Janie Porter Barrett (1865-1948): Exemplary African American Correctional Educator

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Abstract

One problem with the literature of correctional education (CE) and prison reform is that the contributions of African Americans have been generally neglected. This is the first of three essays that will begin to fill that gap. Janie Porter Barrett was an important Virginia leader in the period before and after the turn of the 20th century. She mobilized funds through the Virginia State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs to establish an institution for African American girls outside Richmond, and then became its first superintendent. Throughout her tenure there, Barrett articulated and applied many of the principles that define the modern CE movement. The article includes a context for the work of African American reformers as they are (are are not) represented in the literature of our field, a background biographical sketch on Barrett, some of the themes of her influential career in CE and prison reform, and a summary. The authors learned that the records from Barrett's institution became sealed for 100 years in an effort to protect the reputations of persons who had been confined there during their lifetimes, and they were concerned that this might make information about Barrett's contributions even more inaccessible. They hope the material they were able to access will attract attention to this exemplary correctional educator, and that others will carry on with the traditions Barrett stood for throughout her career.

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> Do precisely the opposite to what is usually done, and you will have hit on the right plan. (Rousseau, in Quick, 1916, p. 241)
>
> Surely, then, if the present system has totally failed, there must be something radically wrong in it, and it ought to be changed. (Carpenter, 1969/1864, vol. #2, p. 241)

Background

When correctional educators from the United States interact with members of the same field from other nations, two or three criticisms are often articulated at the beginning of the conversation, usually in terms much like the following: "You Americans lock up too many people, and the proportion of African Americans and other minorities in your prisons is a problem," and "Your death penalty, and its frequency, demonstrate the brutality of your nation." Often, despite being engaged in the same field of education, useful dialogue cannot be pursued until these criticisms are addressed or at least acknowledged. The criticisms are accurate, especially when our incarceration rates are compared to other industrialized nations. Visitors to Virginia find too many African Americans in confinement and other forms of supervision, in South Dakota too many Native Americans, in California too many Mexican Americans.

However, the same nations that criticize the U.S. for these reasons are generally guilty of parallel brutalities that sometimes go unnoticed until one visits their countries and asks about the situation. Minorities are confined in great numbers in other nations, as well as in the U.S.—the Germans lock up too many Turks, the Scandinavians and Bulgarians too many gypsies or Roma, the Canadians too many Inuit and other Native Americans. This problem is so pervasive that it might be associated with the human condition, at least at the current stage of our maturation. Still, no one can successfully argue that minority incarceration is not a problem in the United States.

This series of articles can be considered a response to large gaps in the historical record

vis-à-vis the education of African Americans in prison and African American social reformers. The series presents a criticism of past and current approaches to penology and correctional education (CE). Further, through the retelling of the stories of exemplary social reformers—who happen to be African American—the series strives to establish a more balanced historical perspective by delineating the contributions of these leaders to broader social reform movements as well as to their immediate communities.

Moving toward a more balanced perspective. This article is part of a series of three that is intended to begin to fill a gap in the literature as it relates to the historic CE contributions of African Americans and themes related to the education of African Americans. The series will go backward in time. This first article introduces the need for the three articles and focuses on the work of Janie Porter Barrett before and after the turn of the 20th century. The second will emphasize the education of the freedmen during the occupation of the Confederacy and after the Civil War, and the role of Hampton Institute. The final article in this series will focus on the denial of education during the slavery time. The authors recognize that three articles will not fill the gap, but they hope they begin the process, and that others will pick up some of the work to fill the gap as well.

The current authors are pursuing this series of three articles not merely because they are critical of past practice and hope to provide a small redress, but also because there are remarkable, inspiring stories and records of important contributors to the field of CE that have been hidden for too long.

A short critique of the historical record. It will probably come as no surprise that the literature on CE and prison reform does not systematically treat professional contributions from minority members of the field. Such treatment should be considered in light of the huge proportion

of minority students confined in our institutions. Minority voices are needed because, in its efforts to support the education of marginalized people and peoples, the field of CE is itself marginalized.

Part of the CE/ prison reform literature gap problem is related to the disproportionate attention given to deficit approaches to penology—the onus placed on individuals to transform their behavior, attitudes and skills so they can lead law abiding lives after release. This perspective ignores the context in which they are expected to transform. But double standards and oppression are evident historically and in current practice. Evidence suggests that double standards are applied along the lines of gender, ethnicity or minority status, and socioeconomic class (Mauer, 2003).

Correctional education is not exclusively about teaching basic academic and marketable skills. This approach misses the point about citizenship education, which is not only about educating students for citizenship, but also about positioning teachers as role models for good citizenship. Part of the struggle of citizens, and of CE, has always been for equality, democracy, and freedom; against predatory imperialism, racism, war, sexism, and genocide. The need for this may be rooted in the settling of America by displaced persons who were at-risk, persecuted, and convicted—"indentured servants" and others (Ekirch, 1987). Georgia was actually founded as a penal colony, and felons were exiled to all the colonies until the American Revolution. The transportation of offenders was one example of this colonizing displacement. Another was the orphan trains, which were pursued on a huge, international scale to supply cheap labor (from orphans) to the frontiers of empires.

The historical record is clear: prisons and other confinement institutions have been part of the brutal underbelly of imperialism, and they fit into worldwide patterns of exploitation. It would be difficult to maintain that teachers who are not struggling against brutality are good role models

for citizenship. It would be impossible to maintain that the schools in which correctional educators work are fostering citizenship if these issues are neglected in the classroom. Citizenship is a meaningless term if it does not attend to the struggle against double standards and oppression. Thomas Mott Osborne asked central questions about our work: "Are you looking for immediate or for permanent results? Do you believe in [mental] discipline or in training? Do you wish to produce good prisoners or to prepare good citizens?" (1975/1912, p. 212; emphases in original). Those questions remain timely—they provide a context for the gap that this article helps address.

Despite these contexts, the historical record regarding education of African Americans in prisons has been generally neglected, and when the issue has been addressed in the record it has been approached superficially. For example, the records of the Boston Prison Discipline Society report that in 1828 Sing Sing Chaplain Gerrish Barrett wrote "After prayers I heard a black man read." (BPDS, 1972, vol. #1, p. 211). This was noteworthy because many states then had laws that provided terrible penalties for slaves who tried to acquire literacy, and even for Whites who had the courage to teach them.

Another example of this neglect is the 1922 report of the Board of Directors of Virginia Penitentiary, which included the following: "The median education of the 182 white inmates is that of a fifth grade in our elementary schools, and the median education of the 402 negro inmates is that of a second grade in our elementary schools" (Virginia, 1922, p. 30). That section of the report was submitted by education advisor Hoke, who also served as assistant superintendent of Richmond public schools, in charge of education programs for backward children (p. 22). The Board emphasized the:

> first school...organized at the Penitentiary...[It] had…two classes of approximately fifteen white men in each, under an instructor who was a prison inmate. One class had men of 8 and 9 years and the other men of 10 and 11 years mentality. Attendance in these classes was entirely optional; in fact, it was conditioned on good conduct. These classes were soon

> followed by two other classes for negro inmates, with optional attendance. The two groups of white men, as originally organized, are still [1922] attending instruction. The negro classes have been reclassified. (p. 4)

These two passages, separated in time by about 100 years and in distance between Virginia and New York, are about all there is in the classic literature on CE on the education of confined African Americans. In many ways this gap in the literature corresponds to the gap between our current practice and our aspirations. Stated alternatively, correctional educators who are alert to these important themes of the field are concerned that most information has been inaccessible, an effect that supports and maintains historic patterns of oppression.

Thus the purpose for this series is twofold: to present stories that serve as counter-scripts to deficit-models of CE prevalent in the literature, and to help fill the gap in the CE/prison reform literature related to the education of African Americans in prison and African American social reformers. This first article highlights the contributions of an exemplary African American educator and reformer–Janie Porter Barrett. The following two sections present (a) biographical information about Janie Porter Barrett and (b) thematic glimpses of her philosophy of practice. Both sections borrow liberally from Barrett's own words and reports to summarize her contributions to the field of CE and prison reform.

Janie Porter Barrett: A Biographical Sketch

> This section is based on Kneebone, et al. (1998), pp. 357-359.
> BARRETT, Janie Porter (1865-1948), educator, was born in Athens, Georgia, the daughter of Julia Porter, an African American domestic servant and seamstress. The name of her father, who may have been white, is unknown. She grew up in Macon, Georgia, where her mother worked for a northern white woman named Skinner who treated the child almost as a member of the family. After Julia Porter married and moved to her own home, Janie Porter remained in the Skinner household. Julia Porter evidently turned down an offer by Skinner to send her daughter north to school, where she might have passed into the white world and left her family forever. Instead, Janie Porter's mother sent her to Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, the first of the self-help, vocational training schools for freed people. Porter initially had difficulty adjusting to life in a school whose students largely came from rural backgrounds. In later years she attributed her desire to serve her

> fellow African Americans to Sir Walter Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men: An Impossible Story*, a utopian novel published in 1882 in which an heiress worked to help the poor of London. (p. 357)

Janie Porter graduated from Hampton Institute in 1884 and taught for four years in rural Georgia. In 1888 she attended Lucy Laney's Haines Normal and Industrial school in Augusta, Georgia. Laney, who had herself graduated from Atlanta University, "sought to give a new generation of African Americans a way to rise in the world by plain living, high thinking, cleanliness, and godliness coupled with academic and vocational training" (p. 357). By 1889 Porter returned to Hampton and married Harris Barrett, who had also studied at Hampton and worked as a bookkeeper and later became a businessman. "They lived in Hampton and had one son and three daughters" (p. 357). Barrett founded activities for community girls: one class or club met nearly every evening or afternoon—sewing, rug weaving, athletics, general gardening, raising poultry, cooking, parenting ("child welfare"), quilting, and flower growing. On their own land, the Barretts constructed a clubhouse, and soon the Locust Street Social Settlement was established, along the same lines as Jane Addams' Chicago Hull House.

> Locust Street typified the growing number of institutions black people were creating for themselves, paralleling similar developments in white society. Another was the National Association of Colored Women, formed in 1896, which encouraged local clubs to organize state federations. In 1908 Barrett helped found the Virginia State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, and she served as its president until 1932. (p. 357)

Barrett was concerned about the terrible conditions in which most African American children were raised. "She often told of finding an eight-year-old girl in jail and becoming convinced of the need for a home for what were then called wayward girls" (p. 358). Under her leadership, the Virginia State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs took up this cause, and Barrett toured the State gathering contributions from its African American communities. In 1912 the National Association of Colored Women held its conference in Hampton, helping to fuel

Barrett's fundraising initiatives. By 1913 she had gained the support of a number of White Virginia women. "Barrett always gave due credit to the white women and their clubs, though she recognized the greater constancy of her black supporters" (p. 358). She received technical assistance from the Russell Sage Foundation, which focused on the influence of women in social improvements. Eventually more than $5,000 had been devoted to the cause. That was when her Virginia State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs purchased a farm in Hanover County just north of Richmond, for the school for girls.

> White residents near the proposed site of the school objected, but Barrett promised to take charge of the school as its first superintendent and to move it if it proved a nuisance to the neighbors. The objections satisfied, the General Assembly appropriated $3,000 for the Industrial Home School for Colored Girls, later the Virginia Industrial School for Colored Girls, and it opened its doors in January 1915. The Virginia State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs owned and governed the school, which had a large board of visitors composed of whites and blacks. During the campaign to raise money, [her husband] Harris Barrett died of a stroke on 26 March 1915. (p. 358)

Janie Porter Barrett intended for the new institution to help girls develop Christian character. Student activities were regulated by the honor system. Using rewards instead of punishments in its programs, she emphasized the facility's role as a home rather than a prison. All activities were aimed at building agricultural and household skills, and cleanliness. Students were expected to work on farms or as domestics until they were able to establish their own homes. The models that had been prototyped at Hampton, and at Tuskegee Institute, were frequently replicated during Barrett's tenure as institutional superintendent. However, her personality was really the "glue" that held the various program elements together.

In the communities, Barrett struggled to "prevent the exploitation of former students by employers in search of cheap labor" (p. 358). Her success in garnering support from private sources and the Virginia legislature was facilitated by both African American and White women.

The African American banker Maggie Lena Walker also gave generously to the school and

> organized a Council of Colored Women in Richmond, which took responsibility for such activities as an annual Christmas dinner for the girls and staff. Little by little, the successful school received recognition and praise. (p. 358)

In 1920 the State assumed control of the Industrial Home School for Colored Girls, but Barrett's management continued until her 1940 retirement as superintendent. In the 1920s the Russell Sage Foundation recognized it as one of the best such facilities in the nation.

During the 1920s Barrett was active in the Richmond Urban League and the Virginia Commission on Interracial Cooperation. Regarding voter preparation as important as institutional programming for girls, Barrett wrote in 1938 that "voting is a duty as well as a fight" (p. 358). She chaired the National Association of Colored Women's Executive Board. In 1929 Barrett received the William E. Harmon Award for Distinguished Achievement among Negroes; in 1930 she was invited to the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection. After retiring she returned to Hampton. She died in 1948 and was buried in Hampton's Elmerton Cemetery.

In 1950 the Industrial Home School for Colored Girls was renamed Janie Porter Barrett School for Girls. Racial integration came in 1965, and coeducational programming in 1972. In 1977 the institution became Barrett Learning Center for Boys, and in the early 21st century it was renovated and became a correctional training academy.

The next section introduces some CE highlights of Barrett's leadership at the Industrial School for Colored Girls. The School's Annual Reports, which Barrett personally wrote, provide a glimpse of her unwavering voice and dedication to her charges.

Barrett's Approach to Correctional Education: A Compendium of Her Writings

This section draws on Barrett's Annual Reports from 1916-1921, 1931, and 1939, unless otherwise noted. (References present relevant report years and page[s].) The reports reveal Barrett's voice as she struggled, schemed, cajoled and otherwise marshaled support and resources

for her school, despite, at times, overwhelming odds. These steadfast efforts are organized under these six headings: Donations, Hardships, School, Inmate Discipline, Release, and Barrett's Comments about Her Own Dispositions. The material is intended merely to introduce these topics—more comprehensive coverage is not possible in a single article. The authors' commentary situates this material in a broader social-historical context within and outside of the CE/prison reform movement and delineates organic connections that both nourished, and were nourished by, Barrett's work.

Donations. Barrett moved comfortably between two worlds. She pursued local African American communities and northern White philanthropists with equal intensity.

> The pair of splendid young mules with new harness, the delicious Christmas dinner, and a pair of new shoes for each girl, given by the Council of Colored Women of Richmond, our strongest Federated Club, brought joy enough to last for days. The Federated Clubs of Covington had a sugar shower just before the sugar shortage was announced [a home front activity to support the troops during WW I], and supplied us with sugar at a time when we could not buy it at any price. At the request of these women and under the leadership of the public school teachers, the school children of Covington gave a barrel of potatoes. By having each child bring two or three potatoes this was accomplished without putting anyone to very great expense. (1918, p.. 12)

> Mrs. Falconer…[gave] ten dollars toward a moving-picture outfit, which she felt would give a pleasure that the girls of the school, who are trying to improve, ought to have. In a few minutes the audience gave in pledges and cash one hundred and ninety-five dollars, almost enough money to pay for the machine. (1920, pp. 10-11)

> Our schoolroom was made very comfortable this winter by a splendid large stove, a gift that came to us through Dr. Gregg. This is the first year we have had adequate blackboards. We need maps, more desks, and more school books.(1921, p. 20)

Barrett expressed thanks for "…the barrels of clothing friends send from time to time" (1921, p. 27). Regarding Thanksgiving dinner after a terrible influenza attack at the institution, she wrote that "When it was all over and everyone had pulled through, I could feel almost glad for our troubles because it revealed so many friends that might not have been discovered" (1919, p. 12). Barrett was even thankful for governmental services that would normally be extended to White

citizens without reservation. She noted that

> The white farm demonstrator for Hanover County, after being appealed to by our president and others, has consented to come and look us over occasionally and has given our farmer the privilege of writing him for any information he desires, so we are sure that we are going to make real progress now. (1919, p. 15)

Barrett's work was situated in impoverished conditions difficult to imagine by contemporary American educators, even those that work in marginalized settings and prisons. (However, they likely typify prison schools in many developing countries—see, for example, Imhabekhai, 2002). Yet, in its broadest form, the CE work of Janie Porter Barrett in Virginia can be compared to that of John Henry Pestalozzi in Switzerland or Anton Makarenko in the Soviet Union (Gehring & Eggleston, 2006). Barrett emerged on the scene at a time when her people had almost nothing, as a result of hundreds of years of systematic brutality. Pestalozzi built a CE infrastructure when the Swiss had nothing—after the terrible brutality of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars; Makarenko built a Soviet CE infrastructure after the devastation of the Bolshevik Revolution, World War I, and the Civil War. In other words, the condition of African Americans, after nearly three centuries in North America, was as if they had just emerged from an intense, protracted war.

Hardships. Barrett pursued State funding with unequivocal directness and—perhaps by today's standards—modesty. At one point Barrett wrote that the institution had "…all the modern conveniences except the lighting" (1916, p. 7). This statement was overly optimistic about the institution. For example, she later wrote "Our water pipes were frozen for weeks and weeks" (1918, p. 10). She reiterated the material needs of the institution periodically in her reports. For example, "The rapidly increasing number of girls on parole makes the need for a parole officer imperative" (1920, p. 15).

> Everyone has been obliged to do double work and there has not been one word of

> complaint. It is the kind of service that makes failure impossible….It would have been impossible to do what has been done had they [the Board of Managers] not stood so completely behind me. (1920, p. 23)
>
> We still have a *poor farm*. I have come to the conclusion that it requires not only rich land but brains to farm successfully and, though I hate to confess it, brains are almost as scarce as hens' teeth among some of our farmerettes and of course the land speaks for itself. (1921, p. 21; emphasis in original)
>
> My earnest plea to the Board is that if possible we get an adequate appropriation…We who are managing affairs in the institution are at a loss to know what to do when it gets too cold for the children to go barefooted and shoes must be bought…and the children must have at least a sweater; and finally, when the time comes to open school and no provision is made to pay a teacher…
>
> There has never been a time when our children have had all the clothes they need for a change. They have always been obliged to wash their clothes at night in order to have them clean for the next day….
>
> We need school the year round with two literary teachers and an industrial teacher…We need more library books. We need a sum set aside to meet the expenses of visiting the girls and investigating homes…We need transportation for girls…We need domestic-science equipment and sewing-room equipment...We need dental services.
>
> We need—and this is a crying need—mental tests for our girls. It is very difficult to ascertain whether our girls' failures are their own fault or that of those of us who have paroled them when they have not the mentality to make their own pay.
>
> I should like banjos, guitars, ukuleles, cornet, fife and drum; we need an orchestra and a drum corps. (1921, pp. 31-33)

After 16 years of operation, Barrett still reported salient needs. "We still have no cows….I look forward to the time when we can afford whole milk for every girl" (1931, p. 6).

Barrett's running catalogue of needs again reflects the paucity of resources at her disposal, but, as well, her visionary stance ("…orchestra, drum corps…") toward education. This stance is grounded in the Social Settlement Movement that flourished in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in London's East End, and manifested in such social projects as Toynbee Hall and the People's Palace. These university settlements, described in near-utopian terms in Walter Besant's (1903) *All Sorts of Conditions of Men,* epitomized broad liberal, social and civic curricula,

including beautiful libraries, great performance halls, gymnasiums and winter gardens. In 1920 America, the settlement movement also stirred Jane Addams' work at Hull House in Chicago, and social workers in hundreds of other settlement houses throughout the U.S.

School. Barrett's passion for education is reflected in her hands-on oversight of the school. Her exulted notions about the power of clubs as an extension of the curriculum are based on Besant's (1903) work and her own successful experiences with social clubs at Locust Street Settlement House.

> A thorough course in domestic science will be given which will include the care of poultry, vegetable and flower gardens, lawns and anything else that we find will be needed. Miss Hyde, the lady principal of Hampton Institute…promised to help us plan this course. (1916, p. 10)

> Special activities and clubs included…were: Charm Club, Y-Teens, Junior Red Cross, Girl Scouts, choir, 4-H Club, Dramatic Club, New Homemakers, Student Council…Religious Education. (1916, p. 10)

In the Social Settlement Movement, clubs were not merely designed to relieve monotony and the hardness of life among the poorer classes; they provided opportunities for what Wenger (1998) calls communities of practice. On one level clubs provided a communal structure for informal learning, on another, community where pro-social and pro-educational identities were forged and nurtured. In Barrett's day this social learning model was exemplified by the summer program at Shellbanks—the farm at Hampton Institute—where rural African American youth were recruited to live in the dorms for a few weeks, wear the Institute's uniform, participate in 4H style projects, and imagine themselves as college students (Brawley, 1939).

Within the largely agrarian program at the Industrial School, Barrett lobbied, cajoled and advocated for high academic standards and certifications commensurate with schools for white children. "We are greatly handicapped because we have neither school house nor proper equipment. Miss Peterson, Superintendent of Kilbourne Farm, the school for delinquent white

girls, sent us some of the books that her girls had finished using" (1918, p. 18). "This year we were fortunate in getting the State Board of Education to put our school on its list and…supplied with a literary teacher and an industrial teacher" (1919, p. 12).

She noted:

> We still have two sessions a day….If we could have a teacher the year round, the time taken out of school for planting and harvesting crops and for many other things that have to be done on the farm…could be made up. (1920, pp. 15-16)

> Our classes are not sufficiently organized and do not cover enough ground to receive a certificate in cooking and sewing, but we are still working to this end and we are nearer to it than we were a year ago. In time I hope there will be a class each year to receive these certificates when we have our annual exercises and exhibit [at the County Fair]. It will be the nearest thing to a diploma that the majority of them will ever receive. (1921, p. 18)

"Without such…[an educational] preparation we must not be disappointed if they return to a life of crime and shame" (1931, p. 7). "The industrial training….equipment is woefully out of date. This lack becomes increasingly serious as the use of modern conveniences becomes more general." (1931, p. 9).

> Four girls were recommended in May to complete…seventh grade…certificates if they passed both in academic studies and conduct. This they did with credit. Commencement activities were as elaborate as we could afford….The four girls…[were] placed in homes …earning wages and saving with the expectation of entering high school…. Only a very small percentage…have the ability to take higher academic training. (1931, p. 8)

> We continue to pattern our program of academic training after that of the public schools of the State with the idea that, when our charges are returned to society they will be none the worse for the interruption in their attendance at the public school….It is our sincerest hope that funds will be forthcoming for the erection of a school building which will meet minimum standards at least. (1939, p. 7)

Barrett was a tireless civil rights advocate. Her quest to give her girls an educational experience commensurate with White public schools—including commencement ceremonies "as elaborate as we could afford" presaged contemporary efforts to bring fully commensurate graduation ceremonies to adult prisoners, even to those who completed Adult Basic Education

(McCollum, 1983).

Inmate discipline. The Industrial School program was steeped in the mutual aid and self-help traditions that evolved from the late 19th century Social Settlement Movement. The Industrial Home School for Colored Girls employed progressive methods that typified these traditions—such as honor systems—and banned the use of corporal punishment. One proactive way to diminish bad behavior was to keep the girls busy.

> Sunday is such a hard day for the girls to get through without getting into trouble. They have so much time on their hands, and if I don't give them something to do, Satan will.
>
> Virginia Cottage is used, as was planned, for the reception cottage, each girl on entering being assigned there and closely observed and studied from all angles. She is given ten days to learn the rules and regulations, after which she is marked each day for work, conduct, and personal appearance. She is then in line to work for the white dress and promotion to the honor cottage, which is Federation Cottage. Fighting, quarreling, abusive language, stealing, running away, are all to be overcome before a girl can receive a white dress, and after the much desired white dress has been awarded, if she forgets in a fit of temper and goes back to her old habits, she loses her dress and has to start at the beginning and work for it again. Knowing this she develops self-control more rapidly. (1920, p. 13)
>
> If…a girl's behavior is so disgraceful that she has to be locked up in the 'Thinking Room' she has to wear a brown dress. The activities of the 'brown-dress girl' must be confined to road…work, which consists of carrying from the gravel pit to the roads on the grounds a… number of bucketsful of gravel which varies according to the nature of her misdemeanor. If her spirit is good she may carry as many as three or four bucketsful at a time in a wheel-barrow or push cart. If her spirit is ugly she has to bring up the gravel a half-bucketful at a time. This gives her all the fresh air she needs to revive her spirits and…lengthens the time she must wear the brown dress. When she is finally permitted to take this off she wears faded and patched uniforms…the dresses allotted to the 'mistakes and failures.' From this she has to work up again as if she had newly entered the school. (1921, pp. 13-14).
> The weekly honor roll is a great help. The names of all girls making A in conduct, effort, and work appear on the honor roll each Monday morning. All girls who get their names on the honor roll are considered the first citizens of our community, and each one of these is permitted to wear a small American flag to the Assembly. (1921, p. 14)

When a girl was promoted to the Student Officers' Corps, designated by a bar on the right sleeve, she took the following pledge:

> I pledge my loyalty to the Virginia Industrial School and to the principles for which it stands. I promise to try to be worthy of the special privileges granted me. I promise to

> respect and obey authority; not to steal, or to allow anyone to steal, if I know it, without reporting it. I promise not to run away and to report any girl making plans to run away. I pledge to give my absolute support to the officers of the institution in maintaining law and order. (1921, p. 12)

Barrett cultivated strong civic values in her girls by helping them learn to govern themselves. Note, again, the elevated use of clubs to create social spaces where her charges could forge new identities.

> So many things that used to have to come before the officers are managed by the girls through their clubs. They serve two purposes: they give an opportunity to the girls to practice the social virtues taught through the moral instruction given; and they are most effective in teaching the girls to obey each other, which simplifies the discipline wonderfully. There are two clubs. The Friendly Girls' Club is made up of honor girls only and its object is, first, to obey the rules, and, second, to be helpful to the officers and to each girl in the school, especially the new girls. If one of their members violates a rule or does anything unbecoming she is handled by the club, a thing they very much dread. I heard a girl crying one day as if her heart would break. When I asked her what the trouble was, she said that she had been turned out of the club for speaking rudely to the girls when she passed the coats. I asked her if they would not take her back when she got to be polite. She said yes, but that it was a terrible disgrace to be turned out. The True Blue Club, I think, takes its name from the blue uniforms. It is made up of the uniform girls who devote their entire energies to self-improvement so that they can become honor girls. Every uniform girl has to be a member of the True Blue Club until she becomes an honor girl, and then her highest ambition is to belong to the Friendly Girls' Club. (1918, p. 23)

> The girls elect the head student officer but their choice must meet the approval of the entire Staff. (1931, p. 7)

The historian Sol Cohen (1964) characterized the Social Settlement Movement as "between old school and new school" (p. 138). Reformers like Janie Porter Barrett believed that poverty was still the result of sin, sloth and vice and that a her girls required a large dose of moral reformation. But she also recognized the social roots of poverty and the need to reform social structures. Her views are reflected in her discipline practices, which provide swift penalties for misbehavior but also evoke a sense of trust in the child's capacity to live a moral life when she is provided healthy social structures within which to grow. Barrett's views are similar to the self-governance ideas of William George (1910), and resonate in the contemporary debates between

Michael Dyson and Bill Cosby.

Release. Barrett understood the profound needs for continued support after the girls were released from the caring structure of the Industrial Home School for Colored Girls. Contemporary proponents of the re-entry movement would do well to ponder the simple—yet radical by today's standards—idea of continuity of support provided through personal relationships with caring practitioners.

> I keep in touch with the girl by writing as often as I can and the lady to whom she is paroled sends a report once a month and oftener if the girl gives any trouble. I encourage the girls to write very fully about the things that seem hard to them. If they *are* hard I write…the ladies about them; if they are *not* hard, I show the girl that she is mistaken. In this way so much misunderstanding is saved….our girls…their complete success depends upon placing them in Christian homes where they can be helped after leaving the institution until they are strong enough to stand alone. (1918, pp. 14-15; emphases in original)

> Our plan is not to allow any girl whom we send out to live an immoral life. If she is not self-respecting she must come back until she can learn to be. This fact braces our girls and makes them try very hard to be respectable, and if they get help and protection in the home to which they go they will not fail. I do not believe there are any people in the world more anxious to be respectable than colored girls; when they are given the right standards and are helped they will make good. (1918, p. 16)

Barrett's vigilance was not limited to the behavior of her students; it extended to their caretakers and the conditions of release as well:

> We must do something to have the people taking these girls understand more fully that our Board of Managers insist that they be kindly treated. Slapping a girl and striking her on the head are out of the question. This kind of treatment, aside from being absolutely wrong, can do no good, and will create a condition that will be most difficult to handle. Anyone having a girl is given the right to bring her back to the school whenever she ceases to give satisfaction, so there is no need of doing anything rash. (1920, p. 15)

> All…things [that] endear the school to the girls and form ties which hold them in a wonderful way after they leave us [are helpful]. I want each girl to feel in going out that at the school there are always friends awaiting her when she finds herself in need of help, and who are glad of any success she makes, no matter how little it may be. (1921, p. 18)

In today's large, overcrowded prisons, we hardly know what to make of Barrett's approach

to release. What warden has time to write regularly to her released charges? Yet precious truths are hidden beneath the *quaintness* of Barrett's reports. Her words remind us of the forgotten potential of institutions to foster relationship, trust and community, and the moral power embedded in the imagined act of answering to a respected other. Barrett's actions provide sharp contrast to our dismally failing Re-Entry systems based on negative expectations and mistrust, impersonal surveillance systems (Foucault, 1975) and bureaucratic Re-Entry structures.

Barrett's comments about her own dispositions. Barrett's life story embodies a voice of determined optimism, commitment, strength. Her "continuous plea" should not be misunderstood today as a submissive stance. We end this brief study of Janie Porter Barrett with some of her reflections about herself, the school, staff and students, and their collective accomplishments:

> …Negro women with human slavery less than seventy years behind them…white women, products of hundreds of years of education and culture, joining hands and working together that the least among them might have their chance. What sacrifice and struggle…of… Negro women who had so little to share; what courage in…white women who laid aside custom and…traditions to champion a cause so unpopular! I wish…their every encouraging word and helpful act might be recorded as they burn in my memory…as a guide to future generations who…contribute to human betterment. This… stands as a memorial to brave women, white and black, who forgot their prejudices…overcame…distrust in order that the underprivileged Negro girl might…[have] an opportunity for training and development. The school could not have been built by colored women alone…not…by white women alone, but together they have given to the Commonwealth an institution without which its organization for social welfare would be incomplete. (1939, p. 6)

> When we compare our present surroundings with the wilderness in which our institution had its birth, our unbounded faith in the things we are yet to accomplish is no source of wonder. The site…was a barren spot indeed: a battlefield during the war between the States, and before that an exhausted tract rendered worthless by unscientific farming. And nothing had been done to improve the soil since the war. Now the land flourishes. Trees, flowers, fruits and vegetables bear silent witness to our conquest of desolation. In the beginning, even more than now, belief in the thing we wanted to do for the underprivileged girls of our Commonwealth, and in the way by which we proposed to accomplish this… was the exception rather than the rule and so money came slowly and in small amounts,

> and we had to use every means of extracting the largest possible returns from the resources at our command….Gradually, as a result of [our building up of the land]…the soil regained much of its long lost fertility. Our hunger for beauty led us to our woods, from which we transplanted holly, dogwood, beechnut and sweet gum. (1939, p. 5)
>
> Whenever I leave [the facility] I ask the Lord to let no harm come to…[the girls]. I feel responsible for these irresponsible children, soul and body…don't want them maiming themselves. (1920, p. 21)
>
> My part in the work of this institution has always been to me a very sacred trust—sacred because the State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs let me persuade them to assume the responsibility of establishing the institution; sacred because of the white friends who worked with us when the cause was less popular than it now is; when their co-operation… did not meet the approval of their friends and was therefore far from an easy task for them; sacred because of the state aid voted by our legislature…though small at first…increased yearly until the State…assumed the entire responsibility. So, beneath my continual plea for adequate support is the earnest desire to keep our institution abreast of the times...[to] serve in a larger way in improving the citizenry…and to build an institution worthy of the friends who have stood by us, and worthy of our great Commonwealth. (1931, p. 12)

We are left with an aggregate picture of a compassionate, humble, and determined pioneer. Barrett was a social reformer inspired by the Social Settlement Movement; she possessed an uncompromising sense of social justice and a deep commitment to her students and to her community. She was well aware of the deep racism and segregation in the Jim Crow South of her day, yet believed strongly in the need for collaboration across color lines and moved with ease in both White and Black society. She was, in short, an exemplary correctional educator.

Conclusion

Janie Porter Barrett's Annual Reports for the Industrial Home School constituted a life's work in the service of delinquent African American girls and in the fight against institutionalized racism and injustice. The State legislature provided State funds to establish similar institutions for White girls, and for White boys, but it did not extend this service to African American girls and boys. So Barrett mobilized funds from Virginia's African American communities and from White citizens who found merit in her work. Then the State legislature assumed control of the

institution's physical plant and all its programs. Barrett continued in her leadership role, despite this change.

Her tenure at the Industrial Home School for Colored Girls was marked by many hardships; yet her work advances our ideas about CE, inmate discipline, moral education, Re-Entry, and even the expansion and improvement of physical plants and fundraising. The authors hope that this brief portrayal of a pioneering African American correctional educator will help address the gap in the historical record noted at the beginning of this essay.

There is much in her work that was exemplary, and a few elements that are artifacts of a different time. It would be inappropriate for modern readers to apply current standards to her work, because even best practices from one period may not be useful in another period. The CE work of Janie Porter Barrett defied the extreme racial and material barriers of her time. Perhaps her most remarkable accomplishment was the community she provided her vulnerable students—a community that nurtured growth and was inspired by the highest educational ideals of her age.

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