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Race, Politics, and Public Housekeeping: Contending Forces in Pauline Hopkins's Boston

Betsy Klimasmith

For Pauline Hopkins, the decision to present readers with a fictional yet faithful portrayal of urban African-American life centered in Boston, which at that time was the capital of African-American advancement, was political.¹ In her introduction to *Contending Forces* (1900), she writes: “Fiction is of great value to any people as a preserver of manners and customs—religious, political and social. It is a record of growth and development from generation to generation. No one will do this for us; we must ourselves develop the men and women who will faithfully portray the inmost thoughts and feelings of the Negro with all the fire and romance which lies dormant in our history, and, as yet, unrecognized by writers of the Anglo-Saxon race.”² Hopkins saw fiction as an instrumental form; preserving and recording growth and development would help to build a progressive vision of the past and future for African Americans.

While critical attention to Pauline Hopkins's life and work has increased dramatically over the past two decades, readers still struggle to reconcile her wild plots with the progressive politics that put her at odds with Booker T. Washington and short-circuited her writing career.³ Despite Hopkins's emphasis on “manners and customs,” critics have tended to focus more closely on the novel's “fire and romance” than on the attention to the rich details of African-American life in Boston that dominate

the novel. This is not surprising; Hopkins builds *Contending Forces* on a fiery foundation of bloodlines, concealed identities, and mysterious connections between the present and the past. When *Contending Forces* is read as a political text, it is seen, according to Thomas Cassidy, “as a work of activist literature whose goal was to lead both its black and white audiences to understand the widespread nineteenth-century lynching and raping of black Americans as a form of political terror” through sentimental and melodramatic narrative strategies.⁴ The novel’s politics, however, are not located only in its melodrama, which occurs largely in prequels and flashbacks outside of the text’s temporal and spatial frames.

Contending Forces begins far from Boston, but is largely set in the two very different neighborhoods where black Bostonians tended to live during the late nineteenth century. Fortune-teller Madame Frances lives and plies her trade in the West End tenement district, while Ma Smith operates a boardinghouse in the South End neighborhood where upwardly mobile black families began to buy houses and raise families after 1880. Juxtaposing these two settings allows Hopkins to put two familiar urban narratives, one of unsettling mystery and one of recuperative domesticity, into productive friction. The tense relationship between the South End and West End can be imagined as a set of dialogues between realism and melodrama, between bourgeois black Bostonians and the city’s impoverished underclass, between the city’s future and its past. Through these dialogues, Hopkins valorizes black Bostonians’ work for racial justice, critiques a Progressive Era positivism that threatens to exclude black women from social gains, points to historical precedents for informal yet efficacious black political organization in Boston, and argues against the stratification that had begun to separate native-born black Bostonians from the new migrants arriving from the South.

Her fictional project in *Contending Forces*—to emphasize the value of extending the benefits of the urban home beyond the bourgeois formation of family—articulates a vision for urban reform in which black families are not the victims of urban vagaries but play significant roles in fostering social change. Amid oppression and injustice, black women succeed politically, economically, and intellectually in Hopkins’s Boston. In order to appreciate how the narrative reveals the breadth of Hopkins’s political imagination, we need to understand how Hopkins’s narrative

choices, including her employment of overlapping genres and the tension she builds between Boston's West and South End neighborhoods, serve her vision rather than occlude it.

Although Hopkins sets scenes in many Boston locales, all of *Contending Forces'* black characters live in one of these two neighborhoods. In 1820, following a black migration from the North End, seventy-eight percent of the city's black population had come to call the West End home.⁵ George Levesque argues in *Black Boston* that the black presence in the West End "was a tangible manifestation of blacks' newly acquired status" following the War for Independence.⁶ The West End, meanwhile, would become synonymous with the abolition movement. There, the African Meeting House (also known as the African Baptist Church), the first black church in Boston, which Hopkins's ancestors had helped to found, was the site of numerous significant events for Boston's African-American community. Here William Lloyd Garrison started the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1832; Frederick Douglass gave his famous anti-slavery speech of 1860, and Robert Gould Shaw recruited soldiers for the Massachusetts 54th Regiment in 1863.⁷ Today, the church building remains and houses Boston's Museum of African-American History.⁸

But by the time the African Meeting House was built in 1806, the West End had already become reviled as a "seamy vice-district" known in the white press as the infamous "Nigger Hill," where prostitution, rowdiness, and debauchery held sway.⁹ Not only uncouth, the West End was also unhealthy: historical records such as Josiah Curtis's Report of the Census of Boston in 1855 revealed that the neighborhood had the highest mortality rates in Boston. "Here, in an environment within an environment, 'the influence of bad air, and confined, badly located, and filthy houses,' killed off the black residents most undemocratically."¹⁰ Further, as black families moved into the West End, white families moved out, resulting in de facto segregation—"with separate churches, and schools, with all-black shops, clubs and fraternal organizations" that developed in the West End as the nineteenth century unfolded.¹¹ Sociologist Lois Horton adds boarding-houses to this list. Like other informal organizations, boardinghouses enabled Boston's antebellum black population to "build a social

movement based in a poor, relatively powerless community”—a movement that would accomplish, among other things, public school desegregation in 1855.¹² Paradoxically, these organizations both empowered and isolated African Americans from the largely white city around them.

But when restrictions on black property ownership were loosened in 1880, bourgeois African-American families began to buy houses in newly developed sections of the South End and Roxbury, leading to a decline in the West End's black population from 80 percent in 1865 to 36 percent in 1890.¹³ In his 1914 study of black life in Boston, *In Freedom's Birthplace* (begun in 1905 when he was working in Boston's new South End Settlement House, later the Robert Gould Shaw House), John Daniels, a protégé of Chicago sociologist Robert Park, wrote that this migration, combined with “constant immigration” of blacks from the West Indies and American South, made Boston a landscape of racial and social flux at the turn of the twentieth century. By 1900, while “the better whites and Negroes [had] moved away” from the lower South End, the upper South End (the “respectable part”) where Ma Smith runs her lodging house retained a bourgeois black population into the early twentieth century.¹⁴ For Hopkins, this bourgeois neighborhood, and Ma Smith's tenuous position in it, becomes a crucial starting point for her narrative.

While discrimination against African Americans and the class-based patterns of migration that it engendered made the African-American experience in Boston at the turn of the twentieth century somewhat typical of northern cities, the black community had fought and gained for black Bostonians more educational, economic, political, and residential opportunities than their closest urban neighbors in New York and Philadelphia. A small but significant African-American intellectual community, the celebrated black participation in Boston's revolutionary history embodied in Crispus Attucks, the city's unique role in the abolition of slavery, its continuing commitment to public education, and its policy of keeping public institutions (including the Boston Public Library) open to black patrons combined to offer relatively wide cultural and educational opportunities to African Americans throughout Boston. Hopkins herself benefited from these policies, graduating from the city's Girls' High School.

According to W. E. B. DuBois, Boston's black population was uniquely positioned to take advantage of the opportunities for which they

had fought: “This urban negro population is peculiar in being the only one among the larger Northern cities to have a normal distribution of the sexes—5,904 males and 5,687 females in 1900. This immediately leads us to expect better family life and social conditions than we have yet studied. Thanks to Massachusetts schools, the literacy rate of this group is about that of England and France (13 ½ percent).”¹⁵ Stable familial domesticity, DuBois implies, allows black Bostonians to profit from the opportunities the city makes available, which in turn improves and nurtures domestic life. DuBois writes, “It is noticeable that only 62 percent of the Boston negroes are in gainful occupations, a smaller proportion than in the other cities, showing a larger number of children in school and a larger number of mothers and daughters making homes.”¹⁶ For DuBois, domesticity determines whether African Americans will thrive or fail in urban space. Here, DuBois is writing as a sociologist. Having published his seminal monograph, *The Philadelphia Negro*, in 1896, he wrote the analysis I’ve just quoted as part of a comparative study called *The Black North* in 1901, which aimed at a more general audience and was published serially in the *New York Times*. African-American intellectuals like DuBois and Hopkins saw the urban home, especially in Boston, as a site from which emissaries would go to improve the world—and both tried to broadcast this vision beyond the intellectual elite. Hopkins, however, had the novelist’s privilege of shaping her setting to suit a social program.

While Hopkins’s Boston certainly reflects the historical realities of its moment, as a novelist, Hopkins simultaneously draws on the past and nods to the future in order to construct the city as a dynamic and powerful space where progressive racial politics may gestate—and from which reform may emanate. In *Contending Forces*, the home is not restricted to a DuBoisian private family; it is the more public boardinghouse. As in many older texts, the boardinghouse setting in *Contending Forces* facilitates the courtship and family recapitulation plots that are central to the novel’s structure. But by positioning the boardinghouse as a center for politics as well as courtship, Hopkins acknowledges the historical political efficacy of the city’s boardinghouses, aligning the sentimental touchstones of marriage, courtship, virtue, debasement, and redemption with domestic and, eventually, global political reform.

Urban fiction of the Progressive Era shared many characteristics with the urban fiction that had come before it, especially in presenting the city as a place of proximity, mixing, and transformation. The urban home, exemplified in *Contending Forces* by Ma Smith's boardinghouse, blends privacy and interaction, individuality and community. In the days before hotels and apartments were standard housing for new city dwellers, boardinghouses were, simply, where almost everyone—married, single, male, female, white, black—who came to an American city would live until either they earned enough money to rent a house or purchase property or they left. The boardinghouse served as a common setting in nineteenth-century American fiction, operating as a metonym for the city outside. In the fictional boardinghouse, strangers mingle and share domestic space under the eye of a proprietress, usually a widow, who conceals the business aspects of the boardinghouse by imagining it as a home. Ma Smith's boardinghouse echoes these historical and fictional patterns and emphatically embraces them through her title, "Ma." At once part of the extended and amalgamating family structure, Ma Smith's boardinghouse acculturates newcomers to the city, builds social networks, and facilitates courtships and marriages. It offers a refuge from the city outside even as it shapes interactions between the city and the boardinghouse residents.

A central feature of antebellum American urban life, boardinghouses played a critical role for Boston's black community. Lois E. Horton estimates that before the Civil War, 30 to 40 percent of Boston's black households included boarders. More significantly, Horton notes, "The practice of boarding performed two important functions for the black community. It provided cooperative solutions to the problems of survival and created networks built on the family with potential significance for social activism."¹⁷ Further, in this era "boarding arrangements" like Ma Smith's that "crossed class lines connected the resources and leadership of the middle class with potential actors in the lower class."¹⁸ After World War I, Hazel Carby argues, migration and immigration would fundamentally change the character of urban life for African Americans. Yet long before this shift, Hopkins's boardinghouse, featuring characters of all ages and economic positions whose origins range from Boston and New Hampshire to the deep South to Bermuda, and set at an historical moment when tensions were developing between migrants and more set-

bled black Bostonians, exemplifies the antebellum, activist model of the Boston boardinghouse.

Historically, most boardinghouses were run by widows who took in boarders in order to keep up the mortgages on the houses they had inherited after their husbands died. In *Contending Forces*, the widowed Ma Smith and her two children work together to support themselves and retain ownership of the heavily mortgaged house, which is the family's major economic asset. Ma Smith's eldest child, the talented, intellectual Will (modeled on W. E. B. DuBois), gives up his college plans to become a "bellboy in one of the fashionable hostelries with which Boston abounds" (CF 84). To supplement Will's small income, Ma Smith opens her DuBoisian private home to the public as a boardinghouse. Effecting this change means some sacrifice for the Smiths: mother and daughter double up in one bedroom, Will takes the least rentable room, and they rent the other rooms out to lodgers found primarily through Will's work connections. The Smiths' hard work pays off: "very soon the mother was able to see that the debt upon the home which she had hoped to leave her children, was slowly but surely disappearing. Deep in her heart was the cherished hope that when the mortgage was paid Willie would be free to choose a profession" (CF 85). If it is successful, the boardinghouse can solve two economic problems for the Smiths: It can pay the mortgage and eventually send Will to college so that he lives up to the potential for which his upbringing and Boston's educational system have prepared him.

Thus Ma Smith follows but revises a narrative tradition of the widow as boardinghouse proprietress.¹⁹ In fiction, the figure of the widow turned boardinghouse mistress was usually caricatured either as a frugal, manipulative schemer or as a randy, slightly predatory woman of a certain age. Ma Smith, however, is an idealized mother who cares deeply about her boarders. She replicates and extends the familial structure of home to her clients in a boardinghouse that exemplifies domestic perfection. "[E]ven in palatial homes a more inviting nest could not be found. The table was carefully spread with a nicely ironed cloth of spotless white, red-bordered napkins lay at each plate, a good quality of plated silverware mingled with the plain, inexpensive white ware in which the meal was to be served. Ma Smith, in her neat calico dress and long white apron, busied herself in making the tea and coffee and seeing that the delicate muffins

were browned to just the right turn” (*CF* 89). As Hanna Wallinger points out, these domestic details “served as proof of respectability, achievement, and progress, all of which are virtues that needed to be defined and defended rather than taken for granted.”²⁰ These virtues prove to be more than personal.

The neatness, the cleanliness, and the perfection of the muffins convey the efficient competency and consummate domestic skill that Dora and Ma Smith bring to the business of the lodging house. The details add up: Things are ironed, spotless, neat, and delicate. Equally important is the careful balance between good taste and good economy. The Smiths have to choose where and how to spend their money; spending on the durable plate silverware while letting the more breakable white ware be cheap and plain reveals both good management and the good taste that are equally important markers of domestic success. With the red borders on the spotless white napkins hinting at the dangers that the Smiths attempt to push to the edges of their ironed-flat world, the perfect domesticity practiced by the Smiths emphasizes both the tenuousness of their claim on urban space and the tenacity with which they cling to it.

The Smiths’ commitment to bourgeois homemaking in the South End reflects historical patterns of housing in Hopkins’s day. In 1905, sociologist Daniels approved of this impulse. Daniels called the South End a “Negro colony,” which together with the lower Roxbury exemplified what Daniels termed a “wedge district,” an area in which, after an initial group of black citizens bought property, each succeeding buyer would find it easier to do the same, developing the critical mass that Daniels believed was crucial to black advancement. He writes, “These men and women, living in the midst of their race, fully conscious of its trials, its hopes, its achievements, are in fact the mainstay of the Negro community, and slowly but surely are developing sound leadership. . . . In education and refinement they are not too far above the majority of their people to make common cause with them and to be accepted by them.”²¹ According to this Progressive Era sociologist, social change will happen as domestic influence spreads among homes and throughout neighborhoods. While Daniels’s language implicitly excludes the black upper class—the one or two percent who were highly educated and tended to segregate themselves geographically from other black Bostonians, it

makes social change the purview and the responsibility of everybody else. It is certainly the project of the fictional Smiths.²²

In contrast to its role in grimmer urban texts like Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods*, here the boardinghouse and the city it represents exert an uplifting, palliative force. But like many other urban novels, *Contending Forces* comprises a variety of subgenres. To politicize the boardinghouse narrative, Hopkins draws on two more socially engaged, similarly optimistic modes of Progressive Era urban writing, the utopian urban narrative and the settlement house narrative. In these texts, the aspects of city life that produced anxiety in some observers, like urban connections, contact among strangers, and anonymity, become the inspiration and foundation for new and improved societies. While settlement house narratives draw on quotidian details of everyday life, utopian narratives are set, for the most part, in times or places outside the realm of the present. Deeply invested in the details of everyday life, they establish imaginary, though realistic, worlds in which the social problems of the day are resolved, and in so doing, demonstrate to their readers that better ways of living are possible. Readers, in turn, develop both the faculty of imagining creative solutions to social problems and the mindset that would put these practices into action.²³

This is precisely what happens at Ma Smith's. First, like Thomas More's *Utopia*, Ma Smith's boardinghouse is literally a no-place. While Hopkins very clearly locates the boardinghouse in the South End, the address she gives for the building, 500 D Street, places it in industrial South Boston on a block that, according to fire insurance maps of the day, did not have any buildings on it. Because Hopkins is so careful throughout the rest of the novel to indicate precise locations as part of the settings she describes, her use of a recognizably fabricated address indicates a desire to pull the boardinghouse at least partially out of concrete space and give it a stronger utopian resonance.²⁴ But the novel's utopianism, like its melodrama, is grounded in quotidian detail. In this regard, *Contending Forces* is similar to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "pragmatopian" short stories.²⁵ Indeed, Ma Smith resembles Gilman's plucky heroines in her ability to turn the domestic and economic tragedy of her husband's death into a successful business that improves the world around it via its residents. But because Ma Smith's boardinghouse serves those who have been

victims of slavery and racism, the better world Ma Smith builds within her boardinghouse takes in a far wider range of people than we see in Gilman's texts. Hopkins not only imagines a great degree of political change, she writes to develop in her readers the mind-set that would make this political vision a reality.

Using the boardinghouse as a utopian space that generates positive sociality both in and outside of its walls becomes problematic when a familial connection is established between the bourgeois home and the lower-class black neighborhood of the West End. While the early part of the novel isn't set there, Hopkins refers to the West End obliquely throughout the text. Ma Smith's West End church, for instance, is a strong reminder of and a connection to the West End of abolition days. But no coherent image of the West End emerges until later in the novel, when John Langley decides to consult fortune-teller Madam Frances about his future. When Langley calls on Madam Frances in her dilapidated tenement, Hopkins takes the opportunity to guide her readers on a brief tour that stresses the neighborhood's past political glory: "The history of Massachusetts is forever linked with that of the Anti-Slavery Movement, and the Anti-Slavery Movement is entwined about the familiar street-corners of the old West End" (CF 278). Massachusetts history, Hopkins reveals, is black history. It is worth noting that Langley, a corrupt politician in the pockets of white backers, represents a trend in black politics that runs counter to Hopkins's ideals; clearly Langley must be eliminated from the novel's family and political plots. At Madame Frances's, Langley eavesdrops on Sappho, overhears the truth about her child, and receives proof of her identity when he recovers a monogrammed handkerchief Sappho has conveniently dropped. Then, in one of the novel's stranger scenes, Langley has his consultation with Madame Frances, in which she shows him several glimpses of his grim future with the help of magic screens. Finally, after a midnight walk through Boston when she decides that her past is an insurmountable barrier to marrying Will Smith, Sappho takes refuge in the West End and acknowledges to her illegitimate son that she is his mother. Psychic mediums, melodrama, and concealed parentage thus take their place in the West End, becoming a part of its storied past and grim present.

The recurring presence of the West End makes it integral to the narrative—and the city; this historically black neighborhood emerges as a crucial resource for Hopkins’s political project—and Boston’s future. In the context of the larger body of Hopkins’s fiction, which engages over and over again with issues of history, family, and spiritual power, we can’t just discount the West End’s supernatural overlay as a bizarre deviation from the attention to quotidian detail with which the rest of Boston is portrayed. Rather, the presence of the supernatural suggests that the West End holds a certain kind of power that the bourgeois South End doesn’t, and that the forces of domestic, historic, and supernatural power all must be brought into alignment in order for the black community of Boston, and any extension of it, to prosper. Hopkins’s treatment of the West End emphasizes that if the political project of improving black urban life generally is to be successful, local problems affecting the broader black community need to be seen as significant and prioritized.

Sappho’s intimate familial engagement with the West End moves her—and the novel—beyond the do-gooderism of Ma Smith’s boardinghouse. When Sappho’s secret connections to this neighborhood are brought into the open, the heretofore happy community is thrown into disarray. The truth, condensed and broadcast through the seedy filter of the West End, is shocking enough to shatter the domestic plots that have been developing in Boston. Sappho leaves town; Will is devastated; John Langley’s evil nature is revealed; Dora rejects Langley as a suitor and marries Arthur. Against the power of the past, as exemplified by the West End, the South End boardinghouse is impotent. No quantity of delicate muffins or spotless napkins can stem the tide of revelations and their consequences.

Hopkins mends her novel’s fractures with happy coincidences and a large legacy that is conveniently obtained in the last boardinghouse scene. At least one element of this contrived ending is worth noting: the ultimate fate of the boardinghouse. When the Smith family decamps for England, Ma Smith leases her house to two tenants whose courtship and marriage have provided a steady “comic” undercurrent to novel’s realism and melodrama. In the ultimate demonstration of Ma Smith’s—and her project’s—power, we see that her tenant Ophelia has learned enough to keep the successful business, with all of its social and political aims,

running even in Ma Smith's absence. If the test of a successful mission is whether it can survive a change of leadership, Ma Smith's boardinghouse seems to pass. Significantly, it's now not a bourgeois black woman from New England but an uneducated former slave from Louisiana who possesses the skills and connections to keep a successful business with an elevated vision intact.

Hopkins's boardinghouse narrative, while certainly politically engaged, keeps violence and exploitation at arm's length. Truly horrifying social problems (rape, lynching, and educational inequities) remain elsewhere, usually in the South, acknowledged and yet fundamentally un-confronted by well-intentioned people. Sappho, for instance, is raped and exploited not in Boston, but in New Orleans. It is only when Will Smith falls in love with Sappho in Boston that, through Sappho on the one hand, and through Dorá's eventual marriage on the other, these distant "race" problems become family problems. Sappho's marriage, along with Will's adoption of her son, offers Sappho a route to respectability as well as a sense that through marriage and the nuclear family, the past wrongs of racial violence can somehow be resolved. But Sappho's secret is connected not just to a displaced past of racial and sexual enslavement. Significantly, the reconstruction of Sappho's hidden family brings together the two sections of black Boston—its future in the South End and its complicated past in the West End. Hopkins thus reveals that, in order to be successful, the social politics of racial uplift can't all be located elsewhere. She emphasizes the need to tackle the problems that lurk under the surface even of New England's "freest" city—while continuing to assert that black Bostonians have the power and the responsibility to do this work successfully.

Ma Smith's boardinghouse operates as a microcosm of the idealized, utopian, yet also realistic city. Through it, Hopkins constructs an urban space in which the past heals and enriches itself as the nuclear family expands to incorporate people like Sappho and Ophelia, whose origins in slavery, as well as their social class and lack of formal education, would tend to mark them as "other" to the bourgeois Smiths. By the novel's end, the house itself, as property and as the nexus for social change, will continue its mission under Ophelia's management, and this change will allow the Smiths to cast a wider net of reform—one that reaches nationally (to New Orleans and to rural Louisiana where Dora, Arthur, and their

daughter Sappho run their school) and internationally, both through familial ties to England and through intellectual work when Will begins his studies in Heidelberg. In contrast to the more pessimistic urban novels that would follow *Contending Forces*, such as Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods* (1902) and James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), *Contending Forces* imbues urban space with possibility and endows black characters with surprising agency within—and beyond—the city of Boston.

Hopkins's optimism about the possibilities for African-American power across the class spectrum in urban space is unusual for her era and more progressive than many of her peers. W. E. B. DuBois, for instance, believed that individual homes could incubate social change; Hopkins expands this paradigm considerably. Though the home emerges for DuBois as the most important site for African-American advancement, his rhetoric about urban domesticity is loaded with disturbing bourgeois elitism. Stating that “no respectable family should linger a week in the Tenderloin of New York or the Fifth Ward of Philadelphia, or in the worst parts of the West End of Boston,” DuBois limited his vision for social justice to the small elite class. He writes: “Concerted, organized effort can bring relief here, even if it costs something in comfort and rent. The home-training of children should be more strict even than that of whites. Social distinctions should be observed. A rising race must be aristocratic; the good cannot consort with the bad—nor even the best with the less good.”²⁶

The question of who consorts with whom is central to all of Hopkins's fiction, but in *Contending Forces*, Hopkins endorses a far more compassionate sense of the good, bad, and less good than DuBois by constructing a boardinghouse world in which people can become good by acting that way, and in which redemptive consorting crosses class, age, racial, and even gender lines. In Hopkins's vision, DuBoisian “home-training” matters in that the home is the single most powerful force in shaping virtuous people. But by changing the home in question from a family home to a boardinghouse, Hopkins reveals not only that almost anyone can benefit from “home-culture,” but that limiting this ameliorative vision to an elite class is shortsighted at best in a world where even “bad” victims of the horrible abuses of slavery, rape, near-lynchings, concubinage, public whippings, and beatings can first remake themselves and then help

others who are engaged in similar struggles. Because it reaches a broader cross-section of the population than an individual family home could, Ma Smith's boardinghouse exerts a more powerful impact on the city around it through its various residents. Following this pattern, Boston takes on a similar role, nurturing political activism and connections both informally and institutionally, and then sending its residents forth to such places as the rural South, where they develop educational institutions, and to Europe, where, we imagine, they will continue to fight for the cause of racial justice—on a global scale.

Notes

¹ Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 163. Centuries earlier, Boston had of course been home to the first woman of African descent to become a published author: poet Phillis Wheatley. It was there that Crispus Attucks shed blood for the Revolution. The city led the crucible of abolitionism and offered access to a premiere education.

² Pauline Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, 1900. Reprint. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 14. Subsequent references to this text will be noted parenthetically with the abbreviation *CF*.

³ See Jill Bergman, “‘Everything we hoped she’d be’: *Contending Forces* in Hopkins Scholarship,” *African-American Review* 38.2 (Summer 2004): 181–199. Augusta Rohrbach argues that Hopkins found serialized fiction a more useful narrative form for political expression than the novel. See “To Be Continued: Double Identity, Multiplicity and Antigenealogy as Narrative Strategies in Pauline Hopkins’ Magazine Fiction,” *Callaloo* 22.2 (Spring 1999): 483–498.

⁴ Thomas Cassidy, “Contending Contexts: Pauline Hopkins’s *Contending Forces*,” *African American Review* 32.4 (Winter 1998): 661. Following Jane Tompkins’s argument that sentimental domestic novels often argued quite powerfully for political change that would grow from changes of heart, critics such as Claudia Tate, Hazel Carby, and Ann DuCille have persuasively argued that *Contending Forces*’s sentimental marriage plot applies the nineteenth-century tactic of making readers “feel right” to the African-American political struggles of the turn of the twentieth century. Yet as Sean McCann points out, the novel’s ultimate claims that noble British blood will out, and that marriage is woman’s highest calling, leave even these critics to “lament the novel’s sentimentality and its inability to imagine a black feminism worthy of the name.” Sean McCann, “‘Bonds of Brotherhood’: Pauline Hopkins and the Work of Melodrama,” *ELH* 64.3 (Fall 1997): 790.

⁵ George A. Levesque, *Black Boston: African American Life and Culture in Urban America, 1750–1860* (New York: Garland, 1994), p. 34.

⁶ Levesque, *Black Boston*, p. 13.

⁷ For more on racial politics in the church's earlier days, see Lois Brown, "Out of the Mouths of Babes: The Abolitionist Campaign of Susan Paul and the Juvenile Choir of Boston," *New England Quarterly: A Historical Review of New England Life and Letters*, 75.1 (March 2002): 52–79.

⁸ Today, the African Meeting House is considered to be located on Beacon Hill. In Hopkins's day, this side of Beacon Hill was part of the West End.

⁹ Daniel A. Cohen, "Introduction," *The Female Marine and Related Works: Narratives of Cross-Dressing and Urban Vice in America's Early Republic* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), p. 15.

¹⁰ Levesque, *Black Boston*, p. 440.

¹¹ Levesque, *Black Boston*, p. 37.

¹² Lois E. Horton, "Community Organization and Social Activism: Black Boston and the Antislavery Movement," *Sociological Inquiry* 55.2 (April 1985), p. 182.

¹³ Daniels, *In Freedom's Birthplace*, p. 143.

¹⁴ Daniels, *In Freedom's Birthplace*, p. 145.

¹⁵ DuBois, W. E. B. DuBois, *The Black North in 1901* (New York: Arno Press and the *New York Times*, 1969), p. 31.

¹⁶ DuBois, *The Black North*, p. 37.

¹⁷ Horton, "Community Organization," p.186.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁹ See Betsy Klimasmith, *At Home in the City* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2005), Chapter One.

²⁰ Hanna Wallinger, *Pauline E. Hopkins: A Literary Biography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), p. 158.

²¹ Daniels, *In Freedom's Birthplace*, p. 179.

²² I do not count the Smiths as members of Boston's exclusive black upper class. See Adelaide M. Cromwell, *The Other Brahmins* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994).

²³ See Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981).

²⁴ For historical background on urban and rural utopias in the United States, see Dolores Hayden, *Seven American Utopias: The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976).

²⁵ Carol Farley Kessler, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her Progress Towards Utopia with Selected Writings* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 212.

²⁶ DuBois, *The Black North*, p. 46.