
‘The Black and Red Races of Our Country’: African American and Native American Women Public Intellectuals in the Southern Workman

Jacqueline Emery*¹ and Teresa Zackodnik*²

¹SUNY College Old Westbury – United States

²University of Alberta – Canada

Abstract

Despite being an important forum for cultural exchange among prominent Black and Native American public intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Hampton Institute’s *Southern Workman* remains a neglected resource. Our paper seeks to bring visibility to this formidable periodical archive and its role in fostering cross-cultural dialogue among women public intellectuals on topics such as education, literature, gender and racial inequality, and women’s changing roles. Much of this neglect seems due to scholarly discomfort with Hampton’s role as the nation’s first residential school for Native Americans and its approach to education as “civilization” of “the Negro” and “the Indian.” Yet the *Workman* remains a crucial resource in our understanding of how African American and Native women were part of the central debates preoccupying both their respective communities and the nation at large. The stated purpose of the *Southern Workman*, an illustrated monthly printed by African and Native American students at Hampton Institute in Virginia, was to inform students about issues “concerning their own race and the outside world, interesting correspondence from teachers, and practical and original articles upon science, agriculture, housekeeping, and education,” but it also served as a publicity tool aimed at garnering financial and political support from its white readers and government. The *Workman* frequently published writings by students and graduates in its pages to demonstrate the effectiveness of its educational program and documented the activities of important political organizations, such as the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Society of American Indians (SAI). It also served as a publishing outlet for some of the most recognizable Black and Native writers, activists, and intellectuals, such as Booker T. Washington, James Weldon Johnson, W. E. B. DuBois, Anna Julia Cooper, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Charles Eastman (Santee Sioux), Henry Roe Cloud (Winnebago), John Milton Oskison (Cherokee), Elizabeth Bender (White Earth Chippewa), and Angel De Cora Dietz (Winnebago). Our paper examines the complex periodical context of the *Workman* for insight into Black and Native women’s cross-cultural exchanges and their contributions to turn-of-the-twentieth-century public intellectualism. We will focus on African American and Native American women recognized as reformers or public intellectuals, who developed strategies for engaging the multiple and diverse readers of the *Workman*. Anna Julia Cooper served as interim editor of the *Workman* while also publishing on African American women’s employment just one month before Lucy Laney published on Black women’s education. Fannie Barrier Williams, who helped found both the

*Speaker

National League of Colored Women (1893) and the NACW (1896), Janie Porter Barrett, and Victoria Earle Matthews each published on social settlement work during the "moral panic" that arose around Black women's migration to Northern cities. Native American Hampton graduates and members of the SAI, Marie L. Baldwin (Chippewa), Elizabeth Bender (White Earth Chippewa), and Angel De Cora Dietz (Winnebago) as well as Hampton student Lucy E. Hunter (Winnebago) offered critical perspectives on the educational policies designed to assimilate and dominate Native Americans. Bender and Hunter even called for higher education for Native peoples. By highlighting the strategies Black and Native women employed to engage in dynamic cross-cultural discussion and debate in the *Workman*, we hope to not only examine the importance of this periodical for their public intellectual work but also to suggest ways of approaching comparative periodical work in Black and Native American studies.