cary and Douglass well understood the power of the press in developing an awareness of the issues and in fostering debates and social progress for Black people on both sides of the Canadian-American border.

Most Black male and female activists spoke and wrote about the responsibility of their race to raise itself from poverty to prosperity and to move from slavery and its devastating consequences to middle-class status and its entitlements. Black community leaders stressed that education, strong moral values, honest labor, thrift, and so forth would change the myths that Whites had about Blacks’ inferiority. Essentially, this meant the ascent from ignorance to literacy. Shadd Cary and Douglass were also strong advocates for the advancement of Black people through self-help, which largely meant changing Blacks’ social and economic status through education. They agreed that racially integrated education would promote racial uplift, but why did they disagree on school curricula? The response to that question is apparent when their differing biographies are considered in conjunction with the sexism, racism, and classism that confronted both individuals.

**THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF SHADD CARY**

Mary Ann Camberton Shadd Cary (1823–1893) was an African American/Afro Canadian woman born into a multiple-race, middle class family in Wilmington, Delaware. The Shadds were staunch abolitionists, and their home was a *stop* on the Underground Railroad. Shadd Cary, despite her light skin color and class, was denied an education in Delaware because of her race and gender. Seeing no way to educate their eldest daughter in Delaware, the Shadds moved to West Chester, Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia, when Shadd Cary was ten years old. At the time Black children were not admitted to West Chester’s 11 public schools, but Shadd Cary was given a private education for six years by Quakers at Miss Phoebe Darlington’s school.\(^2\) According to biographer and historian Jane Rhodes, she very likely received instruction in religion and philosophy, literature, writing, basic mathematics, Latin and French, the mechanical
When her formal education ended, Shadd Cary left the Philadelphia area to teach in a school for Black children in Delaware, and later taught in schools in Black areas of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York City.

Throughout her childhood and adolescence, Shadd Cary also received a great deal of political education from her parents, particularly her father, Abraham Shadd. The Shadds were members of the Philadelphia-area Black elite—a circle that later helped to support Shadd Cary with fundraising events for her newspaper. Abraham Shadd was a widely respected and influential Black community leader. He attended numerous antislavery meetings and conventions during the 1840s, and often took his daughter with him. While there, he urged Shadd Cary to speak publicly regarding Black liberation and to voice her criticisms of Black leaders. Very few women attended these events, and those who did were mostly silent. Shadd Cary took the floor to publicly debate men or deliver impassioned speeches on the failure of Black leadership to inspire middle-class Blacks to imitate the positive traits of middle-class Whites.

Toward the end of the 1840s, Shadd and his daughter turned their attention to the emigrationist movement. Black emigrationists, the majority of whom were separatists in the 1840s, argued that the only way for Blacks to liberate themselves fully was to leave “the racist Yankee republic” and settle in another country in North America, Latin America, the Caribbean, or Africa. Increasingly pessimistic about any possibility of Black liberation and racial integration in the United States, the Shadd family thought that emigration to Canada represented the best opportunity for Blacks. English was Canada’s primary spoken language. Canada’s climate resembled that of the northern United States, and the country offered rich farmland and virginal forests. Most importantly, Blacks had been free in Canada since 1833, when slavery was abolished across the British Commonwealth.

Initially, there was much African American resistance to emigration. However, the passage of the federal Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 in the United States changed their opposition. The new legislation stipulated that runaway slaves, if caught, had to be returned to their owners. The chilling implication of the Fugitive Slave Law was that even free Black persons in the North might be subject to arrest and extradition to the South. Realizing that the very public Shadds were likely to be arrested and sent to the South, Shadd Cary and her brother crossed the border into Canada in 1852. Other family members followed later.

As a recently arrived émigré, Shadd Cary sought introductions to the Black leadership. At one social event, she met Henry Bibb and his wife, Mary. The Bibbs were abolitionist activists and the editors of a Black newspaper called the *Voice of the Fugitive*. Impressed by Shadd Cary, they
invited her to teach school in Windsor, Canada. She accepted their offer and began teaching in a very small school for the children of Black refugees from the American South.

Shortly thereafter, the American Missionary Society (AMA) offered Shadd Cary the opportunity to open her own school in Chatham, Canada West. Soon after she had settled there, however, she began an intense ideological campaign against the Bibbs, the AMA, and the Refugee Home Society (RHS). The RHS was a group comprising the Bibbs and other members of the Black Canadian male establishment who advocated and/or provided charity for fugitives from the United States. Shadd Cary contended that the AMA focused the sights of Blacks on heaven and overlooked the reality of their lives on earth. She accused the RHS of fostering the mentality of begging (her term for accepting charity) when it provided poor refugees with food, clothing, and shelter after their arrival from America. In letters to the Bibbs’ newspaper, the Voice of the Fugitive, Shadd Cary accused both the AMA and the RHS of catering to the slave mentality developed by those who were owned by White Christians. She argued that these organizations should be demanding that the new arrivals become independent as quickly as possible. She believed that White citizens would never respect or accept former slaves if they were living on charity.

Shadd Cary deemed the Black separatists’ campaign for racially segregated education and settlements in Canada West far worse than advocating the acceptance of charity. As opponents of integrated education, Henry Bibb and other separatists argued that Black, racially exclusive education in all-Black Canadian settlements was the best antislavery weapon Blacks could wield. They believed that Black success with no help or interference from Whites would provide indisputable evidence of Black self-reliance and achievement for skeptical Whites, including those who were members of the Colonizationist Movement. Colonizationist Movement members such as Harriet Beecher Stowe (author of Uncle Tom’s Cabin) wanted to repatriate Blacks to Liberia.  

As an assimilationist, Shadd Cary promulgated the opposite position. She argued vehemently that Blacks could overcome the arguments of White racists only through self-help and rapid assimilation into White Canadian society. She believed that Blacks and Whites would benefit from being exposed to each other, because only exposure would guarantee each race’s appreciation of and respect for the other. As Shirley J. Yee (1997) notes, “[Shadd Cary] denounced racial separatism in any form, which challenged both segregationist practices in the larger society and Black nationalist views about how the Black community should be constructed.”
The Bibbs, in turn, considered Shadd Cary a public disgrace and a nuisance for her attacks on the Black male establishment. She had transgressed gender boundaries by stepping into a male-dominated public sphere. The Black male establishment and even some Black women denounced Shadd Cary for conduct considered improper for a Black woman and member of the Black elite, because she had a particular set of ideas and assumptions that were middle-class, reformist, and Christian.

When Shadd Cary realized that the Bibbs’ *Voice of the Fugitive* was censoring her letters to the editor, if they published them at all, she decided to found her own newspaper. She closed her school at the end of December, 1852. In March of the next year, she announced in a prospectus that she and her highly respected associates, the Reverend Samuel Ringgold Ward and Alexander McArthur, would publish the *Provincial Freeman*. The first issue of her weekly broadsheet was published in March 1854. While the publication was primarily an abolitionist newspaper, it also dealt with issues such as temperance, immigration, the conditions of slaves, and current events. Shadd Cary acknowledged herself only as “publishing agent,” but the Afro Canadian and African American communities knew that she was the newspaper’s editor, which failed to improve her standing in either community.

With regard to her activism on behalf of integration, Shadd Cary worked assiduously to insert herself into the male world of political leadership. Shirley J. Yee interprets Shadd Cary’s vision of integration as being two-fold: encompassing both racial and gender integration. Her concept of integration was as much about her securing a place for herself in the movement as it was about finding a safe haven for fugitive Blacks. By and large, it was easier to find a new geographical location for Blacks than it was for her to be accepted as an equal by the Black male leadership of Canada West.

Shadd Cary was able to engage in the Black male public conversation regarding integrated or segregated education, because she was a liminal figure in the male-dominated Afro Canadian society. Female self-assertion lay outside the boundaries of appropriate behavior for a Black woman in the 1850s, but Shadd Cary was not consciously self-limited or socially limited by traditional gender roles. She ignored social boundaries and she no longer cared about power and privilege, role, status, law, or institutions. Groomed for leadership since her early childhood, Shadd Cary assumed a dominant position in the community. She stood on principle and courageously pursued life as an activist working solely for the good of the community. Her father’s tutelage and influence, her private schooling, the world of ideas, a strong moral conviction, and a cosmopolitan view were evident in Shadd Cary’s activism. In her utopian world
view, men and women, Black and White, were equals who recognized the humanity of the other.

**THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF DOUGLASS**

The biography of Frederick Douglass (1813–1895) stands in marked contrast to that of Shadd Cary. He was born a slave in Talbot County, Maryland. His mother, whom he described as “quite dark,” was a slave on another plantation. Douglass saw her only four or five times before she died when he was seven years old. It was rumored that his father was the White plantation owner. Douglass lived in a cabin with his maternal grandmother (also a slave) on the outskirts of the plantation.

Douglass was taught to read by the mistress of one of his families and he learned how to write by working in a shipyard, copying letters, and tricking literate people into teaching him. Douglass wrote in his 1845 autobiography that “my copy-book was the board fence, brick wall, and pavement; my pen and ink was a lump of chalk.” He worked at literacy until he could forge his master’s handwriting. In his autobiography, Douglass described his epiphany after a violent altercation with his sadistic last master:

> It was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. 
> It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again [to vow that those who] succeed in whipping me, must also succeed in killing me.

In 1838, Douglass succeeded in his second escape attempt, and made his way to New York.

Although he was literate, racial discrimination prevented him from finding employment that required literacy. His first job was stowing a sloop with a load of oil. When he attempted to find a second job caulking, he was confronted with the racial prejudice of White caulkers, who refused to work with him. Seeing no future for himself in New York, Douglass moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts, where a sympathetic White man hired him to perform a less menial job.

Soon after his arrival in New Bedford, he began to read William Lloyd Garrison’s abolitionist newspaper, the *Liberator*. It quickly became his “meat and drink.” Influenced by Garrison’s stands on “the principles, measures, and spirit of the anti-slavery reform,” he took up the abolitionist cause, pleading the case of those who were still enslaved. Douglass addressed antislavery meetings and was hired as a lecturer by Garrisonian abolitionists. In May of 1845, he published his first autobiography, *Narrative*.
From 1845 to 1847, he traveled in Great Britain as an abolitionist lecturer. Establishing his family in Rochester, New York, he published the first issue of his weekly newspaper, the *North Star*, in 1848. According to his own account, he broke with White Garrisonian abolitionists between May and June of 1851, and revamped his newspaper into a vehicle for the Liberty Party, calling it *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*.

Douglass strongly advocated racial integration in every aspect of American life, including education. Like other Black leaders, he believed that education was the linchpin of racial uplift and equality. However, Douglass also was realistic about the power of White racism in the United States and elsewhere. What good would even the finest education be, if racism continued to deny Blacks their rightful place in any occupation, professional or vocational? Although Douglass respected all forms of labor, he regarded menial labor—another form of slavery—as a state from which one should escape as soon as possible.

**THE ROOTS OF SHADD CARY AND DOUGLASS’S EDUCATIONAL VIEWS**

Shadd Cary and Douglass’ theories of racially integrated education were rooted in their gender, race, and class differences, which affected their worldviews, experiences, and thought in different ways. While both Shadd Cary and Douglass experienced White racism, Shadd Cary was born into a family that was free. She did not know the sting of the lash and the sound of the whip. White Quakers educated Shadd Cary and partially shaped who she was; Douglass was taught to read by the mistress of the family that enslaved him. Although Shadd Cary was of mixed race, her gender, class, and education made it possible for her to be employed as a teacher—a job generally reserved for Whites. Douglass was forced to accept menial employment because of his race, sex, former slave status, and class. Shadd Cary was lauded by her family and her elite circle for aspiring to have White mores, values, and behaviors, while Douglass struggled to overcome his former status as a slave. Shadd Cary’s light skin color may have led her to believe that any Black person could achieve what she had accomplished. Douglass’ darker hue may have made it easier for him to understand the difficulties of dark-skinned Blacks, who were discriminated against by both Whites and light-skinned Blacks.

Sexism was as crucial an oppression as racism and classism in the antebellum years. Because Shadd Cary was female, the Black leadership of Canada harshly criticized her for her participation in the public sphere. But African Americans praised Douglass’ leadership because he was act-
ing within his gender role as a Black male community leader. Shadd Cary’s memory of the sexism that, in part, prevented her from obtaining an education in Delaware influenced her feminist position on the necessity of education for girls and women. As a male, Douglass encountered no such prejudice.

**ANALYSIS OF SHADD CARY’S AND DOUGLASS’ VIDEOGRAPHIC IDEAS**

A common thread among African Americans and Afro Canadians in the antebellum years was their strong desire to dispel the pernicious mythologies about Black inferiority, bestiality, and hypersexuality. On both sides of the border, most Black people aspired to improve the status of their race by any means possible, but especially through education. Shadd Cary and Douglass agreed that the route to equality and assimilation lay in Black education. In this respect, Afro Canadians were better positioned than African Americans in the struggle for education prohibited by Whites, because Afro Canadians were citizens of their adopted country.

Shadd Cary’s education served as her model for the intellectual curriculum she advocated. However, her model curriculum was best suited for—and only available to—the Black middle- and upper-middle classes of the 1850s. Former slaves were not well regarded by some of the Black elite unless they aspired to the Protestant ethic. This meant that Shadd Cary’s theory was classist. However, her personal experiences with racism and gender discrimination at an early age in Delaware, and her struggle to overcome both, surely led her to believe that racism and sexism could be eradicated with intellectual education comprising literature, languages, arts, and sciences. She thought that if she could succeed, so could others. What Shadd Cary failed to consider was her class privilege, including not having to fight for survival. Her model curriculum assumed that Blacks had assimilated successfully and were preparing to enter the professions.

Douglass’ curricular theories were far more inclusive than those of Shadd Cary. As his plans for the American Industrial School demonstrate, Douglass was an egalitarian of the first order. The school was to admit any student, regardless of complexion distinction, class, or gender. Douglass’ egalitarianism was rooted in his past. His memories of his former enslavement and early days of freedom influenced his later thought on the education Blacks needed for their survival. Thus, Douglass’ theory of what a good Black education should comprise was not only the literature, languages, arts, and sciences that Shadd Cary proposed, but also a vocation such as agriculture, cooking, sewing, and other such occupations so that students would always be able to earn a living, even if racial discrimi-
nation barred them from the professions. His was a curriculum based upon honing the intellect and learning how to survive in a racist society.

**DOUGLASS’ AND SHADD CARY’S NEWSPAPER DISCOURSE ON THE EDUCATION OF BLACKS**

Douglass thought that African Americans’ status as slaves was due to both White and Black ignorance, and that education—whether integrated or segregated—was central to the progress of Black people. In a speech made on August 10, 1852, at the successful Black settlement in Buxton, Canada West, he emphasized the relationship between ignorance and slavery:

> Ignorance is another evil of, and indispensable to slavery. Knowledge enlightens and expands the mind, elevates the thoughts, and makes the slave dissatisfied with his condition and to pant after liberty. Hence, in all the slaveholding States, the most stringent laws are enacted, the violation of which entails the severest punishment, to forbid the slave, either to read or to write, aye, to forbid even to learn the nature and existence of that God who breathed into him the breath of life.  

Douglass extolled the pleasures and pursuits of the trained mind such as participation in literary societies. He strongly believed that human dignity lay in the cultivation of the intellect and understanding of one’s ethical and spiritual obligations.

Shadd Cary concurred with Douglass regarding ignorance and thought that the remedy for it lay in integrated education and assimilation. Writing about affairs in the state of Kentucky in her editorial, “White and Black Slavery,” she argued:

> It is essential that the [Black] youth [of Kentucky] should all be educated…. Slavery prevents this being done. What do the few wealth[y] planters in the State care for the education of the masses? Nothing at all. Their sons at college, their daughters at boarding school, [wealthy whites] control the legislation of the State, and take care to see, that taxes for educational purposes, do not, bear too hardly upon them. They seek to monopolize the intelligence, as they monopolize the wealth of the State.

Shadd Cary surmised that Whites, especially Southern plantation owners, would not support education for the Black masses, primarily because education put the entire slavocracy at risk. In providing this pointed rationale for the ignorance of the Black masses, Shadd Cary buttressed her pessimism with her belief that the prospect of slave liberation and Black assim-
ilation in the United States was delusional. Although some Black separatists such as Martin Delany and Henry Highland Garnet were convinced that it would be only a matter of time before the United States annexed Canada and re-institutionalized slavery there, Shadd Cary believed that Canada would remain the bastion of Black freedom and equality in North America.²⁸

Douglass held a more cautious view of what lay ahead for both free and enslaved Black people. He recalled the prejudice that he had suffered before being accepted as a literate person, and surmised that Black people would need two types of education: intellectual and vocational. Whether obtained clandestinely in slave cabins and Black churches or openly in free public schools, African Americans, he believed, had the goal of achieving some level of literacy. Ultimately, Douglass hoped that integrated rather than segregated education would lead to assimilation. He considered segregated institutions of any kind to be detrimental to human progress. However, Douglass recognized that separate Black institutions might be necessary in view of the ferocity of entrenched White racism. As Douglass wrote in his article, “Equal School Rights”:

The subject of exclusive organizations among our people is one, in which we have long been interested. As a general thing, we consider them detrimental to our interests, having a tendency to foment the spirit of proscription where it does not. But we can easily conceive of certain exigencies, in which they may be absolutely necessary to our well being. We would not have our people support a colored school, or colored church, in these places, where they can procure admission into schools and churches, in which there are not complexional distinctions, where they will be in the possession of the same rights and privileges, that others enjoy. This is our private opinion, publicly expressed.²⁹

His acknowledgement that segregated institutions such as schools and churches might continue to be segregated is evidence of Douglass’ fears for the future of Blacks in the United States.

Shadd Cary, on the other hand, seemed to ignore the increasing racism in the provisionally racially integrated society of Canada. She believed that Blacks alone were responsible for surmounting whatever challenges lay before them in obtaining an education. In a Provincial Freeman editorial (no title) published on January 20, 1854, Shadd Cary praised the virtues of former slave William Wells Brown, who had given a series of lectures “embracing other topics than the anti-slavery subject” in Philadelphia. Commenting on Brown’s lecture on “The Humble Origin of Great Men,” she wrote that he “spoke of the beauties of several noted places in London and Paris. ['Humble Origin'] was well-chosen, as it was calculated to inspire the colored people with energy, and cause them to
surmount difficulties to educate themselves.” Shadd Cary thought that Brown was an excellent example of her philosophy of self-education: Blacks would have to lift themselves up by their bootstraps and educate themselves and their children, despite racism.

Douglass also believed that Blacks were compelled to be responsible for procuring their education. As he stated in his editorial, “This Age”: “The colored man must no longer depend upon his White friends for intellectual resources with his hat in his hand, and head towards the earth….it is time that intellectual effort be sustained by the people of color themselves.” But while Douglass alluded to the importance of an intellectual education, he adamantly espoused a type of education that he thought was more practical for Blacks of the 1850s. As he wrote in his article, “The Industrial School”:

As to a mere knowledge of books, I have no faith in it. I do not say that I undervalue education, for I think that every child should be kept in school till twelve or fourteen years old, at least. But a mere knowledge of books, without a trade of some kind is useless, as the colored people are situated now.31

To survive in the dominant society, Douglass believed that African Americans required an education that stressed vocational skills as well as intellectual development.

Shadd Cary’s newspaper rhetoric suggests that a rudimentary intellectual education was not sufficient for racial uplift. As she stated in her response to a Letter to the Editor:

All labor is respectable, yet we must not be content to be a class of common laborers; we have fair portion of these already. What we want, and what we must have, is a fair proportion of other classes among us. Some fitted for School Teachers, Lawyers, Doctors, Merchants, &c. We must educate ourselves and educate our children.32

Shadd Cary’s position on the necessity for a purely liberal arts education did not waver in the 1850s. If anything, she was even more insistent that Afro Canadians obtain an intellectual education as quickly as possible, leaving behind menial skills. On May 6, 1854, Shadd Cary published a reader’s Letter to the Editor that stated, “We must devote a portion of our time to mental cultures; we must become a reading people.”33 Shadd Cary responded thusly:

We must dip or pry into the fine arts and sciences; we must become painters, sculptors, architects; in short, scientific and it must be by our own exertions. When we have ended our collegiate course, we are not truly wise, but must become so by research afterwards.”34
Although Douglass was a staunch feminist and advocated the education of Black girls and women, Shadd Cary was an even more committed proponent of Black female education. As she wrote in her article “Miscellaneous” concerning the education of Black girls: “Whatever your position in society, educate your daughter for some business in her life, educate her according to your means and condition, according to her tastes, and capacity.” This statement suggests that Shadd Cary was hearkening back to her own education, both formal and informal, as a young girl and adolescent. Shadd Cary may have attributed her temerity and activism to her unusual education, which was not available to most girls. As she continued in “Miscellaneous”:

The “sphere of woman,” which has always reduced far below the hemisphere which all accord her as a right, includes the whole range of teaching—in letters, in science, in music, and drawing, and whatever else is learned in our schools. [Women’s mission] surely is to teach.

In other words, educated women were the key to the future of Black advancement.

One of Shadd Cary’s most impassioned editorials, “Female Education,” was inspired by her zeal for educating girls:

Oh, it is a burning shame that our women are not educated to a greater vigor of body and mind! If the world were mine, and I could educate by one sex, it should be the girls. I could make a greater and better world of the next generation by educating girls of this…. Strengthen the woman-heart, and you strengthen the world. Give me a nation of noble women, and I will give you a noble nation. Cultivate the woman-mind if you would cultivate the race.

The above statements reflect more than Shadd Cary’s upbringing and her strong identification with her father’s teachings. They also reflect the indignities she had suffered as a female activist, whose case for gender equality was tried constantly in Black communities on both sides of the Canadian-American border.

Shadd Cary enthusiastically envisioned a future that included not only women’s education, but also the integration of Blacks and Whites in the same classroom. Her faith in her integrationist theory is exemplified in her editorial, “The Future of the Colored Canadians.” “The Future” begins with her exceptionally optimistic assumption that racism was merely a product of ignorance, and that the coeducation of Blacks and Whites would remove racism from Canadian society. She argued that the missing factor in the equality equation was a quality liberal arts education in racially integrated schools. Shadd Cary envisioned a learning environ-