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WARING, MARY FITZBUTLER

November 1, 1869–December 3, 1958

PHYSICIAN, CLUBWOMAN, ACTIVIST, EDUCATOR

The lives of African Americans were impacted by migration, urbanization, and war in the first three decades of the twentieth century, and, from within the black community, individual men and women emerged to aid in the construction of community life in northern cities. The presence and power of such women as Mary Fitzbutler Waring, through their vision, dedication, and energy, provided guidance during those tenuous times. She joined with a number of pioneering African American women of the early twentieth century whose voices were heard locally, nationally, and internationally as they proclaimed the gospel of racial uplift and equality.

Mary Fitzbutler was one of six children born to Henry and Sarah H. Fitzbutler. Migrating from Ontario, Canada, in 1872, the Warings settled in Louisville, Kentucky, where Mary Fitzbutler was born. This was also the place where Henry Fitzbutler, after he completed his studies at the medical school of the University of Michigan, established a medical college in 1888, the Louisville National Medical College, which was open to all, regardless of color. Mary Fitzbutler's own career unfolded as she saw her father's efforts to train young doctors, one of whom was her mother. These examples of service to others motivated Fitzbutler throughout her early education in the public schools of Louisville, her teacher training at the normal school, her graduation from Louisville National Medical College in 1898, and her completion of a degree in medicine from the Chicago Medical School in 1923.

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In 1901, Fitzbutler married Frank Waring, an educator and activist who served as a high school principal. The Warings moved to Chicago. Frank Waring raised funds to support the Old Folks Home and was active in the Appomattox Club and the Grand Lodge of the Knights of Pythias. His work as activist and educator continued until his death in 1923.

Mary Waring was a teacher at Wendell Phillips High School before she practiced medicine in Chicago. Little can be found regarding her medical practice; because of racial, gender, and professional bias, many pioneering black and white women physicians combined their medical practices with community service work. Waring turned to the growing health needs of the black community. Many of her efforts to expand medical care and raise the consciousness of her community about health issues were directed through the activities of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW).

The NACW was founded in 1896 as an effort to organize and centralize the energies of the many local black women's clubs across the nation. These clubs responded to the violence and racial pressures experienced by the black population following the Reconstruction Era, when Jim Crow laws were passed in the wake of a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 1883 that nullified the Civil Rights Act of 1875. This conservative trend culminated in 1896 with *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which "upheld state measures of discriminating against colored patrons on the railroads and established the 'separate but equal' doctrine" (Wesley, 24).

By the early 1900s, the gifts and visions of black clubwomen like Waring were put to use as they joined with other political and civic organizations in the black community to fight for equal opportunity for African Americans. Waring's early leadership in such organizations as the local Phyllis Wheatley Club and the Emanuel Settlement Day Nursery provided a much needed service to young women newly migrating to Chicago from the South. By locating housing and organizing vocational counseling and training, child care, and social activities, these and other black-initiated and black-run agencies addressed the serious needs of African American migrant women in their search for urban employment opportunities.

Waring's leadership moved beyond the local level when she was selected, in 1911, to serve as an alternate to represent the NACW at the executive session of the National Council of Women, the white counterpart of the NACW. Two years later she was elected as the corresponding secretary of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women. While continuing her local and statewide activities, Waring accepted an appointment to the position of chair of the NACW's Department of Health and Hygiene. She was also the editor of the NACW publication, *National Notes*.

From 1913 to 1930, as the growth of urban centers in the North provided jobs for many but also created massive health problems, Waring focused on the health problems of blacks. One of the first was the tuberculosis epidemic that afflicted thousands between 1913 and 1914. Waring sponsored a number of training sessions and health programs across the country, through regional and local black women's clubs, to address critical health concerns. Through her writings in *National Notes* she provided common sense information that stressed the need for sanitation in urban areas and for prevention programs.

In 1914, Governor Edward F. Dunne, confirming the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs' choice, appointed Waring to serve as one of the commissioners of the Abraham Lincoln Jubilee planned for the Illinois Exposition of 1915. Her appointment, in response to a resolution passed by the NACW to include a "colored woman" (quoted in Carney, 681) on the board, involved Waring in the planning and executing of a twenty thousand dollar event commemorating fifty years of progress of black women and men in Chicago. Waring wanted the event to be an opportunity for black and white viewers alike to see and appreciate exhibits of "'quality' work" (quoted in Carney, 681) by Blacks to illustrate the "gains made by the race in business, education, and manufacturing" (Carney, 681). The exposition served not only to dispel negative images and stereotypes but also to illustrate in a concrete way the motto of the NACW, "Lifting as We Climb," a theme of racial uplift and self-determination.

The Great Migration of southern Blacks to northern cities after World War I escalated the challenges to health, hygiene, and sanitation in the overcrowded, segregated "Black Belt" of Chicago. Waring continued to address these issues in a variety of articles in *National Notes*. "Census counts in the northern cities during the migration period showed that a greater number of women than men were making the journey from the South" (Giddings, 142). Black women were seeking employment opportunities in the textile, clothing, food, and tobacco industries. On the one hand, for the first time, "significant numbers of Black women were earning decent wages in the mainstream of the American labor force" (Giddings, 143), but "Black representation in the unions was very small," and, of this small number, "the number of Black women was negligible" (Giddings, 154). This swelling of employment numbers forced the NACW to deal seriously with the problems of black working women and, specifically, acceptance of black women in the labor unions.

Waring's personal campaign during this time of work and war continued to focus on health. At the eleventh biennial convention of the NACW in 1918, she introduced a proposal to include black Red Cross nurses in the war effort. On the local level, Waring continued in her role as educator and physician as she organized training classes for nurses in Chicago through the National Nurse Training Service; regionally, she instituted Red Cross training and classes in home care in St. Louis, Missouri, all in an effort to increase preventive and supplemental health care for African Americans.

By 1920, Waring had served the NACW as chair of its Department of Health and Hygiene and had been the editor of *National Notes* for seven years. She was treasurer of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women for three years. In the fall of 1920 she was elected one of three alternates of the then president, Mary B. Talbert, to represent the NACW at the International Council of Women in Christiania, Norway. Her international experiences were both expansive culturally and disheartening. When she and her black colleagues visited the American Women's Club managed by the Young Men's Christian Association in Paris, they were confronted with the same racial prejudices and inequities practiced at home. Waring wrote, "Now the prejudice of the United States is a disgrace to the country and the

Y.M.C.A. should let it be washed out by the broad expanse of water of the Atlantic and not introduce it into their private hostels of Europe. . . . In Norway the women cannot understand this sort of thing and we have been treated with the greatest courtesy everywhere" (quoted in Carney, 682). Finding that Americans in Europe tenaciously held onto standards of inequality and segregation, Waring became even more committed to the uplift and integration of Blacks into the mainstream of American society.

In 1929, as the nation struggled to cope with the economic tragedies of the stock market crash and the Great Depression that followed, the NACW escalated its efforts to meet the needs of the black community. At the same time, internal problems among black clubwomen began to emerge. "Former NACW president Mary McLeod Bethune felt that the NACW's priorities were misplaced and had begun in 1928 to recruit supporters to form a new national organization. By 1930, plans for this group, which was to become the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), were underway" (Carney, 682). Waring disagreed with this initiative, and "the mantle of leadership was passed on to her at a critical moment in the organization's history" (p. 683). Waring feared that the proposed NCNW would weaken the national black women's club movement. Advocating strengthening the NACW, she rose to the ranks of an executive officer when she served as vice president from 1930 to 1933 and then national president, serving two terms from 1933 to 1937.

During Waring's four years as president, the NACW continued to emphasize the traditional concerns of women that centered around home, family life, employment, and health. Waring also, through the pages of *National Notes*, remained a strong voice against the injustices of lynching and discrimination. In an era of rising violence against Blacks, defense of the Scottsboro boys became a rallying cry for African Americans as well as white reform and radical groups. Nine young black men were accused of raping two white women on a freight train near Paint Rock, Alabama, and were arrested on March 25, 1931. The Scottsboro boys—ages thirteen to twenty-one—went to trial without adequate legal representation and were quickly convicted on superficial evidence. All but one were sentenced to death. A struggle to free the young men was waged in the courts; the defendants' lawyers secured a new trial on appeal, which began on March 27, 1933. A month before the new trial, one of the young women repudiated the rape charge. Despite new evidence and a strong defense, the all-white jury delivered a guilty verdict. An Alabama circuit judge overturned the verdict and ordered a new trial. In 1934, in the midst of the Scottsboro case, Waring urged NACW members to "actively support the anti-lynching measure that was pending in the U.S. Senate and to join efforts to make segregation illegal" (Carney, 683). In 1937, at the conclusion of the final appeal, four of the nine defendants were released and the remaining five sentenced to lengthy prison sentences. That year Waring wrote an open letter to NACW members, soliciting their continued efforts to campaign for release of the five and thanking them for their ongoing support.

In 1935, Waring's address, "Women in Industry," at the nineteenth biennial convention reflected her continuing concern

with the impact of the economic depression and the high level of black unemployment on the black community and black women workers. She advocated the hiring of Blacks as salespersons and attendants in the parts of the community where Blacks predominated. Waring also demonstrated diplomatic skills as the leader of the NACW when, in 1935, she helped avert a lawsuit against the association by the Ralph Printing Company. Unusual haste to complete a written history of the NACW for the 1933 convention had resulted in poor proofreading and additional costs. Waring stepped in to pay the balance of the expense while encouraging club members to squelch their criticism and support the effort regardless of the mistakes.

Waring had been a proponent of working with white women's organizations and had supported the NACW's affiliation with the National Council of Women, the predominantly white umbrella organization for women's clubs in the United States. Mary McLeod Bethune, already initiating the National Council of Negro Women, "supported withdrawal of the NACW from the predominantly White National Council of Women, although a Black clubwoman had recently been named a council vice-president" (Giddings, 211). Opposing this withdrawal, Waring, who had worked for integration, told the NACW, "My dear friends, *now and ever* let me admonish you not to burn the bridges over which you pass that those who come after may not cross" (quoted in Giddings, 212). The debate between Waring, who criticized Bethune before an NACW meeting, and Bethune reflected the historic tension between integrationists and separatists among black intellectuals. In spite of such controversies, Waring remained a strong and constant advocate for the racial uplift of African Americans through integration, not separation.

After her tenure as president of the NACW, Waring continued her work through the creation of clubs in other regions and her involvement in other organizations like the Chicago League of Women Voters, the National Republican League of Colored Women, the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

At the age of eighty-nine, Waring died from complications associated with arteriosclerosis. Her funeral was at St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Chicago, and she was buried in Lincoln Cemetery, Worth, Illinois. She had no children, and her estate was divided among her two surviving sisters, two nephews, and two great nephews.

Waring left a lasting legacy to the African American community through her life's work. Her emphasis on the support and empowerment of African American women in both the home and workplace can be seen as a prelude to the work of contemporary black feminists. Through her efforts to unite across racial lines, she joined the cadre of later emerging black leaders who were committed to seeking equal opportunities through integration.

Sources. Correspondence, minutes, programs, articles, and other records from her work with the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) are in Lillian Serece Williams, consulting ed., *Records of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs 1895-1992* (Microfilm, 1993-). Copies of *National Notes* are located in the Northwestern Univ. Library, Evanston, Illinois. Waring is listed in *Who's Who in Col-*

ored America (1941–44, 1950) and in *Notable Black American Women, Book II*, ed. Jessie Smith Carney (1996). Helpful studies of African American clubwomen include Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (1984), and Charles Harris Wesley, *The History of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs—A Legacy of Service* (1984). Information about African American women physicians can be found in Darlene Clark Hine, “Co-Laborers in the Work of the Lord. Nineteenth-Century Black Women Physicians,” in *“Send Us a Lady Physician”: Women Doctors in America, 1835–1920*, ed. Ruth J. Abram (1985), and in Herbert N. Morais, *History of the Negro in Medicine* (1920). The *Chicago Defender* mentioned Waring January 10, 1910, and the *CT* published her obituary December 6, 1958.

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