

PIONEERING BLACK SCHOOLS SECOND TO NONE

EMANCIPATED TO EDUCATE

Former Birmingham resident Esther King Casey was one of the first Black¹ public school teachers in the U.S. South to rise up from slavery and emancipate her community by way of the schoolroom.² She was described as cultured and refined with speech “surprisingly devoid of the usual Negro dialect.”³ Her most vivid childhood memory was walking with her father past President Abraham Lincoln “hanging” (as an effigy) in the courthouse square, riddled with the bullets of Confederate soldiers embittered by their Civil War defeat. After the Emancipation Proclamation, most freed Blacks were “leased out” to plantation owners and continued to work under an oppressive and exploitive sharecropping system not too far removed from slavery.⁴ Casey fared better than most Blacks, however. After her family’s emancipation, similar to many freed Blacks, Casey remained with her mother and the wife of her former slave owner, Susan King, to whom she referred as “the White lady.” King was one of many Civil War widows left to manage the plantation after her husband, Captain Henry King, went off to, and later died in, war. She taught Casey to read and write as a child during slavery, and then insisted that Casey’s mother enroll her in the newly opened school for freed Blacks. Whether King was anxious to abide by new laws requiring former slave owners to care for and educate freed Black children until age fifteen is not clear,⁵ but she willingly assumed responsibility for paying the required monthly school fees of fifty cents as long as Casey remained under her care. When Casey turned eighteen, she had acquired enough education to qualify her to become a teacher. She taught for three years before marrying Jim Casey, and eventually moved to Birmingham under her grandson’s care.

For Esther King Casey’s generation, the long civil rights struggle for educational equity began shortly after the Civil War ended. The end of the

Civil War brought an influx of freed Blacks to Birmingham, which was founded in 1871, and other cities in the U.S. South in search of a better way of life.⁶ During slavery, Blacks in Alabama were generally forbidden from being taught to read and write, and poor Whites were not much more literate.⁷ Therefore, the establishment of schools was the first order of business for White and Black Alabamians alike but it proved to be an uphill battle in a post-Civil War state whose economic livelihood was practically decimated by the legal dismantling of slavery. An anti-public education sentiment, deeply rooted in the American South's colonial period and continuing into the modern era, also undermined early efforts to establish public schools in Birmingham and its surrounding Jefferson County seat.⁸

While White Alabamians appealed to prominent local business and civic leaders for new schools, Black Alabamians had to rely more heavily on their own communal efforts and support from Northern White philanthropists and missionaries.⁹ As a result, the first school for freed Blacks in Alabama was established in Huntsville in 1863 in partnership between a U.S. Army base and a Northern missionary board.¹⁰ A Freedmen's Bureau followed in 1865, serving as the federal government's primary vehicle for relief and rehabilitation in Alabama's first freedmen's schools established in 1866.¹¹ The American Missionary Association (AMA) was the predominant mission group in Alabama advocating education for Black people in the post-Civil War era.¹² While the Freedmen's Bureau primarily provided the physical building infrastructure, the AMA mostly recruited and paid an integrated teaching staff to work in Black schools.¹³

Black education during the Reconstruction era was regarded as the responsibility of the federal government and private philanthropy rather than as a local government function.¹⁴ Despite this view, Black Reconstructionist legislators, community members, and educators fought painstakingly to establish schools for Black children in Alabama.¹⁵ Yet in the midst of their self-determination, it was the intent of many White Southerners to relegate Black education to a substandard system dictated by White benevolence rather than by state-mandated support.¹⁶ As Bullock concluded, the late nineteenth century marked the beginning of a very long period of Black education that placed the interest of Black children "out of the mainstream of American culture and into the bayous."¹⁷

There was a glimmer of hope for Blacks in 1867 when delegates to the Alabama Constitutional Convention, which included eighteen Black Alabama legislators out of nearly one hundred, laid the foundation for a state-supported school system for Black and White children.¹⁸ However,

the constitution did not materialize without racial political strife. Black legislators fought vociferously against an amendment to establish racially segregated schools.¹⁹ Although the amendment failed to pass, it foreshadowed a system of educational apartheid that would become commonplace in Alabama.²⁰ The contingent of White legislators who aimed to thwart Black education, even if it meant dismantling the state's fledgling public education system altogether, finally had its day in 1875 when it replaced the 1867 constitution with one that called for abolishing the state board of education, reducing administrative expenses, forbidding payments to any denominational or private school, and mandating racially separate schools.²¹ Throughout the Reconstruction era White legislators in Alabama and across the South were unrelenting in their schemes to allocate money inequitably for Black versus White public schools.²² Between 1875 and 1891 these legislators passed several constitutional amendments intended to thwart and eventually dismantle Alabama's fledgling public education system writ large in order to circumvent racial integration and Black progress.

In the midst of Reconstruction-era political battles, Birmingham's Black community continued to press forward to establish schools for their children. The public school was paramount of any government service for Birmingham's recently freed Black community. Unlike Black-owned and -operated organizations such as churches and fraternal associations, which were sustained by small leadership staffs, the Black community was hard put to sustain an adequate teaching force solely on its own resources.²³ Public schools depended in large part on tax revenue collected and allocated by the White-dominated state and local governments, which meant that the advancement of Black education often involved wrangling and compromising with White public officials.²⁴

Birmingham's first school for White children was opened for occupancy in March 1874.²⁵ The land deed drafted by Elyton Land Company stipulated that the school be built "for the white children now residing in, and who may reside hereafter in said city for no other purpose and use whatever. The school is to be taught by white teachers."²⁶ It was not until the Black community petitioned the board of aldermen in 1876 for "a free colored school" that they made headway in establishing its first publicly supported school for Black children.²⁷ In response, the only contribution the board made was an agreement to hire and compensate a teacher.²⁸ The building itself was to be provided by the Black community. In 1882 the mayor appointed a committee to select a lot for the erection of the first Black school.²⁹ It was in 1883, nine years after the establishment of the

first school for White children, that Black children in Birmingham finally were able to attend their own quasi-public school on the north side of the city, followed by a second school on the south side in 1884.³⁰ Although Birmingham's emergent Black public schools were supported by White Northern philanthropic societies and some White Birmingham school and civic leaders, by and large the Black community had to rely upon its own toil and resources to educate Black children.³¹ Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Black educators in Birmingham joined ranks with local businessmen and community leaders to establish schools, upgrade facilities, advocate for higher teacher salaries, garner resources for faculty and students, and promote racial pride through Black History programs and curricula.³² In the absence of this persistent agitation for resources, Birmingham's Black citizens would not have progressed as far as they did during the Jim Crow era, which is comparable to the experience of Blacks throughout the U.S. South.³³

BIRMINGHAM EDUCATORS AND BOOKER T. WASHINGTON: PARALLELS AND INTERSECTIONS

Booker T. Washington's Campaign to Build Black Schools

While Black citizens worked tirelessly to establish Birmingham's first public schools, Booker T. Washington was initiating an ambitious plan to educate Blacks throughout the rural South, West, and Mid-Atlantic regions with the help of the Black community and several prominent and interconnected White Northern philanthropists and civic leaders, namely, George Foster Peabody, John F. Slater, Julius Rosenwald, and Anna T. Jeanes.³⁴ Peabody, a native of Massachusetts, a Baltimore, Maryland, merchant, and a London banker, established the Peabody Educational Fund in 1867 to promote common school education and assist in establishing a permanent system of public schools in impoverished areas of the South and Southwest.³⁵ Notably, Washington also received philanthropic support from a prominent White Alabamian and former state-legislative opponent of Black education, Jabez L. M. Curry, who became the chief agent of the Peabody Fund.³⁶ Washington's vision for Tuskegee Institute benefited from the Peabody Fund's shift in direction to support normal schools focused on teacher training in 1880.³⁷ In addition, Slater, a native of Norwich, Connecticut, was inspired by Peabody's philanthropic suc-

cess and started a fund in 1882 to support Black schools, namely teacher training programs.³⁸

The most well-known of Washington's philanthropic relationships was with Illinois businessman and philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, who served as president and later chairman of Sears, Roebuck & Company.³⁹ Rosenwald launched into large-scale philanthropy during his fiftieth birthday when he gave away \$700,000, a portion of which went to Tuskegee Institute. He also set aside a notable sum of this investment to partner with Washington to establish Black schools in primarily poor rural areas throughout the U.S. South. In the long run, the ambitious Rosenwald Fund project invested an estimated four million dollars to build nearly five thousand schools across a swath of states between Texas and Maryland. But the Washington-Rosenwald vision could not have been realized without the strong monetary and nonmonetary support of Black community members, which included a number of educators.⁴⁰ Black teachers, principals, and curriculum supervisors, referred to as "Jeanes Supervisors" after their namesake the Anna T. Jeanes Fund, which based its program on the ideas of Black teacher and school founder Virginia Randolph, led community campaigns to raise thousands of dollars for schools.⁴¹ As one author noted, "Local people did not wait for someone to offer them a Rosenwald school."⁴² Notably, of the total dollars expended on Rosenwald Schools over the years, 64 percent came from publicly collected taxes, 17 percent was invested by the Black community, 15 percent was donated by Rosenwald and the Rosenwald Fund, and only 4 percent came from other private white donors.⁴³ In Alabama, the Black community's donations exceeded contributions made by Whites, tax funds, and Rosenwald.⁴⁴ Yet only one school in the Birmingham area, Miles Memorial College, which would later be named Miles College, is recorded as receiving a Rosenwald Fund grant in 1929 to upgrade its library resources.⁴⁵

Booker T. Washington is widely acknowledged to be the foremost leader in Black education during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the fact that he hailed from Alabama made his influence even more formidable among Birmingham's Black turn-of-the-twentieth-century education pioneers.⁴⁶ His endorsement of industrial education afforded many formerly enslaved Black Americans like himself with a practical education and a modest trade. This educational philosophy resonated with his worldview and humble beginnings. However, his approach to Black progress was not embraced universally by some of his Black contemporaries who advocated a classical or Black heritage curriculum and more

direct confrontations to Jim Crow.⁴⁷ Yet, his approach appeased many White Northern and Southern philanthropists and business leaders, with Rosenwald being one of his most ardent supporters.⁴⁸ As one scholar noted, “Washington was extremely skilled at wearing masks and operating behind the scenes.”⁴⁹ His critics, however, contended that his accommodationist tactics in soliciting White philanthropic support for Black schools undermined the aims of equality and reinforced second-class citizenship for Blacks in the U.S. South. This criticism was validated to some degree in Birmingham where in 1907 Blacks were used as common laborers in the steel industry.⁵⁰ Local White media and school leaders rationalized Black workers’ relegation to unskilled and semiskilled labor by demeaning their intelligence.⁵¹ Notably, Birmingham Public School (BPS) superintendent John Herbert Phillips, often characterized as a loyal supporter of Black education, once claimed, “Whatever anthropologists may report, the black race is to all intents and purposes a young race; therefore it is imitative.”⁵² Yet in spite of Washington’s often derided approach, his influence on Birmingham’s Black education pioneers was far-reaching.

Arthur Harold Parker and Birmingham’s First Black High School

While Booker T. Washington embarked on his mission to build Black schools throughout the South, one of his admirers, Arthur Harold Parker, was a leading figure in establishing Birmingham’s first Black high school.⁵³ Parker was a fair-skinned man with Caucasian features, born in Springfield, Ohio, in 1870 on the homestead his mother inherited from her former White slave owner and biological father. Both of his parents were products of a mixed ancestry of White, African, and Native American. His father was also born into slavery in Decatur, Alabama, although he escaped through the Underground Railroad, making his way all the way up to Canada.⁵⁴ His mother was raised and worked on a Virginia plantation where she was taught to write and read alongside the White children who lived in the main interior of the slave owner’s house, commonly referred to as “the big house.”⁵⁵

Parker attended an all-Black elementary school, but later enrolled in an integrated high school, which made him highly cognizant of his racial status in America. He recalled: “I remember well that I did not care for the high school as I did for the elementary school. Gradually, I came to understand.”⁵⁶ When his plans to attend Oberlin College were diverted by his parents’ physical incapacitation, he migrated to Birmingham in 1887 where his two uncles lived. One of his uncles encouraged him to pursue



Figure 1.1. Arthur Harold Parker, principal of Birmingham's first Black high school. Photo: Birmingham, Ala., Public Library Archives.

the teacher's examination. It was not difficult to convince Parker to pursue teaching because he held the profession in high esteem, recognizing it as one of the few routes Blacks could embark upon to become white-collar professionals. In 1888, Parker became only the thirteenth Black teacher in Birmingham when he accepted a position at Slater School. After grieving the losses of his mother and first wife, Parker pursued the principalship. Upon losing his second wife during childbirth, a despondent Parker left the education field briefly to work for the Internal Revenue Service. It was his third wife, Anna Gilbert, who encouraged him to return to teaching and administration in 1899.

When several prominent Black businessmen and community members petitioned the board of education for a high school in 1899, BPS

superintendent Phillips asked Parker to serve as the school's first principal. In his reflections on Phillips's invitational meeting with him, Parker recalled: "I gave him my word that I would roll up my sleeves and go to work with all my might. I never faltered in my faith and belief that we would succeed and Dr. Phillips never faltered in his help of me."⁵⁷ Parker assumed the helm of Industrial High School in September 1900 with eighteen students in one room on the second floor of the all-Black Cameron School building. Initially, he served as the school's first principal and teacher, eventually hiring two more teachers in the second and third year of his tenure. Over time, Parker would employ many well-credentialed Black educators who had been denied jobs in other sectors.⁵⁸ Many of Parker's newly hired teachers had master's degrees and doctorates from Northern universities and were eager to return to Birmingham to work.⁵⁹

Following in the footsteps of his role model, Booker T. Washington, Parker instituted a primarily industrial education curriculum. Although the curriculum emphasized industrial education, it also included a number of academic classes such as English, Algebra, Plane Geometry, Civics and History, including "Negro History," Science, and even Spanish.⁶⁰ In fact, the second teacher Parker hired during the school's early years, J. R. Coffey, made it clear that he was not interested in teaching industrial classes but rather academic classes such as science, philosophy, and foreign languages. Parker gave no indication that he failed to oblige Coffey's curricular preferences, but he found a kindred spirit in his third hire, Miss O. D. Kennedy, who assumed responsibility for teaching female students sewing, cooking, and singing skills.

Although Parker's endorsement of an industrial education curriculum has been characterized as an appeasement strategy akin to Washington's tactics, his penchant for industry was deeply rooted in his upbringing.⁶¹ As the second oldest of five children, Parker was responsible for a great deal of housecleaning. During his four years of high school he did all of the family's washing and ironing. As he reminisced: "Each Monday morning I would get my tubs, water and soap ready—put the clothes to soak and have them out by seven or eight o'clock."⁶² On Saturdays and alternating weekday afternoons, Parker would report to his father's barbershop to shine shoes and learn the barber's trade. By the time he graduated, as he put it: "I was holding down a barber's chair—with quite a number of regular customers."⁶³ One of Parker's former teachers, Carol W. Hayes, who would later become the longtime "Director of Negro Education" for the BPS, wrote in a foreword to Parker's autobiography that "[Parker], like the late Booker T. Washington, believed that the foundation

of every race must be laid in the common every-day occupations that are right about our doors.”⁶⁴

Since it was the only Black public high school in Birmingham at the time, Industrial High School drew its students from a cross-section of socioeconomic classes. Students traveled from diverse areas such as Woodlawn, South Birmingham, and the more middle-class communities of Smithfield and Enon Ridge. But some of Birmingham’s middle-class Black families opted to send their children to private schools because they did not approve of the industrial curriculum.⁶⁵ Ellen Tarry, who attended Industrial High School for her final year of school, recalled in her memoirs that some Black parents sent their children to boarding schools because of their aversion to the Birmingham Board of Education’s emphasis on industrial education for Blacks at that time. She recalled that “[m]any parents felt that our [Industrial] high school did not measure up and that their children would be handicapped by attendance there.”⁶⁶ Some parents became even more disenchanted upon receiving correspondence from their former neighbors who migrated to the North only to find that their children were retained in lower grades because “they had no Latin or French and found it impossible to keep up with their classes in mathematics.”⁶⁷

Oral histories of former Birmingham educators who attended Industrial High School as students in the 1930s reveal the indelible print of the city’s social class schisms. Gertrude Crum Sanders recalled that wearing school uniforms “was one of the best things that could have happened to the black folks” because they helped to mask social class differences.⁶⁸ She explained that she and her sister only had four dresses between them: “one on and one off, and when that one’s off it better be in the wash, getting ready for the next day.”⁶⁹ Similar to Black Pentecostal church culture, Sanders noted that girls could not wear lipstick or jewelry at Industrial High School.⁷⁰ She described the curriculum as including “cooking, sewing, washing and the laundry, [and] beauty culture.”⁷¹ Sanders recalled Parker summoning her to his office to her initial chagrin, only to learn that he had decided to skip her one grade level due to her high scholastic performance. But her memories of skin color discrimination were not as flattering, as she recounted her teachers’ preference for “half white girls” and conversely, their prejudice against darker-skinned students.⁷² However, the fact that Parker acknowledged her aptitude by promoting her a grade ahead demonstrates his egalitarianism in interacting with some of his darker-skinned students.

Undeniably, Parker was a member of Birmingham’s Black bourgeoisie, based on several factors.⁷³ First, he could readily trace his White heritage on both sides of his family. Second, he was visibly fair-skinned,

and no doubt often mistaken for White by many during his day. Third, he could boast of a family heritage of land and property inheritance as well as pre-Civil War emancipation and literacy. Finally, by virtue of his profession as a teacher and school administrator, he was a part of an educated and credentialed class. Yet in spite of his pedigree, Parker showed signs of leveling the playing field at Industrial High School. Once when a White news reporter mistook a female student who was sweeping the floors during his visit for a “janitress,” Parker laughed in jest at his misjudgment, noting that the girl’s father was one of the “most wealthy Negroes in the city.”⁷⁴ He proudly proclaimed to the reporter: “No difference who they are. When they enter high school they know that [they’re] going to have to work with brooms as well as with books.”⁷⁵

Parker was not only revered in his school but also in his professional associations and throughout the Birmingham community. In 1900, he was elected president of the Alabama State Teachers Association.⁷⁶ As a long-tenured principal, he went on to make major building and program improvements, which included moving the school to a new location that his students helped to renovate, and establishing a night school and a summer school for teachers. During an influenza epidemic in 1918, the school closed temporarily and was converted into a hospital where the students served the community as nurses. Parker received many distinctions from the Black community, including a Negro Citizens’ Loving Cup for “that citizen that had done the most for his race in 1924,” and an honorary Doctor of Letters from Miles College in 1933.⁷⁷ A former Industrial High School student, Juanita Waiters Clarke, recalled that Parker and her teachers were “revered by everybody and everybody in Birmingham knew them by name.”⁷⁸ In spite of the industrial curriculum critiques leveled by some Black middle-class parents, Ellen Tarry attested that she and her fellow Industrial High School classmates never wavered in their pride for their beloved school and principal: “I. H. S. was our school and we loved it. We loved our principal Professor A. H. Parker, too.”⁷⁹

However, Parker also had his fair share of critics in his day who winced at his perceived accommodationism in courting White patrons to support Industrial High School. A member of the Birmingham NAACP once complained that his silence on political equality for Blacks did more harm than good and made him a sellout.⁸⁰ Parker was known to acquiesce to Phillips’s requests for his high school choir to sing Negro spirituals in order to remain in his good stead.⁸¹ One common explanation for Parker’s tactics is that, similar to Booker T. Washington, he viewed accommodationism as a necessary evil to withstand in order to realize his vision for Black education

in Birmingham.⁸² But it is also likely that Parker genuinely liked Negro spirituals, and therefore, did not view showcasing this genre as self-abasement. Furthermore, the school's choir was well renowned throughout the Black community, and Parker scoffed at the notion that Negro spirituals were degrading. A chapter in his autobiography, "The High School as a Musical Factor" is devoted to highlighting Industrial High School students' musical acumen, especially in singing spirituals.⁸³ Parker also expounded on a May 1914 *Birmingham News* article, titled "Folk Songs of Negroes Praised by Dr. Phillips," where during a commencement program, Phillips was reportedly so moved by the Negro spirituals that he threatened not to grant Parker with an orchestra director, "lest they stop singing the spirituals."⁸⁴ The news reporter noted several "amens" and even weeping from the primarily Black audience when Phillips "declared [the spirituals] were born when the Negro race was in its tragic period."⁸⁵ It is quite probable that Parker's sentiments about industrial education and spirituals coincided with Phillips's paternalism, and that Parker exploited their commonality on these two matters for the good of his school and community.⁸⁶

Parker was also genuinely fond of Phillips and considered him to be a friend and ally. Phillips was arguably one of the most ardent White supporters of Black education in Birmingham at that time.⁸⁷ Even though his views on Black intelligence reflected the White supremacist thinking of his day, Phillips advocated fairly strongly for the establishment of Birmingham's Black public schools. His advocacy for Black schools aside, Parker spent time getting to know him personally during their trips between Tuskegee Institute, where Parker taught for five summers and Phillips was an annual keynote speaker, and Birmingham. During one trip, they encountered a violent thunderstorm that struck and killed several people in a "colored church."⁸⁸ Phillips got out of the car and assisted people until medical staff arrived. He was detained for over an hour, apparently ignoring Parker's warning that he would miss his train to Birmingham, which he did. On another excursion, Parker walked alongside a public highway to pick blackberries while waiting for a flat tire to be repaired, only to be accosted by a White man who forbade him from doing so. Phillips immediately got out of the car and intervened by asking the man when it became a crime to pick fruit on a public highway where private owners had no claim to its property rights.⁸⁹ Upon learning of Phillips's death, Parker attended his funeral and remained "until the last sad, touching rite was finished at his tomb."⁹⁰ A mournful Parker reflected: "As I turned away and almost groped my way back home, the feeling surged over me that I had lost one of the best friends that had yet touched my life."⁹¹

After serving as principal of the Industrial High School for thirty-nine years, Parker went into “semi-retirement” due to illness, serving briefly as principal emeritus and Director of Guidance for Negroes for the school board.⁹² Industrial High School was soon named after him. He died shortly after his retirement and was funeralized in the renamed A. H. Parker High School auditorium. By newspaper accounts, his reputation among Black and White Birmingham residents alike was admirable. The White-owned *Birmingham News* published elegiacally: “And now that the death which knows no color line has come to claim Dr. Parker, the mourning and the sense of loss transcend all racial lines.”⁹³ The newspaper went on to describe Parker’s important role in promoting positive race relations in the city, noting that “the always delicate and sensitive problems of race relationship found help in the sane and informed viewpoints of Dr. Parker.”⁹⁴ Many Birmingham residents during that time and since then believed that his dream “to see built in Birmingham a high school for Negro boys and girls that would be second to none in the South” was realized under his nearly forty-year tenure as Industrial High School’s inaugural principal.⁹⁵

Carrie Tuggle, Tuggle Institute, and Colored Women’s Clubs

Although prominent Black men helped found and establish Birmingham’s first Black schools, Black women were also important contributors. During the height of Colored Women’s Clubs at the turn of the twentieth century,⁹⁶ Black women educators in Birmingham fought for educational equality and voter enfranchisement.⁹⁷ Among these women, Carrie Tuggle is an exemplar.⁹⁸

Born into slavery, Tuggle overcame the poverty of her early life to become one of Birmingham’s prominent Black community leaders. In 1903 she founded Tuggle Institute, a combined school and home for poor Black children and youth, with only \$2.50. Tuggle was affiliated with a number of Colored Women’s Clubs such as the Courts of Calanthe, Knights and Ladies of Honor of the World, and Rising Sons and Daughters of Protection. She created the Rising Sons and Daughters solely for the purpose of supporting Tuggle Institute. Club members and Black community residents supported Tuggle Institute during a time when public monies generally supported White institutions. Many of Tuggle’s fellow club members served as teachers and administrators at the school. Tuggle also doggedly solicited support from Birmingham’s White philanthropic community. In fact, prominent White Birmingham businessmen and their



Figure 1.2. Carrie Tuggle, founder of Tuggle Institute. Photo: Birmingham, Ala., Public Library Archives.

wives, such as “Mr. and Mrs. Louis Pizitz” and “Mrs. A. B. Loveman,” lent their financial support to Tuggle Institute. Over time, Tuggle expanded her school’s wooden makeshift building to include an integrated academic and industrial curriculum, nursing training, music instruction, and character education. Tuggle also emphasized lessons on racial pride and self-esteem development using books written by Booker T. Washington and other Black leaders of her day.

Tragically, in 1919, when Tuggle was just shy of paying off the school building’s mortgage, the school burned down in a suspicious fire that killed two orphans. In response, Birmingham’s Black and White citizens banded together to raise funds to rebuild the school. Tuggle Institute’s teachers moved operations to a nearby church and did not miss a beat with respect to teaching and caring for the children. Despite these struggles, Tuggle Institute was rebuilt and touted as “one of the most effective and beneficial institutions of the South.”⁹⁹

There are notable commonalities between Tuggle and her Black school-founding contemporaries. Tuggle and Washington shared a common heritage of being born into and later progressing “up from slavery.”¹⁰⁰ Akin to Washington and Parker, Tuggle was successful in soliciting funding from prominent Whites in the U.S. South who were a far cry from being diehard advocates for the Black community’s advancement. For example, Hugo Black, a controversial Alabama figure who had ties to the Ku Klux Klan, yet later became a “liberal” Supreme Court Justice who ruled in favor of *Brown* and other desegregation cases, served on Tuggle Institute’s advisory board.¹⁰¹ The Institute actually originated from Tuggle’s plea during her early career as a social worker to a court judge not to send two young juvenile delinquents to prison but rather to her home for her loving brand of reform. Some of Birmingham’s prominent Black residents at that time, for example, A. G. Gaston, credited Tuggle for rescuing them when their lives were spiraling out of control.¹⁰²

Although the Institute initially emphasized an academic curriculum, Tuggle eventually adopted Washington’s model of industrial education. Similar to Washington, she encountered criticism for adopting the industrial education curriculum. Her advocacy of industrial education may have even put her at odds with her son-in-law, Oscar W. Adams Sr., a successful leader and publisher of the Black-owned newspaper *The Birmingham Reporter*, who might have had “Du Boisian” philosophical leanings.¹⁰³ Yet in spite of her characterization by some as an accommodationist, Tuggle was the first Black woman to register to vote in Jefferson County, and often was called upon to vouch for many other Black women to be permitted to register, including a number of teachers.

Unfortunately, Tuggle suffered more tragedies after the deadly fire. One of her two daughters, Mamie Adams, who was a prominent civic leader in her own right, preceded Tuggle in death. Furthermore, the never-ending need for fundraising also took a tremendous toll on her. Consequently, she was in confinement for six months prior to her death due to exhaustion and an emotional breakdown. Upon her death in 1924, the *Birmingham News* remembered her as the “female Booker T. Washington.”¹⁰⁴

Indiana Little: Colored Women’s Club Activist and Educator

Notably, a lesser-known contemporary of Tuggle’s, Birmingham women’s club member, and teacher Indiana Little paid an even higher price for her voting rights activism.¹⁰⁵ As a part of a larger campaign for Black Alabamians to recoup voting rights lost after the adoption of the infamous

1901 Alabama Constitutional Convention, in 1926 Little led a thousand Black women and men to the Jefferson County Board of Registrars to demand their right to vote. Little charged the board of registrars with giving intelligence tests to Blacks but not to Whites. She was arrested and charged with vagrancy and disorderly conduct. Regrettably, the board of registrars did not budge in its position and none of the group members were registered on that day. But Little's protest eventually mobilized Black community protest ten years later. It would not be until thirty-one years later that Little would become a registered voter, at age fifty-five.

FOUNDING HBCUS AND NORMAL SCHOOLS IN BIRMINGHAM AND ALABAMA

The early efforts of Birmingham's Black citizens to establish schools for their children resulted in twenty-four elementary schools and two high schools by 1939.¹⁰⁶ Establishing elementary and secondary public schools proved to be an uphill battle. An equally ambitious project was to build higher education institutions to train Black professionals. Given that teaching was one among a few professional careers that educated Blacks could pursue at that time, the establishment of teacher training programs, or normal schools as they were called during that time, was especially important. The demand for Black teachers was especially pressing given that many Blacks were confined to teaching in private versus public schools. A 1918 report of the U.S. Commission on the Southern States underscored Black underrepresentation in the teaching field, documenting that Black educators comprised only 36,920 or 17.4 percent of the region's 211,900 teachers while Blacks made up 30 percent of the U.S. South's population.¹⁰⁷ The advancement of Black education in the U.S. South during the early twentieth century depended desperately on the bolstering of teacher training programs.¹⁰⁸

The founding of HBCUs was critical for advancing Blacks' struggle for educational equity after slavery. Once again, Booker T. Washington was at the forefront of this ambitious project in Alabama. Washington and others founded Tuskegee Institute in 1881, where he employed a primarily industrial education curriculum.¹⁰⁹ His efforts benefited from the Peabody Fund's shift in 1880 from focusing on elementary schools to normal schools.¹¹⁰ Through this new emphasis, Washington was able to secure Peabody funding for Tuskegee Institute, Talladega College, and the state normal schools in Huntsville and Montgomery.¹¹¹ The Jeanes Fund also gave generously to Alabama's Black higher education institutions, especially Tuskegee Institute.¹¹² A particularly large endowment of

training site for Black teachers in Birmingham in the late nineteenth century throughout the twentieth century. The college originally had grammar school and “normal preparatory” sections, with an overwhelming majority of Black women in the student body. In the 1909–10 academic year, Miles College educated 139 female students out of a total of 158 students in the grammar, sub-normal, normal preparatory, and college preparatory classes. Willie Selden McDaniel became the first woman to receive a bachelor’s degree from Miles in 1918 and entered the teaching profession, as did most of Miles College’s female graduates. Unlike many other HBCUs in the U.S. South, Miles offered a number of classical education courses, including Greek, Latin, literature, and rhetoric. But the curriculum also included traditional industrial education classes. Both Miles College and ASU would later become hotbeds of civil rights activity during the height of the civil rights movement in Birmingham and Montgomery respectively.¹¹⁹

FROM AN EPIC TO A COLLECTIVE NARRATIVE

Birmingham educators began setting the stage for their involvement in the mid-twentieth-century phase of the civil rights movement as early as the city’s establishment in 1871. The fight for public schooling began with Reconstruction-era Black state legislators advocating for the legal foundation to educate Black children. This fight continued when Black educators such as Booker T. Washington, A. H. Parker, and Carrie Tuggle joined ranks with community leaders and educators to establish schools of their own. The historical record bears out that it took a strategic, multipronged plan of action to petition White-dominated local and state governments for the establishment of public schools for Black children, raise money, garner land and pool together nonmonetary resources from the Black community, and solicit support from White Northern and a few Southern philanthropists while alternately trying to temper violence and threats to Black livelihood and progress by appeasing (at least on the surface) White Southerners.

Notably, the figures featured in this chapter have more name recognition than other unsung educators in Birmingham’s and Alabama’s history and folklore. Those educators who pursued what some historians and observers have described as an accommodationist approach to advancing Black education have been memorialized in the names of contemporary Birmingham City Schools—Booker T. Washington Elementary School, A.

H. Parker High School, and Carrie A. Tuggle Elementary School. In the case of Carrie Tuggle, White civic leaders of her day led the campaign to memorialize her legacy.¹²⁰ Yet there are no visible historical markers honoring firebrand educators such as Indiana Little, who chose a more conventional activist approach to challenge Jim Crow. Furthermore, it is difficult to determine exactly how many other Black educators during Little's day chose conventionally activist strategies because their reputations were typically sullied by their bold actions, a reality that disqualified them from being heralded as "credits to their race" and thereby overshadowed their legacy in the history of education and civil rights canons.¹²¹ But it is important to note that Birmingham educators with a more prominent history were not immune from retribution. The suspected arson of Tuggle Institute is a case in point. Reportedly there were two foiled arson attempts prior to the one that was sinisterly successful.¹²² Even A. H. Parker alluded to the suspiciousness of another fire that burned down the all-Black Thomas School in 1894, recalling: "How it caught [on fire] was never known."¹²³

Not only have familiar narratives about Birmingham's and Alabama's early education pioneers focused primarily on educators often characterized as accommodationist, these narratives also tend to emphasize the feats of heroic figures striving almost singlehandedly (with the exception of their reliance on support from prominent Whites) to establish elementary and secondary schools and HBCUs. But these educators were actually part of an elaborate, interconnected network of local, state, and national Black educators whose existence is virtually absent in civil rights history and underplayed in many histories of education.¹²⁴ Of utmost concern to these educators was the establishment of a physical and academic educational infrastructure for Black children. Their second and concurrent order of business was to organize themselves to promote educational equity for students *and* educators.