

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

FANNIE BARRIER WILLIAMS

educator, political activist, women's rights activist, orator

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Background Information

Born: February 12, 1855; Died: March 4, 1944

Williams was born in Brockport, New York, to Anthony and Harriet Barrier. She had two siblings. Her family was one of the only Black families in her community, and well respected. Due to her family's status, she did not experience much overt discrimination in her hometown. In her youth, Williams had aspirations of becoming a teacher. At age 15, she was the first African American to graduate from Brockport State Normal School in 1870. Upon graduation, Williams moved to Washington, D.C., where she taught formerly enslaved students. It was in Washington that she first experienced more overt racism and discrimination.¹

Williams' Resistance

Williams was a gifted orator and first gained recognition after speaking at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. There, she advocated for more African American representation, as this was a significant social and cultural event.¹ Her efforts resulted in two staff appointments being designated for Black Americans, as well as ensuring that African American interests were included in this exposition. Williams was also appointed as Clerk in charge of Colored Interests in the Department of Publicity and Promotions for the exposition.²

Later in 1893, Williams helped found the National League of Colored Women. In 1896, she was involved in founding its successor, the National Association of Colored Women.¹ In addition to her skill as an orator, Williams was a gifted writer. She wrote about the "position and potential progression of African Americans in education, religion, and employment." Many of these writings were published in *The New Woman of Color: The Collected Writings of Fannie Barrier Williams, 1893-1918*.¹

Achievements

In 1924, Williams became the first woman and the first African American to be named to the Chicago Library Board. In 2014, SUNY-College at Brockport, formerly named Brockport State Normal School, named the Fannie Barrier Williams Women of Courage Scholarship after her. This scholarship is awarded to students who achieve a GPA of 3.0 or higher and demonstrate commitment to social justice.³

Essential Questions

1. What actions did Williams take to resist racism and sexism?
 - a. How did her resistance create a more inclusive society for African Americans?

2. How can you use your individual skills/talents to fight injustice in your daily life?

3. ***“...social evils are dangerously contagious. The fixed policy of persecution and injustice against a class of women who are weak and defenseless will be necessarily hurtful to the cause of all women.”***
 - a. What did she mean by this?
 - i. Whom do you think she directed this quote to?
 - b. How can the exclusion of some hurt an entire movement?
 - c. Is this quote still applicable today?

i

ⁱ ¹Staten, C. (2014, March 31) *Fannie Barrier Williams (1855-1944)*. Retrieved from <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/williams-fannie-barrier-1855-1944/>

²"Fannie Barrier Williams". *Western New York Suffragists: Winning the Vote*.

³"Fannie Barrier Williams Women of Courage Scholarship - Brockport Scholarships". *brockport.academicworks.com*. Retrieved 2020-11-18.