

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Victoria Earle Matthews

author, activist, social worker

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Background Information

Born: May 27, 1861

Death: March 10, 1907

Matthews was born in Georgia and was the daughter of Caroline Smith, an enslaved woman, and the family's owner. Her mother escaped from enslavement and fought in court to buy the freedom of her children she left behind, including Victoria. The family then moved to New York City. Matthews attended public school until the family's financial situation forced her to drop out of school to work as a domestic servant when she was sixteen. Victoria used the library in the home of the family she worked for to continue her education. She married William Matthews when she was eighteen, and they had one son together.ⁱ

Matthews' Resistance

Victoria began a career in journalism working as a reporter for well-known New York newspapers such as the *Times*, *Herald*, and *Sunday Mercury*, as well as African American newspapers the *Boston Advocate* and the *New York Globe*.ⁱⁱ She also began writing fiction focusing on the struggle of black women. Issues of colorism and stories to help develop pride in their blackness were Matthew's focus.¹ She also became a prominent activist working with poverty stricken New Yorkers. In 1897, she helped found the White Rose Mission to help women adjust to urban life in a positive manner.ⁱⁱⁱ Additionally, she worked with activist Ida B. Wells to support work against racial discrimination and lynching. Matthews served on the executive board of the National Association of Colored Women in 1896. She was a prominent speaker and writer and published three books relating to prominent issues of healing, anguish, and success.²

Achievements

Her settlement house, the White Rose was an inspiration of the current YMCA organization.¹ Matthews' dedication to racial uplift and gender equality led to her involvement in the Black Woman's Club movement. In 1892 she became the first president of the Woman's Loyal Union of New York and Brooklyn.

Essential Questions

1. How did Matthews' mother provide an example of resistance for Victoria? How did this influence her as an adult?
2. How were her actions acts of resistance? What was it that she was working against/to resist?
3. What are two adjectives you would use to describe Matthews? How can you be more like her in your daily life?
4. "literature in its loftiest development reaches out to the utmost limits of soul enlargement and outstrips all earthly limitations."
 - a. What does this quote mean to you?

ⁱ Wikipedia contributors. (2020, September 16). *Victoria Earle Matthews*. Wikipedia.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victoria_Earle_Matthews

ⁱⁱ Johnson, W. (2007, December 16) *Victoria Earle Matthews (1861-1907)*. Retrieved from <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/matthews-victoria-earle-1861-1907/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Joseph Fischl, "Victoria Earle Matthews," *Black Gotham Archive*, accessed July 10, 2018, <https://archive.blackgothamarchive.org/items/show/63/>.