Book Reviews

Kabria Baumgartner. In *Pursuit of Knowledge: Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America.* New York: New York University Press, 2019. 320 pp.

In this fascinating study, Kabria Baumgartner explores how African American women and girls participated in educational activism during the nineteenth century in northern states. In particular, she argues that these early female activists engaged "in conscious, vigorous, and sustained acts of defiance and protest in their quest for an education" (p. 2). Baumgartner reveals that African American women fought for equal education at the same time that blacks were being excluded from civic and political life because they were considered noncitizens.

Baumgartner highlights three components that comprised black women's educational activism: 1) fighting against prejudice while promoting Christian love, 2) training other African Americans to be educator-activists fighting for civil rights, and 3) promoting moral character among black youth. African American educational activists in the nineteenth century believed that education provided more than just a basic level of literacy and numeracy. Instead, education for black Americans helped support their claims for equal rights and freedom at a time when they faced increasing racial discrimination in the North.

Baumgartner's work contributes to broader discussions about African American respectability. She argues that African American women had such high educational ambitions because they were fighting to gain a toehold in northern society in the nineteenth century by demonstrating their respectability. Baumgartner's work reframes the time period for which most historians discuss respectability among African Americans. In particular, she explores how black women viewed educational equality as a cornerstone of respectability well before the twentieth century. Baumgartner focuses on a notion of "purposeful womanhood" in which black women in the nineteenth century sought to lead purposeful lives (by gaining higher levels of education) to be seen as valuable to American society (p. 4). Purposefulness was a strategy by which African American women and girls could assert their humanity and worth even in the face of worsening racism.

Baumgartner situates her study in a broader discussion of shifts in American public education in the nineteenth century, emphasizing how black activists fought for inclusion at a time when education was growing and becoming more systemized in the United States. Because of these changes in American education, Baumgartner broadens her focus to explore both private seminaries and public schools scattered throughout the northern states. One of the most significant contributions she makes in this book is revealing how African American female activists were hard at work throughout the nineteenth century fighting for civil and equal rights through their efforts to gain educational equality.

In Pursuit of Knowledge is organized in two overlapping parts. Part I explores how African American women fought for schooling at private female seminaries, with a focus on the Canterbury Female Seminary in Connecticut and the Young Ladies' Domestic Seminary in Clinton, New York. In this section, Baumgartner explores how black activists relied on Christian love as a form of social protest. She also examines the roles white abolitionists and Quaker activists played in enrolling black girls in the schools. Baumgartner uncovers the rich teacher-activist networks that African American women formed to fight for civil rights.

Part II turns to a discussion of educational activism in public schools in Massachusetts. In this section, Baumgartner reveals the educational protest movement in cities like Boston and Salem, where black activists fought to integrate the city's public schools. In particular, she examines the various protest strategies African American female activists employed. In this section, she also discusses how African American female teachers used their position in the classroom as a way to help build moral character in their students.

Baumgartner examines how African American girls and women used the power of "Christian love" as a form of social protest (p. 16). She views this as a unique form of activism African American women employed during the nineteenth century, comparing it to moral suasion tactics in nineteenth-century reform efforts. Baumgartner argues that Christian love relied on biblical principles, including "love thy neighbor," and constituted a powerful form of protest.

In her examination of how African American girls entered female seminaries in the early nineteenth century, Baumgartner reveals the vehement protest against such integration by local whites. For example, whites living in Connecticut near the Canterbury Female Boarding Seminary objected to black students being enrolled. Whites coordinated a campaign to force African Americans out by enlisting support from local newspapers, pushing

the local sheriff to fine nonresidents living in the state, and even taking the case to court to argue that black students needed a license to reside at the boarding school. In response to this racism, Baumgartner contends that the black female students protested by promoting Christian love. Baumgartner argues that the success of African American girls who managed to enroll at the seminary for seventeen months mobilized other abolitionists to fight against this racism and sexism. And even though the academy ultimately closed, black women activists remained committed to fighting for education.

Black female activists followed a similar pattern as they sought to integrate the Young Ladies' Domestic Seminary. Baumgartner argues that six black women transformed the seminary into the first racially integrated one in New York and possibly in the entire North (p. 47). Some of these educated black women went on to careers as schoolteachers in places like New York City, where they continued to promote education as a way to claim equal rights.

Baumgartner demonstrates that education was vitally important to many African Americans in the nineteenth century and that educational activism became an arena for female-led reform in places like Massachusetts. In the 1830s and 1840s, African American students were relegated to poorly funded segregated schools like the African School in Salem, Massachusetts. As Baumgartner demonstrates, African American female activists (including many black teachers) fought for equality in schools in Salem by boycotting segregated schools and signing petitions to protest educational inequality and demand integrated schools. During this era, black female teachers promoted character education to their students. Character education encouraged moral and intellectual development and was significant not only because it would help black students confront racism, but because it would help them learn to be purposeful citizens (p. 179).

Baumgartner explores a wide array of sources in her study, including diaries and letters written by African American students and teachers. But she also examines other sources that helped her tap into the lives of women who may not show up in the archival sources. To that end, she investigated family history sources, school catalogs, court records, and reports from abolitionist organizations to gain a sense of how African Americans felt about education during the nineteenth century.

In conclusion, Baumgartner demonstrates how these purposeful women worked to bring about educational reform to make education more equal for all American children, both black and white. Her work contributes to our understanding of the role that education played in

African American efforts to achieve civil rights in the nineteenth century.

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David Gamson. *The Importance of Being Urban: Designing the Progressive School District, 1890–1940.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. 352 pp.

David Gamson's *The Importance of Being Urban* poses big questions about our historical understandings of "progressive education" and provides a new way of seeing the numerous curricular and administrative innovations of the era. He dedicates the book to his mentor, David Tyack, and the book can be read as an attempt to explore the continued analytical usefulness of Tyack's oft-cited distinction between administrative and pedagogical progressives. Rather than abandon these categories entirely, Gamson proposes a new category—"district progressives"—local city school district administrators who strategically combined a range of progressivisms in their attempts to win both local taxpayer support and national recognition as a model "progressive district."

Gamson shows that the "district progressive" category can be useful to the field in three ways. First, it can shift our attention away "from the widely known experts, academics, or curriculum theorists" (p. 3) of the Progressive Era and toward district administrators charged with the daily operations of an urbanizing school district. Second, this change in perspective helps us see a more realistic picture of progressive education as built by the decisions of local educational leaders in response to local political economic pressures. Third, paying attention to district progressivism expands our periodization of progressive education well beyond the "standard bookend of World War I" (p. 7). Gamson argues that while progressive educational *theorizing* might have reached a zenith in the late 1910s, district progressives themselves built, revised, and touted explicitly progressive school *systems* well into the 1920s and 1930s. The book thus seeks to fill a surprising gap in our understanding of district-wide implementation