CHAPTER 1

Victoria Earle Matthews

Residence and Reform

Cheryl Waites

Victoria Earle Matthews devoted her life to the advancement of her race and gender. Although she had little formal education, by age 20 Matthews was a journalist of national repute. Through her writings and other social services activities, Matthews sought to bring African American women together to work for the welfare of the race. An advocate for preserving race history and for using practical means to facilitate the social uplift of African Americans, Matthews opened a settlement house, organized women's clubs, and pioneered travelers' aid services at the turn of the century. While not as well-known as some of her peers, Matthews's work helped to shape the social welfare movement of the United States.

Matthews was portrayed by a New York newspaper reporter as "a woman of virtue, a Salvation Army field officer, a college settlement worker, a missionary, a teacher, and a sister of mercy all in one without being the least conscious of it" (Brown, 1988, p. 215). As an ardent feminist and gifted lecturer (Cash, 1993; Smith, 1992), she charged other African American women with the responsibility of shaping the intellectual and moral foundations of the race (Williams, 1894). Matthews believed that the power of organization and unity of African American women could bring about needed social reform. A New York associate and *Woman's Era* correspondent identified Matthews as "one of the most enthusiastic women in town, earnest, and to a remarkable degree, a believer in her own sex, and a woman destined to succeed in what she sets out to do. She's a credit to her sex . . . She has stirred our best women as no other woman has done, in my time, at least" (Williams, 1894, p. 5).

A leader of the Progressive Era, Matthews was like many other African American women of her time whose contributions to the development of social welfare history and social welfare institutions in the African American and larger community have been ignored (Carlton-LaNey, 1997; Kogut, 1970; Waites, 1990).

Birth into Slavery

The journey begins in Fort Valley, Georgia, in 1861—one month after the Civil War began. During this very onerous period of American history, Victoria Earle Smith, the youngest of nine children, was born enslaved. Oral history reports that her White slave master, William Smith, sexually violated Caroline Smith, Victoria's mother. Victoria and her older sister Anna were believed to be the result of this victimization. William Smith was described as a man with a very cruel nature (Penn, 1969; Smith, 1992). Female house slaves were often vulnerable to sexual exploitation by the master. One can only imagine the degrading conditions that Caroline faced. Her ultimate resistance to this sexual violence was to escape. After several attempts, Caroline Smith escaped to New York during the Civil War, leaving Victoria and her siblings in the care of an old nurse.

Caroline returned to Georgia for her children after emancipation. However, she was able to find only four of them. The others were believed to be dead. Victoria and Anna were being reared in the master's house. After extensive legal struggles, Caroline gained custody of her two daughters and took them to Virginia, where they lived in Richmond and Norfolk for several years. In 1873, Caroline Smith and her daughters moved to New York City.

At age 12, Victoria was described as "wise beyond her years, a fair-skinned, tall, lank, straight haired girl, with large soulful eyes" (Brown, 1988, p. 209). She attended Grammar School 48, where her advanced reading abilities surpassed those of her classmates. At age 15, she was forced to quit school to support herself and her mother. Victoria became a domestic worker, the only position available to her as a woman of color. She worked in a wealthy home that housed an extensive library. The owners granted her permission to use the library in her spare time. Victoria read "whatever she could lay her hands on" (Brown, 1988, p. 209). Though she was not able to complete her formal education, she continued her instruction through reading and other self-taught means. Whenever possible, she attended lectures, undertook special studies, and consulted with professionals to broaden her knowledge (Schockley, 1988). She took advantage of every opportunity to improve herself intellectually and culturally. Although she was largely self-educated, she is often considered among the first generation of educated Black women of the South (Wade-Gayles, 1981).

In 1876, at the age of 15, Victoria married William Matthews, a carriage driver and native of Petersburg, Virginia. Unlike many of her African American women social activist contemporaries of the Progressive Era, she was not married to a wealthy or prominent man. Victoria did not come from a middle-class background, was not college educated, and came from a financially disadvantaged circumstance. She did not have the educational background of many of her contemporaries, like Mary Church Terrell, Josephine Turpin Washington, and A. E. Tilghman (Wade-Gayles, 1981). Yet she rose to become a noted journalist and an impressive organizer (Cash, 1993).

Matthews gave birth to her son, Larmartine Matthews, in 1879. Very little is known about her relationship with her husband and son. Her son died in 1895 at the age of 16.

This tragic event marked a change in Matthews's work. Her social reform agenda became more focused on community development and the social welfare of children and young women (Best, 1939; Keyser, 1907; Lewis, 1925).

Journalist Reformer

Becoming a journalist was one possible career choice for erudite African Americans. This was a time "when white women were imprisoned by the sexist notion of a 'woman's place,' [but] Black women moved beyond this 'place' into any arena where the struggle for Black freedom was being waged" (Wade-Gayles, 1981, p. 138). Black women used their skills and their talents at all levels of the Black struggle, including journalism. Of the 23 Black women in the nation who were journalists by 1891, 16 were native southerners. Wade-Gayles (1981) described these writers as "phenomenal women, impressive Sojourners wielding pens of political militancy and social concern" (p. 139). Essentially, journalism gave these writers an opportunity for employment that provided a platform for influencing thought, raising consciousness, and facilitating social change.

There were several publishing outlets for women writers like Matthews. The Black church was a prominent institution and a major outlet for educating the community on matters relevant to Black progress and achievement through its many regularly published papers. In addition to church-affiliated literary organs, the women's club movement that flourished during the late nineteenth century also produced a Black press. The *Woman's Era*, a prominent journal, was established in Boston in 1894. It was initially the official publication of the Woman's Era Club of Boston, but later became the literary journal of the National Federation of Afro-American Women (NFAAW), which became the National Association of Colored Women (NACW).

Victoria Earle, often considered the "Queen" of the southern-born writers, struck out on her own as a cub reporter for any paper, South or North, that would use her talents (Wade-Gayles, 1981). During the 1890s, she was a freelance reporter who published in leading newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *New York Herald*, and *Brooklyn Eagle*. She also published in such leading Black newspapers as the *New York Age*, *Advocate* (Boston), *Washington Bee*, *Richmond Planet*, *Cleveland Gazette*, and *New York Globe*. In 1893, Matthews's short story, "Aunt Lindy: A Story Founded on Real Life," was published in book form under her pen name Victoria Earle. Five years later, with the encouragement of the *New York Age* editor, T. Thomas Fortune, Matthews edited *Black Belt Diamonds: Gems from the Speeches, Addresses and Talks of B. T. Washington* (1898). In praise of Matthews's ability and highly sought after skill, Penn (1969), a Black press historian wrote, "No writer of the race was kept busier than Victoria Earle Matthews" (p. 398).

Club Women's Movement: Empowerment and Social Reform

As African Americans began to migrate to urban areas after the Civil War, they faced numerous economic and social problems (Carlton-LaNey, 1989; Jones, 1990; Osofsky,

1963). Racism, discrimination, and segregation resulted in inadequate employment, substandard housing, and a lack of sufficient transportation for urban African Americans. In response to these social conditions and in an attempt to advance the African American race, activists formed women's clubs and other self-help organizations (Carlton-LaNey, 1989; Jones, 1990; Waites, 1990). A new racial consciousness was rising among African Americans. That consciousness was based on the race pride and the importance of self-help or community empowerment. Matthews found herself among like-minded men and women as she urged African Americans to work and stand together for social justice.

Matthews was one of the founders of the African American women's club movement. She shares this legacy with a list of prominent African American club women including Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells, and Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin. These community leaders took it upon themselves to organize and lead women's clubs, setting as their primary mission the improvement of African American women and their position in society. In part, this movement was in response to a social climate characterized by male superiority and limited employment opportunities for women (Jones, 1990). These organizations served as information clearinghouses, centers for dispersal of funds for reform work, and hubs for race work within the community. The women's club movement embodied networks of women who were united by their reform efforts.

Matthews was very involved in organizing and advancing the women's club movement. An important event that gave impetus to Matthews's social and political club reform work was Ida B. Wells's antilynching campaign. Matthews was sympathetic to this cause and wanted to support Wells's efforts. On October 5, 1892, Matthews spearheaded a campaign to support Wells. With the assistance of Maritcha Lyons, a noted local educator, Matthews organized a testimonial to honor Wells in New York City's Lyric Hall. Two hundred and fifty women attended, both African American and European American. They raised $700 to resume publication of Wells's newspaper and to publish a pamphlet entitled *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (Smith, 1992). The testimonial not only displayed support for Wells's campaign, but also pushed European American women to examine racial injustice. Concerns about lynching brought into focus similarities between racial and gender inequality, helped pave the way for women to contemplate their own inequities, and raised questions that inspired the women's suffrage movement. This testimonial, for which Matthews is given organizational credit, has been called the beginning of the African American club women's movement (Salem, 1990).

Women's Loyal Union—The Local Club Movement

Immediately after this historic Lyric Hall meeting, Matthews met with Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin of Boston and Susan McKinney of Brooklyn. These three women made plans to form women's clubs in each of their respective cities (boroughs). Matthews and Maritcha Lyons founded the Women's Loyal Union of New York and Brooklyn in 1892.

Matthews was its first president. More than 70 women, including journalists, career women, artists, homemakers, and housekeepers, joined the Loyal Union (Smith, 1992). This was the first club for African American women in those cities (boroughs). The group emphasized better schools and employment. Their watchwords were "Vigilant, Patriotic and Steadfast" (Carmand, 1895). This declaration demonstrated their commitment to social uplift and to the collection and dissemination of accurate information on the civil and social status of African Americans.

Also in 1892, Ruffin organized the Woman's Era Club of Boston; Helen Cook, Mary Church Terrell, and others helped to establish the Colored Women's League (CWL) of Washington, DC; and the Ida B. Wells Club was formed in Chicago. CWL's mission was to promote the interest of African Americans through "moral, intellectual, and social growth" (Terrell, 1940, p. 315). Under a national umbrella, the CWL organized other clubs in Pittsburgh, Omaha, Knoxville, Jefferson City, Providence, and New Orleans.

National Organizer and Leader

As these local clubs emerged, a powerful energy was generated. African American women voiced their alarm about social and political conditions for African Americans; they were ready to organize. The national call to organize came in the June 1895 issue of the *Woman's Era* in which Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin wrote an editorial entitled "Let Us Confer Together." That editorial was in response to an inflammatory letter written by J. W. Jacks, president of the Missouri State Press Club, in which he disclosed his scathing view of the moral character of all "colored" women. Ruffin called for "all clubs, societies, associations, or circles to meet with us in conference in this city of Boston" (p. 4). She distributed a copy of the letter and in her editorial asked her readers to "decide if it be not time for us to stand before the world and declare ourselves and our principles" (p. 4). Matthews's comments followed in the July issue of *Woman's Era* where she called for courageous women to speak through *Woman's Era*, a journal of the Boston women's club, so "that the world may feel the power of the chaste mentality of the true Negro women" (1895, pp. 2–3). In collaboration with the women's clubs throughout the country, a national convention was planned.

As a delegate of the Women's Loyal Union, Matthews attended the first national conference of Black women from July 29–31, 1895, in Boston. On the second day of the conference, she addressed the body of club women on "The Value of Race Literature." She praised the creativity of Black men and women and the contributions that they had made. She emphasized the importance of collecting the writings of Black men and women, including histories, biographies, sermons, speeches, essays, and articles, to preserve the culture and contributions of people of African ancestry. Matthews understood that self-knowledge was empowering. To that end, she was strongly committed to presenting and preserving the history of people of African ancestry throughout the diaspora. Documenting and informing people of African Americans' contributions empowered African Americans and helped to dispel the myths that were promulgated about the group.

At the conference in Boston, Matthews emerged as a national leader. A *Woman's Era* commentary on the convention acknowledged Matthews's contributions and praised her work saying "To many minds Mrs. Matthews was the 'star' of the convention; so devoted was she to the interest of the conference that Boston saw comparatively little in a social way of this gifted women" (*Woman's Era*, 1895, p. 15). Clearly, Matthews was a highly visible and active participant at the conference. Furthermore, she was an astute politician and was appointed to a committee to establish a platform for the convention and to tie together the loose ends of the conference (Smith & Carter, 1895). Matthews's passion, commitment, journalistic skills, organizational skills, and willingness to serve made her invaluable to the new organization during its infancy.

The founding of the NFAAW was the culmination of the first national conference. It celebrated the remarkable feat of women coming together and uniting around a common agenda of empowerment and social uplift. Women were given a chance to develop organizational and leadership skills. Women leaders came to the forefront. Margaret Murray Washington was elected president, and Matthews was elected chair of the Executive Committee. The *Woman's Era* became the official journal of the NFAAW and Matthews would continue to be a major contributor throughout her life.

Matthews's influence and leadership continued to develop. In December 1895, she attended the National Colored Women's Congress in Atlanta, Georgia. Black club women from 25 states attended the women's congress called by the Women's Auxiliary to the Negro Department of Cotton States and International Exposition. Matthews was elected to serve on the committee of resolutions. Immediately after the congress, she toured the South and visited New Orleans and other southern cities. She was interested in the self-help efforts of African Americans and was disappointed by the red-light districts in New Orleans. Following this tour and her investigation, Matthews returned to New York determined to continue her "uplift" and social reform work.

In her powerful position on the executive board of the NFAAW, Matthews played a primary role in planning the NFAAW's 1896 convention in Washington, DC. Presiding over the second annual meeting of the NFAAW's first session, she informed the club women that the NFAAW "began its work in 1895 with approximately twenty-eight clubs in the United States . . . but one year later, in 1896, there are sixty-seven clubs represented at this second annual meeting" (Smith, 1992). The growth of the women's clubs throughout the country was impressive. Much of this was due to Matthews's extraordinary ability to excite and motivate others.

In July 1896, both the National Colored Women's League of Washington (NCWL) and the NFAAW were scheduled to meet in Washington, DC. This was a concern for both groups, but it also presented an opportunity. Matthews was appointed to a joint committee of seven women from both the NCWL and the NFAAW to consider uniting. The consensus of the committee was that the two women's organizations should consolidate under the name of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). In the interest of their work for social reform and social uplift, they chose the motto "Lifting As We Climb." As these two organizations merged, Mary Church Terrell was elected

president, and Matthews served as the first national organizer from 1897 to 1899. She was disappointed with the name of the new organization because she was firmly committed to the term "Afro-American" (Moses, 1990, p. 173). Some had rejected the hyphenation Afro-American (Moses, 1990), feeling it was best to be simply American. Matthews was committed to the organization's need to identify as Afro-Americans. This illustrates that Matthews placed value on connecting and identifying with the group's African and American ancestry.

In 1897, Matthews was invited to represent African American women at the World's Christian Endeavors Convention held in San Francisco. On July 11, in her address entitled "The Awakening of the Afro-American Woman," she stated that it was the responsibility of the Christian womanhood of the country to join in "elevating the head, the heart, and the soul of Afro-American womanhood" (Cash, 1993, p. 760). At this international event, she encouraged respect for African American women, their work, and accomplishments. Her presentation was well received by all (Keyser, 1907), and respect became a theme that permeated her organizational and community development efforts.

White Rose Home: A Model of Community Empowerment

Matthews's concern for the social welfare of her community took a direct service focus after the death of her 16-year-old son, Larmartine, in 1895. She began to concentrate her attention on children and young women. Matthews said that her heart immediately "went out to other people's boys and girls" and she "found that this was [her] field." She selected families that needed her most and began to visit them regularly, trying to become "a real friend to the mothers" (Brown, 1988, p. 212). Matthews's interest in the mothers was simply another dimension of her women's club work. Matthews described the evolution of her work this way:

> . . . Then I began to hold mothers' meetings at the various homes where I visited; and you may not believe this, but one day at one of these meetings we prayed especially for a permanent home where we might train boys and girls and make a social center for them where the only influence would be good and true and pure. Almost immediately Winthrop Phelps, who owns an apartment house, offered us one of its flats, rent-free for three months to make our experiment. We opened here on February 11, 1897. (Brown, 1988, pp. 211–212)

Another event that gave focus to Matthews's social services effort was the victimization of young African American women who migrated North. In the spring of 1898, Matthews received a letter from Miss Hattie Moorehouse, a European American teacher at Baylan Home for Colored Youth in Jacksonville, Florida. Moorehouse, a contributor to the mission, wrote Matthews saying that they were sending a young woman to New York to work and asked Matthews to meet her at the docks. The young woman was to be identified by a red ribbon pinned on her coat. "Although Matthews was at the dock

promptly, one of the unprincipled men who haunted the wharves and preyed upon young women managed to seize the girl and lure her away" (Lewis, 1925, p. 158). The young woman was found three days later when she wandered back to the docks. She could not find the place to which she had been taken, but it was clear that her experience had been "sad and bitter" (Lewis, 1925). She was sent back home, and Matthews resolved to devote all her energies to preventing another such disastrous occurrence.

The victimization of this young African American woman alerted Matthews to the exploitation of unsuspecting young southern women who migrated to the city in search of work. Employment agents went into the rural districts of the South with convincing stories of opportunities in northern cities. In exchange for transportation and the guarantee of a job upon arrival, women were often pressured into signing contracts to work where the agent placed them. Subsequently, many young women were at the mercy of the agencies that had financed their trip to the North. They often found themselves working as prostitutes to pay off the employment bureaus for their passage. They were helpless to resolve their situations because they were not familiar with the city and had no resources.

More than anything else, these two events seem to have shaped the theme of Matthews's work for the remainder of her life. She moved from the role of national organizer of the women's club movement to the more local roles of social worker and community organizer. She focused her empowerment efforts on developing services and providing assistance to women and children in New York.

Settlement House

Matthews's efforts to organize the women in her community to provide social services began early in 1896 when a group of prominent African American women, members of various church denominations, began plans for the formation of a social service organization. Headed by Matthews, the group met and outlined the general program of the association. Matthews founded the White Rose Mission and Industrial Association in 1897 in the five-room apartment that Phelps had offered on the second floor of his building on 97th street. The facility was to become a "Christian Industrial non sectarian home for Afro-American and Negro working girls and women, where they may be educated and trained in the principles of practical self-help and right living" (Smith, 1992, p. 738). The White Rose Mission was a nondenominational settlement house that provided friendly visitors to service the neighborhood (Keyser, 1907; Osofsky, 1963). New services and programs were added as need arose, and by 1906, the annual report indicated that the following services were available at the settlement:

- Mothers' Club—a neighborhood club where the members gathered and received instruction in sewing, music, and reading and held helpful talks.
- Adult Classes—regular classes teaching domestic work and cooking for residents of the home and others in the community. This service provided training to help secure employment as a domestic.

- Home Lodging—temporary housing to shelter and protect young women who were new to the city.
- Service for "Home Girls"—headquarters for many women who did domestic work and had no place of their own or to go on their day off. They received their mail, met friends, came for help or advice, and shared their successes at the home.
- Travelers' Aid—assistance for young women who were stranded and had no place to go after arriving in the city.
- Kindergarten Classes—classes for young children (taught by Alice Ruth Moore, who later married Paul Laurence Dunbar).
- Social Club—activities for young women who lived in the home and those who returned to the settlement on their day off. They received instruction in music and enjoyed entertainment.
- The Victoria Earle Club—a club for girls with another for boys from ages 10 to 15. The girls were taught sewing and table manners and the boys learned cobbling and caning.
- Relief Assistance—free meals, lodging, carfare, and clothing provided to families.
- Library—books for self-study, including a rare book collection.

The home's library was unique and reflective of Matthews's race pride. She established a special library of books by and about African American people. The books, some of which were contributed by the Women's Loyal Union Club, were used in Matthews's teachings on race history. Educating others about the accomplishments of Africans and people of African ancestry was essential to Matthews (Frazier, 1894). She had gathered many rare books, and her collection was described as one of the most unique special libraries in New York (Schockley, 1988). The library included books on African and African American history with specific works by authors such as Booker T. Washington, Charles Chestnut, and the poet Phillis Wheatley. Matthews's library also included rare manuscripts. For example, a letter from George Washington to a slave woman was a part of the collection. The library further featured the best books on cooking, laundry, and other domestic sciences.

Travelers' Aid

The White Rose Home's mission was "the protection of self-supporting colored girls who were coming to New York for the first time" (Best, 1939, p. 1). A pioneer in travelers' aid work, Matthews and her assistant began as early as 1898 to meet the boats at the Old Dominion pier and help the young, inexperienced African American women from the South. The White Rose Home became a haven for working girls and was known as a place of refuge for women who needed assistance in adjusting to life in the city. The White Rose Travelers' Aid Society was established in 1905. The society kept agents at the piers to meet boats in New York and Norfolk, Virginia, to answer questions and to escort women to their places of employment or to the White Rose Home. Girls and

women from all over the South and rural communities were assisted by the White Rose Travelers' Aid services.

There were many situations that affected the young women who received help from the White Rose Home. Some of the young women had left their homes on tickets given to them by an agent, and they had run out of money before they reached New York. Confused by the conditions of a large city, they were vulnerable to the first person who offered a kind word. There were also young women from respectable southern homes who wanted to improve their sewing or cooking skills, and there were others who wanted to earn money during the summer to support their educations in the winter. Travel times varied, steamers did not always arrive on time, and the young women traveling alone could not always be sure that family or friends would meet them at the pier. Anna Rich (1906), Matthews's sister, eventually assumed the role of New York dock agent and described one day's experience this way:

> We leave the Home, 7:45 with a young girl from Farmville, Va., en route to Lime Rock, Conn.; her steamer arrived too late for her to make railroad connections. After seeing her on the train we go to West 40th Street to see about a young girl from Rocky Mount, N. C., whose "friend" encouraged her coming and wrote her to be sure and go to this place. The "friend" failed to meet her according to promise or be at the 40th Street house when we took her there. The people in the house knew the friend but had no information regarding the young girl. We find her very unhappy, so we take her to the Home.
>
> After a hurried lunch we rush, for it is getting late, to the Old Dominion Pier. We find four girls in tears because they could not get berths on the outgoing steamer; they had come a long way; all were strangers to each other. We assured them that we would take care of them, and see that they got off the next day. A few minutes before five the steamer arrived, crowded. As soon as passengers began to land, dock men and others could be heard calling, 'White Rose! White Rose! Look after these people' or something similar." (Keyser, 1906, pp. 3–4). The White Rose Home provided lodging and meals for young women until they could find work. They were charged $1.25 a week for lodging, which included kitchen privileges.

Matthews led the way, but others later became aware of the plight of African American women. Frances Kellor, a European American social reformer, also recognized the plight and exploitation of immigrants, foreign and Black, by employment agencies (Parris & Brooks, 1971). In her investigation and report on racial problems entitled "Out of Work: A Study of Employment Agencies," published in 1904, Kellor found that African American women "are often threatened until they accept positions in questionable places and are frequently sent out without knowing the character of their destinations." In an effort to protect these young women, Kellor established the National League for the Protection of Colored Women in New York City and Philadelphia (Osofsky, 1966). Like the White Rose Home and sometimes in conjunction with it, Kellor's organization

stationed workers at the major depots within the city and offered advice to young women who came to town for the first time. The White Rose Home for Working Girls, the National League for the Protection of Colored Women, and the YWCA supported each other in sponsoring travelers' aid services (Parris & Brooks, 1971; Smith, 1992).

Support for the Mission

The White Rose Home and Industrial Association for Working Girls received contributions from patrons who valued and supported their work. Matthews's social and political power served the White Rose Home well and attracted a loyal following. Funds came from some of New York's wealthiest families, as well as the local community. Young women who had previously used the home's services often came back to donate money and time. Many distinguished African American leaders participated in the work of the association by conducting lectures, offering advice, and affiliating themselves with the activities of the settlement. Among these leaders were Booker T. Washington, a noted writer, scholar, and founder of Tuskegee Institute, and Paul Laurence Dunbar, a famous Renaissance poet. Philanthropists and organizers such as Grace Dodge also supported the work.

Leadership and Legacy

In 1898, Matthews was named president of the White Rose Home; a position she held while continuing to establish a series of social services from Norfolk to New York until 1906. In 1903, Matthews contracted tuberculosis at the wharves while performing her mission work (Lewis, 1925). She spent four years fighting the disease in various sanitariums (Friend of the Negroes Dies, 1907). As Matthews's health gradually failed, the assistant superintendent, Frances Reynolds Keyser, assumed the duties of superintendent of the White Rose Home. Matthews's sister, Anna Rich, took over much of the travelers' aid work. Frail and weak from her struggle against tuberculosis, Matthews died at the age of 45 at her home on Poplar Street in Brooklyn Heights on March 20, 1907.

In the 10 years with Matthews at the helm, the travelers' aid workers met and assisted 50,000 young women and provided shelter to 5,000. Countless women received meals, carfare, intellectual stimulation, and other benefits. After Matthews's death, Mary L. Stone served as president of the White Rose Home from 1906 to 1920. During her tenure, the White Rose Home moved from 97th street to 136th street in Harlem. The African American population was moving uptown to Harlem and the mission moved with them. A plaque outside the brownstone distinguished "The White Rose Home" and a large photograph of Matthews dominated the hall entrance as memorials to her dedicated service and as inspiration to others. The White Rose Home remained a haven for African American women until it closed some time in the 1960s.

The Empowerment Tradition and Implications for Social Work Practice

Organizing by women within ethnic communities in the United States has a rich and diverse history (Gutierrez & Lewis, 1994). Like Matthews, many African Americans, Latinas, and others describe themselves as motivated to engage in activism because of their commitment to their communities and ethnic groups (Barrera, 1987; Collins, 1991; Gilkes, 1981, 1983; Lacayo, 1989). Moved by social injustice and lack of service, Matthews provided a model for organizing, protecting, and training African American women. Such activities by and on behalf of African American women during the Progressive Era offer some lessons for present day community women (O'Donnell, 1995) and social workers.

Gutierrez and Lewis (1994) identified eight practice principles for organizing with women of color. These principles are grounded in the worldviews of women of color and emphasize group process, leadership by women of color, and the organizer's role as a facilitator. The work and life of Matthews epitomized these principles.

1. Know about and participate in the ethnic community.
2. Recognize and build upon ways in which women of color have worked effectively within their own communities.
3. Involve women of color in leadership roles.
4. Serve as a facilitator and use the "lens" women of color.
5. Use the process of praxis to understand the historical, political, and social context of the organizing effort.
6. Begin with the formation of small groups.
7. Recognize and embrace the conflict that characterizes cross-cultural work.
8. Understand and support the need that women of color may have for their own separate programs and organizations.

The Community of African American Women

As an African American woman who was born in the South and migrated north like many of her generation, Matthews was familiar with the social conditions that her community faced. She was a member of a new generation of African American women who emerged from the cataclysm of slavery. As a domestic worker, she understood the plight of African American women and families, and, as an activist, she recognized what was needed to address the myriad social problems that burdened them. Matthews constantly worked to expand her knowledge through reading, writing, and research.

Building on the Strengths of the Community

Women of color have traditionally been involved in activities to benefit their community (Gutierrez & Lewis, 1994), and they have often organized community empower-

ment efforts. Matthews was a great organizer who called upon African American women across the country to come together to form a national organization. She understood the power of numbers and worked to unite African American women for the social and economic benefit of their communities.

African American Women in Leadership Roles

Matthews collaborated with other African American women. Working with local community women, she organized the first women's club for African Americans in New York. As a result of her involvement on the national scene, Matthews encouraged other women to take leadership roles. She was the epitome of competent and effective leadership, as well as a respected role model for her colleagues, who continued her efforts after her illness.

An African American Woman's Vision

Matthews was a visionary. She was able to expand the work at the White Rose Home so that it met demand, but she was also able to anticipate need. Perhaps her skill as a reporter contributed to her ability to focus on the future issues and problems with an emphasis on social action. Matthews's work was conducted through her "vision" as an African American woman. She delivered speeches directly addressing African American women, their work, and their place in society. As a journalist, she wrote to inform and correct misperceptions and to advocate for justice and social reform.

Praxis: Understanding the Historical, Political, and Social Context

The principle that "the organizing process as well as the outcome will inform both the organized community and 'community'" (Gutierrez & Lewis, 1994, p. 37) indicates the importance of reflection on process. In organizing the White Rose Home as a settlement house in the African American community, Matthews and her colleagues learned as they progressed. Programs were added, such as travelers' aid and social clubs, as the community needs changed. Matthews's role as a journalist also reflects her talent toward praxis. She was in touch with the pulse of her community.

Small Groups Group Building

Matthews's women's club leadership, mothers' meetings, and White Rose Home are all examples of the grass roots efforts. The White Rose Home for Working Girls began with a small group of women who laid the groundwork to establish the mission. This small band of women formed the backbone of the organization that fueled local community commitment that helped to keep the home operating for more than 50 years.

Recognizing Conflict That Is Characteristic of Racism

Matthews was a member of a community of African American women that sparked the cry for respect, dignity, education, and social reform for their community. Using newspapers and journals such as the *Woman's Era*, Matthews called women's attention to the danger and negative impact of racism. Meaningful dialogue and interaction between African Americans and European Americans was not common. Many fears, lack of information, and laws separated these communities. Matthews attempted to bridge that divide in her work. She fought with her pen to dispel myths and inform everyone about African American people, especially women. She was able to draw people in to support her mission.

Programs in Their Own Community

African Americans were migrating to New York in great numbers during the Progressive Era. Few settlement houses, however, were willing to serve the African American population. By 1911, the Lincoln Settlement House was the only settlement opened specifically for African Americans. Other organizations would often refer African Americans who came to their door to the White Rose Mission for services. The home provided a variety of services to the African American community in New York that they could not adequately access elsewhere. As a result of this development, Matthews created a place were African American women could not only receive help, but also provide help to others. Through this experience the women developed teaching, organizing, and leadership skills in a supportive, safe environment.

Conclusion

Victoria Earle Matthews was a woman who worked tirelessly for the advancement of her race, and for African American men, women, and children. She was a leader of the Progressive Era. Through her work with the White Rose Mission and the Home for Working Girls, she left her mark by establishing a tradition of self-help and community empowerment for women. Her vision and work were the forerunners to travelers' aid in New York and other cities. She lived a life that epitomized social uplift. Despite her deprived beginnings and personal losses, she moved on to serve others with zeal and determination. Ultimately, her real strength and goodness lay in her ability to strengthen others and to spark the flames of self-knowledge and empowerment.

References

Barrera, M. (1987). Chicano class structure. In R. Takaki (Ed.), *From different shores: Perspectives on race and ethnicity in America* (pp. 130–138). New York: Oxford University Press.

Best, L. (1939). *History of the White Rose Mission and Industrial Association*. WPA Research Paper. New York: Schromburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Brown, H. (1988). *Homespun heroines and other women of distinction*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Carlton-LaNey, I. B. (1989). Old folk's home for Blacks during the Progressive Era. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, *16,* 43–60.

Carlton-LaNey, I. B. (1997). Elizabeth Ross Haynes: An African American reformer of womanist consciousness, 1908–1940. *Social Work*, *42,* 573–583.

Carmand, K. (1895, August). Report of the Women's Loyal Union of Brooklyn and New York. *Woman's Era*, 2, pp. 4–5, 19.

Cash, F. B. (1993). Victoria Earle Matthews. In D. C. Hines (Ed.), *Black women in America: A historical encyclopedia* (Vol. 2, pp. 759–761). Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing.

Collins, P. (1991). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

Frazier, S. E. (1894, May). Mrs. Wm. E. Matthews (Victoria Earle). *Woman's Era*, Vol. 1, 2, p. 1.

Friend of the Negroes dies. (1907, March 11). *The New York Times*, 7, 16.

Gilkes, C. (1981). Holding back the ocean with a broom: Black women and community work. In L. F. Rogers-Rose (Ed.), *The Black Woman* (pp. 217–233). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Gilkes, C. (1983). Going up for the oppressed: The career mobility of Black women community workers. *Journal of Social Issues, 39* (3), 115–139.

Gutierrez, L., & Lewis, E. A. (1994). Community organizing with women of color: A feminist approach. *Journal of Community Practice, 1* (2), 23–43.

Jones, B. (1990). The woman's club movement. In D. Hine (Ed.), *Black women in United States history: Vol. 13. Quest for equality* (pp. 17–29). Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing.

Keyser, F. (1906, September 27). *Report of the White Rose Home*, pp. 3–4.

Keyser, F. (1907, March 14). Victoria Earle Matthews: A tribute to life and good works. *The New York Age*, p. 1.

Kogut, A. (1970). The Negro and the charity organization society in the Progressive Era. *Social Service Review*, *44*, 11–21.

Lacayo, R. (1989, September 11). On the Front Lines, *Time.*

Lewis, M. (1925, 7 April). The White Rose Industrial Association: The friend of the strange girl in New York. *Messenger*, p. 158.

Matthews, V. E. (1895). New York Victoria Earle editor. *Woman's Era*, Vol 2, 4, pp. 2–3.

Matthews, V. (1898). *Black belt diamonds: Gems from the speeches, addresses and talks of B. T. Washington.*

Moses, W. (1990). Domestic feminism conservatism in sex roles and Black women's clubs. In D. Hine (Ed.), *Black women in American history, Vol. 3. From Colonial times through the nineteeth century*. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing.

O'Donnell, S. (1995). Urban African American community development in the Progressive Era, *Journal of Community Practice, 2*, (4), 7–26.

Osofsky, G. (1963). *Harlem: The making of a ghetto*. New York: Harper & Row.

Parris, G., & Brooks, L. (1971). *Blacks in the city: A history of the National Urban League*. Boston: Little Brown.

Penn, G. I. (1969). *The Afro-American press and its editors*. New York: Columbia University.

Ruffin, J. (1895, June). Let us confer together. *Woman's Era*, Vol. 2, 3, p. 4.

Salem, D. (1990). Black women in organized reform, 1890–1920. In D. Hines, (Ed.), *Black women in United States history* (Vol. 14, pp. 261–357). Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing.

Schockley, A. (1988). *Afro-American women writers*. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co.

Smith, H., & Carter, L. C. (1895, August). Minutes of the first national conference of colored women. *Woman's Era*, Vol. 2, 5, p. 3.

Smith, J. (Ed.). (1992). *Notable Black American women*. Detroit, MI: Gale Research.

Terrell, M. (1940). The history of the women's club movement. In D. Hines (Ed.). *Black women in United States history: Vol. 13. Quest for equity* (pp. 315–325). Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing.

Untitled Comments. (1895). *Woman's Era*, Vol. 2, 5, p. 15.

Wade-Gayles, G. (1981). Black women journalist in the south, 1880–1905. In D. Hines (Ed.), *Black women in American history*: *Vol. 4. The twentieth century* (pp. 1409–1423). Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing.

Waites, C. (1990). The tradition of group work and natural helping networks in the African American community. In D.Fike & B. Ritter, *Working from strengths: The essence of group work*, Miami: Center for Group Work Studies.

Williams, F. B. (1894, December). *Woman's Era*, Vol. 1, 2, p. 5.