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Eric Gardner

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LEGACY REPRINT

Two Stories by Barbara E. Pope

ERIC GARDNER

Saginaw Valley State University

Until recently, Barbara E. Pope's place in American cultural memory has been limited to brief references to her courageous challenge to segregation at the beginning of the twentieth century. After refusing to give up her seat in the white section of a Southern Railway train on 7 August 1906, she was arrested and fined ten dollars; with the aid of the fledgling Niagara Movement (led by W. E. B. Du Bois and William Monroe Trotter), she challenged the fine—eventually going to the Supreme Court of Virginia and also seeking damages via the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia. She won both battles, but neither court was especially supportive: Virginia essentially negated the fine, and the District of Columbia awarded her a single penny for damages. Even though these cases marked early post-*Plessy* legal victories, they were taxing both monetarily and emotionally for Pope.¹

Jennifer Harris's 2015 *Legacy* profile of Pope urged scholars to consider a set of four rediscovered short stories written by Pope and published in Boston's *Waverly Magazine* between 1896 and 1900.² The stories were later clipped from a copy of that periodical and bound into a collection labeled *Storiettes* that was displayed at the celebrated "Exhibit of American Negroes" at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900. Harris rightly links Pope's activism and artistry, and she recognizes that "if we consider Pope's civil disobedience in the light of her writing, it suggests that her [law]suit was nothing new; Pope had been a fierce critic of [dominant] expectations . . . for decades" (292). In a broader way, Harris reminds us that recovering Pope's work "expands our knowledge of African American women writing in the late nineteenth century, especially their negotiations of a world that was simultaneously changing rapidly and not changing fast enough" (281–82). Most intriguingly, Harris cites a small

set of sources that claim, in the words of a 12 September 1908 *Washington Bee* obituary, that Pope had “written several stories which commanded her liberal pay” (“Miss Pope”).

The two additional stories recovered here, both published a decade before the *Waverly* stories, reaffirm and enrich Harris’s conclusions. “The Old and the New Order” appeared serially in the 20 February, 27 February, and 6 March 1886 issues of T. Thomas Fortune’s *New York Freeman* (which would, a year and a half later, take its better-known title, the *New York Age*).³ “Truth versus Hypocrisy” appeared in the second issue of the short-lived, Boston-based magazine *The Negro* in August 1886.⁴ These two stories are unlike Pope’s later *Waverly* work in three ways: they clearly label their main characters as African American; they focus specifically on race and racism; and they were published in Black-owned and Black-centered venues. They thus offer a richer sense of how Pope engaged with Black print culture at the end of the nineteenth century and expand our growing sense of “postbellum, pre-Harlem” Black literature.⁵

Skillfully combining material from periodicals and public records with information garnered from descendants of one of Pope’s siblings, Harris offers key information on Pope’s biography: her birth in January 1854 to Alfred and Hannah Pope, African Americans who had only recently gained their freedom; her place in the Black society of Washington, DC; her Southern Railway cases; and her death by suicide on 5 September 1908. Harris rightly places the Pope family “on the periphery” of “Washington’s ‘black 400,’ the nation’s most elite African American community,” and she notes Pope’s work as a teacher, primarily in Washington’s segregated schools, but also, for a year, at Tuskegee (282). Harris also alerts us to how Pope “became increasingly vocal about her dissatisfaction with the leadership of the local schools for African American children” in Washington, culminating in her 1888 resignation after being forced to readmit a student who had assaulted her (282). Harris further connects Pope to a 1901 letter from Robert Wesley Taylor to Booker T. Washington that spoke of Pope’s failed engagement to Black writer and gadabout William Hannibal Thomas in the early 1890s.⁶

We still have much more to learn about Barbara Pope and, beyond traditional biography or literary history, we need to consider her intellect and artistry holistically and in dialogue with her diverse networks. Her coming of age took place in a Washington that mixed hopes not just of emancipation but also of citizenship with the terror articulated in postbellum Congressional hearings on the vicious violence against the recently freed African Americans of the South. Pope might well have read the works of key early African American writers like Frederick Douglass and Frank J. Webb as they considered new possibilities for Black print in new venues like Washington’s own *New National Era*; she might

also have seen not only Douglass but Frances Ellen Watkins Harper lecture in the District. She clearly engaged with—albeit at the edges of—an amazing circle of Black leaders who came out of the war to strive to create African American spaces both in the nation and in the nation’s capital. Her initial appointment in the DC schools in 1873 took place when antebellum lions like poet and activist George Boyer Vashon were deeply involved in Black education there; important women activists like longtime *Christian Recorder* writer Sallie Daffin taught in the same system.⁷ Pope’s eventual frustrations with the DC schools came in the midst of a rapid, post-Reconstruction realignment of Black leadership within those schools that was both ideological and generational.

We are only beginning to speculate about how Pope fashioned her own social, political, and print spaces in this landscape. Pope’s interactions with Thomas, for example, may have come on the heels of the publication of her “Truth versus Hypocrisy,” as *The Negro* was his magazine. Regardless, publication there placed Pope in dialogue with not only Thomas’s shifting and uneven sense of Black uplift but also Mary E. Lee’s poem of race pride “Afmerica,” which appeared in the journal’s very first issue.⁸ We also know that news of her *Waverly* stories reached not only the *Broad Ax* of Salt Lake City, which Harris notes, but also the *Enterprise* of Omaha, Nebraska—suggesting that knowledge of her work funneled into Black pipelines of newspaper exchange and news-sharing.⁹ And her Southern Railway cases brought her into dialogue with Trotter and Du Bois and brought her physically to the Niagara Movement’s historic 16 August 1906 meeting at Harpers Ferry, where she likely interacted with Lewis Douglass, Richard T. Greener, Reverdy C. Ransom, and a range of other activists.¹⁰

Pope is one of those blurry figures on the edges of our growing number of pictures of African American activism in and beyond print—figures who, when brought into sharper focus, may tell us much. The deep need for such an American reckoning is only emphasized by coverage of her suicide, which suggests that she left behind a letter saying that even as her “body was worn out,” “her brain was on fire.”¹¹

Context makes the two stories recovered here all the more important: both were published soon after Pope’s work as a temporary faculty member at Tuskegee during the 1884–85 school year (only a few years after the school’s founding). Both stories highlight the difficulties surrounding Black higher education and the pressures that racial “accommodation” placed on both Black educators and students. Late in “The Old and the New Order,” protagonist George Warren accepts an offer to teach at an unnamed “flourishing colored normal school, with Negro principal and teachers” and is intrigued that the principal is described by white citizens as “a sensible man” who is “peculiarly

fitted for Southern work” (278). The school, Warren finds, is only tolerated by white residents because it is “a source of considerable profit to the white population,” and its accommodationist principal is known to leave his office and “walk down to the gate to talk to a white man who evidently considered it beneath his dignity to cross the threshold of a Negro school” (279). Warren also finds out that the teacher whom he is replacing—old acquaintance Professor Carrington—was nearly beaten to death by a white mob for trying to save a young African American child from a whipping by a white man. Pope’s treatment of her subject echoes critiques of Booker T. Washington and his Alabama school’s approach that were already entering Black public discourse—that, as Carrington suggests, Black “leading men” have “their hands so firmly tied by selfishness and fear of the august white man that they cannot lift the yoke from their necks” (282).¹²

If the unnamed normal school in “The Old and the New Order” sounds like Tuskegee, then the “Ainsworth Normal and Agricultural Institute” of “Truth versus Hypocrisy” sounds more like Washington’s alma mater, Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute. The protagonist Clara gazes at “the body of water which separates the school grounds from the dingy little town of Ainsworth,” the white principal of the institute is referred to as “General,” and the school hosts “negro and Indian students” (284)—all very much like Hampton Institute. Hampton, which was located across the Hampton River from downtown Hampton, Virginia, was led until 1893 by Samuel Chapman Armstrong, a Union brigadier general, and had a well-publicized contingent of Native American students. Hampton was notably founded on the grounds of a former plantation, and the protagonist lists among her complaints about Ainsworth “the rudeness of the Virginian ex-slaveholder” (285). Readers familiar with Pope’s biography will wonder how many of Clara’s critical words to the general echo Pope’s own thoughts about Armstrong—or about Booker T. Washington.

The liveliness of these stories’ treatment of Black higher education represents a crucial forebear to the approaches in later and better-known texts like Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* (1928), whose depiction of the Black Southern boarding school of Naxos has been read since publication as direct commentary on Tuskegee. But in a much broader way, Pope’s 1886 stories challenged readers of the period—and challenge readers now—to consider what an educational system that honestly supported Black students might look like. In this regard, the stories speak to numerous texts that consider Black education—from Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig* (1859) to Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s *Iola Leroy* (1892) to Angie Thomas’s *The Hate U Give* (2017).

Both stories engage a rich range of other questions. As a short dialogue

featuring a young Black woman reflecting on the places occupied by (and possible for) African Americans, “Truth versus Hypocrisy” represents a fascinating precursor to the emphasis on “New Women” that Harris rightly locates in the *Waverly Stories*, albeit one with an explicitly Black heroine and Black context. The story also seems like a kind of next generation of Harper’s “Fancy Sketches”/“Fancy Etchings” series (work that powerfully presages later depictions of Black womanhood by authors like Virginia Earle Matthews and Alice Dunbar-Nelson), the bulk of which appeared in the *Christian Recorder* just as Pope was beginning her teaching career.¹³ Indeed, one of the most striking features of Pope’s work is how richly she positions herself within Black print culture and traditions; future scholars will want to attend to how Pope uses allusion as well as other forms of suggestion and remembrance to engage Black literary forebears.¹⁴

“The Old and the New Order” is also especially fascinating given Pope’s transit lawsuits and Harris’s early suggestion that Pope’s activism and writing were deeply intertwined. Like Pope, both that story’s protagonist George Warren and key character Professor Carrington face discrimination on trains; Carrington’s first scars came when he tried to defend a Black woman being put off a train and was cut “to the bone” by the knife-wielding white conductor (282). Considering these incidents reminds us of how close Warren comes—repeatedly—to white supremacist violence. In addition to seeing repeated white threats to Warren, we learn that his adopted sister came to the Warrens after her father was lynched and the family home burned, causing her mother to die of grief. And, of course, the event that brings Warren to the Tuskegee-like normal school is Carrington’s beating. Warren hears of that attack secondhand: another teacher tells of how “a party of white men” took Carrington “off his horse, dragged him to the woods, and beat him until they evidently thought he was dead. We found him there the next morning lifeless and covered with blood” (281). But he sees the result directly. Warren remembers Carrington “as a tall, noble-looking man . . . whose handsome face, fine figure, powerful intellect, and courteous manner won the admiration of all” (281); he finds, instead, “a feeble, emaciated being, with sunken eyes and hollow cheeks” who holds out “a thin, trembling hand” and asks “Shall I never be myself again?” (281–82).¹⁵ In these details, the story joins not only the literature of civil rights but also the literature of witnessing surrounding lynching, ranging from Harper’s serialized *Minnie’s Sacrifice* (1869) to Walter Stowers and William Anderson’s *Appointed: An American Novel* (1894, published under the pseudonym “Sanda”) and a growing number of works by Black writers moving into the twentieth century.¹⁶

No wonder the story hit a nerve—first with the staff of the *Freeman*. They paired the second installment with an editorial paragraph that used Pope’s story

to ask “How long this villainous condition of things will survive in the South.”¹⁷ Three weeks after the serialized story concluded, none other than Gertrude Bustill Mossell, who was in charge of the paper’s “Woman’s Department,” used most of her column to engage with Pope’s tale. Mossell said that it “is by far the best [story] in our estimation that has yet been written by one of our own race” and hoped it might be a precursor to “the Great American Novel.” She agreed with Pope that African Americans could no longer stand with white and Black leaders who were telling them to “Be patient” or “live peaceably,” and she then extensively detailed her own experiences of discrimination, in conscious comparison to Warren’s (Mossell).

Readers engaged, too. The paper’s Boston correspondent told readers of the 6 March issue that “The Old and New Order” “is being widely read here, and pronounced a charming and stirring story, vigorously and excellently written” (“Race Doings”). As late as the 8 May 1886 issue, Black teacher Hank Banter of Flat Creek, Mississippi, was writing in to praise this “very successful pioneer effort” but also to argue at length with some of Carrington’s choices—almost as if Carrington were a real person. Not unlike the straw men invoked by Mossell’s column, Banter advocated for massive restraint, if not complete accommodation. He ended by mentioning “the Carrollton massacre”—the 17 March 1886 white supremacist attack on African Americans gathered at the courthouse in Carrollton, Mississippi, that left at least two dozen Black citizens dead—but asserted that he “would not disclaim against the Carrollton massacre in my town” even as he would give his own “students the whole story.”

Pope herself responded to Banter’s letter in a letter dated 10 May that appeared in the 26 May issue under the provocative title “Are We Cowards?” She took up her character Professor Carrington like an old friend—“a special favorite of mine”—and quickly fought back: “I pity the colored man who, even in the State of Mississippi, fails to denounce the Carrollton Massacre. I advise the writer of the article to be a man, even though it cost him his life.” Positing Charles Sumner, Jesus, and the revolutionaries behind the Boston Tea Party as models, Pope asks, “How can a cowardly teacher—pardon the expression—awaken manhood in his pupils?”

Pope’s final words in “Are We Cowards?” offer a frame for thinking not only about Banter’s critique—or about the two stories recovered here—but also about her broader work, both found and not yet found: “No sane person would advocate a war of races, no true Christian would favor war of any kind; but can we not arouse ourselves and manage by some means to cast off this yoke of oppression? ‘Where there is a will, there is a way.’”

NOTES

1. On these cases, see Harris 281 and 289–91 and Carle 191–92 and 202–10. Struggles by African Americans against transit discrimination, including legal challenges, were often anchored by women (from Frances Ellen Watkins Harper to Ida B. Wells).

2. Carle is the first modern scholar I have found who mentions Pope's literary work; she briefly considers the *Waverly Magazine* stories in *Defining the Struggle*; see 202–3. Harris provides bibliographic information on the individual stories' magazine publication and the collection *Storiettes* (294).

3. Fortune began editing the young *New York Globe* in 1881. The four-page weekly became the *Freeman* in 1884 (when Fortune became the paper's owner) before taking its better-known name—the one it would carry into the 1950s, decades after Fortune's death—in October 1887. While Fortune would often ally himself to Booker T. Washington, he had a streak of fierce independence (including a real commitment to women's rights) that was often illustrated in his editorials but also came into play when he chose what to publish. Paper copies of the *Freeman* are exceedingly rare. My transcription is based on a microfilm copy of the paper, though it has also been digitized and is available in subscription-based products like Readex's *African American Newspapers, 1827–1998*.

4. *The Negro*—a short version of the full title *The Negro: A Monthly Publication Devoted to Critical Discussion of Race Problems Involved in the Mental, Moral, Social, and Material Condition of the Negroes in the United States*—was a thirty-two-page magazine created by writer William Hannibal Thomas. It published only two issues—July and August 1886—before folding. Of note, John E. Bruce (“Bruce Grit”) was briefly involved with the publication, though he and Thomas soon broke ties. While the July 1886 issue is available free digitally (as the Hathitrust collection includes a scan of Emory University's copy), the August 1886 issue is not. That said, a handful of paper copies exist, including one at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The author thanks Claire Berman for her assistance in accessing that copy.

5. I am here, of course, invoking Caroline Gebhard and Barbara McCaskill's generative collection, *Post-Bellum, Pre-Harlem: African American Literature and Culture, 1877–1919* (2006).

6. This letter was first studied by Thomas biographer John David Smith; see Smith 140–45 and 202–9. Smith also mentions “Truth versus Hypocrisy” in a separate listing of contents of *The Negro*, but he does not connect Pope-the-author to the Taylor-Washington letter.

7. See, for example, “The Colored Public Schools.”

8. During the nineteenth century, this important poem was also published in the *Southern Workman* (1886) and excerpted in both Lawson Scruggs's *Women of Distinc-*

tion (1893) and Gertrude Bustill Mossell's *Work of Afro-American Woman* (1894); Paula Bernat Bennett reprinted it in *Nineteenth-Century American Women Poets: An Anthology* (1998).

9. The *Enterprise's* snippet is accompanied by the coding "Ex" for "exchange"; see "Straws that Tell." See also "A New Literary Star."

10. See, for example, "The Niagara Movement."

11. See "Hangs Herself."

12. While Pope sets her story in Georgia, she says that Carrington received his first scars from racial violence in Alabama, perhaps a nod to Tuskegee's location.

13. On Matthews, see Rudolph; on Dunbar-Nelson, see Gebhard et al.

14. My thanks to one of *Legacy's* anonymous readers who pointed out a number of references of varying directness to William and Ellen Craft, especially in "The Old and the New Order," including the similarities between Hempstead and Macon and the name of the woman whom Carrington is defending when he is wounded by a train conductor ("Ellen"). Here and in other suggestive references, some of which are noted above, Pope appears to be engaging in what P. Gabrielle Foreman calls "histotextuality," a major variation of intertextuality that is "predicated upon the recognizable historicized markers that authors and readers share, rather than on a formal appropriation and recirculation of texts" and is "a strategy used to reach the segment of the audience whose prior knowledge and interpretive schemata determine the level of historical and epistemological engagement they experience while appealing on a different level to a broader reading public" (10).

15. My thanks to one of *Legacy's* anonymous readers who noted the number of references to hands in both stories, many of which seem to serve as markers for collective and personal trauma but that also speak to a long tradition of antislavery iconography, both white and Black, tied to hands, including white abolitionist Jonathan Walker's famous "branded hand"—marked with "S S" for "slave stealer" after Walker was convicted of aiding seven escaping self-emancipating African Americans.

16. The possible connections between "The Old and New Order" and *Minnie's Sacrifice*, which Pope could have read as a youth, are all the more striking given the name of George's adopted half sister, the child of the victim of a lynching: Minnie. In this, readers will also see conversations with Black writers' broader depictions of racist violence like those in Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends* (1857).

17. See untitled editorial. This engagement highlights the fact that Pope was beginning to experiment both with a longer-form tale and with serialization. Indeed, the story was advertised as running three chapters but ended up taking four.

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