African-American women were a visible presence in Hunter College from its earliest days. Class photographs, yearbook pictures and student publications attest to the diversity of the student body and the range of activities available to all students. Clockwise from top: a graduation picture from 1893, Patricia Williams, Secretary of the 1940-1941 Student Council, the 1932 Yearbook photograph of Dorothy Williams, treasurer of the Hunter Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta national writing fraternity and on the staffs of both the student newspaper, The Bulletin, and the yearbook, The Wistarion. Pictures of students of various ethnic backgrounds appeared routinely in college publications.

This article discusses the history of African-American women at Hunter College from the first year of their admission in 1873, to the year the institution ceased to be an all-women's college in 1945. This history is particularly important in view of the enormous resistance and opposition that African-American women experienced in their attempts to attend predominantly white institutions of higher education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

African-American Women and Hunter College: 1873-1945

Linda M. Perkins

IN HER SEMINAL STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF women's higher education, *In the Company of Educated Women*, Barbara Miller Solomon was the first to observe that Hunter was unique in its inclusive treatment of women from diverse social, religious and racial backgrounds. She noted that, after Oberlin College, in Ohio, and Kansas State University, Hunter enrolled more African-American women prior to the 1950s than any other institution that was not a Black college.[1]

Throughout the nineteenth century, opportunities for African-American women to attend institutions of higher education were extremely limited. In the South, slavery and later the lack of adequate public primary and high school education kept most African-Americans from attending college. As a result, although institutions called 'colleges' were established for African-Americans during and after the Civil War, until the first two decades of the twentieth century most of these were actually elementary and high schools. In the North, while African-Americans did have access to primary education, it was usually in segregated schools.

Although white female seminaries emerged in the North and in New England during the early and mid-nineteenth century, few African-American women were allowed to attend. When Prudence Crandall, a Quaker abolitionist, admitted an African-American student to her Canterbury Female Boarding School in Connecticut in 1833, the parents of the white students threatened to withdraw their daughters from the school. Crandall closed the school and later reopened it as a boarding and teacher-training school solely for African-American young women. Local opposition then induced the town to pass a law barring schools which admitted out-of-state African-Americans or those who were not residents of Canterbury. Crandall was jailed, and the school was vandalized and burned. After she married in 1834, Crandall abandoned all attempts to establish a school for African-American girls.[2]

In an important move for African-Americans, Oberlin College, established by abolitionists, announced in 1833 that it would admit women and Blacks on the same basis as white men. Many African-American families valued education so highly that they relocated to Oberlin to enable their children, both male and female, to have access to the college. In 1850, for example, when Blanche V. Harris, was denied admission to a female seminary in Michigan, her entire family moved to Oberlin. Similarly, Mary Jane Patterson's parents moved to Oberlin from North Carolina in the 1850s. Patterson became the first African-American woman to earn a college degree (1862), and three other Patterson women and one man followed her lead. By 1910, more that 400 African-American women had attended Oberlin College.[3]

While educational opportunities for African-Americans residing in the North were far greater than those in the South, they were still limited. Public education was primarily separate and unequal, except in small towns and rural areas, and attendance in high school was difficult and rare. In Albany, New York, for example, African-American parents had sent their children to Wilberforce School (a Black public school) since before the Civil War. However, when the parents petitioned for admission to the all-White Albany Free Academy, a public school for advanced work and superior students, their children were refused admission until 1871.[4]

In his study on the education of African-Americans in New York State, Carlton Mabee notes that, of the more than 150 academies in the state

Marion Wilson Starling,'28 participated actively in the life of the College. Her yearbook entry indicated that she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and majored in latin.
Her other activities included the Varsity Costume Committee, Secretary and Treasurer of Writers' Club, Make-up Box, Classical Club, President of Writers' Club, Vice-President of Journalism Club, Classical Club, Editor of Classical Club Paper, and the English Club.

Class photograph, 1884. African-American women were admitted to the Normal College on the same basis as all others, but until the mid-twentieth century, their numbers were small. The few who enrolled often appeared surrounded by a sea of white faces.

from 1840 to 1860, probably only eight accepted African-Americans.[5] In 1870, frustrated by the limited opportunities for higher education, several prominent African-Americans proposed establishing a Black college named after the Haitian revolutionary leader, Toussaint L'Ouverture. Others opposed the plan, fearing that such self-segregation would result in permanently segregated schooling and, as a result, the proposal never came to fruition.[6]

For Blacks in New York City, public education was limited to four segregated elementary schools known as Colored Schools 1, 2, 3, and 4. African-American teachers for the segregated schools received their training primarily at the Colored Normal School, available to them only on Saturdays. Although New York State legislation in 1873 barred discrimination in public education on the basis of race, the law was not always enforced.[7] Hunter College was an exception.

Hunter, originally the Female Normal and High School but soon renamed the Normal College, was established as the counterpart to all-male City College. Its primary purpose was to provide the city with a steady supply of well-trained teachers for the rapidly expanding public school system, although graduates were not required to teach. It was the only public school offering education to girls and women beyond the eight years of primary and grammar school: despite its name, it was New York City's first public high school for girls.[8]

Admission to Normal College (and City College) was based solely on examination scores, age and residency requirements. This was unusual. Equally important, the College was tuition free. In 1873, eight African-American women from the Colored Schools qualified for and were admitted to the Normal College. The Annual Reports listed the names and examination scores of all entering students, as well as the public school each had attended. From 1873 until 1882, when the Colored Schools were finally abolished, the number of 'colored' students admitted appeared as a separate category.[9] The socioeconomic background of these students was as varied as that of their white counterparts. Occupations of African-American parents listed in the registrar's records included: janitor, laundress, seamstress, waiter, clerk, teacher, cook, coachman, caterer, steward, merchant, sexton, and rector.

Mary A. Lewis was admitted as an advanced student in the first class of African-Americans to attend the College and was the first to graduate in 1874, with an 85 average. Laura Adair and Annie Lawrence Dias graduated in 1876. Two others who entered in the first group left prior to graduation to accept teaching positions; another student never enrolled and one left to study music.[10]

In 1874, another eight African-American women were admitted, although only half enrolled. Of the four who attended, only one, Mary Lane, graduated, in 1880. The other three left the institution due to "continued absences." Interestingly, as more and more African-American women attended predominantly white public schools after the abolition of separate schools, the number of African-Americans admitted to Hunter declined. By 1881, only one woman was admitted out of a total of 808 accepted students.[11]

It is possible that the drop in the number of African-American women accepted to Hunter was a reflection of the fact that, until the turn of the century, their prospects for a teaching position in the city schools were slim or non-existent. Blacks had been employed as teachers only in the segregated schools, and these positions were abolished by the early 1880s. As a result, few bothered to take the Hunter entrance examination.

It is unclear where most of the fifty-six African-American women who attended Hunter by 1890 were ultimately employed. Two of the ten African-American teachers working at the Black public school in Brooklyn in 1887 were Hunter graduates. Susie Frazier, '87, was placed on the city's list of teachers eligible for appointment upon graduation but was passed over repeatedly for a permanent position. In the 1890s, she visited the ward trustees and members of the school board to appeal, unsuccessfully, for racial justice. In 1895, she hired an African-American attorney to bring suit against the school board but failed also in this attempt. Finally, after using political influence, Frazier was given a permanent appointment to a school.[12]

Although Frazier was a 'first,' equity in obtaining a teaching position in the city's public schools remained a formidable challenge for African-Americans. In Sadie and Bessie Delany's best-selling memoirs, *Having Our Say*, the sisters recalled the difficulty African-Americans continued to have in becoming teachers in the city's public schools — particularly in a predominantly white school. In 1930, Sadie became the first African-American to teach domestic science in a white high school in New York. When she had begun teaching in 1920, she had been assigned to a predominantly African-American school in Harlem. She remembered that "this was a typical assignment of a colored teacher. [The New York Board of Education] most certainly did not want us in schools where the children were white. The parents would object."[13] When Delany reached the top of the seniority list for the position available at a white high school, she applied for the post but deliberately failed to appear for the personal interview, claiming that there had been "a mix-up in the appointment." Delany later boasted that "the plan worked! Once I was in, they couldn't figure out how to get rid of me."[14]

Another reason for the dramatic decline in the number of African-American students admitted to Hunter in the 1880s and '90s may have been that the growth of schools for African-Americans in the South during Reconstruction and the later decades of the nineteenth century attracted many northerners to that region. Teachers were desperately needed in those schools and many were hired without diplomas or degrees. The registrar's record at Hunter noted that African-American students often left school "to teach."

Thomas Hunter wrote lengthy comments in his annual reports, but other than the numerical listings of the African-American women, he made no mention about their entrance into the College. In his *Autobiography*, published posthumously by his daughters, Hunter recalled that only two of the thirty-five faculty members at the Normal College objected to the presence of the African-American students. He separated the students, placing two of them in each class and assigning the darkest women to the classes of the faculty members who objected to their admission. Hunter noted also that there was no opposition on the part of students to the admissions from the Colored Schools.[15]

The lack of fanfare about the admission of African-American women to the Normal College was highly unusual. African-American scholar W.E.B. DuBois kept close accounts of African-American college students and graduates. In 1910, he was appointed editor of *The Crisis* magazine, the journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. During his editorship, a special issue each August was devoted to higher education and included photographs of graduates of both Black and White institutions. Photos and names of Hunter graduates were often portrayed. These issues also carried letters from African-American students who wrote of their experiences in white colleges. As early as 1900, DuBois had noted the difficulty that many African-American women experienced in attempting to gain entrance into white women's colleges. In his study, "The College-Bred Negro," DuBois asserted that it was easier for an African-American male to gain entrance into a White male college than for an African-American woman to gain entrance into a White women's college, concluding that the women's colleges were "unyielding" in their prejudices against African-American women.[16]

It was particularly difficult to gain entrance into the elite Seven Sister Colleges.[17] In 1913, after an unpleasant dispute over the question of housing an African-American woman at Smith College, the Seven Sister campuses were polled on their policies. Only Wellesley College affirmed a policy of nondiscrimination in housing and admissions. Mt. Holyoke, Vassar and Bryn Mawr stated that they did not admit African-Americans at all.[18] These colleges were thought to represent finer womanhood and to be the epitome of culture and learning; such

Normal College students welcomed President Benjamin Harrison to New York for the celebration of the Centennial of the United States Constitution, 1889.

attributes were not considered compatible with the white conception of African-American women.[19]

Although there is no record of opposition to the admission of African-American women to Hunter College, Thomas Hunter's autobiography indicates that he held views common in the late nineteenth century concerning the hierarchy of intelligence based on racial and ethnic characteristics. Categorizing his students by race, Hunter wrote that he believed that the Nordic groups were superior in intelligence while Italians, Bohemians, and Russian Jews were below average. He placed African-Americans at the lowest intellectual level.[20]

The opinions Hunter espoused in his *Autobiography* appear at odds with statements in his annual reports praising the diversity of the Hunter student body and the college's embodiment of the American ideal of equal opportunity for all. Hunter repeatedly pointed out the high caliber of the student body, stressing that the students were admitted by examination and not by personal recommendation from a teacher or a principal.[21] He also repeatedly boasted of the college's egalitarianism and democracy. In his 1886 Annual Report, Hunter listed the occupations of the students' fathers: these ranged from banker to day-laborer. Poor and rich attended the college harmoniously.

> *We have Jews and Gentiles and the children of almost every European nationality; dark-skinned Negroes sitting beside fair-haired Scandinavians, and almost every breed under the sun is represented....This is the true democratic mingling of the classes which could only exist in a Republican country like the United States.*[22]

The following year, he reiterated this point: "No wonder the European is astonished that so vast a number of students, belonging to every creed and race and station in life, can meet on terms of perfect equality in the same educational institution."[23]

As many colleges and universities began to offer higher education to women, and qualified African-American women sought admission to white institutions, questions of housing and board, as well as exclusion from campus activities, became important concerns. Many campuses became more restrictive in their admissions policies. In a 1914 issue of *The Crisis*, DuBois wrote: "Northern white colleges have, in the last ten years, ceased to encourage Negro students and, in many cases, actively discouraged them....[B]oth Columbia and Chicago Universities have been active in discouraging colored students in their summer schools by various devices."[24]

DuBois was inundated with complaints from African-American students regarding their treatment on white college campuses. Even Oberlin College, once the symbol of egalitarianism in higher education, had changed dramatically by 1880. Some students objected to rooming or eating with African-American students. When African-Americans were requested to eat at a separate table, they wrote, outraged, to campus authorities:

> *We expect to endure some slight here, to meet some prejudice, but when it comes to a separate table at the Ladies' Boarding Hall in liberal, Christian Oberlin, it is more than we ever conceived of.* [25]

Racial discrimination at Oberlin also resulted in barring African-Americans from membership in literary and other organizations. Consequently, in 1908, African-American students formed a separate literary society. By 1913, even a discussion of limiting the number of African-American students at Oberlin was entertained.[26]

The issue of housing was the primary concern for African-Americans on virtually every campus. In 1920, white women at Oberlin protested the assignment of two African-American women to a previously all-white cottage, and some students moved out. The Acting Dean of Women defended the [white] women's position to the college president:

> *They [white women students] do not really believe that it is best for either race to live in the same dormitory, nor do they think that the present situation ought to be more than makeshift. I do not know a girl who would be willing to have any purely scholastic opportunity closed to colored students....But they do not want social relations with the colored race, and they do not feel it to be a duty. It must be remembered that the evolution of dormitory life has made the relation there social to an extent for which there is no precedent in our earlier history; and that the present bathroom and laboratory system necessitates a personal intimacy from which many of us of the older generation shrink, and which we do not like to force beyond its instinctive limits.* [27]

Sadie Tanner Mossell, an African-American woman who commuted from her Philadelphia home to the University of Pennsylvania from 1916 to 1918, recalled the humiliation of not having a place to eat on or off campus. She had to bring lunch from home and eat it under the steps of the university's library. Of her experience, Mossell wrote:

> *The first year was very tough. There was not another colored student in my class. I had no one with whom to discuss assignments. . . There was no lunch room in a drug store or elsewhere or restaurant that would serve colored students. I stood in line at every available restaurant or counter on either side of 34th and Walnut only to be told: "We don't serve colored people" (or sometime "Niggers") and not one said a mumbling word in the presence of students, including often a few from my class.*[28]

"These are the Faces of the city," proclaimed the Wistarion, the College yearbook, in 1944, celebrating the City as a melting pot and

"A college of united nations,
United races
United religions
Faces of American-born
and American-made
Faces of eight times a
thousand girls
Who are met for common
purpose
And mingle in a common
humanity."


These Are the Faces

These are the faces of the city,
These are the faces of New York,
Faces of American-born and American-made
Pale Nordic faces showing Scotch and Norwegian descent,
Long Nordic faces, narrow and lean of jaw
Broad Alpine faces of Czechs and Russians and Slavs,
Olive-skinned, oval-shaped faces of Italians and Portuguese
These are the pale faces of the city
The faces of subway travelers and housewives,
Of students and departments store clerks,
Of soldiers and sailors and business men.
Far down in the city where we go in crowds to eat chow mein—
Browsing like tourists through little shops huddled together on narrow streets,
Buying for Buddhas to put on our dressers and back scratchers of carved wood—
Are the faces of dwellers in Chinatown.
Broad and round, with dark, slanting eyes are these faces
Straight-haired and black-eyed are the Chinese of our city.
Up and down in the far-flung corners of the city
Are the dusky Negro faces,
Faces bearing the mark of African ancestors,
Faces bearing the stamp of American life.
Ebony-colored hair and eyes as dark and dancing
As the eddying pools in a river seen at night.
Joyous and gay
Sad and despairing
Tender and poignant
Are the faces of the melting pot, the city,
And the faces of a smaller melting pot.
A college of united nations
United races
United religions
Faces of American-born and American-made
Faces of eight times a thousand girls
Who are met for common purpose
And mingle in a common humanity.

Hunter's campus and student body were quite different. Hunter students were all commuters, and thus African-American women escaped the humiliation of exclusion from housing and dining facilities. Housing was not an issue and there was no discrimination in dining or in other areas of student life. The College was known as the subway campus, with students coming and going throughout the city to various locations. By the 1920s, the student body had increased to such an extent that branch campuses were opened in Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island and the Bronx. By the 1930s, Hunter was the largest women's college in the world, with an enrollment of more than 5,000 in the College itself and 15,000 in various summer and extension courses.

Unlike the elite private women's colleges, where family background, wealth, religious affiliation, and race were important variables, Hunter was largely a poor woman's college where the students overwhelmingly sought degrees forvocational purposes. For them, college was not merely a cultural experience. Katherina Grunfeld's study of Hunter College discusses the ambivalence and ambiguity of the college experience for many of the Hunter students who were bright but poor. Grunfeld quotes former President George Shuster's observation that many Hunter students often felt sorry for themselves and believed that they had been "cheated out of a rich college experience on some more pleasant and fashionable campus."[29]

Grunfeld also points out that for many students in the 1920s and '30s, Hunter was both a "golden opportunity and a last resort."

> *For some it was the path out of poverty and menial work; for others, it was a place of refuge when all other doors were closed. From 1920 through the World War, Hunter students were united by their ethnicity, their poverty, their immigrant status — by their anger, and eagerness, and desperate aloneness — by their sense of exclusion — far more than by common links to undergraduate women elsewhere.*[30]

These observations in large part describe the experience of Pauli Murray, who moved from North Carolina to New York in the 1920s and attended Hunter from 1928 to 1933. Murray's autobiography, *Song in a Weary Throat*, provides an extensive and candid view of Hunter. Inspired to come North by a favorite teacher, Murray was unaware that the teacher had attended Columbia's Teachers College. Murray appeared at the Columbia College Admissions Office only to learn that it was an all-male institution. Referred to Columbia's sister school, Barnard College, she then learned that she lacked the necessary high school prerequisites to be considered for admission. Luckily, Barnard officials referred her to Hunter.

At Hunter, Murray was told, once again, that her segregated high school in North Carolina had not prepared her for admission to college. Also, she was not a resident of New York. In her book, she recalled:

> *Despite these barriers, however, the admissions people at Hunter did not turn us away without hope; they sat down with Aunt Pauline and worked out a curriculum of the courses I would need for admission provided she could resolve the problem of residence. They recommended that I try to complete my education in a New York City high school and receive a diploma which would be accepted automatically by Hunter College.*[31]

Pauli Murray, author, lawyer, Episcopalian priest, civil rights activist, feminist. She moved from the segregated south to New York in order to continue her education, and she found a welcome in Hunter.

This was a remarkable story. When scores of qualified African-Americans were being denied entrance to white colleges and universities, Murray, who was not qualified, was encouraged by Hunter College officials to remove the deficiencies and to apply for admission. Taking their advice, Murray enrolled in Richmond Hill High School in Queens, the only African-American among 4,000 students. She quickly passed the Regents examinations and was admitted to Hunter College in 1928.

Hunter, as Grunfeld noted, was not only a golden opportunity but also a last resort for Pauli Murray. Orphaned and adopted as a young child by an elderly school-teacher aunt, Murray's financial resources were meager. Although years later she was able to value her Hunter education, Murray was disappointed initially to have to attend a commuter school of which she had never heard. Hunter did not fit her image of a college: it was not a residential campus, nor was it a coeducational institution.

Murray described the hundreds of Hunter students with whom she commuted each day on the El train, back and forth to the Brooklyn Campus.[32] Students often lived great distances from one another and the train provided the only opportunity for them to visit with each other. She developed friendships with both African-American and white students and also maintained cordial and helpful relationships with faculty and staff at Hunter.

The rigorous academics at the College helped Murray develop into a first-rate writer. One professor of English, Catherine Reigart, marked her papers C- and D for poor grammar, but she also invited Murray and another African-American student to her apartment for tea one weekend. The gesture had a profound impact: "Miss Riegart had communicated to me my worth as a person quite apart from my poor academic performance. I tried

harder, and my papers improved slowly but steadily."[33] On her last paper for the semester, Murray earned the grade of A-. She later developed the paper, a story about her grandfather, into her first book, *Proud Shoes*.

Hunter had a strong effect on Murray, not only academically, but also in reshaping her views on race and humanity. A product of the segregated South where African-Americans were denied the most basic of human dignities, she was treated at Hunter with respect and equality. Outside of Hunter, however, she found that racism existed. The restaurant where she worked to support herself did not serve African-Americans. The white staff (executives, cashiers and hostesses) were served from the regular menu in the dining room; the much larger African-American staff "ate on bare tables in the basement and were given leftovers so tasteless we invariably threw them into the garbage can."[34] The job was considered a good one, however, despite the racial humiliation, because the restaurant was popular and she received good tips.

At the beginning of the depression Murray lost her job and her financial situation became desperate. In 1932, she wrote an article for *The Echo*, the student literary journal, (and reprinted in this issue) entitled, "A Working Student," which chronicled her struggle to support herself while pursuing a college degree. She described how her desire to be an outstanding scholar and to become a member of Phi Beta Kappa was affected by the necessity of working full time.

> *My sophomore year was a horror. The problem of merely living overshadowed my school work. Of primary consideration were room rent, clothes, carfare and lunch. I did my own laundry. My salary was so small it did not allow for such necessities as toothpaste or medicine, nor for occasional recreation. I lived just within the limit of starvation.*[35]

Murray was constantly exhausted, listless and nervous. After becoming anemic, developing low blood pressure, and losing fifteen pounds, she suffered a nervous breakdown and had to take a leave from school. Murray described other Hunter students who also worked desperately toward a college degree and who jeopardized their health to obtain it.

Returning to Hunter in 1931, Murray and another African-American student, Louise E. Jefferson, found jobs and became roommates. Hunter officials provided enormous assistance. The director of Hunter's Bureau of Occupations helped Murray obtain a secretarial position in the Journalism Department. In view of the rare opportunities given to African-American women for secretarial or office work in the general society, this was not a small gesture. In fact, Murray noted that "clerical jobs for Negro women in downtown white business firms were virtually nonexistent." In addition, Miss Mattison, assistant to the Dean of Women, kept a closet full of clothes donated by faculty for needy students. Murray recalled that Miss Mattison "let me take my pick of attractive skirts, suits, and sweaters, and for the remainder of my career at Hunter I was well dressed."[36]

Hunter students of all races made enormous sacrifices to attend the institution. Employment opportunities for African-American women were particularly limited, however, even for those who received their degrees. After graduating in January, 1933, Murray wrote:

> *Some of my classmates were able to get temporary jobs teaching in the public schools, Others were lucky if they were taken on as salesclerks at Macy's. One could spot several women on any floor at Macy's wearing the Hunter College ring — that is, if they were white. Negroes were limited to elevator and cleaning jobs whether they had a degree or not.*[37]

Murray, who graduated as one of four African-American women in January, 1933, in a class of 247 women, later reflected on her Hunter years. She had not been aware, she wrote, that Hunter was considered the 'poor girl's Radcliffe' and had enrolled the top women students in New York City. Murray also exclaimed:

> *Hunter's tradition for excellence was so strong that in later years I was surprised to find how often I could recognize a Hunter-trained woman by the thoroughness with which she approached her work. Less obvious was the fact that the school was a natural training ground for feminism. Having a faculty and a student body in which women assumed leadership reinforced our egalitarian values, inspired our confidence in the competence of women generally, and encouraged our resistance to subordinate roles.*[38]

Murray had no desire to become a teacher like her aunt. She majored in English, a department that had the reputation of being elitist and highly selective. This brought her in contact with Hunter's most articulate students and leading writers, stimulating her own talent to write. In her last term at Hunter, Murray was elected to Sigma Tau Delta, the national professional English fraternity, and her confidence was further boosted by the invitation from the associate editor of *Echo* to submit for publication the article mentioned above.

Murray, indeed, challenged society's notion of women's and African-Americans' subordinate roles. She became an eminent civil and women's rights advocate. After applying unsuccessfully in 1938 to the segregated graduate school of the University of North Carolina and in 1944 to all-male Harvard Law School, she entered Boalt Hall Law School at the University of California (Berkeley), earning an LLM in 1945. In 1965, she became the first African-American to receive a Doctor of Judicial Science degree from the Yale University Law School. In 1972, at the age of 62, she entered the General Theological Seminary, earning a Master of Divinity in 1976 and, in 1977, becoming the first female African-American Episcopal priest. In 1974, The Hunter College Alumni Association inducted Murray into its Hall of Fame and presented her with the Outstanding Professional Achievement Award.

Despite the many positive experiences and opportunities at Hunter, Murray recalled "one bad Hunter experience," when a history professor insultingly demeaned the history of African-Americans in her class. In response, a group of African-American students, including Murray, decided to form an intellectual organization to study and discuss their history and culture. The proposed organization was to be an egalitarian club, meeting for weekly discussions, with membership open to the entire student body. Many white students, however, apparently objected to the idea of a separate club because its existence would contradict Hunter's reputation and image as an inclusive institution. The International Student, a liberal student organization, issued a counterproposal for the group to be integrated within their existing club. African-American students would then be seated on the club's executive board.[39] The two proposals were presented at a large meeting.

According to a front-page article in the campus newspaper, *The Hunter College Bulletin*, this was the "first time in the history of Hunter College [that] the Negro students as a group have made a successful step toward becoming an integral part of college life." The article stated that only 100 of the 5,000 day students were African-American. Because of their small numbers and because they were "scattered" among the three campuses, there was little opportunity for the women to become a force in college activities.[40] The article reported that the meeting was unusually well attended and that "[l]ively and heated discussions followed the presentation of these proposals." A close vote resulted in a merger with the International Student. Murray later recalled that one of the African-American organizers voiced great skepticism about this arrangement. The fears were substantiated when, by 1936, African-Americans had withdrawn from the International Student and established the Toussaint L'Ouverture Society for the study of African-American history and culture.[41]

The Toussaint L'Ouverture Society was an important organization for African-American women at Hunter, and yearbook entries indicate that an overwhelming number of African-American students were members. The desire of these women to affirm their heritage was part of a larger movement begun in the 1920s, during the Harlem Renaissance. Although they were not excluded from campus life, the women sought to have an organization that acknowledged African-American contributions to national and world history and culture.

Although African-American women appeared to be less involved in campus activities during the first two decades of the twentieth century than they were in the 1930s and later, nonetheless, they were visible. Marion Elizabeth Wilson, '28, was the first African-American Phi Beta Kappa at the College

The Toussaint L'Ouverture Society sponsored annual concerts and brought prominent speakers to the College. The Society also campaigned successfully for a course in Black history and culture. Pictured here is Polly Prince, vice-president, and members of the organization in 1939.

In addition to her position as Editor-in-Chief of the Bulletin, Shirley A. Simpson was secretary of the Bronx Executive Committee, Vice-President of Toussaint L'Ouverture, and a member of the Y.W.C.A. She signed Dean of Students Hannah Egan's Wistarion, "In deepest appreciation of the splendid advice and heart-felt sympathy you have offered during my undergraduate years."

and was active in a plethora of organizations: she was a member in the Varsity and Make-up Box drama clubs; vice-president of the Journalism Club; secretary/treasurer of the Writer's Club, editor of the Classical Club Paper, and a member of the English Club.[42] In the 1930s, Dorothy Williams, an African-American, was an editor of the *Bulletin* for two years; she was also on the staff of the *Wistarion*, Hunter's yearbook. Other African-Americans were members of various varsity teams, including swimming, from which African-Americans were generally excluded at other campuses.[43]

In the mid-1940s, Hunter employed its first African-American faculty member. Adelaide Cromwell, a Smith College graduate with a M.S.W. from Bryn Mawr and a Ph.D. from Radcliffe College, was appointed in 1945 to a part-time position. In 1946, Mary Huff Diggs, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate with degrees from Bryn Mawr College, the University of Minnesota, Fisk University, and the University of Pennsylvania, was hired as the first full-time tenure-track African-American faculty member. Diggs' field was social work and she brought to Hunter considerable experience as a case worker and supervisor, in addition to her background as a college teacher.

After a semester at Hunter, Diggs wrote to Charles S. Johnson, the recently appointed first African-American president of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee:

> *Aside from the complete surprise that my presence stirred in one or two of my fellow teachers, and a few awkward efforts at adjustment on the part of one or two students, my stay here has not been different from that of any other faculty member. Since I teach courses in the regular Sociology and pre-Social Work curriculum, I have girls from freshmen to seniors, with the majority being upper-classmen. One of my students is a Negro girl. A still larger number are of foreign birth, and who are yet in the process of mastering the use of the English language. There are one or two from south of the border....I've liked the stimulation by this very alert student body in general. I've enjoyed the extent and degree to which all members of the faculty participate in the over-all planning for them — the objective being the education of the whole person. I've been amused at times with the timid questioning on the part of some of the foreign born girls — questioning that could be and sometimes is expressed in "I did not know that Negroes teach in non-Negro colleges in the USA." I have had to face the fact with myself that I do not have an appropriate reply to this questioning, since any reply that I might give would be neither wholly true nor wholly false. So I meet it with a smile that encourages the particular student to talk more and more, and in the end the question either has been forgotten, or else a satisfactory answer is arrived at by the student through the conference process.*[44]

Diggs noted the pride, excitement and ownership that the African-American students felt with her appointment:

> *The Negro women students are very glad to have me here, and in the beginning started out with a bang to make me their number one exhibit. It took a good bit of strategy for me to keep their very good wishes, but at the same time have them understand that functionally I "belonged" equally to every student on the campus. I had not anticipated that such a situation would arise, and that it could be so tedious. From the other side of the line, I've had to use diplomacy in refusing to allow all problems of Negro students from no matter what departments to be loaded on to me. But this proved to be the easier of the two situations....I've been especially happy for the entire teaching experience here.*[45]

To summarize, although African-American women had access to Hunter from as early as 1873, their numbers through 1945 were always small. The experience of African-American women students on the predominantly white campuses of American higher education, from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, has been a story primarily of exclusion and discrimination. While not a utopia, from its beginnings, Hunter College served as a testament to the ideals espoused by Thomas Hunter and as an example of the best in American democracy. The inclusion of African-American women within the College doors without mishap or fanfare distinguished the institution from others that admitted women. While Hunter College is unique in many aspects, its diversity and openness to students without regard to religious, racial or socioeconomic background from the earliest years of its history, make it one of the most significant institutions in the history of the higher education of African-American women. For them, admission to the College was indeed a "golden opportunity."

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[9] See Annual Reports of the Normal College of the City of New York, 1874-1882.

[10] Registrar's Record Book, Hunter College Archives.

[11] Ibid.

[12]. Mabee, 114, 220.

[13]. Sarah and A. Elizabeth Delaney with Amy Hill Hearth, *Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years* (New York: Kodansha International, 1993), 118.

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[15] *The Autobiography of Dr. Thomas Hunter* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1931), 231-232.

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[20] *Autobiography of Dr. Thomas Hunter*, 232.

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[37] Ibid., 92.

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[39] Ibid., 86.

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[41] 1936 *Wistarion*.

[42] 1928 *Wistarion*.

[43] 1932 *Wistarion*.

[44] Mary Hugg Diggs to Charles S. Johnson, December 30, 1946, *Charles S. Johnson Papers*, Fisk University Special Collection, Nashville, Tennessee.

[45] Ibid.