

The Early Years

Berryville, Virginia, October, 1889

Lucy Slowe learned of her mother's death when she heard her oldest brother, John, say, "She's dead."¹ Both he and their Aunt Martha were overcome with tears, but Lucy, who was six years old at the time, reported that she was simply bewildered. So, she announced that she was going out to play with James Williams, her cousin and favorite playmate. When her aunt told her not to go because her mother had just died, Lucy wondered what her mother's death had to do with her playing! After all, when her pet chicken had died, she and James Williams had dug a grave, sung a song, and buried it—but they did not stop playing.

Fannie Slow,² her mother, had been gentle and easy with her because she was the baby of the family. She did anything she wanted to do, despite the protests of her brothers, John and Bill, and her sister, Charlotte. Her sister regarded herself as Lucy's boss, and Lucy felt she had a perfect right to "scratch her, pull her hair" and hide behind her mother's skirt.

Because Lucy's father had died five years earlier—and the children were now orphans—his sister, Martha, had traveled to Berryville from her home in Lexington to help with the arrangements.³ On the day of the funeral, Aunt Martha dressed Lucy in a stiff white dress with a black sash. She kept the child close by her side so that she would not run out to the road to play. Once, while Aunt Martha, whom Lucy feared, was pinning on her long, black crepe veil, Lucy darted to the door, but she was not quite quick enough. "You little demon," Aunt Martha hissed, "What am I to do with you? If you don't stay right here, I will put you to bed for the rest of the day." After quietly waiting for Aunt Martha to finish dressing, she was led into the "front room," which was what they called the best room in the

house. Her mother lay in a black casket. The family—John, Bill, Charlotte, Aunt Martha, and Lucy—sat near the head of the casket and near where the minister stood. They joined Aunt Caroline, who had been her mother's helper when she made applebutter, and their "friends, enemies and relatives," who crowded themselves into the room as best they could. The minister and everybody but family members sang "Nearer My God to Thee," and he prayed and talked about her mother. Everybody cried but Aunt Martha and Lucy. Aunt Martha did not cry "because she was too busy watching" Lucy, and Lucy did not cry because she was "trying to figure out why Aunt Caroline wore a red bandana handkerchief on her head when everybody else wore black ones." Fanny (alternate spelling) Slowe was buried next to her husband in the Milton Valley Cemetery.⁴

Later, while they were eating supper, John agreed that the siblings would have to be separated because he could not get anyone to look after the girls. Moreover, Aunt Martha could not be expected to stay there in Berryville to look after them. He was candid about the girls' dispositions, acknowledging that Lucy needed a strong hand. Charlotte, on the other hand, was a good child. Because of this assessment—"Lucy was bad" and "Charlotte was good"—Lucy got mad at the whole family. She then made up her mind to give Charlotte "a good pinching" when they went to bed that night.

Aunt Martha concluded—"batting her eyelids rapidly"—that she would take both Charlotte and Lucy home with her and give them both a "Christian raising." Lucy did not know what that was, but she knew she was not going to like it, especially if Aunt Martha had to give it to her. Lucy rolled her eyes at her aunt, but said nothing, for her throat was getting tight. Lucy's eyes filled with tears because she knew she would have to give up at least three things: her pal—James Williams—the road up and down which they raced, and the mud hole in the yard. Her aunt did not believe in playing in the mud, or playing with boys, or running up and down the road.

Lucy had been born on July 4, 1883, to Henry Slowe and Fannie Potter Slowe.^{5, 6} Her siblings were John, Nellie, Coltrop, Preston, William, and Charlotte,⁷ all older than Lucy. According to the record of marriages in Clarke County, Virginia, Lucy's parents were married in Berryville, a Shenandoah Valley town, on January 15, 1867. At that time, Henry was forty-two years old and listed his work as restaurant keeper. Although Berryville was a farming community, and African Americans were just close to thirty years out of slavery, it was quite a feat for him to be a restaurant keeper. He had been born in Louisa County, Virginia, the son of David and Penny Slow. His bride was born in Clarke County to George and Ann Potter and was twenty-two years old when she and Henry married.⁸ It is not known whether Lucy's parents and grandparents were slaves or free.

Lexington, Virginia

Whether Lucy wanted to or not—she was not consulted—two days after the funeral Aunt Martha and the girls started off for Lexington. To Lucy's mind, the trip from Berryville to Lexington probably felt like it was longer than 135 miles. Lexington was also located in the county where she was born. Berryville, however, was northeast, closer to the West Virginia line. Traveling was not easy in 1889. One could ride in a buggy or maybe a train if a railroad line had been constructed between Berryville and Lexington.

This could have been the saddest day in the little girl's life. She, Charlotte, and Aunt Martha arrived in Lexington one bright October afternoon. A sleepy old town, Lexington rested between two spurs of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Main Street was the principal thoroughfare, with the post office on one corner next to the bank that abutted the hotel. In front of the hotel, men lounged in chairs waiting for the evening mail to be sorted. Main Street also was home to a few stores that advertised general merchandise.

Lucy's journey probably took her past the large manor houses that still stood as vestiges of plantation society. Many had been erected long before the Civil War as the stronghold of a society built on slavery, and they had withstood the devastation of that war. Even today, a number of these homes remain.⁹

Lexington had been called "The Athens of the State." It was the town where "Stonewall" Jackson taught his Sunday School class [S.S. Class] for colored children.¹⁰ The McDowells, the Massies, the Prestons, and many others who lived in those big houses had "curious ways," as Lucy later described them.¹¹ They were the folk who made the town historically famous.¹² These families are said to have been prominent white Virginia families.

Aunt Martha led the two girls through the business district and paused before her house that sat on a large plot of land. It came with a frontyard that bore a weeping willow and a walkway that was lined with rows of horse chestnut trees. The backyard was laden with apple trees; it was a real apple orchard. "Home at last," Martha was saying as they mounted the steps of the wide veranda. Louise, the girls' cousin "Lou," as they called her, ran out to meet them.

"Why didn't you let us know that you were coming today, Ma? I would have sent Tom to meet you. And who are these children?" exclaimed Cousin Lou. Martha said, "These are your Uncle Henry's children, and I have brought them home to live with us. Take them upstairs, Lou, and see that they wash their faces and hands clean before they come to supper."

Life with Aunt Martha was quite different from what it had been with her deceased mother. The pattern Lucy would subsequently follow was nurtured by the years she spent in the Price household. Martha was very strict. She was forty-five years old, tall, straight, and proud. Her sternness could have developed well before she married Robert Price, for she had worked for a rich white lady named Mrs. Pendleton. Serving as Mrs. Pendleton's maid, Martha assimilated culture, manners, stylish dressing, and all the characteristics of white society that she could possibly absorb. She believed that children should grow up to be God-fearing and to get a good education. She had pronounced ideas on dignity, morality, and religion, which she did not fail to impress on members of her family. When she brought Lucy and Charlotte into her home, she was a widow, and her sons, Will and Tom, and her daughter, Louise, supported her.

Presumably Martha's husband, Robert, had also influenced the Price home. Prior to his death, he had worked—from the 1840s through the post-Civil War era—at Virginia Military Institute (VMI) in Lexington as “a servant in the home of Superintendent Francis H. Smith. Smith family history credits Price, whom they called Old Bob, with gathering valuable personal and VMI papers and family silver and burying them in a gravesite just before the Union forces entered Lexington during ‘Hunter’s Raid’ in June 1864.”¹³ So, as was characteristic of so many of the homes of African Americans who worked for white folk, aristocratic trappings were unmistakable. “Old Bob” no doubt believed in education and also personified dignity, as was the role for African Americans who were suitable enough to work as servants in white folk's houses. His son, William, had succeeded his father at the military academy, but Tom stayed at home and took care of the orchard while Louise looked after the house.

The girls were given a large room upstairs at the back of the house with two windows where they could look out over the apple orchard. When she saw the orchard, like kids everywhere, Lucy's greatest yearning was to climb one of those trees and eat those beautiful apples.

They soon gathered around the supper table: Cousin Will, a tall, reddish-brown young man with a kind face; Tom, a sixteen-year-old awkward boy whose black eyes were full of mischief; Cousin Lou, a young woman of twenty with a plump figure and full, round face; Martha, Charlotte, and Lucy. Aunt Martha told Tom, “I want you to take Charlotte and Lucy to school in the morning. They might as well start in at once, for I expect they are both far behind where they should be.” Tom replied, “Why Ma, Lucy can't be behind, she's only five.” Lucy was grateful to Tom for defending her. Martha rejoined, “Well, she ought to know her letters anyhow, and I am sure she doesn't know A from B. Her mother didn't start her bringing up as I would have done.”

That night, after they had eaten supper and after decisions had been made that Tom would take the girls to school the next day, they returned to their room, and there, filled with grief and homesickness, cried themselves to sleep.

Aunt Martha made sure that her nieces had a good education. Schools in Virginia were segregated,¹⁴ requiring that the sisters attend the school for African Americans. In Lexington, the Randolph Street School was the only graded school for those children.¹⁵ The two girls had been enrolled only a month when the teacher sent a note home to Martha Price that Lucy had not learned her ABCs, and she had also been a nuisance for the teacher. Lucy detested school; she had never been still in her life, and Miss Harriet, her teacher, insisted that children had to be as still and as quiet as mice. Lucy's heart almost stopped beating. What would Aunt Martha say? All the boys and girls were staring at her, but she scarcely saw them. She began to feel rebellious and angry. Before she knew it, she told Miss Harriet, "I don't care if you do send a note home," whereupon the teacher punished her by sitting her in a corner alone. Was this behavior an early sign of stubbornness? Was she really recalcitrant? Or was it just being six years old?

Her aunt decided then and there that Lucy would be home-schooled. From nine in the morning until 12 noon, every day, including Saturday, Aunt Martha supervised the teaching, with Charlotte teaching the alphabet and Tom teaching reading, spelling, and arithmetic. After three years, Lucy returned to school and found herself far behind other children her age. Because of this break in grade level, she would be much older than her classmates when she later graduated from high school at age twenty-one.¹⁶ This period must have been one of the defining times for Lucy: not associating with children her own age, giving attention to learning, taking orders from both her sister and her brother as well as her aunt. There was no father present to assume the traditional role of ruler of the house; Aunt Martha was quasi-mother and father; she was the rule-maker. Why should she not have an impact upon who Lucy would become later in life?

Lucy related another story¹⁷ that illustrated her aunt's firmness. It was her recollection of John Hance. The son of Charles and Malinda Hance, John was about ten years older than Lucy.¹⁸ As the story goes, John Hance was a cross-eyed¹⁹ man who fascinated Lucy. He loafed at the post office corner every day. As groups of school children passed, he would glare at them, and they would run.

When John Hance died, Lucy wanted to view the remains. Her aunt emphatically forbade it. One day, on the way to school, however, a classmate persuaded Lucy to join her to see the corpse. When someone drew back the sheet, Lucy wrote, "One of those cross-eyes wide open glared menacingly at me. I was too frightened to scream."

That evening, Lucy's aunt instructed her to go upstairs and bring her eyeglasses, which were on the dresser. "I was afraid to go." Her aunt asked the second time. Lucy replied, "Yes, Aunt Martha, I heard you, but it is dark upstairs." Martha noted that Lucy had never been afraid of the dark before. Lucy burst into tears, and, when she was calm again, she told her aunt of her visit to view John Hance's remains.

"Aunt Martha listened with a look of suppressed amusement and said, 'I think you have been punished enough for your disobedience. I don't believe that I shall have any more trouble with your viewing remains, as you call it. I'll get my glasses myself.'" Lucy could have been genuinely afraid, or perhaps she was showing the earmarks of stubbornness, not particularly unusual considering her age.

Aunt Martha, of whom Lucy was dreadfully afraid, insisted that Lucy go to church with her every Sunday. Sunday was indeed a day of rest in Lexington. Everybody went to church. "Lucy, Lucy!" came the short crisp call up the stairs one bright July Sunday morning. "It's half past nine and time you were in Sunday School. Come down here immediately. Charlotte is ready and waiting for you." "Aunt Martha," Lucy pleaded, "I have a headache this morning. Can't I stay out in the yard in the cool?" "No!" came in an explosive tone, "Do you think that I am going to have a little heathen in my house? I never stay home from church and neither will you. Come down right now."

Down Lucy came and slowly started up the street with her sister to Sunday School and preaching services. The morning was hot and the outdoors alluring; hence, religious worship in a small church was torture for Lucy.

Martha's attitude toward going to church reflected a significant phenomenon of the late nineteenth century: African-American churches were enormously important organizations. The largest denominations were Methodist and Baptist congregations like the National Baptist Convention that was organized in 1895. Their churches became "solid and dynamic institutions,"²⁰ bringing the newly freed African Americans together not only to worship but also to make plans for the uplift of the race. In Lexington, Virginia, churches "occupied central places" in the lives of the African-American community. There "the community freely expressed its common culture and shared its common concerns . . . the churches became community centers in a very real sense."²¹

Lucy would later write that, "Religious worship in a small church was torture for me. I made up my mind that I would never know what the inside of a church looked like when I became a woman."

Continuing, Lucy noted, "There were some joyous times, even in my dignified Aunt's home." She was not allowed to run or to roll a hoop or climb a tree if her aunt saw her, but sometimes she did not see her. One

happy occasion came with the visit of James Stuart, the young man who was Cousin Louise's fiancé, and the departure of the bride to Washington, DC.

Lucy wrote, "We had just returned from seeing the bride off. How lonely the house seemed after Cousin Lou's departure. She had always been my friend, and many times I am sure her intercessions saved me from punishment. Now she had gone to Washington and I supposed I should not see her again."

"September slowly passed into golden October. The orchard hung heavy with red and yellow apples. I helped to pick them and store them in the cellar. One day, while I was sitting listlessly on a barrel in the cellar, Aunt Martha quietly entered. How long she had been standing before me, I did not know, for my mind was far away in Washington. I longed to see Cousin Lou, to see the big city, to stretch my wings, to fly."

"Is that the way you get your work done?" Aunt Martha was saying. I awoke from my reverie with a start.

"I was resting a little while," I answered.

"Only lazy people rest before their work is done," she added crisply. "Sit down again; I have something to tell you," she continued.

"I have been thinking that you and Charlotte have learned about all that you can learn in the school here, and so I have written to your brother about letting you both go to Washington to school." Lucy gasped, but was afraid to jump up and scream for joy, because Aunt Martha had a way of changing her mind about permitting her to do things, if she appeared too eager. Lucy wrote, "I sat as still as a mouse; but how my heart was beating!"

Martha continued, "I want you girls to have a better chance than I had, and than my children had. So, your brother, John, and I think it best to send you away from Lexington. You will live with Louise, and as soon as I can make some arrangements for Will and Tom here, I am coming to Washington, too." Lucy wrote that she "lived in a dream from that day until that memorable morning in the latter part of October, when I shook the dust of Lexington from my feet and faced the mysteries of the city of Washington."²²

1895: The Need to Leave Virginia

In September, 1895, Aunt Martha told Lucy that because she and Charlotte had learned just about all they could learn in the Randolph Street School, she wanted them to move to a city where they could get a good education.²³ They had then been living in Lexington for seven years. Like so many families of that era, their aunt wanted the girls to have "a better chance" than she had had and even a better education than she had provided for her own children. This view of education was not unusual. Rather, it was

a typical mantra for the times. Once African Americans were free, “Black mothers walked ten, fifteen, and twenty miles to put their children in school. They sacrificed and stinted. They bowed down and worshipped the miraculous ABCs from whom so many blessings flowed.”²⁴ Yet the quality of education in Southern states like Virginia was inferior to that available in most states farther north.²⁵ Thus, they had a decision to make: stay and submit their children to sub-standard education or leave. Aunt Martha decided to leave.

A bit of social and political history can help in understanding the setting that cradled Lucy. During those formative years in Lexington, Virginia, she was growing up in the aftermath of the Civil War. She was growing up in Jim Crow America.

The Civil War—also called the War Between the States—is said to have derived from several circumstances, one of which was disagreements among the states over the presence and economic value of slavery in the United States. Forced labor—slavery—of African Americans had been introduced into colonial North America in the 1600s.²⁶ For many years early in American history, wealthy Americans—especially Southerners—bought and sold slaves, a large majority of whom were brought from Africa.²⁷ Countless slaves worked at menial tasks, such as cotton farming and housekeeping, tending children, cooking, and yard work, while some others served at skilled tasks such as construction.

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, anti-slavery sentiment—abolitionism—grew in strength despite strong support of slavery among white Southerners. When the abolitionists and the slave holders reached an impasse, eleven Southern slave states seceded from the Union and formed the Confederate States of America. A sectional conflict ensued between the Confederacy and the Union, precipitating the Civil War. Fighting began on April 12, 1861, and lasted four years. In 1865 the Confederacy collapsed. The Emancipation Proclamation that freed the slaves had become effective on January 1, 1863. The War’s end “. . . brought to a close a period of enslavement that had lasted for almost 250 years.”²⁸

Although the age of Reconstruction—when African-American and white people went about their daily lives as equals—ensued, “Jim Crow”—a codified system of laws and practices designed to subordinate African Americans to whites—was taking root. These laws set African Americans aside in a class by themselves. A “new” social order, reinforced through violence and intimidation, it affected schools, public transportation, jobs, housing, private life, and voting rights. Cutting across class boundaries, Jim Crow united poor and wealthy whites in a campaign of aggression and social control while denying African Americans equality in the courts, freedom of assembly and movement, and full participation as citizens.²⁹

“The South universally hailed the disenfranchisement of the Negro as a constructive act of statesmanship. Negroes were viewed as aliens whose ignorance, poverty, and racial inferiority were incompatible with logical and orderly processes of government. Southern whites said that the Negro had done nothing to warrant suffrage.”³⁰

In the face of a culture that was as crushing and demeaning as this, what did African Americans do? They created “their own of everything”—a parallel universe. And, because they were not content for their lives, families, and institutions to be inferior in any respect, they set about to improve the quality of their group life as well as their achievements in business ownership and the professions.³¹

The Negro church had become a solid and dynamic institution. Large numbers in almost every city belonged to the AME [African Methodist Episcopal], the AMEZ [African Methodist Episcopal Zion], the Baptist and the CME [Colored Methodist Episcopal] churches. The secret fraternal orders, the Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias and others, had laid the basis for Negro insurance companies. In the same year, C. C. Spaulding and others organized the North Carolina Mutual Benefit Insurance Company. Two years later, Booker T. Washington and others organized the National Business League. There were four Negro banks, sixty-four drugstores and at least one millionaire. . . . By 1900, Negroes had more than \$500,000 invested in funeral homes. The professional class had grown to more than 47,000. There were 21,267 teachers, 15,528 preachers, 1,734 doctors, 212 dentists, 310 journalists, 728 lawyers, 2,000 actors and showmen, 236 artists, 247 photographers and one black congressman.³²

The word “Achievement” took on the form of a slogan. People heard it in churches and fraternal organizations. An African-American child growing up in an era like this could not help but be motivated to excel. The watchword of the African-American community was to get an education and “be somebody.” African-American teachers—often called “professor”—were teaching their pupils the best that they learned from their own limited schooling. Moreover, they taught them to “hold their heads high” in the expectation that one day they would be accepted as equals by privileged white people. The biblical words, “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free,” were often quoted as if they had been spoken directly to them. This, then, was the kind of environment in which Lucy was immersed.

Exhortations like these typically were heard on Emancipation Day, a celebration that became traditional for the first day of January each year at

least in the Eastern part of the United States. African Americans set aside this day once-a-year to not only celebrate the end of slavery but to inspire their people to move forward—not backward—in order to reach their goal of full equality.

Not only did 250 years of enslavement of African Americans plus the Civil War and its aftermath create the milieu in which Lucy Slowe grew up, another phenomenon is relevant. She was born on July 4, a day that is filled with meaning for America as it is the date America celebrates its independence from England. By the early 1800s, the traditions of parades, picnics, and fireworks were established as the way to commemorate the newfound freedom. It seems in keeping with the celebratory tone of July 4 that one of the biggest events on July 4, 1883, was the opening of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Staged at the Omaha, Nebraska fairgrounds, it featured a herd of buffalo and a troupe of cowboys, Indians, and vaqueros who reenacted a cattle roundup, a stagecoach holdup, and other scenes drawn from Cody's own life on the frontier.³³

Yet, thirty years before Lucy was born, Frederick Douglass, the acclaimed former slave and leading abolitionist, had given a starkly contrasting view of July the Fourth. It was a perspective that surely continued to resonate among freed African Americans even in the year of Lucy's birth. Douglass gave the speech at a meeting sponsored by (obviously an abolitionist group) the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society in Rochester, New York, where he said, in part:

What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages.³⁴

Regardless, then, of the parades, picnics and fireworks and even the debut of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, Douglass' commentary on July the Fourth is the one that helped to produce the sense of outrage she was to feel about racial conditions in America. It was as if she had been branded by it. Another of Douglass' declarations—"Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will"—was probably the drumbeat of the day. Throughout the 1880s in the South, whites removed African-American

officeholders and, by using intimidation, poll taxes, literacy tests, and violence, effectively robbed them of their rights as citizens. None would be surprised that the civil rights movements would capture the attention of this child once she became a woman. She had literally lived disenfranchisement. Frederick Douglass' commentaries then became the cradle in which she was laid, and this whole social and political history constitutes a significant backdrop to the life of Lucy Slowe as she moved into more of it as her aunt moved her up North.

Washington, DC, or Baltimore, Maryland?

Large numbers of African Americans who had been servants in white folk's houses did leave Lexington. They found homes in other states, determined to win distinction in the making of new American citizens.³⁵ Late in October, then, Martha Price gathered up her nieces, Lucy and Charlotte, and departed. If they traveled by train, they were required to board by separate stairs and sit in the Jim Crow—colored—section that was located in the front car that was closest to the coal-fired engine. There is no information concerning their sojourn in Washington. We next meet the sisters in Baltimore, Maryland, a city more than 200 miles north of Lexington. In Baltimore, the girls lived with Cousin Louise's family.

While Lucy was growing up in Baltimore, the city was becoming prosperous as a seaport and hub of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. This possibly accounts for the fact that the Price family had made its way—during what has been labeled the Great Migration—to this city along with hundreds of others displaced by the Civil War and its aftermath.³⁶ Baltimore—with 79,000 African Americans—had become one of seventy-two American cities with more than 5,000 African Americans.³⁷

It was a metropolis with the obligatory racially segregated schools. In 1896, the year following Lucy's move to the city, the Supreme Court issued the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision establishing the doctrine that was to legalize segregated schooling for the next fifty-eight years. Almost by definition, these schools set aside for African Americans were inferior to those for white children. Yet urban areas like Baltimore—unlike smaller rural areas—were ahead in educating their children. Some schools began to offer organized sports and other extracurricular activities. More and more women entered the teaching profession, and they started their own schools. Take Philadelphia, for example. Fanny Jackson Coppin became head of the Institute for Colored Youth in that city and trained teachers to work in the inferior schools provided for African-American children. She had graduated from Oberlin College in 1865.³⁸ In 1890, Jamie Porter Barrett also started a school in Philadelphia. Located in her home, it was called the Locust Street

Social Settlement. It became America's first such institution for African Americans. This system of schooling remained the law of the land until the *Brown v. the Board of Education* decision of 1954 that outlawed segregated public schools.³⁹

In Baltimore, Lucy and Charlotte shared the home of Martha Slowe Price's daughter, Louise.⁴⁰ "Cousin Lou" was now Mrs. Louise Stuart, and her household consisted of her husband, James, and their two daughters, one of whom was named Martha. Martha Stuart (later Doali), who was obviously named for her grandmother, would later state that they were one happy family.⁴¹ Martha Price, ever the attentive aunt, also moved into the Stuart residence. James Stuart supported this extended family, since neither his wife nor his wife's mother worked outside the home. Each summer, Martha Slowe Price would take her nieces back to Lexington for a vacation that they enjoyed immensely. Many years later, as a college student, Lucy would recall her experiences with the white folk during those summers in Lexington.

The Prices lived in a racially segregated section of Baltimore as a result of white citizens' determination to separate the newly arriving African Americans from white folk. "Municipalities gave sanction to this practice by enacting segregation ordinances."⁴² Baltimore, along with Louisville, Kentucky, Richmond, Virginia, and Atlanta, Georgia was one of the cities that passed the first group of these laws.⁴³

Baltimore was "a city that retained many of its Southern antebellum prejudices."⁴⁴ Children learned to recognize the sign "colored" even before they could read their names. Their lives depended on it. The town featured white-only schools, white-only cinemas, white-only libraries, and practically white-only everything else. Developments in the African-American community illustrate the strong need African Americans had to further the creation of a parallel universe. As a case in point, in 1892, *The Afro-American Ledger*—the first newspaper owned and operated by African Americans in Maryland—was established. In 1894, a group of leading African-American physicians opened Provident Hospital in Baltimore, a medical facility for their people.⁴⁵ African Americans opened the Lexington Savings Bank in 1896 for the African-American communities of Baltimore.

Lucy and Charlotte had been in Baltimore just one year before a group of middle-class African-American women founded the Colored Young Women's Christian Association (CYWCA). The creation of YWCAs in American cities was in response to the large numbers of migrants, primarily from Virginia—like the Slowses—and other states who were flocking to large northern cities.⁴⁶

Because Baltimore was a racially segregated city, African Americans were not welcome at the YWCA branch organized by white women. Thus, the CYWCA came into being in response to the need for racial uplift. African-American families were not alone; their community was there to

evangelize and provide them with parental supervision just as occurred in white neighborhoods.

Lucy, at age 12, began attending public schools in this city up North. True to the segregationist policies of the era, her school was designated for colored only. The Colored High School of Baltimore—opened in 1885—had been housed in the old City Hall on Holiday Street. Two years later, it was moved to a new building on Saratoga Street, near Charles. The Colored Polytechnic Institute that the City established five years later was combined in 1900 with the Colored High School, creating an enlarged curriculum that included academic subjects, manual training, and teacher training. Lucy graduated from that high school in 1904. She experienced a couple of “firsts:” she was a member of one of the first classes in a new building, and the building had African-American high school teachers for the first time.

The Afro-American Ledger regularly ran articles about the education of African Americans, commenting favorably on the new facility and its faculty.⁴⁷ The high school had the largest enrollment in its history in 1901, with 250 students in attendance. Responding to the demand, an additional story was added to the building, and the shops were improved.⁴⁸

Lucy was a bright student. Teachers and classmates remembered her for her scholarship and extensive student activities. Dwight O. W. Holmes, one of her high school teachers and her mentor for many years to come, noted that two girls—Lucy Slowe and Alethea H. Washington—placed number one and number two in each of their classes.^{49, 50}

Holmes, who became Lucy’s mentor, was in his thirties when he was teaching at the Baltimore Colored High School. He had earned the Preparatory Certificate from Howard University in 1896 and the AB degree in 1901.⁵¹ His father, John Alexander Holmes, “. . . was pastor of Baltimore Methodist Episcopal churches for a number of years.”⁵² It is not surprising that Dwight would develop a special relationship with Lucy. His father had grown up in Lexington, Virginia, where, as a youngster, he had attended Sunday School⁵³ and where he joined the Methodist Episcopal Church.⁵⁴ The Holmes’ acquaintance with Aunt Martha Price and her family was perhaps no accident, for their roots reached back to Lexington.

According to a high school classmate, Lucy was interested in a host of activities, including membership on the first basketball team organized for high school girls, student government, and the Girls’ Club Program.⁵⁵ Basketball had just been introduced to America in 1891. Women were increasing their participation in sports, as the catch phrase, “The New Woman,” was used to describe the women who rebelled against restrictive Victorian dress of the day.⁵⁶ Many women were also active in the suffrage movement. Thus, student government with girls participating was a sign of the times. It would not be until 1920, however, that women would finally

be given the right to vote, although, because of discrimination, African-American women who resided in the southern United States did not vote. Facts like these must have flooded Lucy's environment.

Lucy graduated in 1904 from the Colored High School as the second honor student at age 21, no doubt much older than her classmates. This was the largest class—28 girls and 12 boys—to finish that school. In the Class Day Exercises on June 4 at the Sharp Street Memorial Church, Lucy delivered the class oration, "A True Education." The title of her speech became a lifelong theme. At this point in her life, then, she already had her sights set on education.⁵⁷

Holmes described how Lucy came to him shortly after she became his student to seek advice concerning her future. "Of only one thing was she certain then, that was, she intended to do something and to be somebody. The fact that she had no money and no place to get money did not seem to be a serious difficulty at all. 'Is it not time,' asked she, 'that students earn their expenses in college by working?' When I told her that I had known boys to do that but that girls so far had done very little to help themselves, she replied, 'Well, I'll be a pioneer.'"⁵⁸ She was on her way to discovering she could take control of her education, and from that she could learn to take control of her life.

Lucy had no way of knowing then that Holmes would remain a presence in her life over the next thirty years, helping to guide her, helping to open doors. Already, at age twenty-one, Lucy revealed that she was ambitious. She had an unflinching, pioneering spirit, the urge to achieve, to be somebody—all of the teachings that had molded Lucy at home, in church, and in school characterized Lucy throughout the rest of her life. She was going to "make a way out of no way." This incident epitomized a pattern as to how she would approach a challenging situation. Aunt Martha's nurturing was key to who she was. The stories about life with Aunt Martha help explain her proclivity to Christianity and church attendance, to manners, to morals, to scholarship, to refinement—qualities that remained with her to the end of her life. Aunt Martha set the stage.⁵⁹