The Dividing Lines: How Tensions Surrounding Class and Racial Uplift Ideology Intersected with Funding during Chicago's Black Settlement House Movement in the Early 20th Century

Abstract

When one thinks of the Chicago Settlement House Movement big names like Jane Addams and Graham Taylor might come to mind. Most likely one would not think of Celia Parker Woolley, a former Unitarian minister, or Ida B. Wells-Barnett, a famous black anti-lynching activist. However, both Woolley and Wells-Barnett, made an impact on their communities through the creation of settlement houses directed at the black community. My project places Woolley’s settlement house, the Frederick Douglass Center, in conversation with Ida B. Wells-Barnett’s settlement house, the Negro Fellowship League, exploring how they developed and functioned. The comparison of the centers highlights the tensions surrounding class and ideology that existed in black charity work. It specifically illustrates how classism (prejudice or discrimination based on economic status) impacted the development of black settlement houses and determined the amount of funding they received. The influence the larger ideological debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B Dubois had on the structure and funding of the organizations is also explored. I demonstrate how both of these factors – ongoing-classism and the ideological debate – not only put the houses into opposition with each other, but also caused the Negro Fellowship League to consistently suffer from great financial difficulties as a result of prejudice against the population the League served (the poor, migrant communities) and the militant ideology of its founder, Ida B. Wells-Barnett.