

Colored Conventions Project Teaching Guide for College/AP

EXHIBIT:

Working for Higher Education: Advancing Black Women's Rights in the 1850s

Prepared by Samantha de Vera in collaboration with P. Gabrielle Foreman

Reviewed by Janel Moore Almond

This teaching guide can be taught in conjunction with Kabria Baumgartner's article "Gender Politics and the Manual Labor College Initiative at National Colored Conventions in Antebellum America," which appears in the volume *The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century* (2021), edited by P. Gabrielle Foreman, Jim Casey, and Sarah Lynn Paterson, published by the University of North Carolina Press. For more information on the contents of the volume and where to find it, click [here](#).

"Working for Higher Education: Advancing Black Women's Rights in the 1850s" curated by Sharla Fett, Occidental College, and David Kim, University of Delaware, in consultation with Kabria Baumgartner, University of New Hampshire. ([link](#))

Questions:

1. *How does this exhibit highlight the connections between the Colored Conventions movement and Black women's role in the establishment of educational institutions open to African Americans? How do the curators privilege the lives and work of Black women who were active in the movement for Black education but not necessarily—or only minimally—acknowledged in Colored Conventions movement records?*¹ Consider the biographies of [Prior Foster](#), [Mary Leary Langston](#), [Caroline Richards Morel](#), [Susan Paul Smith](#), and [Clorice Esteve Reason](#)—activist Black women whose names do not appear in convention minutes.
2. As Baumgartner writes, by the latter half of the nineteenth century, Black leaders increasingly encouraged and emphasized Black women's community activism over domesticity.² Indeed, the experience of teacher and activist [Barbara Ann Steward](#) affirms this, but while strongly encouraged by her parents, Steward was denied the opportunity to participate in a convention in Troy, New York, in 1855.³ *How does the*

¹ In many minutes, Black women participants are often only referred to as "ladies." For example, the minutes of the 1844 New York State Convention notes the presence of "One hundred ladies." Similarly, the 1855 California State Convention only mentions the presence of Mrs. Alfred J. White and "the ladies of Sacramento," even though they proposed a resolution as a group.

² Kabria Baumgartner. "Gender Politics and the Manual Labor College Initiative at National Colored Conventions in Antebellum America," *The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. P. Gabrielle Foreman, Jim Casey, and Sarah Lynn Paterson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 230.

³ During the convention, 'The roll was then read. The name Miss Barbary[sic] Anna Stewart[sic] was stricken out from the roll, several gentlemen objecting to it on the ground that this is not a Woman's Rights Convention.' Colored Men's State Convention of New York (1855 : Troy, NY), "Colored Men's State Convention of New York, Troy, September 4, 1855.,"

exhibit speak to the shift toward affirming Black women's activism and the challenges Black women faced when seeking to carve a space for themselves in activist circles?

3. In its biographies page, this exhibit provides [a visualization mapping the generational differences among Black activists](#) who shared a common cause for education. *What are the possible uses of this visualization? What claims and arguments can we advance using the information this visualization provides?*
4. As this exhibit shows, both [Black](#) and [white newspapers](#) covered the 1853 Colored Convention (and most conventions). The white press at times ridiculed and denigrated Black Americans' political organizing efforts. *What other insights can we glean by looking at Black and white news reports side by side? Which of the delegates' discussions did Black and white presses focus on and why?*
5. This exhibit offers brief biographies of [four educational institutions](#): the Oneida Institute of New York, Woodstock Manual Labor Institute, Albany Manual Labor Academy, and Albany Enterprise Academy. *What are the activist traditions that bind these four seemingly disparate institutions?*
6. *Write a paragraph to a page proposal for a visualization or other type of content that could advance the argument of this exhibit. Explain how and why you made this decision.*
7. CLASS ACTIVITY: If your class were to create/hold a convention today, what issues would be its focus? Write a convention call that outlines the convention's objectives, urgent issues at hand, and the active measures delegates and attendees would need to consider, discuss, and plan. Write a comprehensive call and brief version of it (see examples [here](#) and [here](#)). Prepare to address the following questions:
 - a. How would your convention be organized?
 - b. What organizations and which leaders would be invited? Who are the non-famous people who would need to be there and from what communities/entities would they draw? Consider how an [unprecedented number of Black women participated in the 1854 Emigration](#) Convention and how their presence informed the issues that were discussed and the resolutions that were passed.
 - c. What objectives do you think most attendees would agree on?
 - d. What major differences in approaches do you think delegates might have?
 - e. How do you think it would be covered by the press?

Colored Conventions Project 2020-21
Teaching Guide for College/AP - Working For Higher Education

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Suggested Readings:

- Baumgartner, Kabria. *In Pursuit of Knowledge: Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America*. New York: NYU Press, 2019.
- . "[Building the Future: White Women, Black Education, and Civic Inclusion in Antebellum Ohio](#)." *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no. 1 (2017): 117-45.
- Perkins, Linda M. "[“Bound to Them by a Common Sorrow”: African American Women, Higher Education, and Collective Advancement](#)." *The Journal of African American History* 100, no. 4 (2015): 721-47.
- Rhodes, Jane. *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.