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Franchesca R. Hackworth
The University of Dayton

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Writing Process

The overall goal of this piece was to compose an essay conveying how different historiographers have varied in their views of a single moment within the Reconstruction period. Discovering the similarities and differences was intriguing and provided much to analyze. I specifically chose to review how historiographers have viewed the white women teachers — mostly Northerners — who traveled to the South during the Reconstruction period for the education of freedmen.

As this extensive process took hold, I knew the topic I chose was perfectly fit for me. I have a deep appreciation for education and all that it does to shape who we are as individuals. For this very reason, I became greatly hypnotized by the promise and importance of this situation and its circumstances during the Reconstruction. I first proposed my topic to the instructor of the course. In the beginning, it was unclear if the resources would be lacking due to the specificity of the topic. However, we found a path that offered many accounts of these women and all they had accomplished. The next step was to submit approximately 15 proposed sources to the instructor. He narrowed it to eight to ten sources. Two drafts later, two of my peers along with the instructor and the Write Place reviewed my piece for clarity and a complete analysis of the research done. Not only was I able to compose an essay that compared eight historiographer's accounts, but I was also able to relay who I deemed most compelling. This process took much diligence and many drafts, but in the end, I was proud of what I had learned.

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Educating Our Future: White Women Teachers and What They Contributed to the Reconstruction

Franchesca Hackworth

The education of African Americans was a key component of the Reconstruction Era. Without the enhancement that academia provided, people in the black community would have had a very difficult time progressing and establishing their place within society. More specifically, social progression for blacks would not have been possible without the individuals who were willing to teach them. Commonly, these educators were white Northern women and sometimes white Southern women. Over time, these educators have had many images.

Historians have viewed Northern teachers in ways that can be divided into three groups. The first group has the remembrance of teachers as *missionaries*. These historians have found that most teachers did not have a desire to improve the black community's conditions. They were ultimately focused on their "Christian duty." The next group recollects white women teachers as *good-willed.* This group finds that teachers wanted social change for the black community, but they often failed to reach their goals. The final group views teachers as *heroes.* Among this group are historical accounts that view these teachers as genuinely wanting to improve the black community's social conditions. They were known as heroes of their age because of the actual success in making change happen. This group of historians is most compelling; they are correct in recognizing these women as heroes. But no matter how the white women teachers are viewed, all these histories support that these women had a prevalent impact on education in Reconstruction.

As the views of these women are displayed, it is imperative to note how differently each group expresses opinions. The *missionary* interpretations portray

these women in the worst light. Here, teachers are believed to have lacked genuine motives, which ultimately keeps them from achieving anything meaningful during the Reconstruction. Among the *missionary* interpretations lies Bratton and his analysis of white women teachers in "The Christian South and Negro Education." He argues that God put blacks and whites into each other's lives on purpose. He sees it as the Christian South's duty to help blacks, and the best way to help a race is to help the individual. In this case, it is through education. This form of education may be arithmetic, science, or religion. Bratton's point is that no matter which form of education each individual may need, the teacher will provide that particular type for the success of a black man. This all relates back to the idea that the Christian teachers saw it as their duty to help God's people live well. Ultimately, Bratton believes that black people are not ready to be emancipated from white guidance and leadership. Instead of segregating races within schools, he wants the blacks to be acclimated with their white teachers and supervisors so that they can become accustomed to what it is like living among the whites. The teacher's focus is helping blacks understand they are equally important: Under God, no race exists. The purpose of the educators is to help blacks find their God-given purpose in life. This is different from the other historical views because it depicts blacks as somewhat equal. The blacks are not valued as less than whites; they simply have some catching up to do within their social abilities. Although this analysis contains an underlying theme of attempting social reform that relates to the *good-willed* category, it is the strong need to fulfill a Christian duty of educating blacks that puts Bratton and his interpretations in the *missionary* category.[1]

Butchart parallels with Bratton in most aspects. In his most recent study of Northern teachers, "Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876," he describes a precise motive known as missionary work. Butchart differentiates a true abolitionist teacher from a strictly missionary one by how long the person stayed in the South teaching. The few teachers who went with genuine interest stayed twice as long as those who did not portray any evidence of wanting to improve blacks' social conditions. Butchart categorizes Northern teachers in three ways: strongly abolitionist, generally antislavery, and no particular interest in the enslaved prior to teaching. He finds

[1] Bratton, Theodore DuBose. "The Christian South and Negro Education," *The Sewanee Review* 16, no. 3 (1908): 290-297.

that the strong abolitionists are few compared to the rest of the Northern teachers. Because of this, in the eyes of black teachers and freedmen, the Northerners acquired the image of falling short. Due to viewing their work as a "field of Christian labor," the Northern teachers did not intend to help bring the blacks out of the political, economic, and ideological struggles that they face every day. Instead, Butchart tells us, their intent was to bring blacks out of the depths of degradation and into an intelligent Christianity. For this reason, he portrays Northern teachers as not taking seriously the idea of a new South where black people control their own destiny. Rather than the heroes that Butchart (1980) and Jacqueline Jones portray, the Northern teachers were a disappointment. Although Butchart acknowledges some revolutionaries, the majority of these educators lacked genuineness, which soiled the image of Northern teachers.[2]

Some historians remember these women as strictly *missionaries*. However, other historians mildly disagree and provide their own take on the impact of white women teachers at the time. This group recognizes the teachers as *good-willed.* Scott Beck, in his article "Freedmen, Friends, Common Schools and Reconstruction," puts his focus on Northern teachers who were Quakers. He argues that Quaker women came to the South in an effort to provide relief for blacks within spiritual enlightenment, practical education, and political empowerment. However, like Butchart's 2010 argument that Northern women were a disappointment, Beck offers that they did not in fact achieve their agenda. Part of the reason political progress among blacks was unsuccessful relates to the state freedmen were already in: It was hard for the Quaker teachers to help blacks succeed under an unjust economic system with undercapitalized men and unskilled freedmen. Beck relays that the freedmen knew they needed labor law reform and self-sufficiency in-order to progress within society, but they acknowledged that schooling was a large step toward progression. Although the Northern women had a very strong urge to spread faith, they also had an inherent desire to defend freedmen's rights through education. This is what qualifies Beck's interpretation as mildly different from the *missionaries'* category. They are indeed intent on Christianity as the center. However, they have an additional desire to help the social progression of blacks. Beck emphasizes that even though Northern teachers did not achieve everything they set out to, their intentions were

[2] Butchart, Ronald E. *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876.* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 108-119.

genuine from the beginning. This contrasts the historical accounts from Butchart (2010) and Robert C. Morris, who argue that Northern women went south without a desire to make social change among the blacks. [3]

In "Pennsylvania Quakers in Southern Reconstruction," Oliver S. Heckman contributes to Beck's case that these women were genuinely *good-willed,* explaining that many Quakers on the front lines of the abolitionist crusade directed their attention toward educating and spreading Christianity among the conquered areas of the South. A particular finding from Heckman is that Northern teachers typically based their work on educational and philanthropic ideas, not strictly around missionary incentives; the teachers and missionaries did not attempt to seek out members of the church to help with this "crusade," but rather believed that the Holy Spirit would lead certain individuals their way if that was what God intended the individual to do. Northern teachers provided physical aid as well. Christian women often met to talk about how they could help the suffering blacks; this sometimes included providing them with clothing and blankets. The Northern women partook in such caring acts and were among the first to encourage emancipation. These women supported the education and elevating influences of blacks. Yet in return they never expected an increase in church members. The women believed that a spiritual relationship was within, and that is all that mattered. Therefore, these Quaker women appear to be a part of the generous Northern educators. They wanted the blacks' education enhanced along with their well-being. Although this account could easily place the teachers in the *missionary* category, they are better fit for the *good-willed* category due to their willingness to help without wanting in return an increase in church members.[4]

Morris offers a different explanation of white women educators in his work "Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South, 1861-1870." He provides a detailed illustration of how Northerners viewed the place of blacks within society. His argument is that the Northern teachers were willing to do what they could to help, but they ultimately did not have faith in the idea of black equality. Northerners had certain aspects that were restricting them from being fully revolutionary. Although they were good-willed, which is what

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[3] Beck, Scott A. "Freedmen, Friends, Common Schools and Reconstruction," *The Southern Friend: Journal of the North Carolina Friends Historical Society* 16, no. 1 (1995): 5-23.

[4] Heckman, Oliver S. "Pennsylvania Quakers in Southern Reconstruction," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 13, no. 4 (1946): 248-264.

places them in this category, they knew that the Southern whites had all the power and that they would not accept blacks as having an equal place in the world. One strong force against their aid within the progression of black society was the brashness in which Southern whites responded to Northerners. Southerners hated the Northerners, and they often feared that if blacks were educated by *Yankees,* then they would be taught that Southerners were the villains. Even the Northerners had their own racism to internally face. Although the racism was a lot less strong than Southern racism, it was still present. Northerners were not convinced that blacks would ever earn a high place in society. This is the factor that keeps them from being in the heroic category. The result is Northern teachers traveling to the South simply to do what they can to prepare blacks for their destined place within society. This place was below all others. Blacks would live and survive as any other human except with no hope of social or economic mobility. The historical view that Morris found of white women educators appears to be drastically different from the account of Jones when it comes to the heroic nature of these educators. Morris does, however, connect with Scott and Heckman when he acknowledges that the Northern teachers truly cared to make some sort of social impact. Connecting the three historians' accounts is the fact that although the women tried to make a change, they encountered continuous failure. Morris's history shows the good intentions of white Northerners as well as the cold reality of black immobility within society.[5]

The final group to note is known as *heroes.* The historians in this category would claim that white women teachers changed black society forever. Butchart's earliest analysis happens to be one of them. In his book *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction: Freedmen's Education, 1862-1875,* he provides illustrations of how Southerners viewed Northern teachers as wretched Yankees. In the beginning of Butchart's findings, he explains how hard it was for the Northerners to find comfortable living arrangements. Most of them left everything back home. The text tells how the Southerners made finding living arrangements even harder for the Northern teachers because of denial and stubbornness in accepting the education of blacks. Even finding a secure building for the teachers to teach in was a struggle. Once a building was secure, peace for the Northern teachers was not guaranteed. They were verbally and physically

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[5] Morris, Robert C. *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South, 1861-1870.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), ix-xi.

attacked, and buildings were stoned or burned down. Despite what the Southerners thought about the Northern teachers, Butchart parallels with Jones and James M. McPherson in seeing them as the heroes of their age, which is what puts Butchart's 1980 history in the category of *heroes.* Northern teachers should be credited for why they truly went: to educate freedmen and release them from their oppression.[6]

Many of Jones's findings align with Butchart's 1980 account. Part of Jones's work includes a foreword to *Sarah Jane Foster, Teacher of the Freedman: A Diary and a Letter.* Throughout this piece, she shares her view of white Southern teacher Sarah Jane Foster, a teacher to freedmen during the Reconstruction Era, as truly heroic. Jones notes how Foster lived in both triumph and tribulation; during this time of Reconstruction, Foster held the typical image of a "do-good" white teacher who ventured into a dangerous area to redeem the minds and souls of blacks who had lost everything during the constraints of slavery. Jones relays that Foster succumbed to her loneliness and went without certain necessities in an effort to fight the new war and provide her students with the supplies they needed. It becomes apparent that Foster not only wanted the glory of the people she educated, but also the glory of the white supremacists. Unlike many other historians who see white female Northern educators as busybodies or "do-gooders," Jones sees them as heroes who changed African American society forever. Jones praises Wayne E. Reilly, editor of the volume, for revealing the works of Foster and changing social history, specifically with respect to the education of the freedmen.[7]

McPherson's "White Liberals and Black Power in Negro Education" finds that blacks reached a point when they wanted to shift white liberal institutions over to black leaders. In some cases, blacks felt they should have pride and control over their own education. Black leaders thought it was time to stop relying on white liberals for everything. Academic achievement may have decreased among blacks during the transition of administration from whites to blacks, though the available evidence is inconclusive. McPherson writes that black leaders should be commended for keeping the institutions running smoothly under their control. However, at the end of his evaluation, McPherson gives some credit

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[6] Butchart, Ronald E. *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction: Freedmen's Education, 1862-1875.* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980), 115-134.

[7] Jones, Jacqueline. Foreword to *Sarah Jane Foster, Teacher of the Freedman: A Diary and a Letter.* Edited by Wayne E. Reilly. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), ix-xvi.

to white Northern teachers who passion and service helped make higher education for blacks possible. Further, McPherson points out that some of the black community's best-known leaders graduated from white-established institutions: W. E. B. Dubois, James Weldon Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and many others. Although McPherson focuses his studies on the transformation of black institutions led by whites to blacks, he credits white liberal educators for the foundation of black education. Through this lens, his findings resemble those of Jones and Butchart (1980).[8]

After reviewing the interpretations of white women teachers, I think it is best to show how and why their portrayal as *heroes* is the most accurate and compelling interpretation. Jones seems to have moved me the most. Her argument brings to life not only the struggles on the outside but also the struggles within the women. During a time of lynchings, war, devastation, and tragedy, taking a stand contrary to popular belief was dangerous and terrifying. However, Foster did not let the terror stop her as she made great sacrifices to be a change within society. Foster brought humanization and reality to the scenario when she acknowledged that she even desired white supremacist acceptance, as Jones states in her analysis. Foster intended to do everything in her power to change the society, but she realized that without the support of white supremacists, limitations would constrain her from being the true revolutionary as Jones portrays her. Those historians in the *missionary* category might argue that women only contributed to African American education for Christian reward. To that I would ask if one has examined the Christian deeds of Foster and her genuine commitment to education. Others might argue that women were genuinely *good-willed* but failed to achieve anything great. To this argument I reference McPherson's analysis. He found that without the foundation that white women teachers created for black academia, some of the most precious society-changing individuals—W. E. B. Dubois, Martin Luther King, and others—may never have made the impact they did. She contained all these important qualities and never gave up; she fought until she could fight no more. That is what makes her and this account the most compelling.

[8] McPherson, James M. "White Liberals and Black Power in Negro Education," *The American Historical Review* 75, no. 5 (1970): 1357-1386.

Over time, white women teachers have had many different "images," ranging from *missionaries* to *good-willed* to *heroes.* Historians offer reasonable interpretations with *heroes* being the most accurate. It is undeniably inherent that these women have had an impact on African American society. They made a stamp that can never be erased.

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