

## Black Women in the ‘White City’

by ANN MASSA

*University of Leeds*

### I

The scope of the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893, which celebrated, albeit a year late, the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus’s discovery of America, ranged over many centuries, numerous nations and almost every type of human achievement. The 27 million people who came to the five months long Fair were able to see Grace Darling’s boat or Spanish galleons of Columbus’s time; they could follow the history of transport from coracles to cars; they could see the latest in Krupp’s cannon and Bell’s telephone in a classically styled Machinery Hall six times the size of the Coliseum. With the exception of Louis Sullivan’s golden Transportation Pavilion, the buildings which housed the Fair, covered uniformly with staff, composed a classical ‘White City’, grouped round a complex of lagoons and fountains on Chicago’s Lake Front.

In this ‘White City’, nations, arts and occupations vied with each other in pavilions and conferences to demonstrate the latest thinking in religion or the most efficient techniques of ship-building; and in the U.S. especially, each state and every section of the host nation did its self-conscious best to boom and boost itself. Elliot M. Rudwick and August Meier, in their article ‘Black Man in the “White City”: Negroes and the Columbian Exposition, 1893’,<sup>1</sup> demonstrate the problems of participation and exhibition confronting one disadvantaged and sectionalized section of American society. Should black men work for a separate exhibit or an integrated one? Should they ask for or accept special (or discriminatory) help in collecting such an exhibit? Should they work for the appointment of a black collector or co-operate with a white one, if white co-operation were forthcoming? Precisely the same problems were involved in the impressive series of collective and individual attempts which both obscure and well-known black women made to secure an effective display of black women’s achievement at the Fair. Moreover, the unceasing, embattled flow of ideas and activities from these women made as effective a display of race pride and talent as any static exhibit in the Fair’s pavilions might have provided.

<sup>1</sup> *Phylon*, 26 (Winter 1965), 354–61.

Since the World's Columbian Commission had given the Board of Lady Managers plenary power as 'the channel of communication through which all women or organizations of women may be brought into relation with the Exposition, and through which all applications for space for the use of women or their exhibits in the buildings shall be made',<sup>2</sup> the black women focused on the Board. On 16 November 1890, three days before the Board's first meeting, the *Chicago Tribune* announced: 'There will be a Ladies' mass-meeting at Bethesda Baptist Chapel . . . next Monday evening [November 24] at eight o'clock relative to the position in which colored ladies' exhibits shall be placed in the National Columbian Exposition.'<sup>3</sup> The organizers were apparently in touch with Mary S. Logan,<sup>4</sup> the formidable, reputedly liberal widow of one of Illinois' emancipating triumvirs, Lincoln, Lovejoy and John A. Logan; she was in Chicago as Lady Manager for Washington, D.C. On 25 November she presented the Board 'a communication from the colored women of Chicago':

WHEREAS no provisions have, as yet, been made by the World's Columbian Exposition Commission for securing exhibits from the colored women of this country, or the giving of representation to them in such Fair, and WHEREAS under the present arrangement and classification of exhibits, it would be impossible for visitors to the Exposition to know and distinguish the exhibits and handwork of the colored women from those of the Anglo-Saxons, and because of this the honor, fame and credit for all meritorious exhibits, though made by some of our race, would not be duly given us, therefore be it

RESOLVED, that for the purpose of demonstrating the progress of the colored women since emancipation and of showing to those who are yet doubters, and there are many, that the colored women have [made] and are making rapid strides in art, science, and manufacturing, and of furnishing to all information as to the educational and industrial advancement made by the race, and what the race has done, is doing, and might do, in every department of life, that we, the colored women of Chicago request the World's Columbian Commission to establish an office for a colored woman whose duty it shall be to collect exhibits from the colored women of America . . .<sup>5</sup>

Mrs Logan's motion that the resolution be referred to the Executive Committee of the World's Columbian Commission was carried; but the petitioners suspected, rightly, that the Commission would take no action. The following

<sup>2</sup> *Report of Mrs Potter Palmer, President, to the Board of Lady Managers, September 2, 1891* (Chicago, 1891), pp. 7–8. <sup>3</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 16 November, 1890.

<sup>4</sup> Biographies and bibliographies for Mary Logan and the following women mentioned in this article can be found in Edward James (ed.): *Notable American Women, 1607–1950* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1971); Hallie Brown, Matilda Carse, Fanny Coppin, Phoebe Couzins, Frances Harper, Isabella Hooker, Bertha Palmer, Ida Wells-Barnett, Fannie Williams.

<sup>5</sup> *Approved official minutes of the Board of Lady Managers of the World's Columbian Commission, 19–26 November* (Chicago, 1891), p. 79.

morning the Board received two pressing communications from the women, and agreed to hear their spokeswoman, Mrs Lettie A. Trent. She reiterated their 'wishes and claims' with a slight shift of emphasis: she 'asked to have a colored woman designated by the Commission and legally authorized to be placed in charge of the exhibit of the colored people',<sup>6</sup> underlining that it was an executive post, not a fieldworker, that the women had in mind. The President of the Board, Mrs Bertha Honoré Palmer, wife of Chicago property tycoon, Potter Palmer, suggested a committee of three to confer with the delegation over lunch: Mrs Logan, Mrs Helen Brayton<sup>7</sup> of South Carolina, a philanthropist involved in helping the dependants of lynch-law victims, and Mrs Mary Cecil Cantrill, wife of Representative James Cantrill of the Kentucky legislature, who 'expressed her deep interest in the race and her desire to use all her powers in their elevation and advancement, and seemed to feel that her long and intimate acquaintance with them gave her peculiar opportunities for helpfulness'.<sup>8</sup>

The report submitted in the afternoon differed significantly from Mrs Trent's request in that it did not specify a 'colored woman' as organizer.

The committee . . . has the honor to report that the colored people request that the Lady Managers recommend to the Columbian Commission that in designating persons to solicit exhibits, that they recognize them in securing exhibits by their race, and that the President of the Lady Managers, in appointing the Executive Committee of the Ladies' Board, be respectfully requested to appoint some Lady Manager on that Committee to represent the interest of the colored people.<sup>9</sup>

The report bears several interpretations. The committee, speaking for rather than to the Board, might be stating that the Board would not appoint or co-operate with a black woman organizer, but was not opposed to a black women's exhibit. Alternatively, the intention might be to indicate that the Board would co-operate with a black male organizer. In all probability the committee had framed a resolution which, without committing the Board to any specific action, would convince the petitioners that some progress was being made.

From 26 November 1890, when the first meeting of the Board ended, the

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91–2.

<sup>7</sup> Brayton to Albion W. Tourgée, 13 April, 1892, in the Albion W. Tourgée Papers, Chautauqua County Historical Society, Westfield, N.Y.; hereafter cited as *TP*. Tourgée, radical-liberal judge, journalist and author, was the adviser and confidante of black and white liberals; and as 'Bystander' of the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, had a special interest in the city. Dean H. Keller, 'An Index to the Albion W. Tourgée Papers', *Kent State University Bulletin* (May, 1964), numbers the items in the Brayton-Tourgée correspondence, 4361, 4717, 4789, 6181.

<sup>8</sup> Susan G. Cooke, 'To all interested in the colored people', 3 pp. carbon typescript, Logan Family Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; hereafter cited as *LP*.

<sup>9</sup> *Approved official minutes . . . November 19–26*, p. 92.

Lady Managers and the lobbyists did their best to determine who Mrs Palmer would appoint to her twenty-five member executive committee, which, since Congress seemed certain to refuse to fund frequent meetings of the unwieldy and expensive 115 member Board, would become the *de facto* female power centre.<sup>10</sup> Would it be more southern than northern, since Mrs Palmer was originally from Kentucky? Mrs Trent, now President of the Woman's Columbian Association, badgered the Board as appointment day drew near. She wrote Mrs Logan:

As Mrs. Potter Palmer is about to appoint the executive board of Lady Managers, our Association sent a petition to her asking that in the interest of the colored women of this country that she appoint Ladies whose names would be inspiring to them, that they might feel assured of having friends on the board of Managers. We . . . request that your name should head the list. Knowing how thoroughly your name is known among our people it would certainly make them feel more at liberty to send their exhibits.<sup>11</sup>

But there were black women in Chicago who did not agree with Mrs Trent's plan to stage a separate exhibit, her attempt to work through white women, and her apparent willingness to be represented by white women. On 27 February 1890, a rival organization, the Women's Columbian Auxiliary Association came into being, registered as a corporation under the State of Illinois, with an all-female board of seven women directors and seven women officers, President, Mrs R. D. Boone. A seven-man advisory panel included Frederick L. Barnett, a Chicago lawyer who in 1895 married Ida B. Wells, and Dr Daniel Hale Williams, founder of Provident Hospital, whose all-black governors and staff admitted black and white patients equally. The W.C.C.A., quickly claiming a hundred committed members, had organizational strengths and race ambitions lacking in the W.C.A. In the first stages of its existence the W.C.C.A. was only secondarily concerned with women at the Fair. Its first care was that this 'best opportunity . . . to give evidence to the world of the capability of the race . . . just what it has accomplished since Emancipation' should not be passed up; and that opportunity had to be seized independently.

We cannot expect for the American people to expend their energy and tax their best efforts to help any one class of American citizens. Still less can this be expected when we consider that toward the colored race there exists a well defined prejudice which in almost every avenue of action tends to work against us.

The W.C.C.A.'s members opted for an integrated exhibit.<sup>12</sup> They did not

<sup>10</sup> *Congressional Record*, 51:2, 24 February 1891, pp. 3196-7.

<sup>11</sup> Trent to Logan, 25 March 1891, LP.

<sup>12</sup> The Board had faced 'the burning question . . . whether the work of women at the Fair should be shown separately or in conjunction with the work of men' and had decided to integrate. *Mrs Palmer's Address to the Fortnightly Club of Chicago* (Chicago, 1891), p. 4.

want to be set apart, for 'we are American citizens and desire to draw no line that would tend to make us strangers in the land of our birth'. They appealed, then, to blacks for information, volunteers and money, and outlined eight areas where they expected to demonstrate black achievement: music, art, church work, education, agriculture, mining, skilled work and woman's work. In the last area, the W.C.C.A. would act as 'a supplement to the labors of the Lady Board of Managers'.<sup>13</sup>

## II

Like the officers of the Board, only one of whom, Mrs Charles Price of South Carolina, was a Southerner, the Executive Committee, appointed in late March, had few Southern members. Lady Manager Mrs R. A. Felton of Georgia complained to Mrs Logan, who was appointed: 'From Washington city to the Mississippi river, the six states of Virginia, South and North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi – not a single lady.'<sup>14</sup> When the Committee met in April, in accordance with the Board's minutes, and as a filial, compensatory gesture by Mrs Palmer to her home state, the South, and the lady who had nominated her for President, Mrs Cantrill of Kentucky was appointed to represent the coloured people. The appointment was a *faux pas*. Mrs Cantrill was so soaked in Southern paternalism that she was incapable of recognizing her own discriminatory practices.<sup>15</sup> Mrs Trent protested the appointment, though, since she was still prepared to work through, with and under white women, she based her protest on a claim that the Board's minutes and the subsequent Executive Committee procedure was incorrect. 'In the conference we had at the Palmer House it was settled to have three ladies to look after the interest of our women although the minutes read one lady.' Mrs Boone protested the Booker T. Washington-style approach of Mrs Trent.<sup>16</sup>

It is not specifically known how Mrs Cantrill construed or fulfilled her office, with one exception; she did refer all representations from black women

<sup>13</sup> Women's Columbian Association, *Aim and Plan of Action. Constitution and Bylaws* (Chicago, February 1891); 10 pp. carbon typescript, TP. Keller, *loc. cit.*, items 5384A, 6148. Apart from Mrs Boone, *infra*, only one of the fourteen ladies has been identified as subsequently active: Mrs Lloyd [Connie E.] Curl, who became President of the Women's Civic League of Illinois, 1896–8, and Recording Secretary of the National Association of Colored Women, 1899–1900. See [Elizabeth Lindsay Davis], *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, 1900–22* [n.p., n.d.], pp. 50–1, 98.

<sup>14</sup> Felton to Logan, 30 March 1891, LP. Presumably southern representation was slight because Mrs Palmer expected to find most evidence of women's progress in the North.

<sup>15</sup> Logan to Palmer, 16 October 1891, LP.

<sup>16</sup> Trent to Logan, 25 March, 4 April 1891, LP.

in Illinois<sup>17</sup> to the State Woman's Exposition Board, and this may have been her regular procedure. Events in September and October, 1891, showed that the black women's organizations, whose numbers had grown from two to four, and even some members of the Board, were discontented with Mrs Cantrill. Between April and September, 1891, when the Board held its second meeting, the black women canvassed the Lady Managers, especially three professional women who coveted Mrs Palmer's post and resented the authority of a society woman: lawyer Phoebe Couzins of St Louis, journalist Mary Lockwood of Washington, D.C., and suffragist-politician Isabella Beecher Hooker of Connecticut. Mrs Trent found that only these women, Mrs Logan, Mrs Brayton and a few others were 'in favour of doing justice and right by the colored women'<sup>18</sup>. Mrs Boone claimed that only three of the responses she received were favourable; the majority of the Board

ignored the letters of inquiry entirely, while some were frank enough to speak their pronounced opposition to any plan which would bring them in contact with a colored representative, and to emphasize the opposition by a declaration that they would resign in case [of] such an appointment.<sup>19</sup>

When the Board met in September, 1891, members interested in the black women's cause had difficulty in bringing Mrs Cantrill to the bar. In the morning of the sixth day, 8 September, she still 'required further time'; in the afternoon 'on the motion of Mrs [Matilda B.] Carse [the egalitarian business manager of the W.C.T.U.] Mrs Cantrill's report on the work among the colored people was made the special order of business for the following morning'. The only point of information in her vague report was that 'many of the questions referred for decision and action did not properly belong to our Committee [Mrs Cantrill: a Committee of one] and we have not jeopardized the interest of a state of our great Exposition, but gladly and appropriately lay before the proper authorities these questions'.<sup>20</sup> The sense of the meeting defined itself: a minority 'felt that the colored women should

<sup>17</sup> Frances B. Philips, 'To all interested in the colored women' (Office of the Illinois Women's Exposition Board, 1 October 1891); 1 p. carbon typescript, LP.

<sup>18</sup> See *An Official Statement of the Act of the Executive Committee of the Board of Lady Managers in removing from office Miss Phoebe Couzins* (Chicago, 1891); *infra*, note 25; Hooker to Palmer, 8 May, 17 June 1891, Palmer to Hooker, 4 June 1891, in Correspondence of Mrs. Bertha Honoré Palmer, President, Board of Lady Managers of the World's Columbian Commission, Chicago Historical Society; hereafter cited as PP.

<sup>19</sup> 'The Appeal to the representative negro women of the United States', *Boston Courant*, 24 October 1891; issued 'a few weeks ago', *ibid.* Ida B. Wells (ed.), *The Reason Why the Colored American is not in the World's Columbian Exposition* [Chicago, 1893], p. 71. Cooke, *loc. cit.*, 'The Appeal . . .', *loc. cit.*, and Palmer to Mrs Russell Harrison, 3 November 1891, PP, all mention four organizations.

<sup>20</sup> *Official Manual of the Board of Lady Managers of the World's Columbian Commission, November 10, 1890–September 9, 1891* (Chicago, 1891), pp. 264, 282, 299.

be treated separately, and their exhibit placed by itself', and a majority 'were in favor of no unjust discrimination in color but favored placing the colored women on the same footing with white women, giving them the same latitude and opportunity . . .' <sup>21</sup> The summary resolution of Mrs Paul of Virginia was adopted:

That the work of arousing interest in each of the several States and Territories, and the District of Columbia, among the colored people, and the best methods to be adopted and pursued therein, be and the same are expressly referred to the Lady Managers . . . in each State and Territory, and the District of Columbia.<sup>22</sup>

On paper justice had been done, for manageable size and financial reality dictated the state as the effective organizational unit, as Mrs Palmer had told her Executive Committee:

We must depend upon State Boards for all statistics as to woman's work . . . [to] ascertain what exhibits the women of their States will make . . . so that we may apply to the Installation Committee for the needed space . . . [to] suggest to us proper members for the juries of award.<sup>23</sup>

The Board's annual appropriation from Congress of \$36,000 barely covered running costs. Most states financed their own World's Fair's Boards, and catered for them by allotting a percentage of the entire appropriation, or a specific sum, or by honouring itemized accounts, *per diem* and travelling expenses. In practice, justice was out of the question, even given the hypothetical goodwill of the Lady Managers. The Southern States were, on the whole, late in setting up Boards (Kentucky, June, 1892; Louisiana, August, 1892); women in Alabama, Mississippi and South Carolina had to raise money by subscription; Kentucky's and Missouri's national Lady Managers had no expense accounts.<sup>24</sup>

### III

Specious referral to the states momentarily united Mrs Trent, whose appeal for special help and a separate exhibit had thereby been refused, and Mrs Boone, who took the spirit, if not the letter of the resolution to mean that the Board was 'bitterly opposed to any advancement of the Negro race'. Both women wanted redress for the slanderous, racist remarks and jibes they believed had been made about them at the Board's September meeting.

<sup>21</sup> Cooke, *loc. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Report of Mrs Potter Palmer, President, to the Board of Lady Managers, September 2, 1891* (Chicago, 1891), p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> 'Report of Amy M. Starkweather, Superintendent, State Work, Chief of Installation and Superintendent of Woman's Building', Appendices 'A-I' through 'A-11'; carbon type-script, Chicago Historical Society.

Representative from Arkansas: 'I wish to exhibit the work of the poor white cotton pickers.' Representative from Georgia: 'I want to exhibit the work of the cotton pickers – I mean the white cotton pickers.' Democratic representative from Texas: 'The darkies are better off in the white folk's hands. The Negroes in my State do not want representation.' Representative from Washington, D.C., who desired to have a delegation of colored women heard, was told by the President that if she ever brought up the colored question, she would never be forgiven for it. . . . This the representative from Washington informs the delegation.<sup>25</sup>

Two of the petitioning organizations, whose splits, according to Mrs Palmer, were related to their affiliation to different brands of Methodism, decided to take their cause to Washington, to appeal to the Ecumenical Methodist Conference opening there on 9 October, and perhaps to Congress, for, they recalled, 'the colored people had friends in Congress in the dark days of slavery, and they have friends today'. In preparation for this visit each group issued a circular. One was from the Women's Independent Organisation, which, led by Mrs J. Roberts and Mrs Mary A. Henderson of Chicago, issued an 'appeal to the representative colored women of the United States . . . to resent the insult hurled at the women of our race at the last session of the Board of Lady Managers'.<sup>26</sup> The other circular, which named no organization and no leaders, called on 'the representative Negro Women of the United States, urging them to meet at Washington, D.C., October 21, 1891, to take steps relating to the Negro woman's interest in the world's Columbian exposition', and 'earnestly solicited' a number of 'representative colored women to be present and lend their assistance in this great and important movement'. Lettie Trent was the only Chicago woman of the eleven named; the list included the well-known Sarah J. Early of Tennessee, school principal and national superintendent of temperance work among the coloured people; Fanny Jackson Coppin of Philadelphia, Oberlin graduate, missionary and vocational training pioneer; Frances W. E. Harper of Philadelphia, anti-slavery lecturer, poet and suffragist; and others from Kentucky, South Carolina, New Jersey and Massachusetts, Ohio and Texas. The text was apparently kept out of the Chicago papers by Mrs Palmer, and out of the Washington papers by Mrs Logan, but it did appear in the *Boston Courant*, and presumably circulated in the black press.<sup>27</sup> It was an effective piece of rhetorical

<sup>25</sup> 'The Appeal . . .', *loc. cit.* The representative was Mrs Lockwood. See Palmer to Cantrill, 17 October 1891; Palmer to Lockwood, 18 October 1891, PP.

<sup>26</sup> Palmer to Logan, 15 October 1891, LP; *Washington Star*, 7 October 1891. Roberts and Henderson later joined the W.C.A.; they were signatories to the resolution of 16 December 1891, *infra*, p. 328 and note 41.

<sup>27</sup> For Sarah J. Early, see L. A. Scruggs, *Woman of Distinction* (Raleigh, N.C., 1893). No mention of the black women's circulars has been located in the black press, which was as diverse in its concepts of a black exhibit as the rest of the black community – see Rudwick:

questioning, punctuated by the refrain 'the Board of Lady Managers, created by an act of Congress, says no'.

Shall the Negro Women of this country have a creditable display of their labor and skill at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893? . . . Shall five million of Negro women allow a small number of white women to ignore them in this, the grandest opportunity to manifest their talent and ability in this, the greatest expression of the age? . . . Ought not the work of the Negroes and their interest to be placed in the hands of Negro women? It ought or else the work of all the bureaux of white women should be placed in the hands of colored women . . .<sup>28</sup>

But the black women were far from united. Mrs Boone was not a signatory to the circular, for the Illinois Woman's Exposition Board had convincingly welcomed her in her self-styled supplementary function. Mrs Trent had developed strong personal ambitions, and offered to compromise. In return for 'a commission to take care of the interest of the colored people . . . she would go to Washington, address the convention and allay all discontent'. But, as Mrs Palmer discovered, the Board would have to pay the price for the black women's delays and frustrations: 'Mrs Trent's plan, which she read me in full, provided for a President, a Secretary, stenographers and clerks and officers – in fact for a duplicate of our organization for the special benefit of their race.'

In spite of her sarcastic comment on Mrs Trent's plan – 'Of course it is very easy to understand from that standpoint why they were dissatisfied with our actions for them'<sup>29</sup> – Mrs Palmer was apparently not trying to kill off a black exhibit. At this time she was weighing the merits of a variety of proposals about the exhibition, including one suggestion made to her by a coloured minister that there should be state-wide conventions of black churchwomen, each of which would elect an organizer and work through her.<sup>30</sup> But Mrs Palmer's interest in black representation was minimal. Above all she cared for the reputation of her Board, which must be without blemish if it were to exemplify woman's superior competence and probity, 'I do not want them to vilify us,' she stated; but 'apart from that I am perfectly willing that they should present all the petitions they choose to Congress.'<sup>31</sup>

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and Meier, *loc. cit.* *The State Capital*, Springfield, Ill., 17 October 1891, published Susan G. Cooke's circular without comment. Mrs Palmer claimed the black press 'more universally than any class of publication demanded pay for the insertion of articles relating to the exhibit, which of course prevented their readers from gaining the information . . . this created the impression among them that their interests are being neglected'. Palmer to Hallie Q. Brown, 4 July 1892, PP.

<sup>28</sup> 'The Appeal . . .', *loc. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> Palmer to Logan, 3 November 1891, PP; Trent to Logan, 4 November 1891, LP.

<sup>30</sup> Palmer to Logan, 15 October 1891, LP.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

For assistance and outlet she turned to Mrs Logan<sup>32</sup> who held a political salon of some importance in Washington. On 11 October 1891, she wrote her: 'I am greatly annoyed by the antagonisms of some of the negro women who have recently issued a circular which . . . is a tissue of lies. . . I beg that you will see Fred Douglass and Bishop Fowler at once.'<sup>33</sup> Again she referred the issue to the states, this time with a public relations flourish. She asked 'all our southern ladies' to send Mrs Logan 'an expression of their goodwill and wish to help the colored people in their respective states', and she asked Mrs Logan, 'in case the response is quite general please make use of the fact'. The expression of goodwill took the form of a pledge to sign:

As a Lady Manager of the State of — I shall do all in my power to further the interests of the colored women of my state, and will take pleasure in giving them all the information and assistance possible by sending them the publications issued by the Board . . . and in every other way striving to promote their interest. I shall be glad to co-operate with any person appointed to represent the colored people in the state, in order that the whole exhibition of our State may be brought out. This is entirely in accordance with the feelings of our whole Board.

In addition, the Board and the Illinois Women's Exposition Board issued counter-circulars to the black women's, the first recounting the 'true' history of negotiations and the second reassuring 'all the women of Illinois . . . that without regard to nationality, or color, and in every respect, their work stands upon the same footing before this Board, believing that to give the colored women this absolute equality is the highest honor the Board can confer upon them'. This resolution met with Mrs Boone's 'hearty approval'.<sup>34</sup>

The Southern ladies rallied to a woman, though any publicity Mrs Logan gave the solidarity was exclusive; Mrs Trent tried in vain to obtain the text of the pledge.<sup>35</sup> Sight of the paternalistic, condescending letters which accompanied the signed pledges would have inflamed the black women. Mrs R. A. Felton of Georgia wrote:

I went to Atlanta and talked with the colored woman at the Passenger Depot who has charge there — and who sees every person passing through and told her I was ready and anxious to do all I could in this line & if it could be so arranged I would like to talk with them about it whenever they wished information.

<sup>32</sup> Cantrill was in a sanatorium in Georgetown, Kentucky. In a 28 pp. letter to Palmer, 21 September 1891, PP, she barely mentioned the black women, except to refer to Trent as 'most irritating to my nostrils physical and spiritual'.

<sup>33</sup> Bishop Charles Fowler of Minneapolis had been a pastor in Chicago, and President of Northwestern University. For Douglass's role in the black exhibit controversy, moderate until his speech on 25 August 1893, 'Colored People's Day at the Fair', see Rudwick and Meier, *loc. cit.*

<sup>34</sup> Palmer to Logan, 11 and 15 October 1891, PP; Philips, *loc. cit.*; 'As a Lady Manager . . .', 1 p. carbon typescript, LP.

<sup>35</sup> Trent to Logan, 1 November 1891, LP.

The circular also gave the Lady Managers a chance to speculate on the situation which had produced the need for them to sign a pledge. Florence Olmstead of Georgia expressed the prevalent Lady Managers' belief that some white woman must be behind such articulate and sustained protests. Mrs Cantrill suggested Mrs Logan; Mrs Palmer suggested Mrs Carse.<sup>36</sup> In fact, there is no evidence to suggest that anyone was behind the black women except the black women. The intermittent co-operation of a Lady Manager was no spur to action; only a voting majority of the Board could have helped them. As it was, the Board was never faced with any real likelihood that Congress or the W.C.C., which were comparably 'colour-proof', would press it to accept a special black representative. It did not even need to join issue with the black women; instead, its members anticipated and prevented potential adverse publicity – 'we do not want to be ridiculed by paragraphs all over the country'<sup>37</sup> – though with a degree of overkill that was a tribute to the tenacious, emotive, cogent power of the black women's organization and presentation. Mrs Palmer believed that 18,000 copies of the circulars had been issued, and suspected a conspiracy:

I think their [the black women's] plan is to appear before Congress as soon as it convenes and make a strong protest against our Board, and then Mrs. Hooker and Miss Couzins will enter their complaints, so that we will seem guilty of acts of wrongdoing and Congress may hesitate to give us an appropriation.

She even got Mrs Russell B. Harrison, Lady Manager for Montana, to lobby her father, President Benjamin Harrison.

I am very much obliged to you for your compliance with my request to write to the President about the matter of the colored people. Our aim was to have their meeting amounting to nothing, and I think we have reason to congratulate ourselves on the work we did in advance which produced the desired result.<sup>38</sup>

Although the divisions of the women were not in themselves invidious, the Board made them seem so in such (unverifiable) statements as 'our Board was entirely willing to appoint a national representative from the Negro women, and only refrained from doing so because they were quarrelling so among themselves and could not decide on a leader...' <sup>39</sup> The consequent fear of sympathizers that they might be caught in black crossfire, and on the losing

<sup>36</sup> Olmstead to Logan, 14 October 1891; Felton to Logan, 17 October 1891, LP; Cantrill to Palmer, 21 September 1891; Palmer to Cantrill, 17 October 1891, PP. There is no evidence that Logan was anything but solid behind state referral. Letters to Palmer, 16 October 1891, and Trent, 10 November 1891, PP, show she disliked Trent. Palmer to Cantrill, 17 October 1891, PP, claimed Mrs Carse tried to have Mrs Paul's resolution voted down.

<sup>37</sup> Palmer to Mrs Charles Price of South Carolina, 11 August 1891, PP.

<sup>38</sup> Palmer to Logan, 3 November 1891; Palmer to Harrison, 3 November 1891, PP.

<sup>39</sup> Palmer to Logan, 11 October 1891; Logan to Trent, 4 November 1891, LP; Cooke, *loc. cit.*

side, must have contributed to the frustration of the Washington lobbyists. Their petition(s) did not get onto the floor of Congress; the Methodist conference refused to hear them; their convention took the form of a private conference where about forty people condemned the conduct of the Board. Mrs Trent claimed that the convention elected her 'Chairman of the National Council of Colored Women', and lobbied Mrs Logan and Mrs Palmer through December.<sup>40</sup> The last known gesture of the W.C.A. was the resolution passed on 16 December 1891, which has formed the chief basis for the charges of pettiness against the women.

Whereas we understand that a request has been made by a woman representing no organisation or workers, for two clerkships to satisfy nine millions of citizens, we do emphatically protest against such an action as we already have a very capable young gentleman of our race filling such a position. . . . We deem it necessary to present you this protest . . . as we sincerely believe this woman's proposals to be detrimental to our works. . . .<sup>41</sup>

'This woman' was Fannie Barrier Williams, wife of a Chicago lawyer, member of the élite black community and its exclusive, twenty-five-member Prudence Crandall Study Club, whose art and music department she headed. There was clearly resentment that perhaps by virtue of her friendship with leading liberal Chicago whites, Mrs Williams, formerly unconnected with the women's protest activities and in that sense unrepresentative of those who had clamoured for representation, might achieve at a single stroke what numbers of obscure women had laboured for in vain. But, fundamental to the objection, two token clerkships were no approximation of the executive machinery which had become the W.C.A.'s goal.<sup>42</sup>

#### IV

Organized black protest had peaked and failed; individual action took over, exemplified in the action of Rose E. Lumpkin Brown of Chicago, who called on Mrs Palmer with a delegation from Mrs Trent in late December, 1891, and then wrote to Mrs Palmer of her reaction

<sup>40</sup> Logan to Trent, 4 November 1891, LP.

<sup>41</sup> Women's Columbian Association, 'Whereas we understand that a request has been made . . .', 16 December 1891, PP. The young man was James Johnson (Wells, *The Reason Why* . . . , p. 74); Mrs Johnson was an officer of the W.C.A. (*supra*, note 13).

<sup>42</sup> 'Cultured Negro Ladies', *Chicago Tribune*, 28 October 1888. The W.C.A. may have misunderstood the nature of Mrs Williams's application. According to the *Chicago Tribune*, 16 December 1891, her application was made with black Illinois State Congressman E. H. Morris, and requested that 'a department be created and placed in charge of a colored man or woman to promote the interest of the World's Columbian Exposition throughout the U.S.'; Wells, *The Reason Why* . . . , p. 75, cites a resolution urging 'the expediency of having the department of Publicity and Promotion employ a colored man and a colored woman to promote the interest of the World's Columbian Exposition throughout the U.S.'.

when you remarked that you have not recognized any colored organization, as I have several times been informed that you had recognized the Columbian Association society, Mrs. L. A. Trent, President, as the band of workers. . . . That is the reason I joined with them. . . . But if none of the organizations are recognized by the Lady President, then I don't see any use of them continuing their meetings, paying admission fees, and car fares.

She put forward a scheme for a staff of five: an all-in-one 'Afro-American World's Fair Agent . . . Editor and Business Collector with four salaried clerks. Let one come from the North, South, East and West. Five for eight millions. Business like, earnest, dignified, not ashamed of their race people.'<sup>43</sup>

Of the twenty-three women whose letters suggesting modes of black female representation at the Fair were listed in Mrs Palmer's Employment Application Index (Colored), only one woman's application seems to have been seriously considered on an individual basis; that from Hallie Quinn Brown, teacher, elocutionist and lecturer; dean of Allen University (1885–9), lady principal of Tuskegee Institute (1892–3), and organizer of a black exhibit at the Southern Interstate Exposition, Raleigh, North Carolina, 1891. Hallie Brown had not as much faith in Mrs Palmer as Rose Brown, and she made her approach for the position of 'Solicitor of Exhibits among the Colored People for the Columbian Exposition' through Isabella Beecher Hooker in February, 1892. She rightly considered herself well suited, for through her platform performances she had 'been brought into closest contact with the best element as well as the masses of the colored people in every section of the country . . . nearly every State in the Union.' As one hundred following letters of recommendation from twenty states would show, she was the 'necessary . . . wide-awake person to go among them to arouse an interest.' She had already 'talked Exposition in the strongest and most forcible language I could command . . . I wish I could convey to you, Madam, the enthusiasm that was awakened. . . . Articles of merit and beauty were brought to me – even children caught the inspiration and came with their baby offerings.'<sup>44</sup>

Mrs Hooker replied she had no influence with Mrs Palmer; Miss Brown asked her to send the letter to Mrs Logan, who remitted it to Mrs Palmer. March 1892 found Hallie in Chicago for an interview with Mrs Palmer who aptly summed up Hallie's formidable and admirable persona: 'Intelligent . . . inclined to be very dramatic and make telling statements' – statements which were some of the most cogent and moving that were made in the cause of a black exhibit.

<sup>43</sup> Rose Brown to Palmer, 19 December 1891, PP.

<sup>44</sup> Hallie Brown to Hooker, February 1892; Hooker to Logan, 11 April 1892; Brown to Logan, 19 April 1892, LP; Palmer to Cantrill, 30 March 1892, PP. The other twenty-two women came from Col., Fla., Ill., Ind., Mich., Mo., N.J., Ohio, Pa., S.C., Miss. and Wash. D.C.

Are nine million of American Citizens to be humiliated in the eyes of the world by the absence of even one black face in the administrative corpus of the Fair? These questions to me seem far more pertinent than vindictive. I am neither for self-embellishment or for personal aggrandisement, but I stand upon the broad platform of justice and equity, leading for the women of my race.

What a grand thing it would be if we were, all over this country, permitted to be and to act as American Citizens; but unfortunately the laws of heredity, in the Negro's case are suspended – he must *now* be all that the modifying environment of centuries have made the Anglo-Saxons. And if he have all this, his color alone directly fixes his station in one half of the United States, and, indirectly, in the other half. My perplexity is, is the same spirit which dominated the legislation of this country for nearly one hundred years yet active and aggressive in its application to World's Fair matters?

She not only impressed Mrs Palmer; that lady, who had believed that 'the negro trouble has all subsided . . . we hear nothing more of it' . . . was worried. Hallie had 'written to the organizations of colored people in most of the States asking what communication they had received from the Lady Managers and what had been done to secure an exhibition of their work, and . . . the answers invariably were, that they had had no communications and no one had approached them in any way.' In other words, Mrs Paul's palliative resolution and the process of State referral had not been implemented. Mrs Palmer's excuses to Hallie Brown virtually admitted the process had been a deliberate sham. Each state had made a more or less mean appropriation, and she 'could not blame our lady managers for not spending money for postage and stationery in order to write appeals in every direction'. Aware that now she really was open to adverse publicity, for the first time Mrs Palmer seriously contemplated the appointment of a black women's black representative. A post in the Department of Publicity and Promotion would be suitable.

She could write for the colored papers, keep in communication with the prominent women of her race; and keep them informed as to what was going on so that they would feel they had 'a friend at court' and were receiving proper attention. . . . Of course she would be employed by the Exposition authorities . . . but the Board of Lady Managers might find her a little extra pay from time to time for working for them. I would even be willing to do this myself should the occasion demand.<sup>45</sup>

But Hallie was not convinced that she could organize a black exhibit from a glorified secretarial position; and she was not prepared to compromise. On 8 April 1892 she sent the Lady Managers a circular spelling out the injustice of the situation. 'Considering the peculiar relation that the Negro sustains in this country, is it less than fair to request for him a special representation?'<sup>46</sup> Mrs Logan's bland answer – you already are specially represented, by Mrs

<sup>45</sup> Palmer to Cantrill, 30 March 1892.

<sup>46</sup> Hallie Q. Brown, 'It seems to be a settled conviction . . .', (Chicago, 8 April 1892), 1 p. carbon typescript, LP; Brown to Logan, 19 April 1892, LP.

Cantrill – was probably typical. Undaunted, Hallie went in person to Washington, where, in a speech at the 15th Street Presbyterian church, ‘she urged upon Mrs Palmer to yield her claim to membership of the Board, where she could, like Esther of old, make supplication, officially, for the people’.<sup>47</sup> Hallie’s variant of the black women’s black representative would not only have special powers, and special funds, but would also be a member of the Board of Lady Managers, and by that membership dispel the vestiges of paternalistic discrimination that could cling to the appointment of a mere special representative, however wide her powers. It was not within Mrs Palmer’s immediate power to alter the composition of the Board but she kept this legal, delaying trump card in cautious reserve. Instead, she wrote to Hallie:

I could quite understand after learning from you that you were making several thousand dollars a year in comparatively light work employing your own secretary and relieved from the drudgery, with the excitement of a semi-public life, that the only position in our power to offer would seem by comparison an undesirable one to you.

I asked you to name a salary that you would consider the equivalent of your services and as you have not done so, presume you did not find the position one you cared to fill. Lamenting that this is the case, I certainly cannot blame you, and hoping we may yet find the proper person to take the place.<sup>48</sup>

## V

Mrs Palmer was still concerned that the black women would ‘begin making complaints at the time of the installation of exhibits’, and in January, 1893, put the black Mrs A. M. Curtis, wife of a Chicago physician, in charge of any black exhibits that arrived. Mrs Curtis, apparently unconnected with any organization, and perhaps by that token acceptable, soon resigned; the post was farcical given the few exhibits and the unco-operativeness of the Chief of Installation, Amy M. Starkweather.<sup>49</sup> Mrs Palmer then turned to Fannie

<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *Lifting as they climb* [National Association of Colored Women, 1933], p. 20. Davis, the official historian of the N.A.C.W., claimed, *ibid.*, that Miss Brown’s oratory, which inspired the women present to form ‘The Colored Women’s League’, proved that it was due to her ‘that the women stepped across the threshold of the home into the wider area of Organized Womanhood’; but the occasion was equally the result of cumulative onslaughts on the black female consciousness.

<sup>48</sup> Palmer to Brown, 4 July 1892. PP.

<sup>49</sup> Rudwick and Meier, *loc. cit.*; Curtis to Starkweather [1893], PP. *The Reason Why* . . . , p. 74, suggests Mrs Curtis stepped into a post vacated by Mrs Williams, but this has not been substantiated. Mrs N. F. Mossell, *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* (Philadelphia: George S. Ferguson Co., 1894), pp. 21, 84, and John W. Cromwell, *The Negro in American History* (The American Negro Academy, 1914), pp. 10–11, suggest that Mrs Curtis was also on the Illinois State Board of Lady Managers, and that three other women were

Barrier Williams, who after incessant campaigning for a representative appointment, had, late in 1892, finally accepted an ordinary secretarial post in Major Handy's Department of Publicity and Promotion. On the strength of Handy's recommendation – 'excellent character – pleasing address . . . considerable literary ability . . . excellent typewriter' – Mrs Palmer appointed her to help supervise the installation of all exhibits in the Woman's Building. Fannie was appalled to find herself unsalaried, but, construing the post as 'a gracious recognition of large number of colored women of intelligence in this country who would like to be interested in and inspired by women's work as displayed in your department', decided to remain.<sup>50</sup> In March, 1893, she was asked to give an address to the 17 May session of the Departmental Congress of the National Association of Loyal Women of American Liberty at the World's Congress of Representative Women, on 'The Progressive and Present Status of the Colored Women of the United States and their progress since Emancipation'. The W.C.A.'s doubt that she could represent anything except an élite was partially confirmed, as Mrs Williams had to apply to Tourgée for help in compiling her speech: 'If there be any literature upon this sex phase of the Negro question that you can refer me to or any accessible data that tell unmistakably of the steady and sure development from a degraded peasantry toward a noble womanhood, I would be duly obligated'.<sup>51</sup>

Whether for lack of information or through recognition of her speciality, Mrs Williams finally spoke on 'The Intellectual Progress and Present Status of the Colored Women of the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation'.<sup>52</sup>

Mrs Williams was by no means the only black woman to take part in the Congress, though perhaps she opened the door for those who participated in integrated sessions. Her own address was followed by a discussion led by Mrs Anna Julia Cooper, school principal in Washington, D.C., and author of *A Voice from the South* (1892). The next day, Sarah J. Early spoke on 'The Organized Efforts of the Colored Women in the South to improve their Condition', and Hallie Brown led the discussion. At the Suffrage Congress, Frances Harper spoke on 'The Race Line of Suffrage'. Seven women spoke at the conferences of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and in the

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appointed to State Boards: Florence A. Lewis, World's Fair's correspondent of the *Philadelphia Times* (Pa.); Mrs S. A. Williams, founder of an orphanage in New Orleans (Miss.); and Joan Imogen Howard (New York). For details of Miss Howard's work, *infra*, p. 335.

<sup>50</sup> Williams and Palmer were in correspondence on 15 December 1891; 6 September, 5 October, 28 November 1892; 1, 5 July, 16 August 1893, PP.

<sup>51</sup> Williams to Tourgée, 12 March 1893, TP; Keller, *loc. cit.*, item 6735.

<sup>52</sup> May Wright Sewall (ed.), *The World's Congress of Representative Women* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1894), p. 396.

Educational Congress, Session of the Association of the Educators of Colored Youth, ten women gave addresses.<sup>53</sup> And, though no description of the items *in situ* has come to light, a small 'Afro-American exhibit' which included Edmonia Lewis's statue of Hiawatha, and a statistical compilation about the black women of the United States, collected by a black woman, was exhibited at the Fair. The collector was Joan Imogen Howard, graduate of the University of the City of New York, and appointed by the Governor of New York to the State Board of Lady Managers. A teacher, and one of five members of the Board's Education Committee, Miss Howard was commissioned to collect statistics for New York State. At the State Board's suggestion, she made the scope of her project nationwide, an act which raised Western hackles, for, at the Board's meeting in May 1893, 'Mrs Roosevelt reported that there were difficulties in the matter; the colored women at the west [Chicago?] objecting to its being a national exhibition'. Miss Howard personally visited Philadelphia, Boston and Washington, preceded by a circular letter in newspapers requesting co-operation, and leaving behind her forms to be filled out and forwarded. Conscious before she began her survey that black deprivation had created a cultural lag, Miss Howard was not worried by a collection of unstartling statistics, which led her to ask the State Board to 'permit me, instead of marking this compilation of facts "Statistics of the Distinguished Work of the Colored Women of the United States"', to inscribe on the cover, "Evidences of the Advancement of the Colored Women of the United States".'

Her report was notable for its integrationist assessment of the black women of the United States:

They feel themselves American, as truly as do those who proudly trace their ancestry back to the Pilgrim Fathers, the Puritans of England, the broad, liberal-spirited Hollanders, the cultivated and refined French Huguenots; and as an element in the progress of this boundless home, we trust, the worthiest representatives of all nations there is implanted in the minds of the best of this struggling people a determination to rise to a common level with the majority.<sup>54</sup>

Not on official display at the Fair was the militant black symposium *The Reason Why the Colored American is not in the Columbian Exposition*, the

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 711–9; World's Congress of Representative Women, *Suffrage Congress, August 9, 1893*, official programme; World's Congress Auxiliary, *The American Association of the Educators of Colored Youth, July 25–9, 1893*, official programme; John Henry Barrows (ed.), *The World's Parliament of Religions* (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Co., 1893), vol. 2, 1895. For Anna J. Cooper, see Cromwell, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>54</sup> *Minutes of the meeting[s] of the Board of Women Managers of the State of New York at the World's Columbian Exposition, June 7, 1892* [–January 17, 1894, n.p., n.d.], pp. 22–32, 75, 104; *Report of Miss J. Imogen Howard to the Board of Women Managers of the Exhibition of the State of New York at the World's Columbian Exposition* [n.p., n.d.], pp. 3–5, 29–30.

brain child of its editor, Ida B. Wells, a truly radical black woman. The editor of her own paper in Memphis, she had been run out of town for her impassioned denunciation of local lynchings. Open denunciation of lynchings became for her the acid test of a human being worthy of the name; and her insistence on discussion and division on the issue made her an embarrassment to blacks and whites who were content to define humanity as non-violence in the immediate community. Early in 1893, Miss Wells returned to Chicago from a European lecture tour and was dismayed to find that black representation at the Fair seemed likely to be limited to the presence of Frederick Douglass, U.S. Ambassador to Haiti, in the Haitian pavilion. Accordingly she resuscitated an idea she had floated before her tour: publishing a record of and appeal against the disadvantages of blacks seeking representation at the Fair.

Miss Wells had Chicago's black women organize meetings at their respective churches, and it was the \$500 so raised which financed the printing of *The Reason Why*. . . . Her action was timely, coming as it did, when, with the news of Mrs Williams's forthcoming speech, the cause of black representation might have flagged. It was well-publicized, too; in April, 1893, Miss Wells issued a pledge-circular 'To the Friends of Equal Rights':

Whereas, the absence of colored citizens from participation in the Fair . . . will be construed to their disadvantage by the representatives of the civilized world . . . I the undersigned, recommend . . . that a carefully prepared pamphlet setting forth the past and present condition of our people and their relation to the American civilized world, be prepared.<sup>55</sup>

She secured written contributions from Douglass, Frederick L. Barnett of the Afro-American League and from journalist and editor I. Garland Penn; she culled information from Mrs Boone, Hallie Brown and Miss Howard; she pieced together a detailed, impassioned, unique and indispensable account of yet one more post-Emancipation example of discrimination against blacks. The pamphlet substantiated her proud, ironic subtitle: "The Afro-American's Contribution to Columbian Literature". Thousands of copies were sold, many by Ida B. Wells herself, sitting at a desk in the Haitian pavilion.

In her memoirs, *Crusade for Justice*,<sup>56</sup> Miss Wells tended to play down her pamphlet while giving the accolade for black achievement at the Fair to Frederick Douglass's speech at a Tambo and Bones 'Negro Day', hastily put on by the Fair's authorities under prodding scrutiny from 'the representatives

<sup>55</sup> *The Afro-American*, Baltimore, 29 April 1893, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Alfreda M. Duster (ed.), *Crusade for Justice: the Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: University Press, 1970), pp. 115-9.

of the civilized world'. But one may be forgiven for disagreeing with Miss Well's assessment. Douglass's speech was as comprehensive and impressive as ever; but it had neither the rarity nor the climactic, pioneering significance of *The Reason Why...*: an appropriate highlight to the ultimately irrepressible efforts of black women and their organizations to have fitting representation at the Fair, and a milestone in the burgeoning career of the remarkable Miss Ida B. Wells.