ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Playing at Learning and Learning at Play: A History of Race, Play and Early Education in Philadelphia, 1857-1912

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In order to understand how play and playgrounds became virtually synonymous with children, childhood and early education, this dissertation examines how play-focused programs, playgrounds and early education programs developed within the highly racialized social context of Philadelphia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One of the central projects of this study is to integrate early childhood educators (all female in this time period), African Americans, and young children into play movement historiography. The inclusion of these actors not only demonstrates that dominant strands of American play advocacy—in which African Americans, and to some extent early childhood educators and young children, were largely absent—were not the only ones, but also that national trends did not always dictate children’s experiences at a local level. In addition, it shows how children’s actions helped to shape the programs and spaces that were created for them, contributing to the prioritization of play and the establishment of playgrounds in early 20th century Philadelphia. Furthermore, it explains how play and playground advocates’ ideas and goals affected children’s access to educationally focused play spaces and programs in unequal ways, showing that in Philadelphia play advocacy did not benefit all children, or communities, equally. This dissertation argues that
for Philadelphia’s late nineteenth and early twentieth century children, caregivers and communities the city’s increasingly prolific production of play-centered programs and play spaces had varied effects, both positive and negative. The specific nature of these effects was dependent on the goals, beliefs, values and resources of particular play and playground advocates and, in particular, how closely their purposes and the strategies they used to implement their ideas aligned with the goals and needs of both those targeted as participants and those who were excluded. Thus, this dissertation provides a historical context for current discussions of play and playgrounds as self-evidently beneficial, while also responding to theoretical critiques of play-focused practices and spaces that characterize on or both as inherently detrimental, encouraging a more mindful approach to current discussions and debates regarding play and play space.
Dedication

To my parents, Al and Sandra Shine, my children, Devin and Joshua Valentine and my husband, David Valentine. This is our accomplishment.
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Introduction

“By the side of the great institutions of society, a good church, a good school and a good home, we must now place a good playground. These are the four inalienable rights of childhood.”

—President’s Remarks, Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia, 1909

Beginning in the late nineteenth century children’s play was built into the fabric of Philadelphia’s urban space in the form of playgrounds. These spaces—designed specifically to protect and, some argue, to contain children’s play—have become synonymous with children and childhood in modern discourse. Symbolically, if not experientially, the playground often represents the facets of child-life that lie outside the more responsibility-laden sites of the home and school (and sometimes the church/synagogue/mosque/temple). Almost simultaneously, play-focused discourses describing play as “the child’s work,” embedded in the fields of early childhood education and child development, have constructed play as both the responsibility and the right of “the child” and play-focused pedagogical practices as inherently necessary components of early education. In order to explain how play and playgrounds became synonymous with children, childhood and early childhood education, this dissertation examines the evolution of playgrounds and affiliated play-focused programs in Philadelphia from 1857-1912.

This study has at least two sites of origin in my own personal experience, one of which is the unheated third floor of a large playhouse in Philadelphia’s Fairmount Park, where I spent several winter days excitedly leafing through boxes of documents and photographs dating back to the 1890s, when plans for the Smith
Memorial Playground and Playhouse began. One folder, titled “Interracial” caught my eye, as did early photos showing both Black and White children to be present on the playground during a time when I knew racial segregation was common practice in Philadelphia. At the time I was ambivalent about becoming “a play scholar,” and historical research seemed far too distant from contemporary practice to offer me the opportunity to impact current practice and policies in the ways that I hoped to do. For these reasons, I tried, unsuccessfully, to resist the pull of these fascinating sources until finally giving up and admitting that I had to find out what they revealed about race, children and play in Philadelphia.

The second site of origin for me was the field of early childhood education, within which I have worked as a classroom teacher, a childcare director, a trainer and an evaluator, in addition to participating in childcare programs and early childhood classrooms as a parent. The self-evident value of play has been institutionalized broadly in the field of early childhood education in the United States, if not necessarily in classrooms and childcare programs, at least in the professional standards that have been developed by organizations like the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and quality assessment tools like the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R), all of which are defined by a commitment to Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). Increasingly, these standards and tools are tied to state, national and international funding sources, leaving dissenting educators with little power to propose alternatives.¹

Whenever “best practices” also correlate closely with the favored methods of
the group in power and conflict with the values of those with less cultural and social capital than those who set the standards, I think that it is worth examining the roots of current practices and standards. In my experience, many (though certainly not all) of my middle- and working-class African American friends and colleagues, as well as a number of the working class and poor parents of students I taught, questioned the exclusive emphasis I placed on play, while White middle- and upper-class preschool teachers and parents were its strongest proponents. In the classroom, I saw many children enjoy and learn through the play-centered, hands-on pedagogical practices that I had been taught in college. And yet some of my students, particularly those whose lives outside of the school context lacked regularity and predictability, many of whom were students of color as well, seemed to long for more structured approaches, begging for worksheets and “homework.”

As I moved from the classroom into leadership positions through which I encountered a wider range of childcare professionals and favored practices, I continued to question whether the methods I had been taught were culturally and class biased.

I sought answers for my questions in education scholarship. Doing so, I discovered that teacher-scholar Lisa Delpit had also found that the methods she had learned in her teacher education courses failed to serve students of color well. I read that education scholar Gloria Ladson-Billings had found in her study of successful teachers of African American children that pedagogical style mattered little in predicting student success, though “culturally relevant teaching” mattered immensely.² Though these studies did not address early childhood education or
play-focused pedagogical practices specifically, they demonstrated the value of asking hard questions about practices that are broadly assumed to have inherent value in all contexts. More recently, critical studies of play have begun to emerge, broadening the conversation about the purposes play can and does serve both inside and outside of educational contexts.

Play scholar and evolutionary psychologist Peter Smith argued that, “consideration of play often seems to fall between two opposite poles—it is either ignored or idealized.” By focusing this dissertation on play and play space, I follow what Peter Smith calls a “middle way” between a perspective that idealizes play as always serving a greater purpose, always beneficial, never controversial or destructive and a trivializing of play as unimportant and insignificant. Smith defines the idealized form, most clearly present in the fields of developmental and evolutionary science and early childhood education, as the “play ethos” in which there is a “strong and unqualified assertion of the functional importance of play” despite the fact that “[n]either the evolutionary evidence, the anthropological evidence, nor the psychological evidence provides a compelling case that play is ‘essential.’” Play scholar Brian Sutton-Smith made a similar argument in The Ambiguity of Play, in which he discussed the “popular cultural rhetorics that underlie various play theories and play terms,” one of which he labeled as the “rhetoric of progress,” within which play is understood to have an essential role in development. “Within this rhetoric,” says Sutton-Smith, “play as a cause of growth can be talked about as if it is self-evident.”

This dissertation is also in conversation with a growing body of critical
scholarship of early childhood education, which challenges the privileging of child-centered and play-based pedagogical practices, and critiques the theories of child development on which most play-centered practice is based. Using post-structural and post-colonial methods of analysis, these scholars argue that play-centered practices in early childhood programs can be deceptively coercive and ethnocentric. Sociologists, anthropologists, geographers and childhood studies scholars have also contributed important critiques. Some scholars have argued that playgrounds have contributed to a broad socio-spatial and material marginalization of children. For example, the fact that children’s play has been designated by adults to be confined to certain places, spaces and times (perhaps because it was simply easier to regulate and contain children than to manage the behavior of adults) can be seen as a victory of adultist control over public space. From this perspective, designated play spaces for children can be seen as “token” spaces, or “child ghettos” provided for children who are largely excluded from meaningful participation as citizens in a democracy. Viewed from these vantage points, it appears that play advocacy has done little to include children as meaningful participants in American democratic society, a result opposite of the claims many early play reformers made for playgrounds.

This dissertation asks, “How did the play movement develop? Historically, has there been support for play-centered practices outside of white, middle-class circles, among African American educators and parents in particular? How has play advocacy and playground production impacted the lives of children over time and in different contexts? Has the impact been consistently positive?” In doing so, it raises
questions about normative assumptions embedded in contemporary play-centered programs pedagogical practices, policies and spaces. Is “play” always “best practice?” Thus, at the most general level, this dissertation makes an important contribution to understanding the historical roots of “the play ethos,” revealing the often-unexamined historical foundations of popular and professional ideologies of play and the play-focused policies, programs and spaces that emanate from them.

Like Smith and Sutton-Smith, I am a fan of children’s play, if only because children consistently value play, as they define it. Certainly, children are not well served when play is ignored or undervalued, which is often the case. Children are not well-served when, for example, their play in public space outside of designated play areas is not tolerated or when the pressure of standardized testing limits eliminates time typically allotted to activities in the school that are more likely to be experienced by children as play, or playful (such as art, music, and physical education).9 Neither is it helpful when an increasingly litigious society deems much of children’s play to be too risky to be permitted, thereby resulting in increased limits on children’s independent exploration of their neighborhoods and communities, and playgrounds that are so safe that children deem them to be boring.10

Yet I am convinced that by overstating the case for play, idealistic assumptions about play—the “play ethos” or the “rhetoric of play as progress”—have not served and do not serve all children well. Thus, I examine the development of common discourses of play that assume its transformative power. Like other scholars who critically examine play, I do not wish to abolish play, nor do I argue
that it is unimportant to children, or unimportant in early childhood education. However, I do suggest that not all play-centered programs, play-focused policies and playgrounds have impacted children in the ways their advocates hoped and expected. Furthermore, I show that discourses and rhetorics of play generally assumed to be products of twenty-first century research findings and priorities actually gained power over one hundred years ago and were tied to the political agendas and scientific theories some of which are no longer deemed to be admirable or useful.

In the United States, children’s play and play spaces first became a target of child-saving reform efforts in the late nineteenth century. Though play-focused pedagogical practices had been promoted in certain sectors earlier in the nineteenth century, during the time period that is the focus of this study (1857-1912), new theories in child psychology, education and medicine designated childhood as a distinct time of life, qualitatively different from adulthood, and posited play as essential to child development. At the same time, immigration, migration, industrialization and urbanization were transforming the social, political and geographical landscape of the United States. Rampant poverty and disease, crime and pollution, and even the positive “problem” of increased leisure time raised concerns about the nation’s future among the middle and upper classes while heightening the frustration of the lower and working class poor. During these years of change, a variety of reformers sought to “save the children” as a means of saving a nation that seemed at risk. It was the impact of these combined forces that tied play to children’s learning in unprecedented ways and made provision for children’s play
a focus of one of many child-saving reform movements.¹¹

Historiography

One of the central projects of this dissertation, therefore, is to integrate early childhood educators (all female in this time period), African Americans and young children into play movement historiography.¹² Play movement historiography has generally overlooked play advocates who were not active in the most visible, national strand of play advocacy, which developed in the early twentieth century and was institutionalized in the form of the Playgrounds Association of America (PAA). Often limited to the Progressive Era, these studies tend to briefly mention nineteenth century play advocacy, but fail to provide in-depth explanations for convergences and divergences of ideology, programming, leaders and participants between nineteenth century play advocacy efforts and later movement trends.¹³ Despite nodding at connections between playgrounds and kindergartens histories of early childhood education, similarly, have provided little insight on the playground movement.¹⁴ Addressing these gaps, this dissertation seeks to answer the following questions: 1) Where were early childhood educators and young children generally and African American children and adults specifically situated in late nineteenth and early twentieth century efforts to promote play and playgrounds in Philadelphia? 2) How did race/ethnicity, class, gender and age structure children's access to play spaces and play-focused programs from 1857-1912? 3) How did the growth of the play movement impact the play opportunities and play spaces provided for children in formal and informal educational contexts, especially for African Americans and preschoolers?
In order to answer these questions, this study pays special attention to the role of Philadelphia’s professional early childhood educators as they participated in the creation and supervision of designated play spaces. It follows their efforts to promote certain types of children’s play as education and to argue that women were uniquely qualified to lead in play-focused education. In doing so, this dissertation shows that the rationales used by early play advocates—those who led play advocacy efforts through the auspices of the kindergarten movement, the parks movement and private charities prior to 1906—differed significantly from those of the later national movement. Play advocacy in America cannot be fully understood without accounting for this change in rationale. In addition, Dickinson, Weccacoe, Starr Garden, the Smith Children’s Playground—all these playgrounds remain in use. These women led in establishing new institutions and urban spaces that have proved to be lasting ones. Perhaps most importantly, in the midst of these efforts, these early playground supervisors consistently cared for caregivers and children together—even for children who were themselves caregivers for younger siblings. In doing so, they reveal the possibilities of paths not taken either in the play movement or in most early twentieth century early childhood programs in which child care programs developed quite separately from early nursery and preschool programs.15

In addition, this dissertation presents a more complex and detailed image of children as participants in the growth of play-focused programs and spaces in ways that expand current understandings of child-saving reform as being shaped only by adult reformers. Several historians of childhood have briefly highlighted the
influence of children, who both resisted the goals of playground reformers and “voted with their feet,” requiring reformers to adapt programs to meet children’s interests and who, along with their parents, could and did use playgrounds and other play-focused programs for their own purposes. Historical geographer Elizabeth Gagen has also made several important contributions, highlighting, for instance, the ways that girls on playgrounds challenged the passive role assigned to them. This study builds on the foundation of these studies.

Finally, this dissertation shows how African Americans adults and children impacted and were impacted by the development of playgrounds and kindergartens in Philadelphia. Though historians of African American reform have demonstrated some Black presence in play advocacy and playground development, many previous scholarly studies of the play movement have ignored African Americans altogether. More often scholars make minor attempts to discuss African American experiences in relation to play and play spaces. Several scholars, most notably Jeffrey Pilz, have indicated that Black children and adults were broadly excluded from the playground movement prior to World War I, after which the PAA Colored Workers Bureau was created. Similarly, parks and play movement scholar Galen Cranz found that African Americans were completely absent from parks movement literature until after 1910. As an example, he quoted an article published in Park International in 1920 in which the authors claimed that “they had only lately heard that Black people might need recreation, having assumed they had no time to play, even as children.” Only Gilbert Osolfsky, based in his more general study of Progressive reform work in New York published in the 1960s, made the claim that
the creation of playgrounds for Black children was typical for White reformers in the Progressive Era.\textsuperscript{23} Black presence has received only slightly more attention in kindergarten histories.\textsuperscript{24}

Contrary to the impression given by most play movement historiography, my research shows that African Americans were present and involved in kindergartens and in the establishment of the Starr Garden Park/Playground, for example, demonstrating that in the early stages, play and kindergarten advocacy wasn’t a movement of White philanthropists and government officials alone. In addition, both the neighborhood playground, Starr Garden, and Philadelphia’s Children’s Playground and Playhouse, located in Fairmount Park, were available to and used by children and adults of varied racial and ethnic backgrounds, including African American children. At least one municipally-supported early twentieth-century Philadelphia playground, Coxe Playground, was used for several years by Black children and families almost exclusively.

Black children specifically are visible in this dissertation in ways that they have not been previously in histories of Philadelphia. Thus, in addition to making an important contribution to play movement historiography and critical studies of play and playgrounds, this story adds to the richness of DuBois’ account of Black life in Philadelphia and the work of Michael B. Katz, Thomas J. Sugrue, Roger Lane, John Sutherland and Vincent P. Franklin, who have written extensively about Black experiences in Philadelphia generally, but very little about Black children.\textsuperscript{25}

**Method**

Using 1857-1912 Philadelphia as a case study, I examine late nineteenth and
early twentieth century American efforts to promote play as an essential component of children’s growth processes and seek to follow the impact of these initiatives on children’s access to play and play spaces. The local case study approach is essential to an understanding of the history of play in American education because it allows me to examine the complicated connections and disconnections among various play advocates. For example, I discuss the efforts and ideas of kindergarten teachers who advocated for play-focused practices in early childhood classrooms, as well as public school administrators who tended to ignore the use of play in the classroom but created school playgrounds for use during recess. Additionally, scholars have demonstrated that a study of local records is often necessary if members of marginalized social groups are to be fully integrated into historical narratives.26 Thus, in order to include African Americans and children in this history, an examination of local records is essential.

Philadelphia is an ideal location for this study. It was a site of very early advocacy for play and playgrounds, as well as for early childhood education, and therefore it allows me to examine play advocacy prior to the Progressive Era. Several Philadelphia play advocates were leaders in national kindergarten, playground and public school reform movements as well as in local efforts; for this reason, it provides a site for exploring the interaction between national and local efforts to promote children’s play. In addition, as a city with a sizable African American population prior to extensive Black Southern migration, and that was also significantly affected by both Black migration and European immigration, Philadelphia enables me to see how race and ethnicity structured children’s play
experiences. The city also allows me to explore similarities and differences between racial and ethnic groups in relation to play. Elizabeth Rose’s Philadelphia-based study of the history of daycare, *A Mother’s Job*, and Thomas Lee Philpott’s examination of housing reform in Chicago provide models for this approach.\(^{27}\)

Finally, Philadelphia offers extensive source material representative of varied strands of play advocacy, policy, programs and spaces. With these purposes in mind, this study centers on an examination of Philadelphia’s Starr Garden and affiliated organizations (including the Philadelphia College Settlement), the Smith Memorial Children’s Playground and Playhouse, and Board of Education summer playgrounds.

The time period of this dissertation is defined by dates that were significant in the development of particular Philadelphia playgrounds, and is especially important because of the inclusion of very early nineteenth century play advocacy. It starts with the antebellum Quaker missions that were founded on the site of what would later become Starr Garden Park, then Starr Garden Playground (Philadelphia’s first “real” playground, according to its founders), then Starr Garden Recreation Park (Philadelphia’s first municipal recreation center). It ends when the transition to a national movement was essentially complete, both in Philadelphia and in the nation. By 1912, Philadelphia had established a Board of Recreation, solidifying the provision of play as a municipal responsibility; the Playgrounds Association of America had changed its name to the Playground and Recreation Association, signifying a significant shift in focus from children to players of all ages; and trustees of the Children’s Playground in the Park, virtually the only playground
that remained dedicated to young children exclusively, began establishing reform-focused playgrounds more in line with dominant trends.

**Chapter Organization**

The aim of Part I of this dissertation (1857-1899) is to examine the nineteenth century roots of twentieth century advocacy for children’s play and play space production in Philadelphia. It asks, “How and why did play advocacy begin in Philadelphia, and who took part in its beginnings?” This section consists of three chapters.

Chapter One begins with an exploration of the steps that led to the establishment of the first version of Starr Garden showing that a variety of influences contributed to the creation of spaces designed to support play during this time period, one of the most important being the kindergarten movement (1857-1884). It shows that there were a variety of people who contributed to the production of playgrounds and play-focused programming in Philadelphia in the 1880s. In addition this chapter demonstrates that advocacy efforts were interracial to some extent and that Black children were intentionally included by some play and kindergarten advocates. Furthermore, Black children and educators, along with White and Black kindergarten advocates all influenced the types of programs and spaces that survived. In particular they played a role in sustaining Starr Park, the seed of what would become Philadelphia’s first model playground and recreation center.

Next, in Chapter Two, I tell the story of how Quaker philanthropist Susan Wharton began her work by creating the St. Mary Street Library in 1884, a program
through which she provided opportunities for children to play despite the fact that she viewed playful activities with some ambivalence. During these years connections made between play, industrial training and manual labor allowed reformers like Wharton, firmly committed to the education of African Americans in practical skills, to support play in particular forms while remaining committed to a solidly middle class, American work ethic in which play was somewhat suspect. These values also influenced her and colleague Hannah Fox to overhaul a local Black elementary school, making it into an industrial school and deposing its newly hired Black principal. Since she and her colleagues invited the College Settlement to establish a house in the St. Mary Street neighborhood, Wharton’s commitment to African Americans forged connections between the Philadelphia College Settlement and Philadelphia’s Black population during these years. Given that most social settlements were situated in White, working class neighborhoods, this was unusual, and ultimately temporary. Even while they were located in the neighborhood there are indications that the focus of the organization was shifting to the needs of White immigrants. The chapter ends when the College Settlement left St. Mary Street in 1899 following a massive expansion of Starr Garden to a size that included the entire block. They left in their wake two lasting legacies – a cleared lot that would eventually become Starr Garden Recreation Park and DuBois’ seminal study of African American life, *The Philadelphia Negro*, published in 1899.

Chapter Three steps back from the narrow focus on the neighborhood of St. Mary Street, placing these developments within the context of the early stages of a consciously forming play movement in Philadelphia in which several organizations
and play advocates participated between 1888 and 1900. Among adult play and playground advocates, these years were a time of debate regarding play's purposes and competition for control over this new field of service. Somewhat on the sidelines of the play movement, both literally and figuratively, the end of the time period included the establishment of a six-acre Children’s Playground in Philadelphia’s Fairmount Park. The Children’s Playground preserved a romanticized, pleasure-focused view of both play and childhood that situated play in the realm of early childhood and idealized nature, but avoided constructing play as a means to educational ends as did the kindergarten movement and nascent play movement. Given my focus on integrating African Americans in the story of playground advocacy, I conclude this chapter with an examination of possible explanations for their absence in records from Philadelphia’s most active play advocacy organizations.

The aim of Part II is to explain how race, gender and age structured children’s access to and experiences on Philadelphia’s playgrounds from 1900-1912 as playgrounds became an accepted site for social reform. It shows how, as the national movement began to define play and its purposes more narrowly, particular leaders and ideas became increasingly dominant and others lost influence. I show how these ideas impacted the play opportunities and play spaces provided for children in formal and informal educational contexts, as well as the leadership opportunities and influence of female reformers and educators. In particular I follow African Americans, women and preschoolers as they begin to be sidelined by dominant trends in the American play movement.
Chapter Four demonstrates that while the nationalization of the play movement led to a defined dominant strand of play advocacy, with more male leaders and an increased focus on adolescent boys, the dominant strand as represented by the Playgrounds Association of America was not the only strand existent. College Settlement and Smith playgrounds demonstrate the presence of alternative strands of play advocacy, mostly led by women, in which caregiving, play and early education were integrated in ways that constituted a path not followed by the mainstream as the movement continued to professionalize and divide the turf of play.

African American children are central to the discussion of Chapter Five. Though barely visible on the national scene, and not active in visible roles among Philadelphia’s leading play advocacy organizations, Philadelphia African Americans were intentionally included on several early twentieth century playgrounds. Their use of these playgrounds and affiliated activities provided Black children with the opportunity to participate in popular cultural trends even if they sometimes did so in racially segregated groups. Though they faced the challenge of White biases, their inclusion also provided opportunities for Blacks to challenge negative stereotypes and to enjoy some of the same activities as their White counterparts. Finally, through their participation African Americans helped to establish playgrounds and other play-focused activities as essential components of American culture.

As was the case in the late nineteenth century, play and playgrounds are the focus of a number of social reform efforts in 2013, particularly since the child’s “right to play” was included in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the
Article 31 states that nation-states have a responsibility to ensure that all children can exercise their right to “rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities . . . and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.” A variety of national and international non-profits focus their efforts on supporting children’s ability to exercise their “right to play.” (International Play Association [IPA World] Right to Play International, Kaboom, for example). The specific mission and methods of these organizations varies from training play leaders to the provision of organized sports to the construction of community playgrounds and a wide variety of other activities. The history of play-focused programs and playground development shows that well-intentioned efforts do not always have their intended effects. It is my hope that the historical context this dissertation provides will be useful in evaluating and planning for play-focused interventions that will serve children, families and communities well within the environment of particular local and cultural contexts. In addition, I hope that it will contribute to conversations about how early childhood educators can more adequately merge culturally appropriate practices with developmentally appropriate methods, caring more effectively for both caregivers and children in a context that offers no fewer challenges to this task than those faced by early educators over one hundred years ago.
Chapter 1

Origins of Philadelphia’s Starr Garden Recreation Park, 1857-1884

Introduction

In 1882, a transformation occurred on a small back-alley street in one of Philadelphia’s most notorious slum neighborhoods. There, a “heap of refuse of the most unsightly and unsanitary sort”—a small awkwardly shaped plot used as a dumping ground by the residents of a neighborhood that lacked sanitation services - became a small playground/park complete with swings, an area for playing ball, a fountain and a garden space. Enclosed behind a fence seven feet high, painted “lead color” and topped with three rows of barbed wire, the park’s literal boundaries served to highlight the symbolic lines drawn between the park space and the surrounding neighborhood. As one reformer described it,

When the change was completed a beautiful garden of plants and shrubs and climbing vines, with trees and a fine grass plat possessed the spot where filth held high carnival before. This oasis of Nature’s beauties, in this dark spot of human degradation began to shed its beneficent rays upon the young and old inhabitants of this long despised and neglected quarter, and good results have followed the proportion that evil proceeded from the former condition of this particular spot . . .

Known as Starr Garden Park, it remained the only green space in the neighborhood for the next ten years. At first under private ownership and then under the supervision of Philadelphia’s City Parks Association, the space was open to the public for several hours daily and used regularly by children as play space. In the summer, concerts and other community events were held there as well.

Starr Garden Park is significant because it was the seed of what would, in 1911, become Philadelphia’s first model playground and recreation center, the Starr
Garden Municipal Recreation Park. Perhaps even more important, because it was located in a neighborhood that had been central to African America life in the mid-nineteenth century and was a typical entry point for late-nineteenth and early twentieth century European immigrants and because it was a notorious slum often targeted by reform and charity work, it was a site where a variety of social and cultural issues were negotiated, boundaries crossed and boundaries drawn. Whether in its construction, its neglect, its expansion, its publicity or its participants, Starr Garden’s development provides a lens through which to view other trends in Philadelphia’s history.

When it opened officially as Philadelphia’s first municipal Recreation Park in 1911, Starr Park covered an entire city block and included both indoor and outdoor recreational facilities. One of many similar centers created in the early part of the twentieth century in American cities, this model playground and recreation center can be seen as an early product of a reform movement that has been described alternately as “the playground movement,” “the play movement” or, in later years, “the playground and recreation movement.”

The American play movement has had a lasting and wide-ranging impact on American life. The roots of a variety of contemporary practices and programs in education and recreation can be traced to the work of its participants. In most cases it was the playground movement that provided the primary impetus for the establishment of municipal departments of recreation across the nation that continue to provide for the recreational needs of children and adults today. Its influence can be seen in the inclusion of physical education in school programming
and in the common practice of designing playgrounds in conjunction with schools and childcare programs. The proliferation of after school sports and arts activities are clearly tied to the work of play movement participants as well. Also, in its focus on the provision of physical space for play in urban districts, the playground movement had a lasting impact on urban planning. 

The dominant, national strand of the play movement was institutionalized in 1906 in the form of the Playgrounds Association of America (PAA). In the first decades of the twentieth century PAA leaders were key actors in a very successful campaign to make the provision of play and recreation for American citizens a public responsibility. Leaders of the PAA kept extensive records, published a monthly journal, *The Playground*, and multiple books, to include a history of the movement published in 1922, written by one of its twentieth century participants, Clarence Rainwater.

According to Rainwater’s account and many later historians, Boston was the site of the first American playground. There, in 1886, three large piles of sand were dumped outside the Massachusetts Emergency and Hygiene Association, an experimental attempt to replicate German “sand gardens.” This was done on the recommendation of Dr. Maria Zakrzewska who, on a trip to Germany, had observed children playing on heaps of sand in public squares, supervised by a police officer. According to this narrative, the first American “sand garden” was so well received by young children and mothers in the area that soon more sand piles were added, other cities followed Boston’s example and the playground movement had its start.
The story of the origins of Starr Garden Park challenges previous claims that the twentieth century playground movement originated in Boston. With the founding of Starr Park in 1882, several years prior to the “first” American playground in Boston, and more than two decades prior to the Playgrounds Association of America, Philadelphia could arguably be chosen as “first” in the American play movement. Admittedly the choice of the origin of the movement depends on the criteria used to define a space as a “playground” as well as that used to define the term “movement,” a task Rainwater took very seriously in his account which led him to conclude that Boston was where the movement started.\footnote{11}

The importance of the fact that Starr Park preceded the sand garden playgrounds of Boston is not, however, that it locates the origins of the twentieth century American play movement in a different city. I argue that the search for a single point of origin is both futile and unimportant to an understanding of play and play space development in the United States. Instead, the story of Starr Park’s origins suggests that a variety of social forces and widely varied individuals and groups of people shaped nineteenth century efforts to advocate for play and to construct playgrounds. Rainwater himself recognized the existence of earlier play spaces; for example, there was a children’s play space in New York’s Central Park by 1870 and plans to establish a children’s playground in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park began in 1871. Rainwater chose the Boston sand garden as the site of origin due to his focus on defining a reform movement rather than describing the evolution of play spaces.\footnote{12} With the perspective offered by the distance of more than a century, it seems illogical to completely remove the construction of these earlier
play spaces from the evolution of other types of playgrounds.¹³

Through the ground-level, local view of the American play movement provided by an examination of the origins of a particular playground, Starr Garden, in a particular city, Philadelphia, it is possible to examine the mixture of influencing factors that must be understood in order to explain how playgrounds became commonplace in American communities and play central to conceptions of American childhoods. As a city with a sizable African American population prior to extensive black Southern migration and that was also was significantly affected by both black migration and European immigration, Philadelphia provides an ideal place in which to examine how race and ethnicity structured children’s play experiences and also to explore similarities and differences between racial and ethnic groups in relation to play space production and access. This ground-level view also provides an opportunity to explore what, and who, was included in or excluded from these new spaces and ideas, showing how certain practices, programs, participants and places were integrated into or excluded from dominant views of play as the self-defined movement began to take shape.

Specifically, this chapter shows that no one person or social movement can be given credit (or blame) for the creation of Starr Garden Park (later Starr Garden Playground and then Starr Recreation Park) in 1882. Rather, there were several strands of influence and many individuals who played a role in its construction. All of these ideas and actions were tied to attempts to address challenges of poverty, exacerbated by racism and complicated by rapid urbanization and immigration, in a growing industrial city at a time of immense social change. All played a role in
shaping this particular space, children’s experiences and dominant ideas about play long after their initial importance had been forgotten.

The story in this chapter begins with a White-led “colored” mission school, placing the creation of Starr Park solidly within the context of nineteenth century religious charity work. This work by was done, however, within the larger context of African American self-help, which was not always recognized by White philanthropists. Next, the narrative follows the park’s namesake, Theodore Starr, as he begins to focus his efforts on Philadelphia’s African American community due in part to the influence of Rev. Henry L. Phillips, an African American Episcopal priest. It then follows Starr’s shift to zero in on child-focused reforms, including the educational innovation of the kindergarten. Finally, it shows that kindergarten theories of play, which were more extensively structured than other play theories during this time period, influenced the construction of Starr Garden.

The Site of Starr Garden Park

The physical site of Starr Garden Park in 1882 reflected the influence of these intersecting forces and of the individual people who, as leaders, participants or resisters, together created and shaped this space for play. In order to examine the forces that influenced the creation the park, an understanding of its location in the physical, social and economic life of Philadelphia and specifically, of African American, or “Black” life in Philadelphia, is essential.

Starr Garden in its original form was an inverted L-shaped space bounded on one very narrow end by an unpaved back alley known as St. Mary Street. [Figure 1: Selection from Bromley’s Atlas of Philadelphia, 1885]. The inner two sides of the
lot bordered the right side and back of a church property which opened onto St. Mary Street as well. No longer in use by its founding congregation, since 1857 the church had housed one, and for several years two, Sunday School programs targeting and attended exclusively by African Americans. By 1882 it was the home of an interracial kindergarten and industrial school as well. This location placed Starr Garden Park within Philadelphia’s Fifth Ward, not far from the Eastern border of the Seventh Ward.

The Fifth Ward was literally Old Philadelphia. Defined on the east by the Delaware River, on the west by Seventh Street (the boundary of the Seventh Ward), on the north by Chestnut Street and on the south by South Street, all of what was defined as the Fifth Ward had been within the boundaries of the city in 1770 during a time when Philadelphia had been primarily a walking city, with middle class and elite residents walking to work in the nearby business district and working class men and women traveling by foot to nearby factories and ports. St. Mary Street was located just north of the South Street border, between South and Lombard Streets. Only two blocks long, it ran parallel to Lombard across ward boundaries from Sixth Street to Eighth Street, leaving one block in the Fifth Ward and one in the Seventh.

The St. Mary Street neighborhood’s importance to African American life was at least partially established in 1787 when an old Blacksmith’s shop was moved to the corner of Sixth Street and Lombard and transformed into Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Rev. Richard Allen and others founded Mother Bethel in 1787 in response to racial discrimination at the St. George’s
Methodist Church where many African Americans had previously been attending worship. In founding the church Allen also founded a separate Black-led denomination and by his death was the head of the only significant Black-run organization in the country. African Americans had been among those who lived in the vicinity of 6th and Lombard since at least 1794 and they had established several other churches and multiple small businesses in the region. Though by the late nineteenth century those who could tended to move out of the neighborhood, it retained a level of significance to the social, political, economic and intellectual life of Black Philadelphia even as new waves of European immigrants added to the diversity, poverty and tension of an already struggling interracial community.

Despite its reputation as a hub of abolitionist activism, the City of Brotherly Love was never an easy place for its Black residents. Race was a salient dividing line in Philadelphia many years prior to welcoming the waves of migrants who arrived from the South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, historians Sam Warner and V. P. Franklin have argued that Philadelphia could be called a Southern City because of how Blacks were regarded and treated. Racial tension in the city increased after the Civil War, as the first wave of Black migrants arrived and many of the city’s White abolitionists were quick to disavow the notion that they were interested in racial equality. The constant challenge of job and residential discrimination, racial violence and social exclusion caused Frederick Douglass to find prejudice against color to be more “rampant” in Philadelphia than in any other city of the time. He cited the segregated schools, clubs and concerts as examples of the problem. Though by the middle of the nineteenth century
Philadelphia had a well established, if small, Black middle class, whose members often had regular contact with White Philadelphians and even worked cooperatively in some cases, it was not an exaggeration to say that there was a Black Philadelphia that existed to a large extent separated from the White one.

According to historian Roger Lane, Black Philadelphia between the Civil War and the 20th century “was not so much ‘typical’... as archetypical, in many ways the metropolitan headquarters of Afro-American urbanity.” Close to 90 percent of all African Americans in these years remained Southern and rural, but Philadelphia had the largest African American population of any Northern city in the nation, both relatively and absolutely. “The pioneers who populated the city remained in touch with those left behind as well as with each other”; thus, due to both geography and industry Philadelphia was in many ways central to the “cosmopolitan web that tied so much of Black America together.” Just as Philadelphia was central to Black America, in 1866 the intersection of Seventh and Lombard, just half a block north of Starr Garden, was central to Black Philadelphia, “the very crossroads of the Black city” according to Lane.

The neighborhood could not claim to be as central in 1882 as it had been in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1866, the highly respected, nationally renowned Institute for Colored Youth (ICY), a private, segregated Black high school with a rigorous academic program, moved from its original location at Sixth and Lombard several blocks southwest to Ninth and Bainbridge. The space originally occupied by ICY was purchased by a group of Black businessmen and used for several years as a meeting place for Black groups and as a venue for Black-led events. Many other
African Americans, and the institutions and businesses they owned, moved several blocks west as well. More financially successful Black families continued to purchase residences on Lombard Street, but by 1882 they tended to buy west of Twelfth Street. Still, hints of the neighborhood’s former centrality remained and it retained a level of importance throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Most important, perhaps, Mother Bethel remained at its original location on the northeastern corner of Sixth Street and Lombard. The church’s congregation and later leadership did not forget its legacy and when the building had to be replaced in the late 1880s, they opted to rebuild on the original site despite the growing crime and poverty that surrounded it and the continual influx of new European immigrants who pushed more and more poor and working class African American families out of the area.

Back alley streets like St. Mary Street were created by Philadelphia’s somewhat unique method of housing the poor, in comparison to other Northern Industrial cities. Often referred to as the “city of homes” due to the lack of large tenement buildings which were common in larger cities like New York and Chicago, the tenements that housed Philadelphia’s poor were simply smaller and better hidden than they were in many big cities. Because of the way the lots were originally set up in William Penn’s Greene Towne – designed to provide for large houses on wide boulevards with long back yards originally intended to preserve green space in the city – housing for poor people ended up being built behind the nice large houses on the front of the lots. Often two houses were built behind the original house, leaving the poorest people living in dark, poorly ventilated back
alleys usually with shared outhouses and surface drainage which led to very high rates of disease.  

These residences were hidden, but still not geographically far removed from city officials and the central business district with its shops on Walnut and Chestnut Street. Looking back on his memories of visiting the region in the early 1880s, a reformer described the scene in this way:

There were a great number of miserable, filthy shanties inhabited by the very lowest and most desperate characters, both White and Black, a locality through which no sane, sober, respectable man or woman would ever think of passing, where licentiousness reigned supreme . . . all this coming right up to the back gate of one of our Police Stations and was within a stone’s throw of the central business portion of our city.  

Though the writer’s view of this community was certainly colored by his perspective as an elite, White male, not many would have been likely to disagree entirely with his emphasis on the least appealing aspects of the region.

The “slums of St. Mary street [sic]” were a fairly well known location of the city in the 1880s, at least by name. Both African American and White-owned newspapers referred to the poverty and crime that plagued the region. Newspaper articles told of murders, racial conflict and extreme poverty. And these issues were not new to the region in 1880. In a column titled “Lombard and St. Mary Streets” published in The Christian Recorder on October 17, 1868, the editor voiced concerns about both St. Mary Street and Lombard Street. “Can nothing be done for Lombard Street?” the author asked readers “And there is St. Mary Street. Can nothing be done for it as well? Is death, eternal death ever to hold big carnival in those regions?”

In the midst of this complicated social and physical geography, Starr Garden
began. How did it end up in this particular location? Both figuratively and literally Starr Garden Park was built on the foundation laid by [White] participants in nineteenth century religious charity work, or missions, targeting the needs of the African American community in particular.

**Saving St. Mary Street: Nineteenth Century “Colored” Missions**

As mentioned above, the park’s original plot abutted one side and the back of a church property that housed, at various times, two Sunday School programs, a public kindergarten, and an industrial school. In order to understand how these programs came to be located in this particular space, and what they contributed to the development of the later playground, it is necessary to travel back to 1857 when a wealthy Presbyterian businessman named George H. Stuart established the St. Mary Street Colored Mission Sabbath School in an old church building. According to a brief history of the mission, Stuart was inspired to start the program by a chance encounter with a young "colored" boy on the street. Out visiting the sick in a poor section of the city on a Sunday, Stuart saw the boy and asked him why he was not attending Sunday School that day. According to the narrative, the boy replied, “all the schools within my reach are for White children.”

There is no historical record that reveals what the boy's intentions were in crafting this answer. It is possible that his primary intention was to go on about his business, having provided a wealthy, White stranger with an excuse that would be hard to refute. Certainly there were Sunday School programs in Philadelphia from which he was excluded. Segregation was the norm rather than the exception in Sunday Schools as elsewhere in Philadelphia. However, virtually all Black churches
ran Sunday Schools, so it is likely that through Mother Bethel or one of several other African American churches the boy might have received some form of instruction if he wanted it.  

Perhaps he knew that. Perhaps he also knew, based on other experiences, that White-led programs were generally better resourced than the African American ones and hoped to inspire the stranger to send some of those resources in his direction. In any case, assuming that this story is accurate, this unnamed boy played a role in the development of Starr Garden Park, and if not a specific boy, the idea of the young black boy in need, based in some part on the lives of actual black children, was an inspiration to the mission's founders.

Besides the ICY, the Presbyterian-led Stuart mission seems to be the first organized White-led philanthropic effort in this neighborhood that specifically targeted the needs of African Americans, many of whom were described as “contrabands” due to their status as escaped slaves. It is telling that Stuart did not attempt to challenge the status quo in relation to Sunday School segregation, or to help one of the African American churches already operating in the area to expand its outreach. Instead, he saw the encounter as a mandate to provide a program specifically for “colored” children.

Historians disagree about what characterized the motivations of religious, White philanthropists, like Stuart, to do charitable and educational work in African American communities. Some scholars suggest a dual motivation for social control in which concerns about societal chaos, disease and class-based violence combined with the goal of creating industrious and efficient laborers through instruction in moral and economic values. Vanessa Julye and Donna McDaniel, authors of Fit For
Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African Americans and the Myth of Racial Justice have argued that there is evidence of “much more genuine” motivation emanating from Christian beliefs about human equality and duty to the poor, especially among Philadelphia’s Quakers who were widely represented in the abolitionist movement in the city and in efforts to provide education for Black children. Still, even among Quakers, the practice of segregation was common in meetings for worship and Quakers who worked at African American missions, like John Whitall, the founder of the second Sunday School mission housed in Stuart church, seemed seldom inclined to bring new converts to their own churches, a hesitation seemingly due to concerns about the possibility of intermarriage.39

The primary purpose of the Stuart mission, which served children of all ages, was religious. In the words of James Grant, the mission’s superintendent from 1864-1886, the volunteer teachers in the program sought “to carry the gospel to the heathen in that part of our city and to elevate and bless them by its mighty power, this being considered the only lever which can truly lift up fallen and degraded humanity.” At the core of the work were morning and afternoon meetings on Sundays, which centered on Bible instruction “suited to the capacity of all ages,” and singing, “which the scholars greatly enjoyed and in which they engaged heart and soul.” In order to broaden their reach, many of the afternoon meetings were held outdoors “on the street corners and in the alleys.”40

Though the Stuart mission school leaders believed that the poor would benefit most from spiritual comfort and instruction (as opposed to physical comforts and academic education), there was some recognition among mission
volunteers that poor children and families had other pressing needs, needs more of body than soul, that also required attention. In addition to instruction in reading, monetary gifts were sometimes provided during home visits made by the volunteers and in small ways the program expanded to address additional needs as they arose. For example, when Grant discovered on a winter morning that of the one hundred children present only ten had eaten before they arrived, he added a simple breakfast to the regular activities of the day, at which “... a cup of coffee and a roll were given to all who desired it before the exercises began.”

The second program, founded by Quaker John M. Whitall (reportedly at the suggestion of his wife) was originally hosted by the John Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Church, located on nearby Shippen Street. When attendance outgrew the capacity of the Wesley Church the program moved to St. Mary Street. Its work, though focused on adults instead of children, also included services beyond religious instruction, namely, the distribution of free coal and inexpensive clothing as well as visits to the homes of the poor to offer “encouragement” and occasional financial aid. “Scholars” were also paid $1.00 for every 24 days of attendance. Given that these programs were only offered on Sundays, it would take approximately six months of regular attendance to earn this reward.

Though not always explicitly stated, a central goal of many Sunday School programs was to teach “scholars” to read. Whether or not they appreciated the religious content of the instruction, it seems likely that many of the participants found this goal to fit very closely with their own aspirations. An 1873 report from the Quaker Sunday School indicated that they saw a high level of interest on the part
of African Americans in this regard: "The teachers of various classes report a great desire on the part of their scholars to learn to read; a desire so characteristic of this race everywhere over all our country... great pains are taken to lead them on as rapidly as a short lesson once a week will permit." 44

In contrast to the musical meetings of the Presbyterian Sunday School (and typical patterns of worship in Black churches) Whitall conducted his Sunday School meetings following the quiet pattern of worship without music that was typical for Quakers. Sunday School “Visitors” reports include multiple examples of participants who discussed how they restrained their impulses in deference to Whitall’s expectations. “Often when I have been listening to instructions there, it has been all I could do to keep from shouting” said one, “But I knew Mr. Whitall would make me keep it in, so I would wait until I got home, and then I would have a good time.” 45

The willingness of some of the participants to acquiesce to Whitall’s behavioral expectations provides further evidence that they valued the instruction they received.

**Legacy and Losses**

Mirroring the “organized benevolence” of earlier antebellum child-saving efforts work in and around Starr Garden began with religious commitment, though its lasting impact is evident in urban spaces, municipal programs and social patterns that had little to do with organized religion in later years. 46 Legacies left by the St. Mary Street Mission Schools includes several threads of influence that can be seen years later in the ongoing neighborhood work that contributed eventually to the development of Starr Garden Playground. Though certain aspects of this legacy are
more evident in later years than others, the foundation laid by these programs is an important part of the story of playground development in Philadelphia. These schools impacted the preservation of the building, paving the way for the development of the site and laid a foundation for ongoing interracial reform work that provided, if temporarily and imperfectly, a place for Black influence on the programs that developed.

What is of perhaps greatest importance is that these programs, and the individuals who provided funding for them, supported the preservation of a particular physical space, the Stuart Church. Had the building not remained in use, it very likely would have fallen into disrepair or been demolished. Because the church building was there, and was being maintained and used, it did not become a crowded, run-down, tenement, or a saloon, or a residence for prostitutes, the most common uses for buildings in this community. Instead it became the cornerstone of decades of programming used by hundreds, even thousands, of children and adults. Without this building and these programs Starr Garden would not have come to be, at least not in this neighborhood.

Second, these were programs that provided services to African Americans specifically, a group largely ignored in the early stages of the national play movement. Though their centrality to the mission of Starr Garden and the programs connected to it would fade over time, the fact that foundational work in this neighborhood intentionally included Black children and families demonstrates that their later exclusion (explicit and implicit) was not accidental. Furthermore, their presence shows how Black participants influenced the shape of the programs
in which they participated despite a clearly unequal distribution of power. These missions would not have continued had they not provided services that many African American members of this community chose to use. Admittedly, they may not have had many other options, but at minimum African Americans had access to Black churches and the leisure activities they provided. An indication that these programs met the goals of the community and not just Whitall’s and Stuart’s goals can be found in records of attendance; many Black Philadelphians chose to attend these programs as well. Attendance in Whitall’s program averaged 150-200 adults per week and though attendance figures for the Stuart program are not available, the fact that it remained open for over 30 years indicates that children voted in favor of the program with their feet.47

In addition, Stuart, Whitall and the volunteers who worked with them formed relationships that were significant because they crossed barriers of class and race. Though not defined by equality, available evidence suggests these relationships were not only beneficial to the “scholars,” but also to the White volunteers, allowing for the development of some level of mutual affection and respect between the White, elite leaders of these programs and poor and working class African American participants. For example, an 1876 report about Whitall’s Quaker Sunday School program included a description of Black scholars providing care for one of the White volunteers by visiting her at home where she had been confined most of the winter due to illness.48 John Whitall also benefitted from his interactions with Sunday School scholars. According to his daughter he enjoyed this work so much that “It was the last of his public duties to be laid down; and long after
our dear mother’s tender anxieties would have kept him away he continued this one most beloved mission.”\textsuperscript{49} A report of Whitall’s death printed in the African American newspaper \textit{The Christian Recorder} indicated that he was well respected and known in the broader African American community and described him as uniquely dedicated to working in the neighborhood.\textsuperscript{50} Even in a paternalistic form, this thread of interracial relationship was one that was atypical for its time and entirely absent from the national story of American playground production until after World War I.

At the same time, however, part of the legacy left by these reformers was one that included a reinforcement of White superiority — moral superiority in particular — and White power. Both program supervisor James Grant’s account of the Stuart Mission and Hannah Whitall Smith’s account of her father John Whitall’s mission work reveal stereotyped views of African Americans that the founders likely shared as well. Grant referred to the “well-known fact” that the “negro . . . has a great love for music and the singing of hymns,” a statement not overtly offensive, but revealing a stereotyped view of a diverse group of people.\textsuperscript{51} In reports about her father John Whitall’s program Hannah Whitall Smith observed that “The secret of a life of full trust seems to be easily learned by this \textit{simple-hearted race} [emphasis mine. . .]”\textsuperscript{52} Other comments include references to the “childlike” faith and peculiar, childlike receptiveness of “the colored race.”\textsuperscript{53} Though these were certainly stereotypes of a much more positive nature than some others, nevertheless they characterized African Americans in ways that supported their ongoing subordination to White leadership.

In addition, neither Whitall nor Stuart directly challenged the status quo of
inequality. Descriptions of miraculous provision of food or money for those neighborhood residents who were trusting God, highlight the precariousness of the lives of people who were often without food because they were without work (or without work that paid a living wage) often because of racist employment practices. Like most nineteenth century charity workers, Stuart and Whitall retained full authority over all decisions in relation to the work they did. They assumed that they had the wisdom and ability to determine, largely based on intuition with support from external clues such as in individual’s degree of cleanliness, who was “worthy” to receive financial help. They set the standards for behavior in the school setting and decided when it would open or close based on their preferences, not the needs of the “scholars.” Also, as was often the case with volunteer charity work, the Whitalls did not consider their commitment to the community to require that they change their regular routines in significant ways. For example, they closed their program in the summer when they left the city to live in their summer home. Hannah Whitall Smith did not seem to notice the irony in the biography she wrote about her father’s life; without comment regarding the stark contrast between the two, the chapter on Whitall’s “mission work,” in which there were multiple descriptions of the intense poverty and suffering of the poor, was immediately followed by a chapter beginning with Whitall’s purchase of an expansive new summer home in New Jersey.\textsuperscript{54}

John Whitall stopped teaching at the Sunday School just prior to his death in 1877.\textsuperscript{55} Quaker involvement at this location didn’t end with Whitall, however. Soon after his death younger [White] Quakers arrived with new ideas about how the
space available in Stuart Church might be used during the rest of the week. At the same time, an Episcopal philanthropist and businessman named Theodore Starr began visiting the neighborhood and looking for a way to invest in its transformation. It was Starr who purchased the plot adjacent to Stuart Church and supervised its initial transformation.

**Rev. Henry L. Phillips, Theodore Starr and St. Mary Street**

Several contributing events preceded Starr’s purchase of the lot near Stuart Church. These events began in some sense at yet another church, the Church of the Crucifixion (Episcopal). In the late nineteenth century Philadelphia had two Black Episcopal congregations of significant size and Starr, though White and not a member, was elected to the governing body (the vestry) of one of them, the Church of the Crucifixion. Established in 1847, the church was located several blocks away from St. Mary Street on Ninth Street, just above Bainbridge.56

According to historian Roger Lane, the Church of the Crucifixion was created especially to serve the poor African Americans who lived in the slums near Eighth and Bainbridge. Since it was located on a block that was not particularly welcoming to Black people and all the leaders were White, its effectiveness in serving poor Black members was inconsistent at best until 1877 when the church’s first African American rector, Rev. Henry Laird Phillips, arrived. Starr and Phillips met soon after and went on to partner together on a variety of philanthropic projects.57

A native of Jamaica, Phillips and his wife, Philadelphia native Sarah Elizabeth Cole, already regularly crossed class barriers as they served the “worthy poor” and socialized among Philadelphia’s wealthiest African Americans. Over time, the
congregation included other higher status members of Philadelphia’s Black community as well. But in keeping with the pattern of racial segregation in Christian worship services across the city, Theodore Starr’s primary membership remained elsewhere, though he was a frequent visitor at the Church of the Crucifixion.58

Under Phillip’s leadership the Church of the Crucifixion greatly expanded its outreach services, leading the way toward the future when social service oriented “institutional” churches of the Progressive Era focused on developing a holistic and comprehensive approach to serving the poor that went far beyond the visiting and occasional aid provided by early nineteenth century missions.59 It was undoubtedly this vision of holistic Christian service that Phillips cast in front of Theodore Starr.

Noticing the Needs of the “Colored”

According to Lane, author of William Dorsey’s Philadelphia and Ours, it was Phillips who managed to encourage his by then racially mixed vestry led by Theodore Starr, “to get involved in the local [Black] community in a number of unprecedented ways.”60 The first cooperative project Starr participated in with Rev. Phillips was to found the Progressive Workingmen’s Club, the Church’s first charitable organization and what appears to be Starr’s first venture directly addressing the needs of Black Philadelphia.61 Founded in 1878 with Henry Phillips as its president and Starr as treasurer, the Progressive Workingmen’s Club was primarily a social club for Black men intended to “afford a means of moral and intellectual improvement” for those who joined.62 The only White men connected to the club were three of its founders, of whom Starr was one. Located on South 11th
Street, the club’s facilities included a gym, baths and rooms for lectures and games. A coal club, providing winter coal at a more reasonable price than what might be available to individuals, was soon started as well as was a penny savings bank that was so successful that it became its own entity. In 1879, along with members of the club, Starr founded an interracially led Penny Savings Fund (later renamed Starr Bank). The Penny Savings Fund would surpass the Workingmen’s Club in its importance and would contribute to Starr’s later focus on children’s needs. In the meantime, he was looking for another project and he found it near St. Mary Street.

Starting with Housing Reform – The Importance of Rev. Phillips

Starr’s first work in the St. Mary Street neighborhood was a focused attempt to transform people’s lives by transforming physical spaces, in this case the tenement buildings they lived in. Like many of his generation, Starr was moving towards a progressive view of moral development that emphasized environmental rather than individual roots of poverty. As new scientific theories of development gave significant power to environmental influences in shaping the morality of those who lived in a particular type of place, reformers like Starr started to shift their efforts from the moral transformation of individuals towards physical transformation of buildings, streets and neighborhoods.

Before meeting Rev. Phillips, Starr had started to work on plans for an experiment in housing reform based on British reformer Octavia Hill’s model. The idea was that if one could provide good housing, working people of “the respectable and industrious class” would rent it and “drive out the vicious and lawless ones.” According to Rev. Phillips, Starr was originally planning to conduct this experiment
“in some portion of the city north of Market Street.” Instead, Phillips encouraged him to consider a new location and happily reported later that “after his connection with the Workingmen’s Club, and further connection with the Church of the Crucifixion, and hence a better acquaintance with this neighborhood, [Starr] began the work that he had already planned . . . here in St. Mary street.”

It is worth noting that Phillips described the neighborhood of St. Mary Street as “here” while speaking from the location of the Church of the Crucifixion, which was actually several blocks away. This reference suggests that there was a shared sense that the Black community at 9th and Bainbridge and the Black community at 6th and St. Mary Street were in some sense one community. Though Starr had not built houses in the neighborhood directly surrounding the church he had built them in a primarily Black slum rather than somewhere north of Market as he had originally planned to do, most likely in a neighborhood where African Americans would not have been able to rent them. Thus, for Phillips, Starr had built the houses “here” as he had requested.

Starr’s foray into housing reform was short-lived. After struggling through a year as a landlord, Starr chose to discontinue this effort. He did, however, retain a belief in the positive moral impact of a physically transformed space, a belief that would find new expression in a project that reflected his growing interest in saving children. He also retained a close relationship with Henry Phillips and the Church of the Crucifixion.

No previous scholarship has credited Henry Phillips with having any role in the creation of Starr Park; neither did his White contemporaries when they
chronicled the development of the park in *History of a Street*. It is true that none of the evidence presented here suggests that Phillips made a direct contribution to its development. However, the project clearly grew out of Starr’s interest in addressing the unique economic and social challenges faced by Philadelphia’s less privileged Black residents specifically, an interest that was probably first cast and definitely nurtured by Phillips. In addition, Starr’s choice of the St. Mary Street neighborhood seems also to have been influenced by Phillips. Evidence therefore suggests that Henry Laird Phillips played an indirect, but not insignificant, role in building the foundation of what would become Philadelphia’s first municipally supported community playground.

**Shifting to Child-saving and Child Spaces – St. Mary Street Day Nursery**

According to N. Dubois Miller, a member of the Progressive Workingmen’s Club, children played an important role in the expansion of the Workingman’s Club Penny Savings Bank. When Starr found that “children showed more appreciation of the benefits of saving than their fathers,” he began to run the bank separate from the club, opening services to children first and then to anyone else who was interested.\(^{68}\) Thus, Miller claimed, through interactions with children at the Penny Savings Bank, “. . . it gradually became evident to Mr. Starr that the real field of labor lay amongst the younger generation.”\(^{69}\) Whether or not this experience was central to his growing emphasis on child-focused interventions, Starr’s next few projects certainly seemed to have had the needs of children in mind.

Starr’s first child-focused effort began in 1880, two years prior to the creation of Starr Park. At that time Starr and his colleagues opened what they
viewed as a unique children’s home, one that would be open to receive children at all hours of the day or night most often those “whose mothers were found in an intoxicated state upon the streets of this section of the city.” The program soon expanded its mission to include childcare for working mothers (a “day nursery”). Next, a kindergarten supervised by Mrs. Susan I. Lesley and taught by Miss Fannie Sommerville opened on July 11, 1881 with a class of 11 African American children. Based on demand, it quickly expanded access to White children as well. As Sommerville described it, “The number increased rapidly and then the color question come up. ‘Shall White children be admitted?’ The answer was ‘yes’ and children ever after were admitted irrespective of race or creed.”

Initially located on nearby Cullen Street, the home was soon moved to the 700 block of St. Mary Street, into houses Starr renovated with this purpose in mind. What is most significant in relation to the origins of Starr Garden Playground is that almost immediately after the move was completed, Starr purchased an adjoining building and had it demolished. According to one of Starr’s colleagues, he did so in order to “give the ground to the Nursery for a playground, having trees and shrubs planted, and swings erected for the amusement and admiration of the children.” This was the first playground Starr created.

Starr’s actions can be seen as both typical and atypical for his time. The provision of a playground for young children in connection with a program providing childcare and education was not a completely original idea even in 1880, but neither was it common. Some early nineteenth century preschools, or “infant schools,” in Britain did include outdoor playgrounds as well. However, according
to preschool historian Elizabeth Rose, the provision of play or play space rarely ranked very high on the list of priorities in Philadelphia’s day nurseries (childcare programs).75

**Why Create a Playground?**

So, why was the creation of a playground important enough to Starr to warrant the purchase and demolition of an entire building? One way to view the creation of this first playground, and perhaps Starr Garden as well, is as an outgrowth of his initial interest in housing reform. It was the creation of a changed environment that was meant to support change in people’s lives. However, this impulse doesn’t fully explain why a *playground* should be created, rather than some other type of space, nor does it sufficiently address the question of why the reconstructed building that housed the St. Mary Street Day Nursery and Kindergarten was not enough on its own.

Neither Starr nor those who wrote about his work recorded the rationale behind his choices in any detail; however, there are some hints in the choice of the words “amusement” and “admiration” used in the quote above. These words, and the choice to include both play equipment (swings) and natural elements (trees and shrubs) indicate an attempt to provide children both with the opportunity to play and with direct contact with nature.

To some extent the term “amusement” suggests a view of play as an enjoyable, if not particularly useful, activity and perhaps also as an activity that is by definition comparatively trivial. Though the term could be, and was, used differently in different contexts. In fact, infant school pioneer Robert Owen used the
term “amusements” to refer to rather structured activities designed to serve educational purposes. What is important in this discussion is to note that in this instance the term was being used as a synonym for play, a practice that later play advocates would resist. Drawing very clear boundaries between “play” and “amusement” in order to heighten the status of play (in opposition to the growing number of commercial activities available) and highlight its particular purposes. It was not until the early twentieth century that rationales regarding the importance of play were broadly applied to a wide range of ages and extensively publicized, so why did Starr choose to invest in providing for it here?

One possibility is that Starr was familiar with the playgrounds of British “infant schools” at which playgrounds were used both as a means of attracting children to come in away from the street and as a place for lessons. As it is used in this context, however, the term does not reflect any kind of well-developed theory of play similar to those that would be commonly espoused by leaders in the twentieth century play movement—play as the “child’s work,” for example, or as essential to the development of adolescent boys from savage, primitive creatures to civilized leaders, or as the means of unifying an increasingly diverse nation.

But Starr did not include only play equipment and open space for play in his design; he also planted trees and bushes. Again, the practice was not without precedent in some British Infant Schools where these natural elements could provide gathering places for lessons. Given the growing popularity of the parks movement in Philadelphia, for Starr, the intentional inclusion of natural elements in the design of a play space for children may also have reflected romantic views of the
child as having a particularly close relationship with the natural world. As Aitken pointed out, the “natural child” discourse, founded on the philosophies of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, gained increasing power in the nineteenth century. In this view both the child and the natural world are understood to have an inherent purity not available to adults or to constructed urban spaces, a purity that required protection from corrupting influences, often represented by “the street.” Undoubtedly keeping children protected from danger was a purpose of the day nursery’s playground; however, the description of the day nursery playground did not focus on its protective purposes. Instead, it emphasized the provision of elements that would lead to the children’s “admiration.”

So, what were the children expected to admire? It is conceivable that the writer expected the children to “admire” the play space and its equipment, but in that case the admiration would seem to be of little importance in the transformative process that the space was expected to encourage. In what way could admiration be transformative? It is more likely that this emphasis on admiration is tied to the natural elements in the space, revealing the influence of another American reform movement already in full swing by 1880: the parks movement.

Building on theories in which nature was understood as an antidote to the destructive forces of urban life, parks movement advocates focused their efforts on the creation of urban green spaces. From 1850-1900 parks movement advocates led in the creation of what parks movement scholar Galen Cranz called the large “pleasure parks” of the mid-to-late-nineteenth century — Central Park in New York City and Golden Gate Park in San Francisco being two of the most well known.
Inspired by what Cranz calls a “softened popular version of the transcendentalist ideals, philosophies that proposed that nature itself could ’train the spirit’ when the virtues attributed to nature were ‘transplanted or duplicated by human ingenuity’,” these parks were created primarily to encourage the transformative practice of reflective contemplation of nature. Though these parks required large expanses of land, for a short time parks enthusiasts thought they might be able to reproduce some of their benefits by creating smaller versions in tenement districts. Within this context the “admiration” that children at the day nursery might express as they had direct contact with the trees and bushes of the nursery play space could be viewed as an essential component of the child-saving work that the space was expected to facilitate. If Starr wanted only to provide play space for the nursery children, he would not have needed to include trees and bushes in the design. In fact, in later years when play itself gained priority over nature as the understood means of regeneration, natural elements were, for a time, rarely included in playground design.

Still, though some early parks advocates argued that the most beneficial forms of children’s play and other forms of recreation took place in natural settings, provision for children’s play was not a primary focus of the nineteenth century parks movement. In fact, children’s play in urban pleasure parks was often restricted. Later playground advocates referred to the “keep off the grass” signs commonly seen in parks during this era, for example. More typical at the time when Starr created his first playground on St. Mary Street in 1881 was the provision of outdoor space in connection with a new educational innovation, the kindergarten
program.

**Starr’s Kindergarten Connections**

In 1881, the people who consistently thought, talked and theorized about children’s play were not parks advocates, or school teachers, but kindergarteners, a term that signified not primarily kindergarten students, but the professionally educated middle- and upper-class women who taught them. Starr was already supporting the kindergarten in connection with the St. Mary Street Day Nursery on the 700 block of St. Mary Street, so it is not terribly surprising that he was soon connected to a second program, founded in 1882, that was located in the 600 block of the same street. Founded by Quaker philanthropist and kindergarten advocate Anna Hallowell and located in Stuart Church, it was with a connection to Hallowell’s kindergarten program that Starr Garden was created. Thus, both of the playground/parks Starr established were directly connected to kindergarten programs suggesting that a motivation for the construction of both of these spaces was Starr’s increasing interest in this new educational innovation.

An early supporter of Philadelphia’s kindergarten movement, Theodore Starr would have little time to impact kindergarten development personally. He died suddenly on June 1, 1884 at the age of 40. In a memorial speech given shortly after Starr’s death, Rev. Henry Phillips described Starr as one who took a great interest in the welfare of “the colored people of the city,” a man who was “the prime mover for kindergarten schools among the colored children.” Three years later at the dedication of a Church of the Crucifixion stained glass window created in Starr’s honor Phillips spoke again of Starr’s interest in kindergartens: “Kindergarten
schools were just coming into general favor in this city, and no one was more interested in them. He watched them and discussed the system as if he had nothing else to do. He was particularly interested in the first colored girls who were being trained for the work . . . .”

Though Starr himself could not lead the kindergarten movement forward, he provided some assurance that the work would continue by leaving Starr Park to Anna Hallowell.

**The American Kindergarten Movement**

Anna Hallowell was a trailblazer in her kindergarten advocacy efforts in Philadelphia, but she was not alone in her enthusiasm for kindergartens. Rather, her focus on the importance of early childhood education was reflective of national trends. Based on the model created by German educator Frederich Froebel, the first kindergarten in the United States was established in Wisconsin by Margarethe Meyer Schurz in 1856. It was a German-speaking program and served mainly middle class children of German origin. In 1860, Elizabeth Peabody opened the first English-speaking program in the United States in Boston and the American movement had its start. Kindergartens grew rapidly in popularity to the point that they were a topic of discussion at the National Education Association’s annual meeting in 1872 at which William N. Hailman gave an address on “The adaptation of Froebel’s system to American institutions.”

Based on Froebel’s theories, which emphasized *early* childhood as a key time in the development of a child, of particular importance to their moral development, kindergarteners posited that during the preschool years moral values and beneficial habits should be taught through play and through contact with the natural world.
Kindergarten programs were thus defined by their play-focused pedagogy. Kindergarteners, the label given to professionally trained kindergarten teachers rather than the children they taught, rejected the formal teaching practices typical of the elementary school. These practices were often dependent on rote memorization, required strict discipline and allowed for little physical movement.

In sharp contrast newspaper articles published in the [White] Quaker *Friends Intelligencer* and in the African American *Christian Recorder* described how kindergarten classrooms made use of the child’s “natural desire for play” as a means of education using toys, songs, games, imaginary play and “hand-activity” to prepare students for primary education as well as to embed “habits of industry” while avoiding any undue strain, fatigue or decrease in interest.

It is important to note here that Froebel’s kindergarten play was not, however, the largely undirected form of “free play” that would become popular later in early twentieth century kindergartens. According to preschool scholar Barbara Beatty, Froebel saw undirected play as a waste of time. Instead, the kindergarten promoted a particular form of directed play that required the use of specific materials (Froebel’s “gifts”). Of particular importance here is the fact that the kindergarten also required a specifically designed space for play, not previously understood to be necessary to classroom design.

Not only did kindergarten theory provided persuasive rationales regarding the importance of promoting particular kinds of play, those deemed to be of benefit for children’s proper moral and physical development, but also it required the creation of a specific type of space. Essential components of a kindergarten included
a special play area, preferably grassy, and a garden, outdoors if possible. Thus, though the outdoor garden of the kindergarten was not equivalent to the playground that would become ubiquitous in the twentieth century, it is the kindergarten movement that first provided clear connections between children's play and a particular type of outdoor space. In Philadelphia Anna Hallowell was one of the first to make these connections.

**Anna Hallowell and the Philadelphia Kindergarten Movement**

Born in 1831, the granddaughter of well-known abolitionist and women's rights activist Lucretia Coffin Mott, Hallowell was immersed early in White Quaker efforts to address the needs of African Americans both in Philadelphia and in the Southern States. At the age of 15, she expressed her concern for the needs of African Americans, as well as an interest in education, by teaching “the little colored children of the neighborhood . . . reading, writing and arithmetic” in her yard (and later in the laundry room of her home) on Sunday afternoons. Later, she began teaching at a night school for African American youth (Clarkson Hall). In her twenties she joined the Board of Managers of the Home for Destitute Colored Children. She was in attendance, with her grandparents, at the trial of fugitive slave Daniel Dangerfield in 1859. Clearly her interest in founding a kindergarten program in the vicinity of St. Mary Street was not only reflective of her belief in kindergarten philosophy, but also connected to this broader concern for the welfare and education of African Americans in Philadelphia. It was a concern that was more common among White Quakers, whose core doctrines emphasized the equality of all human beings, than many other groups in the city. When she was in her early 40s
that Hallowell began to focus her efforts on the establishment of free kindergarten programs in Philadelphia. As a result of her success in this work, she was appointed as the first female member of the Philadelphia Board of Education in 1886 when kindergartens were first integrated into the public school system.94

The kindergarten movement gained increasing traction in Philadelphia throughout the 1870s. Philadelphia’s Society of Froebel Kindergartners had its start in 1874 (it was officially organized in 1878) and by 1875 the city was home to two tuition-based programs.95 In 1876, when the city played host to the world at the Philadelphia Centennial celebration, among the innovations visitors could view were several kindergarten exhibits, including one sponsored by Elizabeth Peabody in which children who were residents of the Northern Home for Friendless Children (all White) provided the literal student bodies for the model classroom which was taught by a professionally trained Froebelian kindergarten teacher.96 By 1879, Hallowell and several friends had established the first free kindergarten in Philadelphia in the James A. Garfield public school at 22nd and Locust, a precursor to the integration of kindergartens into the public school system several years later. By 1881 the number of free kindergartens available had grown enough to warrant the creation of the Sub-Primary School Society to oversee this and other free kindergarten programs conducted outside of residential institutions like the Northern Home, though not necessarily in public schools.97

Though the play-focused pedagogy of the kindergarten was understood to be valuable for young children of all classes, and in fact the first American kindergartens served middle and upper class children primarily, free kindergartens
for “destitute and neglected” children, like other child-focused reform movements, were expected to serve additional purposes. Early in the nineteenth century lines had been drawn between the poor and “paupers.” Middle class charity was founded on the belief that the poor suffered through no fault of their own, but pauperism was the result of “willful error, of shameful indolence, of vicious habits . . .” With the goal of preventing pauperism, antebellum and some later nineteenth century volunteers sought to distinguish between the worthy and unworthy poor as they targeted their charitable works. Kindergartens became a new tool in the fight against pauperism.

Beatty noted that dual, class-based ideas about the importance of early education outside the home had their roots in “ambivalent, class-biased European attitudes” that supported the creation of infant schools for poor children, while encouraging “affluent parents to become more involved in educating their children at home” which led to a “general acceptance that young children from poor families should be educated outside of the home, but no consensus that similar experiences were good for children from higher-class backgrounds.” Hallowell and other kindergarten advocates argued that early education was important for all children, but emphasized that it was crucial for children of the poor.

An article published in the Friends Intelligencer on March 4, 1882 and almost certainly written by Anna Hallowell (the author’s initials were A.H.) made clear the distinction between the purposes of free kindergartens and those of tuition-based programs, presenting the “prevention of crime and pauperism” as the primary object in the establishment of free kindergartens in Philadelphia. The article went
on to describe how the kindergarten took “poor children from the streets and
dismal homes into wholesome places, good air, play, occupation, friendly sympathy
and care.” According to Hallowell’s logic, in free kindergartens the combination of
joy and discipline would transform children’s play and other behaviors. As they
participated in the games and activities of the kindergarten children would learn
that order, discipline and work could be fun! As a result, they would be both happy
and industrious now and later in life, making it “less probable that the poor child
will grow up to become either a criminal . . . or a pauper.”

Foreshadowing future claims made by playground advocates, kindergarten
advocates argued that kindergartens mattered because children’s play in these
protected spaces had the potential to transform life beyond them. Both
kindergartner Mrs. Sommerville Jackson, a teacher in the St. Mary Street Day
Nursery’s kindergarten program, and Constance Mackenzie, teacher in
Philadelphia’s first free kindergarten and later director of the Sub-Primary School
Society, made further claims regarding the kindergarten child’s impact on the
broader community. According to Mrs. Jackson, “Ideas of order, cleanliness,
accuracy and concentration were carried into the homes by the children” both
through kindergarten games and songs as well as through the children’s clean faces
and hands and improved behavior. Constance Mackenzie-Durham, described the
success of free kindergartens in Philadelphia by relating a similar story about how
children from her program not only refused to “participate in the coarser street
romps with the non-kindergarteners,” but also brought “many a child into the
kindergarten who had been wont to stand at the door, hoot and run.” Thus, for
these kindergarten advocates not only was children’s play central to the
kindergarten process, but certain forms of play could also provide the evidence that
there had been a transformation of their inner character as well. Transformation
narratives like these, whether entirely factual or not, were widely used in the
kindergarten movement and the later play movement in order to garner support for
these programs as effective social interventions.

With the prevention of crime and poverty as a goal, it is perhaps not too
surprising that African American children, often among the poorest of the poor in
Philadelphia, were provided with early access to free kindergarten programs,
despite the fact that racial segregation was still a common practice in Philadelphia’s
classrooms. By March 1882 there were ten free kindergartens operating in
Philadelphia serving several hundred poor and working class children, both Black
and White.104 Of the ten programs at least two served only White students, two only
“colored” children and four were racially mixed. Included within this last category
were both St. Mary Street kindergartens: the St. Mary Street Day Nursery
Kindergarten founded by Susan Lesley and the St. Mary Street kindergarten (in
Stuart Church) founded by Anna Hallowell. As noted, the day nursery program had
become a racially integrated program soon after opening in 1881. Hallowell’s
program, by January 1882, was fully enrolled, with two teachers serving 50 children,
mostly White with a “fair sprinkling of Blacks.” “In their positions, games and songs
there is no drawing of the color line,” stated a Friends Intelligencer article titled
“Free Kindergartens” published on January 8, 1882. By March 1883, sixteen of the
students were African Americans.105
In a brief history of the Stuart Church kindergarten, Hallowell directly tied the creation of Starr Garden to the kindergarten program. By her telling, Starr’s increasing interest in the school led to his decision to purchase and transform the adjoining land. “The management of the schools [an industrial school was added soon after the kindergarten] much desired to make this wilderness blossom.” Using language focused on the importance of nature more than play, Hallowell wrote they planned, “to use it as a garden for the children to work in, to have grass and trees and a bit of sweet mother nature to do her part in redeeming the sordid lives that had grown up in the presence of squalor where there should have been beauty.”

Starr soon bought the plot of land with the help of a loan from Hallowell. Once the park was complete Hallowell reported that the kindergarten children used a portion of the plot to “plant and grow things as they do in Germany, where there is much out-of-door work.” The rest of the park was dedicated to a fountain, some swings and green space.

**African Americans and Philadelphia Kindergarten Advocacy**

In order to place Starr Garden within the broader context of Philadelphia’s kindergarten movement, it is important to note that it was not only White philanthropists like Anna Hallowell and Theodore Starr who were responsible for the spread of kindergartens in Philadelphia. Nor were White philanthropists primarily responsible for the provision of kindergarten education for Black children in particular. African American leaders were well-informed regarding this new educational innovation, as is evident in multiple articles published in *The Christian Recorder* in the mid to late nineteenth century.
As early as July 25, 1868 The Christian Recorder included an article, which was originally published in The Methodist, titled “German Kindergarten” in which the author described in detail his visit to a German kindergarten program. In 1876, three years prior to the establishment of Philadelphia's first free kindergarten program, another article titled “Kindergarten” began with the line “Our readers are constantly seeing the word ‘Kindergarten,’ in relation to schools” followed by a detailed description of the kindergarten method in which “toys, games, songs and plays” become “covert vehicles of instruction.”\footnote{109} In 1880 the Recorder included an excerpt from an advertisement for a new kindergarten training program “... now being circulated in the interest of the new departure for the advancement of our people.”\footnote{110} These articles demonstrate that the African American community was being presented with inspiration to create kindergartens and to send their children to kindergartens as well.

Not only were Philadelphia’s African American leaders informed about kindergartens, but several Black leaders including Rev. Henry Phillips and Fanny Jackson Coppin, were active in pursuing access to kindergarten classes for African American children. Because of their efforts two African American-led programs were among the first ten kindergartens in Philadelphia as well. Both programs served African American children exclusively and were taught by graduates of the highly respected high school, the Institute for Colored Youth. Both were housed in buildings that were largely under the control of Phillips and connected to Theodore Starr as well. One program was provided with rent-free use of the Progressive Workingmen’s Club; the other was held in the Sunday School room of the Church of
the Crucifixion.\textsuperscript{111}

The Black children who attended these exemplary programs were receiving instruction from highly trained educators. The four African American women who taught in them were not only Institute graduates, but had also graduated from an additional kindergarten teacher training program led by the founder of the Philadelphia Society of Froebel Kindergarteners, Mrs. Van Kirk. Their training program included special instructional sessions conducted by national kindergarten leader Elizabeth Peabody who also attended their graduation.\textsuperscript{112}

As a result of the work of these highly qualified teachers, these programs were recognized by outside visitors as being of the highest caliber. Even the Institute’s White Quaker managers (who had refused to give permission for a kindergarten to be hosted at the Institute in 1879) acknowledged their quality in their board minutes in January 1881, noting that the Workingmen’s Club program was “highly commended by some intelligent critics, and [was] believed to be the first of the kind amongst the colored people in this Country.”\textsuperscript{113} The programs were celebrated in Philadelphia’s Black community as well. In May 1882, Kindergarten exhibits from the Progressive Workingmen’s Club, the Church of the Crucifixion, and the St. Mary Street Day Nursery’s kindergarten program were a central feature of May festival activities at Liberty Hall.\textsuperscript{114} Both Jackson Coppin, director of the Institute for Colored Youth, and Rev. Phillips were among those who gave speeches about kindergarten work at the festival.\textsuperscript{115} What neither of these programs offered, however, was the outdoor space available to children who attended the St. Mary Street program that was located in Stuart Church.
While there is no specific evidence to explain why the African American-led programs did not create adjoining outdoor space, that fact does not necessarily indicate that their leaders had no interest in doing so. Phillips, Coppin and other African American kindergarten advocates were very likely challenged both by lack of resources and also by systemic racial discrimination in real estate practices in Philadelphia. In addition, knowing how difficult it was for Black families to rent or purchase homes in Philadelphia, they may have been much less inclined to participate in the destruction of African American housing, as unappealing as it may have seemed, in order to create a playground for Black children.

**Conclusion**

The story of the origins of Philadelphia’s Starr Garden Recreation Park demonstrates that African American educators and community leaders and White kindergarteners [female] and kindergarten advocates were important, though previously unacknowledged, players in its creation. Thus, it is a story that supports the claims of scholars who have argued that women played an important role in the establishment of the twentieth century play movement.\(^{116}\) It also challenges the impression given by scholars who either ignore the presence of African Americans in the playground movement or, in the case of Jeffrey Pilz, argue that African Americans did not participate in play advocacy prior to World War I.\(^{117}\) Instead, this evidence suggests that both of these groups lost visibility and influence over time to the point that they seem insignificant in later sources.

It is virtually impossible to discuss the origins of Starr Garden without recognizing connections to both kindergarten advocates and an actual kindergarten
program. The story of the origins of Starr Garden Park/Playground suggests that kindergarten philosophies, programming and students provided the initial impetus for the creation of designated outdoor spaces used for children’s play on St. Mary Street. Scholars do generally acknowledge that kindergarten and playground production were often connected in the nineteenth century, especially in the work done through social settlements. However, because kindergarten theories (and professionally trained kindergarteners) were not essential aspects of the twentieth century movement, their role, and more importantly the role of kindergarten advocates and practitioners, has received very little attention. Kindergarten teachers were, by definition, female. Their students were, by definition, young children, too young to attend primary school (usually under age six). Female early childhood educators and young children were of central importance in the creation of one of Philadelphia’s earliest playgrounds.

In addition and in sharp contrast to trends in the national play movement of the twentieth century, the story of the development of Starr Garden is one of interracial cooperation as much as it is one of racial segregation and exclusion. Due to its centrality to Black life in Philadelphia in the mid-nineteenth century as well as the visible needs of many of its residents, St. Mary Street had attracted the investment of religious, White philanthropists who were particularly interested in addressing the needs of the African American community. Building on the work of George Stuart and John Whitall, Theodore Starr and Anna Hallowell worked alongside, or at least parallel to African American leaders Henry Phillips, Fanny Jackson Coppin and others to establish kindergarten programs. These relationships
led to the construction of a variety of spaces in the vicinity of St. Mary Street, a neighborhood with a sizeable African American population in residence and several important African American institutions that drew other Black Philadelphians to the region on a regular basis. Though in the case of Starr Garden, African Americans served primarily in an advisory capacity, it supports evidence from other cities that demonstrates that Black leaders played a larger role in the American play movement than has been previously thought.118

Furthermore, African American children were intentionally included rather than excluded from access to St. Mary Street’s kindergartens and the playgrounds connected to them, again, a pattern that contrasts with the later movement. Certainly, it cannot be argued that this situation was typical; however, neither can it be argued that Black children were completely absent from the earliest phases of American playground production. World War I, though it may have been the “beginning of organized play” for Black Americans, was not the start of their participation in the American play movement as Jeffrey Pilz argued. Instead, the evidence suggests that access for Black children in the North was dependent on their proximity to particular places, people and programs.

The year 1884 brought to the neighborhood a new group of reformers, mostly women, who would join together and expand on the foundation built by Stuart, Whitall, Hallowell and Starr primarily through the establishment of another nineteenth century innovation, the settlement house. The first of these women was Susan Wharton, another Quaker reformer whose presence in the neighborhood and connections to the African American community would far outlast that of the
settlement she helped found. Chapter 2 tells the story of how she began her work
by creating the St. Mary Street Library in 1884, how she invited friends to join her in
the work, founding the Philadelphia College Settlement in 1892, and how settlement
workers impacted the educational, social and physical landscape of the St. Mary
Street community before leaving the neighborhood in 1899 in the wake of a massive
expansion of Starr Garden to a size that included the entire block.
CHAPTER 2

Ambivalent Advocates:
The St. Mary Street Library, the James Forten School, and the Philadelphia College Settlement (1884-1900)

Introduction

Having completed her schooling at Vassar in 1875, in 1884 Quaker Susan Wharton started volunteering in Anna Hallowell’s small school. The school was located only a few blocks from Wharton’s home at 910 Clinton Street, but in a neighborhood whose residents lived far different lives from her own. In beginning this work, Wharton was not only following in the footsteps Starr, Whitall and Hallowell, but also of her mother and other Philadelphia Quakers who had participated actively in abolitionist work and various forms of service to the poor, including a number of educational activities and schools, some of which crossed boundaries of race in ways that were unusual for the time. It is unlikely that Wharton knew then that she had, in essence, begun what would become her life’s work (though its shape and form would change over time). Until her death in 1928, Wharton would remain doggedly committed to the provision of social and educational services designed to support African Americans in their own efforts at self-improvement, self-sufficiency and self-education.

This chapter begins with the story of how Wharton began her work by creating the St. Mary Street Library in 1884, a program through which she provided opportunities for children to play despite the fact that she viewed playful activities with some ambivalence. Wharton was able to participate in supporting play
without a strong interest in doing so in part because the lines between work and play were not yet as firmly drawn as they would be in later decades. During these years connections made between varied forms of active learning including play, industrial training and manual labor allowed reformers like Susan Wharton, firmly committed to educational programs focused on the development of financial and practical skills, to support play in particular forms while remaining committed to a solidly middle class, Protestant, American work ethic in which play was somewhat suspect. Working in this context, from 1884-1900 Wharton not only provided some play-focused activities through the charities she supported, but also helped to protect Black children’s access to the space of Starr Garden Park/Playground and the activities that took place within it.

As a result of the library’s continued presence, and the interests and activities of those who participated in its work, the St. Mary Street Library elicited ongoing investment in both the building and the neighborhood, investment that played a direct role in facilitating the expansion of Starr Park and its continued existence as a playground in Philadelphia today. Therefore, the more detailed understanding of its development and use that will be discussed here provides a more nuanced understanding of how leaders who were not necessarily play advocates, and children who both worked and played in their presence, contributed to the development of Philadelphia’s first public playground. At the same time, Wharton and her colleagues limited educational opportunities for Black children to some extent through their efforts to manage the local public school, James Forten School.
Taking a slight detour away from Starr Garden and the Library, the chapter then follows the participation of Wharton and her colleagues in the transformation of the James Forten School, located on an adjacent block, into the city’s first industrial school. These efforts had much less positive results for Black children and families than did the preservation of Starr Garden. Revealing the complex ways in which personal prejudice, practical methods and idealistic goals can interact to produce both positive and negative outcomes, in 1890, Hallowell, Wharton and Fox successfully participated in displacing the school’s first Black principal, a highly qualified, experienced and well-educated graduate of the Institute for Colored Youth, despite strong protests from the African American community. By 1899, few Black children remained at a school that had been founded for African American students when Philadelphia schools were segregated, neglected for years while under White leadership and named for one of the city’s most accomplished and distinguished nineteenth century Black businessmen.

On the heels of their “success” in transforming James Forten, utilizing the newly popular methods of industrial education, Wharton and Fox decided to experiment with yet another growing trend in reform work by establishing a social settlement. The chapter closes with a discussion of the Philadelphia College Settlement. Building directly on the foundation laid by the work of the St. Mary Street Library, the Philadelphia College Settlement was established in 1892 at the invitation of the Library’s managers. Because the Settlement was founded on the work of the St. Mary Street Library, there was an initial assumption that African Americans would be included. However, developing close connections with African
Americans was an unusual task for White social settlement workers and not surprisingly, many of the College Settlement’s new residents were not necessarily as committed to African American social welfare, or as comfortable interacting across racial lines, as Wharton was. Though African Americans were not broadly excluded from the Philadelphia College Settlement’s programs, they were also not particularly well served by them either. Whether due to individual prejudice or as a result of practical tactics designed to demonstrate the effectiveness of settlement strategies thereby protecting the health of the organization, or both, early on there were indications that the primary focus of the Settlement was shifting rather rapidly to focus on the needs of White immigrants. By the close of 1899, the Philadelphia College Settlement had relocated to a new site in a neighborhood dominated by White immigrants.

Still, the Philadelphia College Settlement had a direct impact on African American life and history. In addition to providing some services to Black children and families and facilitating cross-class and cross-racial interactions during the years when they were located on St. Mary Street, Settlement residents and volunteers left in their wake two lasting legacies. First, with Anna Hallowell’s help they led in efforts to clear the entire block surrounding Starr Garden Park, preparing the future site of Philadelphia’s first recreation center, Starr Garden Recreation Park. This process had both positive and negative effects on Philadelphia’s Black community, including both the residents of the Fifth Ward and those more successful residents who had moved farther west. In addition, due to Wharton’s leadership and in partnership with the University of Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia

Though the Settlement would leave the region in 1899, Wharton would not. She would stay to found a new organization, the Starr Centre, to continue the work she had started with Black residents of the St. Mary Street community. Thus, Susan Wharton’s story demonstrates that an understanding of dominant trends in the American playground movement and the social settlement movement, in which Black children were broadly ignored and excluded, does not necessarily provide a clear picture regarding individual experiences in particular locations. In and around St. Mary Street Black children entered into and left the programs of these (mostly) White-led institutions — the St. Mary Street Library, the James Forten School and the College Settlement — both influencing and being influenced by the experiences they had and the relationships that they developed. Their stories are part of this chapter as well.

**Susan P. Wharton and the St. Mary Street Library (1884-1892)**

Like John Whitall and Anna Hallowell, Susan Wharton was a member of one of Philadelphia’s prominent Quaker families. Also, like Hallowell, she grew up in a family active in addressing the social issues of their time, in particular issues that impacted people of color. Her maternal grandfather, Dr. Joseph Parrish, was a dedicated abolitionist. Her mother, Susannah Dillwyn Parrish Wharton, focused her efforts on issues that affected both Native and African American communities. A founder of the Philadelphia Children’s Aid Society, Wharton’s mother may also have influenced Susan to direct her energy toward children in particular, though this
choice was fairly typical for women of Susan Wharton’s social standing due to commonly held beliefs in sex-defined separate spheres of work for men and women that made work with children a more justifiable role for women than many other forms of philanthropy.  

Despite her social status, Susan Wharton was not regularly the subject of newspaper articles and no archive holds her personal papers. However, in the mid-1940s, Albert Kennedy, gathering data for a study of settlement work with African Americans, requested information about Wharton from a number of her friends and associates. The letters they wrote in response to his requests provide snapshots of Wharton as she was remembered by some of her contemporaries. Taken together (and alongside the reports and letters she wrote describing her charitable work) these documents present an image of a woman who was passionate, energetic, intelligent, creative, stubborn, perhaps arrogant, and definitely determined in pursuit of her goals. It was an image that left Kennedy “particularly impressed by the vision, ingenuity, and drive displayed by Susan Parrish Wharton in the enterprises which she fostered beginning with the St. Mary’s Street work in 1884.”

According to friends and associates, Wharton was an intelligent and practical woman who valued clear-minded, straightforward thinking in others. A scene described by one of her colleagues, Jane P. Rushmore, gives the impression that she did not mince words when she disagreed with the perspective or behavior of others, no matter how seemingly insignificant the area of difference was.

Susan, whom I knew intimately for many years, doesn’t seem to fit into a little niche. What she was, seems of so much more moment than what she did, that she needs an interpreter . . . I recall a visit of a woman to Susan’s fern garden. She pointed to a fern and said, “There is a phegopteres dryopteria.” Susan said, “Yes,
that is an oak fern, they are more interesting in their common names.” This is very characteristic of her.\textsuperscript{10} In this scene, Wharton seemed to be challenging the elitism inherent in the use of a formal botanical term, but did so in a way that made clear her own superior moral standing. The fact that Rushmore used this scene as a way of describing Wharton’s general personality indicates, also, that she was a woman of strong opinions who was not afraid to voice them.

Wharton’s version of elitism was grounded in Quaker values. For example, she did not seek opportunities to display her elite status publicly by naming any of the organizations she founded after herself.\textsuperscript{11} At the same time, she was not afraid to use her social standing and connections to raise support for the causes she championed. She regularly drew others into her plans and goals for the future, whether the goal was the creation of a nature center at the resort she helped to found in the Pocono Mountains, Buck Hill Falls, or the provision of social services to African American families.\textsuperscript{12} According to the testimony of Dr. Charles F. Judson, a board member of one of the charities she founded, “Miss Wharton had many devoted friends. She had a warm generous heart, full of ideas for the uplift of the colored race, not all of which were capable of accomplishment. She had a striking appearance and a forceful personality, and was a good public speaker.”\textsuperscript{13} A persuasive and talented leader, she was not particularly interested in the ideas and goals of others, especially when they were in conflict with her own. In the words of Jane Rushmore, “She usually played a lone hand following out her own idea with tremendous energy, but she could not be a follower of anybody.”\textsuperscript{14} Similarly, her cousin, Walter Mendelson, once said about her, “She can think of the most
impossible things to do and yet succeed in getting them done.”

The “impossible thing” to which she committed most of her energy until her death on September 21, 1928 was that of improving the financial status, living conditions and “character” of Philadelphia’s poorest African American residents. With help from her cousin, Helen L. Parrish, along with Eliza M. Kane, and a Massachusetts Quaker named Hannah Fox, she started with the founding of a small circulating library in 1884.

For its founders, the St. Mary Street Library constituted a logical first step in reforming the character and habits of the community’s youth through reading. It was a product of two popular innovations in nineteenth century philanthropic work, both of which provided new opportunities for educated college women like Wharton — “scientific charity” and its method of “friendly visiting” and the establishment of libraries for children.

By the time Wharton began her work on St. Mary Street, “scientific charity” was replacing antebellum volunteerism as the favored means of addressing concerns about perpetual poverty and the crime that often accompanied it. Two highly influential books that helped to define the approach were published during in the early 1880s, when Hallowell established the St. Mary Street Kindergarten and Industrial school. One, of the books, A Handbook of Charity Organization (1882) described in detail the principles and methods of charity organization and the second, Public Relief and Private Charity (1884) by Josephine Shaw Lowell carefully explained its central tenants. Both Lowell and Humphreys argued that indiscriminate charity and lack of contact between the privileged and the poor had
exacerbated rather than relieved the problems of the poor, who, having lost their self-respect and ambition through dependence on charity were now defined by their “idleness” and “unthriftiness.” The eradication of these two character flaws remained one of Susan Wharton’s (and therefore also the Library’s) central goals for many years. The St. Mary Street Library’s managers, like other supporters of the methods of scientific charity, recommended the elimination of “almsgiving” and made widespread use of regular “friendly visiting” of the poor in their homes, a method by which proponents hoped class barriers might be broken down and the poor gently educated.

The decision to found a library was also reflective of a growing trend. According to library historian Patrick M. Valentine, when the St. Mary Street Library was founded in 1884, though they were open to a wide range of local community members, most libraries were privately funded institutions built on “a faith in reading, self-education and shared social responsibility.” These were cooperative, voluntary institutions and they marked a transition from the private, exclusive libraries that preceded them to the free, publically-supported libraries to come. Though in the mid-nineteenth century some Sunday Schools developed libraries as did a growing number of public schools, prior to the 1870s very few of the libraries that did offer public access to reading material were open to children. It wasn’t until the 1880’s, when women became increasingly active in the promotion, establishment and administration of library services, that children’s libraries both publically and privately funded, began to proliferate.

The St. Mary Street Library officially began a few months after Theodore
Starr’s death, on Saturday, October 30, 1884. In response to concerns that “a low class of literature” was being circulated in the neighborhood, Wharton and her colleagues decided to replace such books with others that would influence children in a more positive direction.\(^{21}\) Initially, the Library was neither a room, nor a building but a program offered to the children of Hallowell’s St. Mary Street Kindergarten and its newly added Industrial School. It was initially a small undertaking. According to *History of a Street*, published in 1901, the library began with 50 books “bright with colored pictures and interesting with short stories.”\(^ {22}\) Another retroactive account, published as *The Growth of Starr Library, 1883-1903* noted that the Library started with one volunteer (most likely Wharton\(^ {23}\)). At the time of the library’s opening, the school served African American students primarily; therefore, the nascent circulating library program served as a resource for African American children especially.

Operating one day a week during school hours at the St. Mary Street Kindergarten and Industrial School, in keeping with accepted methods of scientific charity, children’s access to the privilege of taking a book home from the small collection required a literal investment on their parts. In order to borrow books, children were required to become “members” of the library by paying a fee of ten cents a year (thus, preventing any habit of dependence on charity).\(^ {24}\) Though the children of St. Mary Street, even those who joined the library, may well have continued to read the “low class literature” that the library’s founders hoped to replace, many children were interested in having access to the books that the library offered. Their interest was demonstrated by the rapid growth of the program.
despite the potential obstacle posed by the membership fee. Within a year, enough children joined so that soon the efforts of one volunteer during school hours was not sufficient to meet demand and the program shifted to Saturday mornings, with two volunteers managing the work together. Still located in the Sunday School classroom of the old church, the change of schedule allowed library volunteers to slowly expand membership, activities and their collection of books.25

At the start, according to the plan for the Saturday morning library, the ladies admitted a limited number of children at a time. Due to the constricted space and high demand for access, during the first year of the library’s operation, leisurely browsing of the collection was not permitted. Children would enter the room to examine the books, which were laid out on the Sunday School benches. They were expected to leave the room almost immediately after choosing a book at which point a library volunteer would record their names, addresses and selections and they would leave with book in hand. Books were due back the following Saturday, with fines being charged for late or damaged books. These rules and consequences were designed to encourage both regular attendance and responsible care for library materials.26

Over the next few years, the library program continued to expand. By 1885 it had 114 members and about 250 books; by 1886 both members and books had doubled to 253 members (eighty of whom were adults) and 500 books.27 In the winter of 1887 the committee expanded services offering evening access to the reading room, an experiment that attracted a significant number of boys (likely to be slightly older than the Saturday morning crowd, though their ages were not
recorded) who, along with many of the Saturday attendees, began to challenge the boundaries of the library’s initial mission. In 1889 when Hannah Fox purchased a small house on the other side of Starr Garden, the library’s managers acquired the use of two additional rooms, which allowed for more permanent storage for the books in one room and the creation of a space for children to stay in the other. Designated primarily as a children’s reading room, it was also used for a popular scrapbook-making class, an activity that nudged library volunteers in the direction of providing activities that began to resemble “play.”

*From Books to Board Games: Playful Activities as a Remedy for Idleness*

Hallowell’s kindergarten and the St. Mary Street Library operated out of the Sunday School room of Stuart Church, the same building that had housed Black mission and education work since 1857, and that was situated adjacent to the Starr Garden Park. Despite its physical proximity to Starr Garden, however, the story of the St. Mary Street Library does not center on children’s play or on the production of play space. Still, the library played a crucial role both in the development of the Starr Garden playground and in the provision of play-like activities for African American children. Though not specifically dedicated to “play,” the library was created to provide engaging activities for poor children and youth. Using the terms “games” and “entertainments,” rather than play, library leaders built on the idea that activities children enjoyed could be used in service of larger goals of social change. They saw the books and entertainments that they provided as a hook, a means of distracting children from other activities deemed to be less beneficial, a way to remove them from “the street.” This idea that particular forms of play could be a
means of preventing crime and poverty and lessening the influence of the street was one that would be expanded in the later play movement as would the connections made between play and education, connections that were also present in embryonic form at the St. Mary Street Library.

Often less interested in reading than in providing their own entertainment, not all library members were inclined to follow the calm and orderly plans set in place by the library’s volunteers who were soon overwhelmed.31 Of the popularity of evening hours in the reading room, for example, the author of the third annual report wrote, “The boys come gladly, the difficulty lay in keeping them in order.” There were several thefts of books and games during evening hours though it should be noted that sometimes the stolen goods were later returned.32 Thinking initially that they would use nothing beyond “moral suasion” to influence children’s behavior, library volunteers found this method to be ineffective and resorted to more coercive means, such as exclusion, in an attempt to control boisterous and unwelcome behaviors such as “turning [cart]wheels rapidly over the floor of the library.”33

It is likely that children’s preferences for more active endeavors than reading, rather than library managers’ philosophical commitment to more play-centered programs, led to the expansion of the library’s services. Through their actions, children to some extent redefined the purposes of the library’s space and programs. Children’s attendance at the library was voluntary; therefore, the programs offered were largely influenced by what children considered to be interesting and enjoyable. Like many others of their time and class, Wharton and her
colleagues saw only danger and moral decay “in the street.” Thus, playful activities were used initially as a lure to attract children to enter the space of the library where they might come under the uplifting influence of the volunteers. In 1888, the fourth year of the program, the library added music lessons two afternoons a week and Saturday morning “games and recreation.” Foreshadowing future patterns in which active play was located in the realm of male leadership, the games were supervised by a “man of experience in whom we have great confidence” rather than by the female managers or volunteers. Unlike later playground activities, however, the library’s games were undertaken indoors in the church building rather than in Starr Garden.\(^{34}\)

In addition to games and music, library volunteers also began providing “entertainments” such as concerts, magicians and magic lantern exhibitions, to which children gained access by paying a one cent admission fee or showing their membership badges.\(^{35}\) According to the author (probably Wharton) of a short history of the library published in 1903, these additional programs “gave impetus and added life and spirit to the work. . .inspiring more children to arrive with their ten-cent fees in hand.”\(^{36}\) Still, the provision of playful fun and entertainment remained secondary, not central, to the work of the library from the perspective of the managers.

Though some library volunteers may have viewed children’s enjoyment of these varied entertainments as sufficient justification for their provision, library managers felt the need to justify the provision of these activities by connecting them to broader goals. In 1887, the popular scrapbooking class was described as one that
drew children into an engaging activity through which the library managers hoped they would learn something, though the exact definition of that “something” was more implied than explicitly stated. “[B]y trying to make the children cut and paste carefully and sit still for an hour, we believe something is gained.”37 Similarly, when they added music in 1888, they noted that it would be “instructive as well as enjoyable to the children.” The seventh annual report made the relatively low prioritization of play abundantly clear:

    We have had recourse to our usual minor devices for drawing or holding the children’s interests in the ways of playing games and making scrapbooks, but these entertainments are not essential and we do not often have enough workers to carry them on without making them more of a burden than is desirable.”38

Concerns regarding idleness, in particular, were perhaps part of what made play-focused activities somewhat suspect for Wharton given that play, a form of idle pursuit, was seen as being neither particularly useful nor productive. “Many of the children of this notoriously bad neighborhood have not even the restraint of the public schools,” they complained in 1886, “but spend most of their time in the street. Our aim is to interest them in some occupation which will counteract the evil tendencies of this life of idleness.”39 Seeing the children’s lack of attendance at school, or perhaps work, as a character flaw rather than primarily an indication that the local public school itself was inadequate and jobs were scarce, the library’s founders expanded the activities they offered, not to address children’s need for or right to play, but in order to entice the children of St. Mary Street to become engaged in what they considered to be more beneficial activities.

Still, the library’s founders did not object to pleasure in itself and the goals of the programs they provided were not exclusively utilitarian. Coming face-to-face
with the “misery” they knew residents of this community experienced, library managers and volunteers also sought to provide children with some “quiet comfort and enjoyment.” Furthermore, managers’ notes included in the reports for 1890 and 1891 demonstrate that children’s playfulness was not always discouraged. A manager’s report from 1889 described the game room as “noisy, but good-natured.” The reader can almost see a twinkle in the writer’s eye as she described a young boy “colored, about 10 years of age” who “carried books from one part of the room to another by going down on all-fours and putting the books on his back.”

It is entirely possible, that the children who made use of the St. Mary Street Library, if asked, may have experienced some library activities as play. To this day, “play” is a contested term; its definition varies from one location, group, or individual to another, but very often contained in the idea of children’s play are the interconnected ideas that it is (or should be) fun and that playful activities are those that are inherently interesting without reference to any larger purpose they may serve. Though a variety of strategies were used to encourage regular attendance, ultimately the St. Mary Street Library was a place in which it was necessary that the activities offered provided enjoyment or pleasure from the perspective of the children who came, so that they would want to attend. It may stretch the term too far to call them “play,” since children’s use of the term has not been recorded and library leaders rarely, if ever, referred to the programs and services offered by library volunteers as play, but certainly there were playful elements to library programs and children’s participation in them.
Adding Industrial Education at the Library (1888-90)

Despite their tolerance for the playful antics of children, further expansion of the programs offered through the Library, moved in a more clearly practical direction in keeping with the founders’ commitment to promoting useful activity. As early as 1888 the St. Mary Street Library’s managers were expressing an interest in adding some industrial training classes at the library (to be provided in the evenings so as not to conflict with school attendance). By adding industrial training library managers were taking part in a trend that had started to take hold in Philadelphia more than a decade earlier after the 1876 Centennial Celebration, at which there were several exhibits featuring industrial education and/or training.\(^4^3\) Anna Hallowell had been an early proponent of the new methods, as were many other free kindergarten advocates. Not long after founding the St. Mary Street Kindergarten, she added industrial training for older boys and girls. Since the St. Mary Street Library started in this school, the addition of industrial education to its other programs is not such a surprising step.

As Froebel scholar Kevin J. Brehony described it, Froebelian philosophy itself provided initial connections between kindergartens and industrial education, because it emphasized “the importance of work and the dignity of labor” long before concerns about industry’s need for trained workers strengthened connections between schools and industry.\(^4^4\) Furthermore, both kindergarten curricula and industrial education utilized “hand activity,” in contrast to methods of rote memorization common in public school instruction. In addition, both were believed to aid in the development of the “whole child,” first morally and physically, then
intellectually. It is with this understanding of industrial education and kindergarten pedagogical practice in mind that it makes sense, then, that an article titled “Free Kindergartens” published in the *Friends Intelligencer* on March 4, 1882 would describe kindergartens and industrial schools together as “the seed of a great system of Industrial training which will one day make pauperism among us only a sad and bitter memory.” Similarly, speaking several years later in 1889, Philadelphia’s superintendent of schools claimed that kindergarten and manual training were “so intimately related that they were inseparable.”45

Both free kindergartens and industrial education were expected to address this perceived deficit in the character education of the poor. It was often the moral component of children’s education that was viewed as being absent in the lives of children of the poor, while it was expected that moral education could be relatively well done by parents in a middle or upper class home. For example, a *Friends Intelligencer* article comparing “what the kindergarten does for every child” with “what the kindergarten does for the criminal and pauper class” by author A.H. (almost certainly Anna Hallowell) explained that all young children should be educated in a kindergarten where they would learn “habits of industry” through play and “hand-activity.” However, “teaching the elements of industrial education” was a benefit provided by the free kindergarten for poor children in particular.46 In Philadelphia, the form of industrial education suggested for public schools by Anna Hallowell and others was not a method recommended for children of means.

Hallowell’s position was reflective of one side of an unresolved debate among kindergarten advocates regarding the place of manual training in kindergarten
programs, a debate that would continue well into the twentieth century. Many kindergarten advocates strongly resisted any focus on manual training in kindergartens, advocating a more exclusive focus on play-focused Froebelian methods. At one of the most well-known kindergarten programs established for African American children, the Hampton Institute kindergarten, manual and domestic training were given priority in the curriculum. However, several well-known African American educators, including Josephine Silone Yates, continued to argue for the universal value of Froebelian kindergarten programs, rather than as a means of providing specific benefits for children considered to be in need of compensatory education.47

One challenge to understanding efforts to implement industrial education programs during this time period is that they could be defined in a myriad of ways. As historian Roger Lane put it, “Speakers might sing one song while listeners nodded to their own beat; the phrase could suggest both moral and material ends, a self-help and technical mastery, old fashioned virtues and newfangled trades, the opportunity to rise in the world and the need for a skilled labor force.”48 For example, some industrial education advocates tended to align themselves more closely to an earlier innovation, manual training. Technically “manual training” referred to a specific system that was developed soon after the Civil War based on an interpretation of the views of educational philosophers Pestalozzi and Rousseau who argued that “education should do more than train the mind or the intellect.” As it was envisioned by its founders, manual training (not unlike kindergartens) was an educational model applicable to all ages and classes of students, a way to provide an
education for the whole child, body and mind, not a means of vocational training for poor and working class children.49

In actual practice, however, many educators and others interested in social welfare interventions used the terms “industrial training” and “manual training” interchangeably to refer to any form of learning that was active and practical in nature. As a result, by either name, the practices were most often implemented as a means of providing either moral or vocational training for poor and working class children, not (as was the case with the earliest kindergartens) because they were widely viewed as an exemplary educational innovation and therefore sought out by the wealthy for their own children as well. In the end, the form of industrial education that had the most lasting impact was viewed by its proponents as a replacement for classical education. In this form, industrial training (whether the emphasis was on practical skills or character education) was viewed as more appropriate for and more beneficial to those children who were more likely to work in factories than to own businesses or continue their academic education after grammar school.

It is important to note that in Philadelphia, White philanthropists and educators were not alone in their enthusiasm for this innovative pedagogical practice. Fannie Jackson Coppin, director of the Institute for Colored Youth (ICY) was one of those inspired by a pedagogical method that promised a perfect combination of intellectual and hands-on learning. In addition, given the fact that Black apprenticeship opportunities were rare, Coppin saw school-based industrial training as a means of technical skill development that might open new employment
opportunities for Black workers. In fact, soon after the closing of the Centennial, she had launched a campaign (against the wishes of her board) to add an industrial education department at ICY, a campaign supported, in part, by both Anna Hallowell and Theodore Starr. “The imperative need of industrial training for White youth is conceded on all hands,” wrote Hallowell and Coppin in a circular requesting funds for an Industrial Department at ICY. According to her biographer and in contrast to Hallowell, Fox and Wharton, however, Coppin had in mind a program that would function as a supplement to a rigorous academic curricula, not as a substitute for it and one that would provide opportunities for skilled employment, as well. This was not a goal of the Library’s programs.

Industrial training at the library began when men joined the board of managers in 1889 in order to oversee the evening work and “almost immediately” added a carpentry shop. According to a report provided by the Carpenter Shop Committee, the class was primarily a character formation project. Not a true apprenticeship program, the shop’s primary purpose was the education of the boys in “habits of industry,” an education that would improve them both morally and mentally so that they would have “the power to earn an honest livelihood.” Though the boys would learn a few useful skills, they would not complete the course with the skills of a “master workman.” This form of industrial education was similar to the goals and methods that were implemented across the South, most famously at Hampton and later at the Tuskegee Institute, as a means of educating African Americans. Even in the kindergarten at Hampton, domestic chores were common practice, replacing a focus on directed or free play.
For reasons of their own, children were interested in the industrial classes offered through the library. Though open to both Black and White youths, library managers found that the carpentry class and the cooking school classes to be of greater interest to the neighborhood’s Black youth than the library itself. Their participation in them demonstrates that they were much less inclined to be idle than library managers assumed.

The first class offered by the St. Mary Street library was a carpentry shop targeting boys aged ten to fourteen.\textsuperscript{55} Opened in the winter of 1888-89, participation required the payment of a fee (as was the case with library membership), the goal of which was to “make the boys self-respecting and appreciative.”\textsuperscript{56} Whether the fee increased self-respect or simply excluded the most needy, the boys’ willingness to pay it indicates that they, or their parents, found value in what was offered. For at least some of the boys, the fee was not easily attained. At times the boys did work for the Library volunteers in order to earn a portion of the needed ten-cent admission. On one occasion a boy short three cents after earning seven went away “almost in tears” when none of his friends would loan him the additional money needed to gain admission. “He was to earn his three cents by Thursday” the manager noted.\textsuperscript{57} The carpentry program began one night a week and as a result of the high level of interest quickly moved to four nights a week.

The carpentry course was probably appealing to boys on St. Mary Street for several reasons, not the least of which being that it provided an immediate opportunity to make some money. Though they were not being trained to be master
carpenters, participants not only learned how to make simple, useful items like shelves, benches and tables, but they were also able to sell them, keeping one third of the proceeds for themselves while returning the rest to the shop to cover the cost of materials and training. On at least one occasion, they were given a more challenging project. In the 1889-90 school year twelve boys were hired to make extensive repairs to the church building under the supervision of the carpenter.58

Again, from the carpenter’s perspective this was a project in character formation, but the boys likely viewed the opportunity differently.

The goals of the cooking class were similarly both practical and moral. Denying any conscious intention of preparing girls for paid domestic work as cooks, library mangers stated that they hoped the girls who attended would learn skills that would enable them to feed their families adequately with very little money. In addition, they hoped to shape their characters: “to help the girls to value independence, teach them thrift in the spending of money . . . something as to cleanliness, decent behavior towards each other and steadiness of purpose in a good direction.”59

Perhaps not surprisingly, the cooking class initially had much less appeal for the girls than did the carpentry class for boys. One of the central issues may have been that it was offered initially on a weeknight. Whether due to concerns for their safety or responsibilities at home, girls were less likely to be available on weeknights. Few, if any, girls had visited the reading room when it was open in the evenings either. In fact, several interested girls requested a Saturday class, which, once started, increased enrollment in the class. It is also possible that since
domestic work was one of the only jobs available to Black women in Philadelphia, some African American girls may have avoided the class because they viewed it as preparation for work they did not want to do, or as an implication that it was the only work they could do. Third, the cooking classes, unlike the carpentry shop, did not offer their participants the opportunity to earn money from their labors. Rather than selling the food they made as the boys did with their bookshelves and benches, the girls were required to purchase any items they made (at cost) in order to take them home. The possibility that income producing activities were valued by many of the girls is supported by the fact that the chance to earn income “scrubbing, washing windows, blackening stoves, etc.” (tasks similarly tied to domestic labor) inspired eighteen girls to join the “house-cleaning class,” more than twice the number of girls who had attended the weeknight cooking class on a good day.\textsuperscript{60}

\textit{Race and the Library}

Because they were popular with African American children and teens, the training classes were soon utilized as a recruitment tool specifically targeting Black youth. In 1889, only five years after opening, the Library’s annual report revealed a noticeable change in the racial composition of library members. The move from school hours to a Saturday morning program in 1884 had had an immediate impact on the racial composition of its clientele, bringing in more White children as members. Still, African American children remained in the majority for the first two years of the library’s existence. By 1889, no longer limiting hours to Saturdays only, the majority of the members were Jewish immigrants arriving in large numbers from Russia and other parts of Europe whom library managers viewed as “White.”\textsuperscript{61}
So many members were Jewish, in fact, that very few books were checked out on Jewish holidays.\textsuperscript{62} The trend continued the following year with more Black children leaving or failing to renew their membership while there were an increased number of applications from White children. The managers attributed some, but not all, of this shift to the changing demographic of the neighborhood as more African American families were pushed north and west by “foreigners.” Still, they were reportedly “baffled” by the change.\textsuperscript{63}

Highlighting the intersectivity of race and gender, a closer look at membership statistics for 1889 indicates that there may actually have been little decrease in the participation of Black girls. Clearly there were fewer Black boys in attendance, but it is not so clear that many African American girls were leaving the program. (Having no figures divided by race and gender for previous years it is impossible to make an exact comparison). Though the overall number of African American members in 1889 was smaller than that of White children, the report showed that African American girls were still well-represented. With 53 Black girls claiming membership, they comprised about one fourth of the total and slightly exceeded the 47 White girls; this fact was given little attention.\textsuperscript{64} Managers did notice, however, that the perceived change in racial demographics accompanied an increase in new members of higher social class standing (“from decent homes”) which “raise[ed] the atmosphere” of the library and made it “less of an effort to preserve order.”\textsuperscript{65} The report implied a cause and effect relationship in which fewer African American children resulted in an increase of children from “decent homes.” This statement is somewhat surprising given that, given limited housing options,
higher income African American families would have been more likely to remain in the neighborhood than White families with similar financial resources. Still, despite the fact that the managers equated the “raised atmosphere” with the decrease in Black members, Wharton and her associates did not view this decrease in African American participation as a positive one, nor did they accept the change as inevitable.

The St. Mary Street library was created to help the “more needy,” those “extremely ignorant, thriftless and vacillating . . . [who were] . . . unable to help themselves.”66 The majority of this group from the point of view of the library’s leaders (at least for Wharton), were African Americans, so their participation was essential to the goals of the organization. It was not true, as one Library report claimed, that “almost no volunteer work [was] done in the city” for Black Philadelphians.67 A wide range of self-help volunteer work was done by and for the African American community, but these efforts were generally under-resourced and less formally structured than those led by White volunteers.68 It would have been more accurate to state that White-led community work programs that targeted the needs of African American children and adults were by far the exception rather than the rule.

In 1890, based on their observations and concerns, library leaders took three steps to increase African American memberships. First, they stopped admitting new White members. Second, they went to visit the homes of former Black members and invited them to return. Third, they started two classes to address what they viewed as the needs and interests of African American children: the carpentry class for
Black boys and the cooking class for Black girls. They also added an advisory board that year which included a highly regarded African American educator, Fanny Jackson Coppin, director of the widely respected private high school, the Institute for Colored Youth.

Interestingly, racial segregation was used as a means of encouraging Black boys to make use of the carpentry shop. Started in 1888 the shop was opened once, then twice, then four nights a week. Initially all the all classes were racially integrated, and some children attended all four nights. The report implies, however, that Black boys’ participation began to decrease. Therefore, the managers set aside two nights a week for African American boys only. After this change, according to the Library’s annual report, boys from ten to fourteen “overflowed the carpenter shop.” A few years later, the tide had turned and by 1892 only African American boys were attending the carpentry classes, a situation that would cause later College Settlement leaders to limit Black participation in favor of opening space for Whites!

None of the children who moved in and out of the St. Mary Street Library left a record of their reasons for either staying or returning. However, the seventh annual report (1889), in which decreased African American participation was noted, provides evidence of one reason why African American boys, in particular, were less likely to remain members in good standing; namely, they received more attention than they wanted and were often in trouble. The report includes excerpts from Wharton’s daily notes in which “colored boys” were by far the group most often mentioned although they made up only 36 of 213 members in 1889, less than 17%.
Most, though not all, of the included comments focused on a description of some type of disruptive behavior.\textsuperscript{73} On February 2, for example, Wharton described a boy who,

came to the Library and making some confusion was put out. He returned several times and so is suspended for a month. He is small and very Black, and slips into the room without being noticed. He is a member of what is known as the ‘Black-fat Gang,’ and was arrested for theft a few months since. An interesting little fellow.\textsuperscript{74}

There is clearly some fondness in this description. However, placed in the context of her entries in other reports, it seems that neither this boy’s actions, nor those of other Black boys often went unnoticed. The following year the pattern in Wharton’s manager’s notes was the same. With one exception, all of the entries that referred to specific children, by name or description, referred to “colored” boys. The following year, the pattern in her notes was the same. These descriptions and others, though certainly not entirely negative even in describing what Wharton viewed as misbehavior, suggest that the behavior of Black boys was highly scrutinized and also that what they wanted to do was often deemed unacceptable by library volunteers.\textsuperscript{75} Unwanted attention and a lack of acceptance of the activities they deemed to be enjoyable in the space of the library, may well have contributed to the decision to stay away that many Black boys made during these years.

Though less racist than the majority of their contemporaries and willing to acknowledge class differences within the African American community, library managers remained ambivalent about the very children they sought to reach. In 1890, they described Black girls as “an idle class apparently devoid of almost all wholesome interests” when they were not inclined to sign up for cooking lessons.\textsuperscript{76}
In an introduction to a report chronicling the modest success of the cooking class in 1891 the writer reminded readers that, “No work done in St. Mary Street can justly be compared with that carried on among White children only, or with the respectable colored; it is only by comparing one year’s results with another’s that we can see what is gained.” In this instance work with poor White children was presented as more likely to bring about improvement than work with their Black counterparts, equating the potential of poor Whites as on par with that of “respectable” (middle class) African Americans.

Building on these assumptions regarding race-based inferiority, library managers attributed diminished Black participation primarily to the ways that White children’s presence served to highlight the inherent and obvious inferiority of Black children. The White children “…crowd out the colored,” a report explained; “The colored soon feel their inferiority and stay away.” Reports during these years do not reflect on the possibility that African American children were being mistreated, or that racially integrated spaces were rare in Philadelphia and interracial interactions often tense, or even dangerous for Black children. Certainly some Black children may have internalized others’ views and considered themselves inferior to Whites; however, it seems much more likely that invasive scrutiny of their actions, overt racial mistreatment and the ongoing challenges of poverty accounted for more of the missing children than a sense of their own race-based inferiority. The fact that many Black children would rejoin the library when they were specifically told that they were still welcome further supports this view.

Regardless of whether they understood exactly why Black children’s
attendance had decreased, the tactics they chose to address the problem were
effective. In 1890, for example, the library’s annual report stated that visits to Black
families had a positive impact on library memberships. Perhaps they were made to
feel uncomfortable by the White children themselves and knowing that those in
charge wanted them there (and would protect them if any threats were made) made
the library feel like a reasonably safe place for them again. For some of the children
and their parents, the fact that someone noticed their absence and invited them
back was likely a powerful motivating factor in rejoining. What is clear is that
manager’s varied efforts to engage African American children led to a significant
increase in membership for Black boys (from 36 in 1889 to 60 in 1890) and a small
increase in membership for Black girls (from 53 to 66). No numbers were provided
for 1891, but the report for that year again stated that White children were
“discouraged” from joining in an attempt to maintain more racially balanced
enrollments.

For a time, then, both children and the managers of the library were pleased
with these initial efforts to increase Black participation as well as early attempts to
provide industrial education. The children seemingly appreciated the chance to
learn new skills and earn some money, in addition to whatever enjoyment they got
out of having a place to go to and do something interesting with friends and
neighbors. The managers felt that important life skills were being learned as they
saw children expressing pride in their work and, in the case of the carpentry class,
improving their technical skills and successfully selling what they made; thereby
learning that hard work could have a financial benefit. These positive results likely
increased Library managers’ interest in extending their industrial training experiment beyond the reaches of the library and into the public schools.

**The Transformation of James Forten School**

In the late 1880s, enthusiasm for industrial education intersected with the Library managers’ increasing concerns about the need for “radical improvement” at nearby James Forten Elementary School. The managers of the Library, with active leadership from Anna Hallowell who was now a school board member, began an energetic and coercive campaign to transform Forten School into a place that would better support their goal of creating moral, well-behaved children who would eventually be financially self-supporting American citizens. They started by pressuring the Board of Education to take radical steps not only towards its general improvement, but also towards its transformation into Philadelphia’s first primary-level industrial training school.\(^8^1\)

James Forten was one of the city’s oldest “colored” schools (all public schools in Philadelphia were officially racially segregated until 1881) and it had a distinguished history. The school’s earliest leader, James M. Bird, though White, was committed to providing high quality education and as a result Forten School could claim some esteemed graduates including the city’s first, and for many years only, Black principal, Jacob White. This legacy was short-lived however. Never given the support provided to White public schools, which were not well-funded themselves, Forten School struggled to provide high quality instruction for its students. Financial challenges were compounded by the assignment of an all-White corps of teachers of questionable caliber and commitment. According to the testimony of
many Black families, the White teachers assigned to the school in the late nineteenth century were not the district’s top performers. Many Black Philadelphians believed that these teachers often neglected or even disliked their students. Despite ongoing protests from the city’s Black leaders, throughout the late nineteenth century, Fifth Ward leaders refused to hire any Black teachers, regardless of qualifications. As a result of these concerns and the growing number of highly qualified Black teachers who could not get jobs in Philadelphia, African Americans regularly argued that Black teachers should be hired to teach the Black students at James Forten, yet with little result.82

The student body changed throughout the 1880s as well. During this time period, most of the important Black-led institutions and businesses (with the notable exception of Mother Bethel83) left the area. More financially stable Black families moved westward also, another likely cause for Forten’s decreasing attendance numbers.84 Furthermore, in June of 1881 a Pennsylvania state law was passed outlawing Philadelphia’s long pattern of racial segregation in the public schools. This fact would have little impact on de facto racial segregation, but that did provide Black families with the possibility of other options in neighborhoods that were farther away from the few Black public schools that were available. Much truancy was blamed on children’s lack of proper or warm clothing, rather than their lack of interest.85 Undoubtedly due to a combination of these issues, by the late nineteenth century attendance at Forten was “ragged.”86

The Library managers were not the first to notice that Forten School could use some improvement. Black leaders had expressed concerns about the School
well before Wharton and her colleagues arrived. In 1881 a brief admonishment published in the *Christian Recorder* challenged parents of students attending the school to “walk down Pine Street a little after 12 o’clock” to view the “rude and heathenish conduct of their offspring.” “Taking the conduct of the children of that school upon its dismissal [sic] as a whole, a worse bred lot were never brought together under one roof.”

The Black community also expressed frustration over the fact that no Forten students were taking the examinations needed to attend high school, though students from Jacob White’s school, Vaux, and ICY had gained admission to the city’s esteemed public high schools and normal (teacher training) schools on several occasions. Class biases likely played a role in this assessment of the student body, but it was certainly similar to the views of the library managers. Forten School, was not serving its students well.

Ironically, library managers began their campaign at a time a significant change had occurred that gave Black leaders some hope for their failing school. Ten years after he first submitted his application, Thomas H. Murray, valedictorian of his ICY class and a highly respected and experienced teacher, was hired as principal of James Forten School. What Thomas Murray inherited in 1888 was by all accounts a mess, but he was given little opportunity to demonstrate his ability to improve the neglected school. Just a few months after he was hired, the all-White Board, citing falling attendance, stripped away the upper grades of the school and lowered Murray’s salary. Next, they appointed a committee to investigate the “gross immorality” at the school, an allegation that “amounted to the use of bad language by children growing up in the slums nearby.” By 1890 Murray had been fired.
Hannah Fox was put in his place as principal at almost double Murray's salary and the school was transformed into the James Forten Manual Training School. From the Library leaders' perspectives this transformation was a great victory. The school had been an enemy and was now a friend. “An enemy, persistently aggressive for six years, has been subdued; the riotous James Forten school is now a primary industrial school under good management,” they exclaimed. “The appeal of our committee to the Board of Education has changed a wretched, ill-governed school into one which promises to be a great centre [sic] of good for the neighborhood.” Black leaders strongly disagreed. Not only had they lost an esteemed Black educational leader, amidst organized protests on behalf of the city's leading Black politicians, but they were not pleased with the new industrial curriculum.

African Americans were not against industrial education in all forms, but the form taken at James Forten was not the type of training most African Americans viewed as valuable. As Lane describes it, “Blacks were enthusiastic about their own visions of industrial education, but these visions did not involve education in cooking and sewing from the first grade onward, with the implication that their children were doomed to a life of domestic service.” The experiment at Forten School was just the beginning of what W. E. B. DuBois would refer to later (in the July 1915 issue of The Crisis) as the “forcing” of industrial education on Black children, an action he deemed “a crime against childhood for which any nation should be ashamed.”

As it turned out, many Black children (with support or encouragement from
their parents) chose not to participate in the industrial education experiment at James Forten School. Murray himself "spent his last bitter days in office signing transfer slips, encouraging students to leave the school and present themselves elsewhere . . ."96 As Black students transferred out of the school, Fox began expanding admission to immigrants, especially the growing number of Jews who were moving into the neighborhood surrounding the school.97 By 1895 the school was only 22% Black (and diminishing) and parents, mostly Russian Jews, were starting to complain about the non-academic curriculum even as Philadelphia’s superintendent advocated expanding the “cookery department” and adding lessons in housework.98

Paul Violas has argued that industrial education was one of many educational efforts designed to prepare working class children for, and limit them to, a working class life.99 This goal is certainly present in the industrial education programs that were founded in the St. Mary Street neighborhood. Though not all industrial training advocates, and certainly not all those who advocated manual training, viewed these innovations as targeting the needs of poor and working class children exclusively, Anna Hallowell, Susan Wharton, Hannah Fox and their colleagues seemed to be among those whose vision of industrial training was closely tied to a type of practical and moral education that it was assumed middle class children would not need. Evidence suggests that they, and others, genuinely considered these methods to be promising ones, but the fact that Forten School served Black children primarily and was (only recently) headed by a Black principal, were likely also factors that contributed to the school board’s decision to make it the location
for its experiment in industrial education.

The reasons why Wharton, Fox and their colleagues chose to work against, rather than with, Thomas Murray are unclear. Perhaps their choices emanated primarily from their enthusiasm for industrial education as a means of training poor and working class children, an enthusiasm they shared with Fannie Jackson Coppin, though Coppin’s vision of industrial education differed in some significant ways from that of her White colleagues. Perhaps Murray was ineffective, though it seems they would have had little opportunity to evaluate his skills given that he was hired in 1888, the year they began their campaign to gain control of the school, and had been replaced by 1890. Perhaps, at a time when men dominated the leadership of Philadelphia’s schools, they were seeking a place of power and influence where they could, as women, most successfully attain it — at a historically Black school with a newly appointed Black leader whose placement in the position many White educators and ward leaders resented, making him more vulnerable than other school administrators. Very possibly, they were genuinely concerned by the behavior and language of the children they observed coming from Forten School to the library and thought they could do a more effective job of shaping these students into more desirable and potentially successful citizens than Murray could. Whatever their reasons, these women literally shifted power away from a Black leader, and resources away from Black children, even as some of them (Wharton at least) were consciously trying to help the African American community specifically.

The actions of these dedicated reformers demonstrate the limits of their commitment to, and respect for, African American leaders. Despite the fact that they
knew and respected Fannie Jackson Coppin and Rev. Henry Phillips, ultimately they still did not seem to trust Black leadership. Coppin’s biographer noted, for example, that when ICY’s board of managers hired Hannah Fox to evaluate its academic program in 1887 she recommended “improvements” that seemed designed to eliminate many of the unique strengths of the institute, requiring ICY teachers to model their practices on those of White-led schools rather than recognizing the possibility that ICY might be a model for the much less successful White-led public school programs. Still, it should be noted that these White educators were women who were not yet able to vote and who, like the African American man they displaced, had very limited access to power, position and paid employment. Had they sided with Murray, they quite possibly would have lost the opportunity to influence the school and to implement a new pedagogical practice they believed might benefit Philadelphia’s children. Still, their choices leave open questions about the results that might have been possible if these women had brought their substantial power and money into the school without taking over the leadership of it.

Specific effects of this change on African American children are not available in the historical record, but there are several likely effects. A Black boy who had been attending Forten School in 1890 would have lost his Black principal, not only a person likely to invest in his education, but a symbol of what he might become. A Black girl who had attended Forten would likely have lost many of her classmates and friends either because she left the school or because they did. If she did leave the school she would have ended up in a more hostile school environment, but
might also have had access to better resources. In addition, the access to cross-class relationships that poor Black children might have had the chance to develop at school would likely have diminished. Prior to its reclassification as an industrial school, James Forten probably still attracted some middle class Black children from other neighborhoods whose families did not want them to attend a predominantly White school. These children would not have been likely to stay on for a primarily industrial education.

The Black boy who stayed at Forten would have noticed improvements in his school building and supplies, but he would also have a principal, Hannah Fox, whose view of African Americans was generally as expressed in a later College Settlement report stating that they are "too inconsequent to be relied upon, even in matters of their own pleasure" and whose primary goal was that "every boy will eventually become a first class cook, with the ability to make his own shirt." It was a transformation of leadership that provided little benefit to St. Mary Street's Black children and families; neither would the library managers' next venture benefit the neighborhood’s African American community to any great extent. In fact, the establishment of the Philadelphia College Settlement would mean, for many of them, that they would lose, not only access to services, but their homes as well.

The Philadelphia College Settlement and Starr Garden

April 1, 1892 brought, at the invitation of the Library’s managers, the establishment of the Philadelphia College Settlement at 617 St. Mary Street, adjacent to Starr Park. Hannah Fox purchased and renovated a house for the purpose and the St. Mary Street Library Association secured the continued use of the Stuart
Memorial Church and Hall for the next two years. Starr Garden Park was situated between these two properties. From its inception the Philadelphia Settlement was a part of the College Settlements Association (CSA) which had begun two years prior, in 1890, of which Wharton was an executive officer.

Part of a broader movement to establish social settlements (one of the most well-known being Jane Addams’ Hull House in Chicago), the first College Settlement was organized by four Smith alumni in 1887. They went on to open a settlement in New York in 1889. Social Settlement workers, mainly college-educated (White) women, sought to bring social change by moving into the neighborhoods of the poor, developing relationships, and meeting the needs of the community through a variety of social programs. Social Settlements were residential houses in which several reformers would live as they sought both to understand and to meet the needs of a poor and working class community. As described in a Philadelphia College Settlement report the establishment of a women’s settlement house involved “the placing of a real home, simple and attractive, in a neighborhood where true homes are rare.” They were also committed to the importance of research as a means of understanding and addressing social problems. Thus, settlement workers not only lived in these neighborhoods, but also used their time there to study the lives of the poor in an attempt to find long term solutions. In addition, they believed that settlement residents would themselves be educated in the process.

The St. Mary Street Settlement was the second house founded under the auspices of the College Settlement Association. It was followed soon after by one in
Boston. Hannah Fox, who wrote the Philadelphia Settlement’s first report, described the Philadelphia location, and diverse population, in detail. Fox noted that Philadelphia’s Settlement was very different from the CSA’s first settlement in New York in that it was located in a neighborhood with a large African American population and that the population served was very near the absolute bottom of the economic scale.

The Settlement House in Philadelphia is situated on St. Mary street [sic], one of Philadelphia’s many small streets . . . St. Mary street is two blocks in length; on one side of it is the shopping street of the poor people; on the other, lodging houses and small stores of the negro population, while the intersecting streets are populated by German Jews and the representatives of many peoples who form a mixed population with no prevailing elements. All of these streets are crossed and re-crossed with a net-work [sic] of alleys, the houses in which are small and occupied by negroes.108

As has been discussed by multiple scholars, settlement houses, not unlike many other progressive reforms rarely served African Americans.109 Throughout the Progressive Era settlement houses tended to be located in working class immigrant communities. It is likely that the additional challenges posed by work with the population of St. Mary Street contributed to the relatively short duration of the College Settlement in this neighborhood.

From 1892 until their departure for a “better” neighborhood in 1899, the Philadelphia College Settlement provided the umbrella under which the already established St. Mary Street Library programs now functioned. These programs included the library itself, the cooking school, the carpentry shop, a stamp saving program (following the pattern started in the Progressive Workingmen’s Club), the kindergarten and a dispensary. Services continued to expand as both residents and the library’s “friendly visitors” noticed more needs in the community. In 1893 a
Cooperative Coal Club was added as a means of both encouraging the poor to save for the cost of winter coal and also as a vehicle for providing substantial savings on high quality coal often not available to the poor and a Kitchen and Coffee House, was founded to provide high quality foods at low cost and nutritional education as well. In 1894 the library was turned over to the city and renamed the College Settlement Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia. In 1895, the kitchen was expanded and relocated at 700 Lombard Street in a building that Theodore Starr had originally purchased in 1880.110

In addition to this wide variety of programs, College Settlement residents quickly expanded the social, educational and recreational aspect of the work. While there, they supported a variety of clubs and social events, which closely followed patterns established by other social settlements including Jane Addams’ Hull House in Chicago. Settlement delegates spoke at conferences, developed connections with other agencies, and were active in the broader context of reform and politics in Philadelphia.111 The most significant and lasting of the Settlement’s efforts in relation to St. Mary Street, one that was also important to playground development in Philadelphia, was their active and successful campaign for the expansion of Starr Park.

Expanding the Park

The outdoor play space available at Starr Garden Park had been of little interest to library volunteers, despite the fact that the Library was housed in buildings on either side of the park. Contrasting sharply with later play movement efforts, library activities, even when they expanded beyond the provision of books
to more active play, took place inside. Neither was the provision of a connection with nature, important to both parks movement and kindergarten advocates, central to the Library founders’ plans. No mention of Starr Garden appeared in any of the St. Mary Street annual reports until 1891, the seventh and last report produced by the Library prior to its placement under the auspices of the College Settlement.\textsuperscript{112} Even then, like play-focused activities, the Park was described as useful primarily because of its ability to attract people to a space where they might come into contact with beneficial influences. “The garden, being on two sides of the building, is a great advantage in many ways, and with music every week during two months of the summer, it has been a wholesome attraction in the neighborhood” the report stated.\textsuperscript{113}

But settlement workers believed strongly that physical environments had to be changed to facilitate social and moral change. Therefore it is not surprising that Philadelphia College Settlement residents began actively campaigning for the expansion of Starr Park early in their tenure. By 1893 they had successfully convinced City Councils to condemn the properties adjoining Starr Park in order to create a larger playground/park.\textsuperscript{114} By 1895 City Councils had appropriated $5,000 for the expansion of Starr Garden Park and the work began in early summer with the destruction of several buildings. At that time the plan was to leave only the College Settlement Buildings and “their hall which is adjacent.”\textsuperscript{115} By September, 1895, the lot was filled with “heaps of ruins.”\textsuperscript{116}

In presenting their plans to the public, Settlement publications tied their efforts to expand the park directly to Theodore Starr’s interest in play and children’s
happiness, claiming that Starr had created the park based on his belief that “boys have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness [which is] difficult when one is obliged to keep one eye on his game and one on a possible policeman around the corner.” It was a vision that implied both that children should play and that they could not play in city streets. Settlement publications from 1895 were filled with glowing visions of their future plans for the space, part of which would be laid out as a park and part as a playground. In April the College Settlement News described their initial hopes for the square which would be laid as both park and playground, with the pleasure of children a key potential benefit:

It is hoped that when the square is complete, one half of it will be laid out as a Park, with grass, trees, graveled walks and benches, where women may sit with their babies and little children may run and play in safety. The other half, we hope, may be set aside as a playground. In this case it would be surrounded by a fence with a high wire netting. There would be no danger then to windows or passers by from stray balls and all could look in to see the fun. Swings and seesaws would doubtless be a feature.

There will be no end to the good times the boys and girls too will have in the new Starr Garden.

As had been the case with the original Starr Park, this expanded design called for both space for play and more park-like features rather than one or the other.

Despite initial delays, hopes were still running high at the end of 1895. The Settlement’s report proclaimed at that point that “… [I]f you visit us next summer you will be unable to recognize this clean, asphalted, stone-walked square.” The work was halted, however, due, at least in part, to protests by some of the property owners who did not feel adequately compensated. No further improvements were made for three years, during which time the block was left in a much worse state than before, with large holes in the ground where the buildings had been.
In some ways, for back room tenants, the additional air and light certainly would have had some benefits. Overall, though, the situation on the block from 1895-1898 was rather dismal. In 1896 the owners of the property, the City Parks Association (not to be confused with the city itself) stated that they could not make any more improvements to Starr Garden Park “due to the barrenness of the soil.”

In 1897 the March edition of the College Settlement News made reference to additional condemnation proceedings ending with the question “Then may we venture to hope something will be done towards improvements?”

Despite these difficulties, during these years the original, smaller Starr Garden Park was still in use for summer concerts and various play activities. A sandbox was added in 1896. In July 1897 the News stated that, “The gift of eight barrels of genuine seashore sand and a bag of large shells, from Miss L. G. Davis, is much appreciated by our kindergarten children and others of our neighbors whose play-place is Starr Garden.” Summer concerts continued and in at least one case children contributed to the improvement of the space as well. In June 1897 the Settlement’s junior baseball club purchased “a jumping apparatus and quiots” for use in the Starr Garden.

Though the city had still done little to improve the lot, in 1898 the Culture Extension League funded the establishment of a more formal summer playground on the site by enclosing part of the “vacant square” with a fence after which it was equipped with “swings, see-saws, a tent and sand piles, books, soap-bubble pipes and dolls.” The Settlement provided a kindergartener and a caretaker “to steady the children and to organize their play and athletics.” The playground was used by
children of varied ages. “Little ones” came in the morning when it was cooler (most likely often with older girls as caretakers) and boys played baseball there in the hot afternoons. Occasional instruction in gymnastics was provided by volunteers. Medical inspections of the children were performed daily and the season closed with a field day at which “There were exercises and sports by the children, and a ball game by the older boys.” Having found the playground to be one of their “most valuable features,” headworker Anna Davies wrote that she hoped that they “might never spend another summer without [the playground’s] presence.” In 1899, due to lack of funds, the College Settlement could only manage a small summer playground, too small for baseball. This factor reportedly caused the older boys to deem it a “failure,” but its regular use by several hundred mothers, sisters and babies caused Miss Davies to consider it to be a success.

The first mention of the Settlement house being included in the demolition plans appeared in their annual report for 1898.

The Settlement, in cooperating with various other agencies to secure this open space for its neighborhood was literally cutting the ground from under its own feet; for to vacate its premises is the next step required of it in the interest of the improvement.

It is not entirely clear whether this change of plans was a casualty of city politics, or whether, by 1898, it was College Settlement leaders who had decided that they no longer wanted to stay. What is certain is that in 1899, the College Settlement Resident House was demolished by the city, along with Stuart Memorial Hall, in the final clearing of the block that would become Starr Garden Playground.

Earlier Settlement publications had proposed glowing plans for Starr Garden with no mention of the possibility that they would leave the area, providing
evidence that their initial plan was to stay. It seems likely that moving became their intention as their disillusionment with the neighborhood increased. In any case, Settlement reports contain no indication that they made any concerted efforts to stay. They did not, for example, cite the success of the playground work they conducted during the summer of 1899 to argue that they should be permitted to stay in their current location. Instead, Davies expressed their hope that they could procure for their new home a building located in a playground, the very situation that it appears they had voluntarily given up on St. Mary Street.133

Some of the houses that were condemned and demolished to make way for Starr Park were houses of prostitution ("rookeries") or gambling establishments, but many were tenements that housed both adults and children.134  African Americans were disproportionately represented among those who lost their homes in the expansion of Starr Park. Those who were displaced included many children whose level of participation at the library dropped significantly after the demolition, most of which was completed between 1893-1895. Given a high level of housing discrimination in Philadelphia, few African American families were likely to have landed in homes that provided more, or even equal, access to fresh air, kindergarten education or outdoor play space.135 Though the displacement of African American, and other, families does not seem to be an intended outcome of the park’s expansion, neither was there any discussion regarding the negative consequences this “improvement” might have for those who lost their homes.

African Americans and the Settlement.

According to the first annual report of the “St. Mary Street College Settlement
of Philadelphia,” the invitation given to the College Settlement to try out their methods in Philadelphia was not “on account of failure” on the part of the work of the Library and its methods, but because the goals of the College Settlement closely aligned with those of the Library.\textsuperscript{136} Though in some ways the goals of the Library and Settlement were similar—both sought to prevent crime and poverty through activities meant to promote hard work and moral behavior — it was perhaps more important that the connection offered the Library the possibility of additional workers, much needed as the Library’s programs grew. Not only would Settlement workers reduce the load carried by Library volunteers, but also they would provide greater consistency, by not only working, but also living in the neighborhood. Wharton might have wished at a later point that she had paid more attention to differences in the two organizations’ goals, as they would grow in importance over time. One of the most significant of these differences centered on the place of African Americans in each organizations’ goals.

Philadelphia’s College Settlement was unique both because it was located in a neighborhood with a large African American population and due to the fact that the population it served was very near the absolute bottom of the economic scale.\textsuperscript{137} Progressive Era settlement houses tended to be located in working class immigrant communities. As Hannah Fox described it, “the situation offered differed from the New York situation in being on a side street in a shiftless neighborhood among a less provident class of people, most of them being colored.”\textsuperscript{138} Head worker Helena S. Dudley gave a similar description: “The population of St. Mary Street is made up chiefly of the most shiftless element of the colored people with an ever increasing
sprinkling of Russian and German Jews” she wrote. Social settlement work typically focused on the importance of Americanizing White immigrants rather than developing Black youth; thus, the presence of African American residents was not generally viewed as beneficial by settlement workers. This focus on Americanization stood in sharp contrast to Wharton’s goal of actively addressing the challenges Black communities faced.

Throughout the 1890s, as the Settlement grew in size and scope, Black children moved from a place of central prominence in the goals of the organization to one of decreased importance. After several years of focused efforts to preserve African American participation, the Library began admitting new White members once under Settlement leadership. By 1893 White members already slightly exceeded Black members (91 to 73) and that same year African Americans, mostly “from the immediate neighborhood,” made up the majority of those served by the resident physician. By 1894 only 15 African American children were “members in good standing” in comparison to 100 White children. When White boys requested access to carpentry classes previously attended by African American boys, the Settlement cancelled two sessions of classes for Black children rather than racially integrating the programs or adding additional classes. By 1899, the Settlement’s kindergarten program served only White children.

Still, Black children created clubs and made use of many of the programs offered by the Settlement during these years. Though reports did not consistently describe the members of clubs and classes in racial terms, there were several that were racially segregated, some just for African American children and some for
White children. As late as 1899, just prior to the Settlement’s move, one club, the Rosebud Club, was made up of African American girls who did gymnastics, sang and were preparing a play with the support of Settlement workers. African American boys were among those who regularly made use of the reading room opened three nights a week.\textsuperscript{143}

It is also important to note, however, that neither the Library managers nor the College Settlement Association initially avoided establishing the Settlement in this racially mixed neighborhood in collaboration with institutions that had previously served Black Philadelphians exclusively. Demonstrating how unusual interracial interactions were for the White college women who came and the expected audience for their reports, a section on the Settlement’s summer work published in 1892 included a question that the author thought a reader might ask, “Do you really sit at able with those kinky-headed little savages?” The author, summer resident Jean Loomis, answered “I grant the social problem and yet I answer that for us, perhaps, we have no greater opportunity than just here. We do not aim at immediate great reforms; we are content to work slowly with small beginnings, and you would be surprised to see how soon your ‘little savages’ learn civilized ways . . . .”\textsuperscript{144} These were women of their time and context, certainly, but they cross racial boundaries in ways that few others did.

Throughout the years when the Settlement existed on St. Mary Street, Susan Wharton retained her commitment to African Americans. Though she did not consider African Americans, and in particular the African American residents of St. Mary Street, to be equal in social status or in potential to their White counterparts,
she did see them as capable of change and worthy of assistance and care.

Furthermore, she recognized that, given widespread patterns of racial exclusion in Philadelphia, African American children had much more limited access to services and supports that might enable them to improve their living conditions and future prospects than did their White counterparts. Reports written by Wharton during this time period as well as years later consistently emphasized the humanity and potential of Black Americans, highlighting the unjust circumstances they faced as they sought to better themselves and their lives.

Though she stopped short of putting Black leaders in places of real power and control, Wharton held regular inter-racial meetings in her home in which she consulted with African American leaders like Fanny Coppin and Rev. Henry Phillips regarding potential interventions addressing the problems of Black Philadelphians. In 1895 she wrote social settlement leader Jane Addams asking for recommendations for a scholar who might be interested in studying “the negro problem” in Philadelphia, then convinced the Settlement leaders and faculty at the University of Pennsylvania to invite sociologist W. E. B. DuBois to conduct the study. As a result of her efforts, DuBois spent a year in a Settlement-owned apartment while he conducted his research. Thus, almost in spite of itself, the Philadelphia College Settlement was in some sense responsible for one of the most groundbreaking sociological studies of Black life ever conducted, The Philadelphia Negro.

During the 1890s the White population in the 5th ward decreased while the Black population increased due to growing Black migration from the Southern
These changes brought new challenges, not only for White Settlement workers, but for Philadelphia's more established Black families as well, many of whom began to move out of the St. Mary Street district, locating west of 7th street. According to the July 1897 issue of the Philadelphia Settlement's News by that date most of the more “respectable” Black families had moved. Wharton disagreed. A Coal Club report the previous year emphasized instead that many back courts still hid “a large number of self-respecting people.”

Beginning in 1897, when the Committee of the Star Kitchen separated formally from the College Settlement, Settlement reports contain hints of a growing tension between Wharton and other Settlement leaders. Since the time when the College Settlement was established, the social and educational services of St. Mary Street Library, including the Star Kitchen, had operated as a group of committees under the supervision of the Settlement. Though the official explanation of the change stated that it was “due to the increased demands on the Settlement workers,” the Kitchen's first independent report hinted that thoughts of a move to a new neighborhood were brewing. “People have asked,” Wharton wrote, "Why not move the Kitchen among a less ignorant and unfortunate class?” Wharton provided a response based in part on a quotation from Columbia College President Seth Low that seemed to reiterate her commitment to African Americans: “No people can afford to neglect even a residuum of its population whether they are White or Black . . . Count nothing valueless in the world about you or in the population in your midst.” Wharton remained on the executive committee of all the programs transferred to the Kitchen Committee, which included the Coal Club,
now serving African Americans exclusively. Later events confirm that Wharton was preparing to prevent the Settlement from taking from the neighborhood the programs that she had built.

In September 1899 the Philadelphia College Settlement moved to a new site about a mile east of their original location. Though Settlement reports claimed that they had to vacate their buildings for the greater good of the neighborhood and did not openly cite the presence of African Americans as a factor in their decision, there seemed to be some intentionality in their choice to move to a location “with a more varied population, Jewish, Italian, German and English-speaking people of foreign birth, as well as a considerable admixture of Americans.” They claimed that the move brought them close to “the centre [sic] of our old constituency” which may have been true in the case of White immigrants who tended to move south and east after entering the city near St. Mary Street. However, if the Settlement’s African American constituency was considered the moved did not improve the Settlement’s proximity to their previous clientele, since according to their own accounts, African Americans who left St. Mary Street had mostly moved west.

Susan Wharton clearly believed that the Settlement’s decision was directly tied to the racial make-up of the population around Starr Garden. Not yet ready to give up on the African American children and families who still lived in and around Starr Garden, she disconnected the Kitchen and Coal Club completely from the Settlement and started work to form a new library and kindergarten under the auspices of the Starr Centre. As a result, she was largely responsible for protecting some level of access to a variety of social services for the African American residents
of St. Mary Street. In a very thinly veiled critique presented in the first annual report of the Starr Centre she wrote, “At Seventh and Lombard Streets the presence of the negro element has been dwelt upon at great length as a deteriorating, impossible one to cope with. We wish to enter a strong protest against this view of the situation.”

**Conclusion**

The broad exclusion of African Americans by Progressive Era reformers has been described by other scholars as one of the movement’s greatest failures. Race scholar Beverly Tatum author of *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* has argued that in the United States racism’s forces are so intertwined with cultural practices and social institutions that to do nothing to directly address racist practices is to extend racism’s reach and influence. She likens non-intervention to the act of standing still on a moving walkway or an escalator that is heading in the direction of increased racial exclusion and injustice; you may arrive more slowly at the destination than if you walked with the force of motion, but unless you walk against it you will head in the direction it is going without any effort to do so. This image seems well suited to the story of the Philadelphia College Settlement’s virtual abandonment of African American children by the end of the nineteenth century. There is little to indicate that the women of the College Settlement had as a primary goal of their work the increased exclusion of African Americans from their programs. However, there is no evidence that they sought actively to avoid following this trend either. As a result, they participated in the institutionalization of racism in both the settlement movement and the play
movement as they developed in Philadelphia.

Settlement historian Allan Davis argued that settlement workers were generally less overtly racist than their counterparts. In the case of Philadelphia’s College Settlement this observation seems to be reasonably accurate. Several of its founders were White Quakers in families that had been active in abolitionist work and the Settlement made use of a space that had been used for African American mission work for decades. However, not unlike Chicago’s settlement workers who were the focus of Thomas Philpott’s study *The Slum and the Ghetto*, the women of Philadelphia’s College Settlement helped to draw and hold the “color line” rather than overcoming it. Even Wharton participated in the disempowerment of the first Black principal of nearby James Forten School who might well have been a valuable partner in her efforts to address the challenges faced by African American children and families living in the St. Mary Street neighborhood had he been supported rather than undermined by their attempts to wrest control of the school from the hands Fifth Ward officials.

The expansion of services that occurred from 1884-1899 as the St. Mary Street Library and was transformed into the Philadelphia College Settlement, the “upgrading” of the nearby James Forten School, and the extension of the boundaries of the original Starr Garden did not benefit all children equally. By the end of the nineteenth century the neighborhood’s African American children and families as a whole had lost much of their access to programs and spaces that were originally established primarily for their benefit, programs and places that, despite their paternalistic foundations, were genuinely helpful to many poor families. The losses
were not absolute, but they were significant. In the end, the expansion of Starr Park through the destruction of the old Stuart Church, originally intended to take place when the services provided in the building were no longer needed, provided a convenient way for Settlement workers to essentially give up on Philadelphia’s neediest Black residents and to focus their efforts on work with White, European immigrants. In doing so their work also became more closely aligned with the direction of the nascent playground movement from which African Americans were largely excluded. The story of the movement’s beginnings in Philadelphia is the subject of the next chapter.

In addition, however, Susan Wharton’s story demonstrates that Black children were not broadly ignored or excluded from the programs and spaces that formed the foundation of what would later become Philadelphia’s first model recreation park. Following in the footsteps of Starr, Stuart and Whitall, Wharton enacted an intentionality of purpose that had the needs of Philadelphia’s poorest African Americans at its core. Through her consistency in and dedication to meeting the needs of the Black community in Philadelphia, Wharton would ultimately have a significant impact on the access that Philadelphia’s African Americans had to play and play spaces in the nineteenth and early twentieth century despite the fact that she was only tangentially interested in the purposes of play. Her story will continue in Part II, but first, the following chapter will step back somewhat from the very local view of these few blocks in order to describe how the actions taken by Wharton and the leaders of the College Settlement Association are situated within the context of a local play movement that was just beginning to take shape during
this same time period.
CHAPTER 3

Playing to Beat the Streets:

Establishing a Play Movement in Philadelphia (1888-1900)

Introduction

The Philadelphia College Settlement’s experiments establishing summer playgrounds in 1898 and 1899 along with their campaign to expand and restructure Starr Park were not without precedent, nor were they performed in isolation. By 1898 Boston, New York, and Providence, Rhode Island, all had publicly accessible playgrounds (privately funded) and playgrounds in several other cities were in the planning stages.¹ Within Philadelphia from 1888 to 1900, playground production was supported by an increasing number of philanthropic organizations and individuals, though there is little evidence to suggest that African American leaders were among those who participated in play and playground advocacy. As was common in cities across the nation, no one entity or individual led Philadelphia’s play advocacy efforts at this stage, but there was a growing sense among play and playground advocates that they were, in fact, leaders in a new social reform movement, the playground movement.

Though some earlier kindergarten advocates had introduced the idea of play as a “need” and a “right” of childhood, it was in the late nineteenth century that play advocates began to present the opportunity to play as essential to child development, a need that many urban children could not exercise.² These views were supported by increasingly popular evolutionary theories of development that presented childhood as a distinct phase of life, qualitatively different from
adulthood, within which play was understood as essential to developmental processes. Practical challenges raised by the impact of crowded, unsanitary living conditions, and increasingly busy streets, on which children, especially boys, played among trolley lines and piles of trash were powerful motivators for playground development as well.

Still, across the nation, the play movement of the nineteenth century was “united,” insofar as it was united at all, by rather vague goals and methods. Though virtually all nineteenth-century playground advocates focused on gaining public support and public space for children’s play, they did not all have the same kind of spaces, programs, purposes or leaders in mind. Even the very basic boundary lines between play and work were not yet clear. Like the kindergarten advocates before them, many play advocates in Philadelphia and elsewhere viewed work, physical training and industrial education as closely connected to their understanding of play and its purposes. Others, more connected to the Romantic views of nature that motivated parks movement participants, continued to focus on the importance of natural play environments. Still others began to emphasize play and its purposes in promoting physical health. Some focused on the importance of play for young children. Others primarily advocated for athletic opportunities for school-aged and adolescent boys. Later in the twentieth century these varied purposes and definitions would develop into a wide variety of distinctly defined applications including camping, physical education classes, community recreation programs, vocational education and organized youth sports. A few of these would become dominant in the twentieth century play movement, but these divisions had not yet
been made prior to 1900.†

In anticipation of my later discussion of the twentieth century movement, in this chapter I tell the story of the leaders and then the development of several dynamic sites of playground production in Philadelphia in the last decade of the nineteenth century, expanding the view of play and playground advocacy beyond the boundaries of the neighborhood of Starr Garden that was the subject of chapters one and two. Most prolific were the Board of Education’s summer playgrounds. Closely tied to the child-saving efforts of free kindergarten advocates and women’s philanthropic organizations, these playgrounds were viewed as compensatory spaces designed to address other social and economic deficits. Located primarily in crowded urban neighborhoods, they expanded the field of meaningful work available to women, especially kindergarteners, and solidified the provision of play as a responsibility of the public schools and a place that might in some way compensate for the difficult environments in which many urban children lived.

Next, an examination of the forces at work at the sites of a failed attempt to establish exemplary playgrounds at Dickinson Square Park, reveals the power of local politics and public opinion in shaping the processes (and the timeline) of private playground production in Philadelphia as advocates sought to shift responsibility for play to the city government. In addition, a comparison of the Dickinson Square and the Children’s Playground and Playhouse which was established in Fairmount Park in 1899 sheds light on how location and funding could impact playground production, for better or worse.

Situated somewhat on the sidelines of much of Philadelphia’s playground
advocacy efforts, both literally and figuratively, is the Children’s Playground and Playhouse (Smith Playground). Its role in the development of play and play space in Philadelphia is significant in part because of its liminal position in the movement. In Philadelphia, it would be, for example, the only sizeable playground at which a focus on the play of young children would be preserved indefinitely. In 1899, however, it was not viewed as being quite as far removed from other playground work as it would be in later years. By far Philadelphia’s most impressive built space designed for play when it opened in 1899, the Children’s Playground was closely tied to Romantic notions of nature, play and childhood. Children from all classes and many neighborhoods participated in free play activities designed to promote the experience of pleasure, as well as to provide a break from the noise, dirt and heat of urban life.

Finally, given that part of the purpose of this study is to reintegrate African Americans into play movement history, I attempt in this chapter to understand the absence of African American participants in Philadelphia’s most visible late-nineteenth-century play advocacy efforts. Though their children were the primary targets of some playground development and some Black leaders likely played a role, playgrounds never seemed to be a high priority for African American reformers in Philadelphia. It was tangential to other more pressing concerns such as job and housing discrimination.

Though there are contradictions between them at times, what is clearly demonstrated through the stories of all of these places, is that by the end of the nineteenth century participants in the Philadelphia play movement had taken some
definite steps in the direction of prioritizing, defining, structuring and institutionalizing play. Movement leaders had neither determined nor fully agreed upon their definitions, purposes, ideal participants or plans for playgrounds.

However, the Board of Education had accepted the provision of play as one of their responsibilities. Women had staked out a new public role for themselves, at least temporarily. Children had demonstrated that they would use playgrounds if they were provided. Some middle class residents had made it clear that in their neighborhoods they did not plan to support playgrounds that might attract unwanted outsiders. The Children’s Playground in Fairmount Park had preserved space supportive of a romantic view of play in which young children, their caregivers and nature were key components; while playgrounds in more populated urban neighborhoods (whether in school yards or on open lots) downplayed the role of nature, but preserved, and in some cases created open spaces, many of which remain part of the city’s landscape today. Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, in the educational system, in urban planning, and in popular ideas about children and childhood, play and playgrounds had gained a foothold in Philadelphia that would only be strengthened in the early years of the twentieth century.

**Philadelphia’s Play Movement Leaders**

In the 1890s, most of the leaders of Philadelphia’s nascent play movement could be described as Progressive reformers. Some were professional educators. Some were wealthy volunteers. Many were women. Few, if any, were African Americans. Also playing an important, though less visible, role in the establishment of the movement were the children (Black, Brown, and White, poor, working-class
and wealthy) who played – on playgrounds, in the streets, while working and after work, at school and after school. Though available sources provide very little information regarding children’s interest in these newly designated play spaces, increasing attendance figures indicate that regardless of whether they would have agreed with adults’ goals for their play, many were willing to take advantage of the play opportunities provided by these spaces designated for their use. Their parents, mothers especially, also contributed to the popularity of Philadelphia’s playgrounds, whether indirectly, by allowing, encouraging or requiring their children to attend, or by going with them, as was sometimes the case.

Among the organizations that made playground production a priority in the early stages of Philadelphia’s playground movement were the City Parks Association (est. 1888), The Culture Extension League (est. 1893) and the Civic Club (an elite women’s organization founded in 1894), and the Board of Education. Philadelphia College Settlement (est. 1892), Each organization, and the individual members within them brought. Each of these organizations had their own distinct missions, but they found in playground advocacy and production a common purpose on some level.

According to their website, the City Parks Association was founded for “the establishment and maintenance of public parks and open spaces throughout the City of Philadelphia.” Though public parks were not always welcoming places for children’s play, it was not uncommon for some parks advocates to be attracted to playground production as well. The Culture Extension League (initially founded by men though it later added a women’s branch) had a rather broad and loosely
defined mission of reform. According to an article titled “A Study of Perfection,” printed in the North American on February 23, 1893, the League’s plan was to “observe the great law of culture . . . ‘Let each become all that he was created capable of being.” By December 1894 the League had more clearly defined its understanding of “culture” and included “the play-ground” along with the home and school as a primary means of producing it. The Civic Club, a women’s club, also had broad and lofty goals of reform. According to its charter it was formed to promote “a higher public spirit and better public order” through “education and active cooperation.”

Suggesting an awareness of their status as forerunners in a new reform movement, within and among these groups, members competed for credit as the founders of Philadelphia’s play movement and jockeyed for control over this new field of service; Miss Constance Mackenzie, Mrs., J.P. Lundy and Mr. Stoyin Vasil Tsanoff (whose writings I discuss below) each presented their affiliated organizations as responsible for the movement’s first steps. Tsanoff claimed that on June 16th, 1893, his organization held the meeting at which “The first practical steps for proceeding to provide playgrounds, as distinct from parks, were taken up.” Mackenzie and Lundy’s accounts credit Lundy with starting the conversation about playgrounds as early as 1888, and stated that “agitation of the subject of playgrounds for children living in the crowded districts” began at a meeting led by the president of the City Parks Association and hosted by Ms. J. P. Lundy in her home during the winter of 1894. Though Tsanoff, Mackenzie and Lundy each acknowledged the participation of the others from 1895-1897, Tsanoff downplayed
the role of the Civic Club and City Parks Association, while Lundy and Mackenzie credited the President of the Civic Club, the headworker of the College Settlement, and the President of the City Parks Association as playing crucial roles in convincing the Board of Education to open four summer playgrounds in 1895.¹¹

Though not united, the nascent playground movement in Philadelphia was a rather insular world. In several cases these organizations shared members. Mr. J. Rodman Paul, for example, was on the board of the City Parks Association and served as a member of the College Settlement’s Executive Committee. Mrs. J. P. Lundy was corresponding secretary for the City Parks Association and a Civic Club member. Constance Mackenzie, also a Civic Club member, was a Board of Education employee as well. Hallowell and Mackenzie were both leaders in the kindergarten movement and worked for the Board of Education in some capacity; Hannah Fox, by then principal at James Forten School, was also a board member of the Philadelphia College Settlement and a member of the Civic Club.¹² Evidence from these organizations suggests that the Philadelphia Board of Education became involved in playground-making largely as the result of advocacy from members of the aforementioned groups.¹³

Three documents, all published in 1897, provide evidence regarding how Philadelphia’s leading (White) playground advocates understood the beginning years of the movement in which they were participants. On May 31, 1896, Mrs. J. P. Lundy, chairman of the Civic Club’s committee on playgrounds, produced a report that summarized the history of summer playground development in Philadelphia. In 1897, this account of playground development was included in the Civic Club’s
annual report. Constance Mackenzie, Philadelphia’s first public school kindergarten teacher, founding president of the Philadelphia branch of the International Kindergarten Union and Director of Public Kindergartens, gave a speech at the National Congress of Mothers in which she provided a brief history of playground development nationally that included some details regarding Philadelphia specifically. The lengthiest source available is a self-published book titled *Educational Value of the Children’s Playgrounds: A Novel Plan of Character Building*. The author was Stoyin Vasil Tsanoff, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and founding member of Philadelphia’s Culture Extension League, an organization that had as a part of its stated mission to “induce the community to provide playgrounds with provisions for youth’s happiness and instruction, where the children shall be turned from the streets.” Though they cannot be viewed as representative of all Philadelphia play movement participants, supplemented by records from the Children’s Playground, the College Settlement, other Civic Club reports and newspaper articles, these sources provide important insights regarding areas of both tension and cooperation, agreement and disagreement in the nascent movement.

**Philadelphia’s First Playgrounds**

According to Constance Mackenzie, the play movement in Philadelphia “began to stir as early as 1888” when some members of the newly formed City Parks Association (Mackenzie singled out Mrs. J. P. Lundy, secretary of the Association, in particular) became interested in promoting the idea of summer playgrounds and met to discuss it. A few years later, on May 25, 1891, following the death of their
only son, wealthy typesetter Richard Smith and his wife Sarah made provision in their wills for the development and maintenance of a children’s playground and playhouse to be established in Fairmount Park. The Smiths’ plans were for a large playground/park, reflecting how closely connected parks and play spaces were for some advocates.

Though, as discussed in earlier chapters, there were some play spaces (including Starr Garden) created in Philadelphia prior to the 1890s, if the existence of multiple and expanding efforts to intentionally equip and supervise places for play is used to mark the start of the playground movement in Philadelphia, then it is most accurate to place its inception in 1894. During this year, a variety of philanthropic organizations (one of which was the Philadelphia College Settlement) and individuals demonstrated a growing interest in playground development by participating in meetings specifically focused on the topic. In addition, during the summer of 1894, the City Parks Association sponsored one of Philadelphia’s first planned, equipped and supervised playgrounds. That same year, Catholic Archbishop Ryan supported members of the Princeton House Settlement in conducting a playground in an old church yard and two women from the Charity Society (mostly likely the Charity Organization Society) established a program in a private school yard. In the same year Richard Smith’s gift to the city of Children’s Playground to be located in Fairmount Park was made public, though the Playground itself would not open until five years later, following the death of Richard’s wife Sarah and several years of legal battles.

It was during the summer of 1895 that Philadelphia’s play movement began
to gain momentum (and increased press coverage) when multiple organizations (including the College Settlement, the City Parks Association, the Culture Extension League and the Civic Club) were involved in successfully petitioning the Board of Education and City Council to open, equip and supervise four summer playgrounds on school properties. The Council members appropriated $1000 for the summer playgrounds and a Committee on Playgrounds was formed on the Board of Public Education, headed by Mr. Paul Kavanaugh, chairman of the Board of Education Committee on Property.\textsuperscript{20} Meanwhile, the Culture Extension League took groups of children from the central part of the city on weekly "outings," began seeking access to vacant lots as potential playgrounds, and moved in the direction of establishing a state-of-the-art "model playground . . . as a real sample of what the playgrounds [should] be."\textsuperscript{21} Also in 1895, city leaders ordered that "Keep off the Grass" signs be removed from city parks, so children under twelve could play there in the summer.\textsuperscript{22}

The school board’s first summer playgrounds were designed to address the needs of poor, urban children in particular. Thus, not surprisingly, an article titled, "Playgrounds for Children: Yards of Four Down-Town Schools Thrown Open for That Purpose" published in \textit{The North American} on July 3, 1895, described them as being located “in the congested portion of the city, where breathing space is at a premium.”\textsuperscript{23} In the mornings, Board of Education summer playgrounds were staffed with a professionally trained kindergartener who served as the playground director and was supported by a janitor. In the afternoons, the janitors assigned to specific playgrounds worked alone or with volunteer helpers.\textsuperscript{24} Playground directors
operated under the supervision of the Director of Kindergartens, Constance Mackenzie. Plans for these playgrounds included the provision of sand, blocks and other toys such as rolling hoops, jump ropes, balls and sand toys. The women of the Civic Club regularly visited the playgrounds and submitted reports to the Board of Education, in addition to making monetary donations for other supplies.

Given the type of equipment supplied, they likely appealed predominantly to school-aged children and their young siblings. The placement of a kindergartener in the role of director also indicates that younger children were the targeted participants, though these sources do not indicate that older children were expressly prohibited. Given that by the time the Playgrounds Association of America was founded in 1906 the movement had already begun to broaden its scope, shifting children, especially young children, to the sidelines, this phase in the movement’s development in which children under twelve were assumed to be the usual players, constituted a unique one in which childhood was presented as a distinct phase of life, qualitatively different from adulthood, within which play was understood as essential to developmental processes.

Evidently, the Board of Education, and at least one reporter, considered its summer playground experiment to be a success. According to the author of an article published in a local Philadelphia newspaper, *The North American* on August 31, 1895, “the results already derived and the possibilities indicated are the most eloquent speakers in favor of the wider extension of this work in the future.” Further comments in this article provided by a representative of the Culture Extension League placed emphasis on the children's improved behavior, physical
health and social skills as evidence of the value of the playground, tying all three to school readiness.

The children will enter school this year stronger, brighter and healthier than ever before. They are more tolerant and friendly toward each other than when they were playing in the streets. There has been less quarreling and fighting in the small alleys on account of children's disputes than ever before...\(^\text{30}\)

Though it is unlikely that the speaker had much more than anecdotal evidence for many of these claims, she would not likely have made them if Board visitors had found the children unresponsive and uninterested overall.

From 1896 to 1899 the Board of Education steadily expanded its summer playground work. Twelve playgrounds were opened in school-yards in 1896, triple the number established in 1895. Though it was not promoted as the most important purpose of playgrounds, their perceived role in promoting children's physical health and safety likely contributed to their steady growth. Tsanoff suggested, for example, that the popularity of Philadelphia's new playground plans was aided by public concerns regarding trolley car accidents, which increased the dangers associated with children's street play and made a protected space for play seem more necessary.\(^\text{31}\) Growth continued in 1897, when twenty-three Board of Education playgrounds were opened. In 1898, there were twenty-five Board of Education summer playgrounds running.\(^\text{32}\) By 1899 there were twenty-seven Board of Education playgrounds in operation at schools around the city.\(^\text{33}\)

The Board of Education had the capacity to expand its playground work more quickly than others, but a variety of private charities also continued to open and supervise playgrounds between 1896 and 1899.\(^\text{34}\) As noted in Chapter Two, the Culture Extension League funded a temporary playground at the College Settlement...
in 1898 on the still undeveloped lot in which the original Starr Garden was situated, and College Settlement residents supervised a smaller one the following year while continuing to advocate for the expanded version of Starr Park to be completed. In the midst of these varied activities, plans for the Children's Playground in Fairmount Park continued and the Culture Extension League picked up their efforts to establish Philadelphia's first “model playground.”

**Failing in the Politics of Play: Dickinson Park**

In 1897, when Stoyin Vasil Tsanoff published his slim volume on playgrounds, he described the South Philadelphia site where the Culture Extension League intended to create Philadelphia's first “model playground.” By using the term “model playground,” in promoting plans for the development of Dickinson Square Park, Tsanoff signified his awareness of play movement trends that were already becoming national in their reach. In fact, he claimed that Philadelphia was leading the way in the “model playgrounds movement.”

Most likely basing his conclusions on Tsanoff's testimony, early play movement historian Clarence Rainwater also claimed that Philadelphia was at the forefront of the model playground stage, but, as will be evident here, the extent to which the execution of this idea was successful in Philadelphia in the nineteenth century is debatable.

In *The Play Movement in the United States* (1923), Rainwater claimed that the American play movement developed in seven roughly chronological stages. The first three of Rainwater's stages included the sand garden stage (dominant from 1885-95), the model playground stage (dominant from 1895-1900) and the small park stage (dominant from 1900-1905). An overview of steps taken in Philadelphia's
playground development in the 1890s reveals that elements of Rainwater’s first three stages, including the model playground stage, are descriptive of different aspects of playground production that were evident in Philadelphia’s early playground experiments.

As discussed in Chapter One, sand garden playgrounds, often affiliated with settlement houses or other charity organizations, were outdoor playgrounds consisting of “a sand heap or sand box with or without other apparatus such as swings or see-saws” and were usually limited to use by children under twelve. According to Rainwater, only a few cities participated in this form of playground development. He counted Philadelphia among those participants. Outdoor sand piles or sand boxes were standard equipment on most, if not all, of Philadelphia’s first playgrounds. From their inception, Board of Education playgrounds provided sand play, for example, and Philadelphia Settlement residents offered sand play as early as 1897 to children in Starr Garden. In addition, in 1895, when play was permitted on the grass in city parks, the privilege was granted only to children under twelve. Similarly, at the Children’s Playground and Playhouse, which opened in 1899, boys over age ten were excluded from entry, as were any adults who came without a child. However, local evidence indicates that the focus of these early “sand garden” playgrounds was not exclusively limited to young children, as early movement historian Clarence Rainwater claimed. Still, children under twelve likely constituted the majority of the participants during the 1890s.

According the Rainwater, Settlement Movement leader Jane Addams coined the term “model playground” to describe a playground created by Hull House in
Rainwater argued that older children were integrated into playground activities during this phase, as were adults, to a lesser extent, sometimes as spectators. In the plans establishing model playgrounds, more attention was paid to the provision of specialized equipment and specific kinds of instruction (often in gymnastics or manual arts) than had been done previously. Relatively little focus was given to natural elements or aesthetic beauty. Advocates of model playgrounds also began to explicitly state as a goal that playgrounds should be supported by public funds.

Tsanoff’s definition of a model playground differed slightly from Rainwater’s in important ways. According to Rainwater’s definition, model playgrounds were defined, in part, by the fact that they were not designed just for children. The Philadelphia leader’s vision, however, kept children at its center. Dickinson Square was to be an open space, “… with everything that the child’s nature requires in order to satisfy and uplift the youth, thus serving in [its] own way, as a connecting link between the home, the school and the church.” In addition, unlike Rainwater’s “typical” model playground, plans for Dickinson Square did not ignore the importance of natural and aesthetically elements. Though he made an explicit statement indicating that a model playground might not include anything “attractive to the eye,” and regularly sought to distinguish the function and features of the kind of playground he wanted to establish from that of parks, Tsanoff still included a variety of natural elements in his plans for the playground at Dickinson Park.

More closely fitting Rainwater’s description, Tsanoff and his colleagues did explicitly seek—and initially received—municipal support (though this was true of
Philadelphia’s school-yard sand garden playgrounds as well). Also more typical of model playgrounds, the space itself was to be carefully planned and extensively equipped for year-round activity. Tsanoff’s book provided a detailed description of planned indoor and outdoor facilities. Outside, the vision was for:

... an open circular area intended for plays [sic] requiring more space. It is to be flooded in winter for skating and drained off for the summer in order to furnish room for other plays. This is surrounded by a race, hoop and bicycle track. The rest of the ground is covered with grass, trees, flowers, baby carriage and walking tracks, and benches, with spaces between them for any other plays that can suitably be introduced ... On the one side a special place is provided for leaving babies safely while their older brothers and sisters (caretakers) are enjoying themselves with other children.47

In addition, in order to provide for “wintry and stormy weather exercises,” the recreation building was to be fitted with “two pavilions, one for girls, and one for boys, with ample halls decorated with pictures and other attractions, equipped with gymnastic apparatus, steam heat, shower bath, and other necessities.”48

Neighborhood resistance to the Culture Extension League’s plans was present from the start.49 Conflicts waged regarding the playground’s purposes, design and location. Its location “covering about three acres, and surrounded by the dwellings of middle class of people [sic],” was perhaps in large part responsible for its downfall. Seemingly in response to critiques of this choice, Tsanoff explained that “Its selection was due to its suitable size and feasibility for cheap equipment and not to the class of people surrounding it ...”50 Despite its middle class location, an early newspaper article described it as promising “magnificent results toward the uplifting of the slums.”51 Not surprisingly, the middle class homeowners in this neighborhood likely feared both that the playground might attract unwanted participants to their neighborhood as well as prove unsightly in comparison to a
more traditional park. Neighbors also expressed concerns regarding the impact of the playground on their property values. Though parks were known to improve property values, the impact of a playground was not yet known. In addition, Tsanoff was adamant regarding the need for a fence to create a protected play environment. Fences were one aspect of playgrounds that distinguished them from parks which, in Philadelphia, were generally unfenced. The fence was, evidently, one of many contested aspects of the plan. Tsanoff reported that some city officials showed “quite a hard hearing toward ‘this fence idea.’”

Prior to Dickinson’s official opening day, newspaper articles recorded that the Culture Extension League was experiencing financial difficulties causing delays in the completion of the playground. When it opened officially on June 30, 1898, equipment installations were not complete and the buildings lacked both light and heat. The situation did not improve for the Culture Extension League. As early as October 1898, neighbors were complaining of noise, dust, and boys throwing stones at the windows of nearby houses. They claimed “that immorality [was] practiced within its limits after dark,” and the City Council was moving in the direction of ending the playground experiment, a solution that fit the original preference of a number of the nearby property owners. By February 1899 the Culture Extension League was out of funds and City officials had taken back control of the square, with support from neighbors who complained that “the square was improperly lighted at night and that it was used after dark as a resort for disorderly persons, to the great scandal of the neighborhood.” Ten years later the description of the space given by the Philadelphia Association of Philadelphia (PAP) report as “full of young trees . . .
crisscrossed by most beautiful cement walks, and nowhere has there been left a space large enough to play,"\(^{56}\) was that of a traditional park, \textit{sans} provision for play.

It seems clear that both city politics and public resistance played a role in the demise of Dickinson Park. A later PAP report stated that the failure was a result of “other interests more powerful than the League,” a reference to those who wanted a park and not a playground. According to a newspaper article titled “A Balked Experiment,” published in the \textit{North American} on February 2, 1899, the City Council members may have acted in opposition to the mayor when they took back control of the square. The mayor had reportedly claimed that the lack of lighting and police protection were a city responsibility, not the fault of the League, and therefore did not justify the removal of the League from participation in the project.\(^ {57}\) Certainly protest by property owners played a role in influencing city politicians on the matter as well.

When play movement historian Clarence Rainwater described the barely functional Dickinson playground in detail as Philadelphia's pre-eminent model playground in his 1923 history of the American play movement, he apparently based his description on Tsanoff's hopeful plans rather than on newspaper accounts.\(^ {58}\) The Culture Extension League made an ambitious, but thwarted, attempt to create a model playground at Dickinson Square, a lot located in a middle class South Philadelphia neighborhood, but it was reshaped as a more typical park by 1899. There were no other model playgrounds established until several years after the turn of the century.\(^ {59}\)

Providing an interesting contrast to Rainwater's inclusion of the failed
Dickinson Square playground, it is significant that he failed to mention the Smith Memorial Children’s Playground and Playhouse (or the Children’s Playground in the Park) at all, though it opened just after Dickinson, included several similar components, and has remained a space dedicated to children’s play to this day. In large part the omission of the Children’s Playground can be attributed to the fact that its development did not follow typical play movement patterns or line up with increasingly dominant views of play and its purposes as the movement established itself in the twentieth century. Thus, it was placed outside of the boundaries of the play movement by many of its later participants. In Philadelphia in 1899, however, it was not viewed as being quite as far removed from other playground work as it would be in later years at least in part because in Philadelphia, parks and playgrounds were not rigidly separated entities.

**Parks and Playgrounds in Philadelphia**

Where Philadelphia was, in some ways, ahead of the typical timeline as described by Rainwater is in relation to the “small parks” stage. From Rainwater’s perspective, this was the stage in which the aesthetic and natural beauty of the park was combined with the more active recreational spaces of the “open air playground,” but within a much smaller space than what a model playground called for. Development of these “small parks” typically followed the development of model playgrounds. In Philadelphia, however, perhaps because the parks movement was so well established, there were several small parks with play areas (or playgrounds with natural features), including the original Starr Park, well before there were any lasting model playgrounds. As noted earlier in this chapter, the City
Parks Association was responsible for one of the first summer playgrounds established in Philadelphia. In addition, it was the organization that supervised Starr Park at the request of Anna Hallowell soon after Theodore Starr's death. The College Settlement’s plans for the expanded Starr Garden included aspects of both park and playground as well, as did plans for Dickinson Park.60

Though (as was the case in Chicago and elsewhere) Philadelphia had its share of play advocates who were affiliated with Settlement Houses, there was significant overlap between parks and playground advocates from 1888-1900. Admittedly, Tsanoff sought to define playgrounds as separate from parks and clearly viewed himself as an advocate for playgrounds specifically (not parks). Thus, the boundary lines discussed by Rainwater weren’t entirely non-existent among play advocates, but neither were these lines firmly drawn.

Both park and playground advocates were concerned about the dangers of “the street.” Like social settlement houses and other child-saving programs, nineteenth century playgrounds were presented by most reformers as an alternative to “the street,” a descriptor that was understood to have both physical and moral dimensions. In the street, children’s games could lead to what they deemed to be unfair arrests, as well as to physical dangers, particularly since the commencement of trolley service in 1895.61 In addition “the street” was understood to be host to a wide range of immoral practices that threatened children’s moral development. According to this rationale, playgrounds were viewed as compensatory spaces, important only for poor children in crowded urban areas where they had no access to open country or the backyards available to the
wealthy. Further, it was assumed, poor children got little moral guidance in their home environments.

For many reformers, however, nature was a source of goodness. As Cary Goodman noted, for example, play advocate and photographer-reformer Jacob Riis viewed “the street” as inherently evil because it was “unnatural.”62 Parks advocates believed that “Urban disorders did not arrive because society was evil by nature, but because its members were out of touch with nature, a source of goodness.”63 Based on these understandings of the moral geographies of urban space, the needed act of reform was to create a space that would provide access to nature in the increasingly unnatural urban environment. Thus, the creation of parks was an act of reform, but it only required reformers to actively participate in supporting its creation, imagining and raising support for it. According to parks historian Terrance Young, American’s nineteenth-century parks were expected to address social problems through the passive influence of nature. Once the park had been created, reform was expected to emerge from the space itself.

Though the usual design of a large, romantic park involved the intentional exclusion of any spaces designated to serve a specific function or to support specific forms of leisure that might interfere with the restorative function of a contemplative, enjoyment of nature, at least one other large urban park in the late nineteenth century included a play space similar to Smith’s. Opened in 1888, (though it had been included in park designer William Hammond Hall’s original master plan created in the 1871) the Women and Children’s Quarters of Golden Gate Park, was designed for use by young children and their caregivers.64 The Children’s
Quarters were so similar to Philadelphia's Children's Playground, in fact, that it seems possible that the San Francisco model served as the inspiration for the Smith's plans, though no evidence of a direct link is available in the Children's Playground records.

The Children's Playground in Fairmount Park

Richard Smith's last will and testament provided $50,000 for an enclosed children's playground and playhouse in Fairmount Park. The will of Sarah Smith, his wife, provided a further sum of $300,000 for the ongoing maintenance and programs of the playground. Though the plans for the site were described in Richard's will only, viewed in light of his designation of $500,000 for a Civil War Memorial (which was to include a full-sized statue of himself as well!) it seems clear that the playground was primarily Sarah Smith's project. Richard and Sarah Smith's primary intent was to provide a well-equipped, safe and healthy play space for young children, and in doing so to make life easier for the children's caregivers (mostly mothers) as well. Four details included in the will clarified the Smith's intentions. They requested: 1) that a recreational space for young children, complete with a well-equipped playhouse, should be created to serve the Philadelphia region, 2) that this space be located in Fairmount Park, 3) that this playground be designed to meet the needs of children under age ten and their parents or caretakers, and 4) that it would include provision for some adult staff, including a nurse and some "attendants" who, as a support to caregivers, would help to care for the children who were guests at Smith Playground.

Due to its location, to some extent the Children's Playground shared the
purposes of a park. Thus, it was expected to address social problems through the passive influence of nature. Fairmount Park was Philadelphia’s version of what parks movement scholar Terence Young called the “romantic park” and Galen Cranz called the “pleasure park.” These were the very large, semi-suburban parks created in the nineteenth century to address social problems through the passive influence of nature, San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park (where the Women and Children’s Quarters were located) and New York’s Central Park being two of the most well-known.

Feminist scholar Heath Schenker argued, in relation to the Children’s Quarters in Golden Gate Park, that Victorian ideas of gender, domesticity, play and childhood, in which both women and children were viewed as in need of protection and most appropriately situated within the protected space of the home, were foundational in its construction. Therefore, according to Schenker, although it provided middle class women with a way to enter the public space of the park, the Children's Quarters ultimately confined middle class women, limiting them to domestic roles and failed to respond to the complexity of the lives of working class and poor women. While this may be true of the Children’s Playground to some extent as well, there is no indication that Sarah Smith resisted or resented her role as a privileged, Victorian mother. In fact, after the deaths of her only son and grandson, her efforts to fund a place in which mothering of children would continue may be seen as a reflection of the value she placed on this role.

Thus, the Children’s Playground located play primarily within the domain of early childhood and domestic life, emphasizing play's intrinsic value as a source of
pleasure, essential to early childhood and to the healthy development of individual children, with an occasional reference to the physical (and vaguely spiritual) benefits provided by fresh air and nature. In this view the (presumed) innocent play of the young child constituted both a need and a right. The space, created specifically for young children, facilitated free play in a safe environment. But the provision of and support for play was primarily the responsibility of the child’s caregivers, not municipal authorities or trained educators. Like the park within which it was situated, the Children’s Playground was a play space first and foremost, not a program.

The Smiths moved to Paris in 1891 and had little direct involvement with the further development of the playground or of the playground movement in Philadelphia, though they worked closely with the Children’s Playground architect in the planning stages. However, by providing both specific instructions and funds for the creation of a children’s playground in their wills in 1891, well before any summer playgrounds were opened, Richard and Sarah Smith were in some sense at the forefront of playground development in Philadelphia despite the fact that they did not continue to participate directly.71

In 1894 and 1895, respectively, Richard and Sarah Smith died, both in Paris, and their plans to establish a children’s playhouse and playground (in addition to Richard’s gift of a Civil War monument) were made public.72 Construction was delayed, however, when Sarah’s half-brother contested the terms of the will. The matter was not settled until the spring of 1897.73 By September 1897, plans for the playhouse and grounds were approved and by November of the following year the
house had been built, though it was not yet available for use.74

On March 9, 1899 final preparations for the opening of the Smith Memorial Playhouse and Playground began. J. Foster Ogden, the Playground’s first superintendent, recorded his observations regarding the day in the journal entry quoted below.

I, J. Foster Ogden and wife, Emma L. Ogden having been appointed and duly commissioned superintendent and matron of the Children’s Shelter & Playground established in East Fairmount Park at Fountain Green, under the will of Richard Smith, deceased, do this day take our residence in the Shelter and have entered upon the discharge our respective duties rejoicing in the fact that the little ones are to have a day home of easy access, and yet removed a comfortable distance from the City’s heat and the great enemy of peace and quiet, the Electric street railway with its hum, buzz and danger and disfiguring poles and wires.75

With this journal entry Mr. Ogden provided some evidence of his personal understanding of the mission of Smith Playground as he began what would be a fifteen-year tenure as superintendent along with his wife Emma who served as matron. The emphasis in his statement coincided closely with that of Richard Smith’s will in that he emphasized that the playground would provide a safe and inviting place for city children, away from the heat and noisy, dangerous streetcars, rather than focusing on the provision of a directed program of play. Ogden’s use of the word “accessible” is most reasonably understood as a reference to the habit of wealthier families who would often leave the city during the summer months to escape the heat.76 A day in the Park would, in comparison, be much less “accessible” to those for whom this was not possible, that is, working and lower class families and children.77

With these purposes in view, on July 23, 1899 in Fairmount Park in Philadelphia, Smith Memorial Children’s Playground and Playhouse opened under
the supervision of a male superintendent and female matron, a strategy that exactly paralleled the plan for the model playground at Dickinson Square, which called for two supervisors, a man and a woman. According to an article titled “Happy Little Ones: Opening of the Children’s Playground in East Fairmount Park” published in *the Philadelphia Inquirer on July 24, 1899,* hundreds of children arrived despite “threatening gray skies” and “rode in the swings, played tag and romped” from early morning until sunset. [Figure 2: Children’s Playhouse, front, 1907]

In regards to outdoor equipment the Children’s Playground did not differ significantly from other playgrounds when it opened in 1899. The grounds were enclosed by an iron fence and a hedge. The equipment included only a sand pit (albeit a large one!) containing twelve tons of white sand and some swings. However, there were several more distinctive features at the Smith’s site as well. First, the Children’s Playground provided children with play space in a natural, park-like setting. Second, it had a spacious and beautifully designed colonial style playhouse mansion which contained a large basement playroom, a kitchen, a first floor reception room, a dispensary and a second floor “dormitory” of smaller rooms where infants and sick children could rest. Also, in stark contrast to the majority of playgrounds available in Philadelphia in 1899, the Smith Memorial Playground and Playhouse was open daily year round, including holidays. Hours were from 9:00 am -7:00 pm from May 1 to November 1 and from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm in the remaining months.

Children quite rapidly influenced the development of the space and equipment at the Children’s Playground, pushing Ogden in the direction of providing
more play equipment for very young children especially. The grassy lawns were not
even enough; it quickly became evident that they needed more play equipment and
supplies. Improvements and additions to the Playhouse were made almost daily in
response to the guests’ needs during the first weeks after opening day. Just a few
days after opening, swings and more tricycles were added to the playroom. On the
fifth day, the superintendent described the “amusements” provided as “not greatly
varied,” a situation he hoped to address. On the sixth day, after attempting to meet
the needs of 450 guests, he again expressed a need for more equipment particularly
suited to the youngest children.83 “This day has proven the necessity of a play
ground completely equipped for the little children,” Ogden wrote, “A large number
of the four hundred and fifty present have been under six years. The sand pit has
been the one great joy of the day.”84

Though mothers and supervisors may have hoped that many of the children
would want to rest during their day in the Park, the children themselves tended to
be interested in more active pursuits. As a result, the need for more play space
quickly eclipsed the usefulness of places for children to rest. By the second week,
the Ogdens had refitted the dormitory as a playroom for mothers and young
children complete with couches, rocking chairs, “rollicking mats,” rocking horses,
jumping rockers and swings.85 By August 5th, a music box and “graphophone”
(phonograph) had been added to the reception room.86 A few smaller rooms
equipped with space for sleeping or resting remained available for sick children and
infants, but by the end of the century most of the space in the Children’s Playhouse
was completely dedicated to children’s play.
Both the successful construction and the mission of the Children’s Playground were directly tied to its funding source, the Smith Trust, the instructions included in the Smith’s wills, and its location in Fairmount Park. Though the playground’s trustees did have to negotiate with the Park Commissioners regarding some aspects of the playground plans and policies, the fact that the playground’s construction and ongoing support was fully funded already, undoubtedly made those negotiations proceed more smoothly. Its location in a large park also protected it from encountering the kind of middle class resistance experienced by the Culture Extension League in their attempts to place a playground in a middle class residential area. In addition, the Children’s Playground did not need to justify its existence by touting play’s potential as a tool of character formation as other playground advocates would do. Built on romantic, Victorian ideas about nature, women and children, the Children’s Playground reflected an ideology in which the park itself, and the caregivers who would bring the children there, would provide all the positive moral influence that was necessary.

**The Playground as a Compensatory Educational Institution**

Overall, Philadelphia’s nineteenth century playground advocates agreed more than they disagreed regarding the purposes that playgrounds could serve. Whether they were specifically concerned about containing the dangers and influences of “the street,” like Constance Mackenzie, or more generally concerned about the potentially damaging effects of unguided play, as Tsanoff was, play-focused reformers consistently sought to ensure that playgrounds were spaces where children would be protected from moral and physical dangers, whether these
dangers emanated from within the child or from the outer environment. Creating a protected and protective space was important to movement leaders regardless of whether they worked in the most densely populated neighborhoods or lived and worked in the center of Fairmount Park, as did the superintendent and matron of the Children’s Playground.

One of the ways that playground advocates demonstrated the importance of the playground’s protective function was through their consistent efforts to enclose these spaces by using a fence. The other component understood to be essential in the production of a playground with protective characteristics was the playground supervisor. Virtually all of the reformers who sought to create playgrounds in nineteenth century Philadelphia focused on the importance of supervision, though to varying degrees and with different definitions regarding the description of the ideal supervisor. Mackenzie, for example, presented the playground supervisor as essential, but more specifically, she argued that a female supervisor was essential. Making exception for playgrounds exclusively designed for older boys, she presented the kindergartener of “approved experience” as the ideal playground supervisor.\textsuperscript{87} Even at the Children’s Playground and Playhouse where supervision was provided primarily by the caregivers and parents who arrived with the children, not by professional play leaders, adult supervision was deemed essential and staff was hired to ensure that it was provided. Play movement historian Dom Cavallo argued that for virtually all early American playground advocates (those operating from 1887-1906 by his definition) playgrounds were almost unanimously committed, not just to supervising, but to directing and controlling children’s play
activities. Philadelphia’s nineteenth century play leaders, however, were somewhat divided on this point.

Tsanoff’s position seemed to fit Cavallo’s characterization most closely in this case, particularly in his emphasis on the grave dangers of unsupervised and unregulated playgrounds which he called these “wild playgrounds,” and arguing that they were likely to cause more harm than good. “It may be better to confine the children at home and rear them in suppression of spirit and dullness,” claimed Tsanoff, “than to leave them to seek play, and companionship which will be certain to give the fullest development to their evil tendencies.”

Differing from many of their twentieth century counterparts, Philadelphia’s nineteenth century play leaders focused primarily on supporting children’s free choice in play, as opposed to facilitating teacher-directed activities. The Children’s Playground most fully exemplified this emphasis, but it was not absent from the professionally supervised center city playgrounds. Board of Education programs offered the highest level of directed instruction, but even there the general picture that Mackenzie painted of the typical Philadelphia playground was one directed by children’s choices.

The child’s natural activity is encouraged to its utmost . . . the children are doing what they want to do, and they are learning it in a harmonious, happy fashion. . . . the playgrounds invite them in, provided them with material through which they may express themselves, offer them plenty of space for play, or pleasant, shady places in which they may rest with quiet work, singing, listening to stories, minding the baby if need be.

Thus, according to Mackenzie, playgrounds were designed to teach, but the methods were founded on offering children freedom in their play. She went on to
describe the children’s play as “free... but free under law.” Using similar terms, Tsanoff stated that on the ideal playground, the children were “to have within reasonable limits, full freedom in their play... They are to enjoy themselves freely, but in civil and gentle manners.” On the playgrounds of the later nineteenth century, the play of children was to be guided by adults when needed, but playground programming was seldom rigid or highly directed.

Like early kindergartens, and often beginning from the foundation of Froebelian philosophies which primarily emphasized the moral rather than academic benefits of education through play, Philadelphia’s nineteenth century playgrounds were understood to be sites of character education. In Tsanoff’s words, playgrounds would “stimulate and guide life in a way that nothing else can do. Their relation to the development of character is very similar to that which the school bears to the development of the mind.” Mackenzie concurred. Using “the child’s natural activity,” playgrounds would teach lessons of “freedom and self-government along the line of right ideals.”

Though Tsanoff argued that all children, regardless of class or location, needed access to public playgrounds and recommended the expansion of playground production to rural areas and wealthy neighborhoods, in nineteenth century Philadelphia this view received little support. Mackenzie was more typical when she demonstrated in a speech presented at the National Congress of Mothers that she viewed playgrounds as compensatory spaces, not needed by more privileged children. Before closing, she encouraged her listeners to further the cause of the play movement by visiting a playground with “other men and women.
with hearts and minds and wills, and with children of their own who have no need of the public playground, and the result will be committees forming everywhere in the interest of the playground . . .” 94

Mackenzie’s focus on playgrounds as compensatory spaces may also have influenced her definition of the activities that would meet the broadly educational purposes of the playground, which was much more expansive than Tsanoff’s. Like many other kindergarteners, Mackenzie did not draw sharp lines between educational play and education for work. Thus, on the playgrounds she supervised, the “work habit” was given encouragement “through the introduction of pleasant forms of employment, such as sewing, modeling, weaving and toy-making,” activities she described as “additional means of development to that represented in play.” 95 In addition, she saw playgrounds as appropriate places at which to introduce children to “good books and magazines” and the “aesthetic and uplifting influence of good music . . .” 96

Despite these differences, there is evidence of further convergence among Philadelphia’s play advocates around the practice of including some level of support for caregivers as well as provision for the play of children. The Children’s Playground made the support of caregivers central to its mission, but this purpose was not absent from other locations where planners and supervisors recognized that they would likely serve both adult- and child-caregivers. Plans for Dickinson Square included “a special place for leaving babies safely while their older brothers and sisters (caretakers) are enjoying themselves with other small children.” 97 Mackenzie discussed her observation of benefits that playgrounds provided to the
mothers who came and rested while their children played, sometimes joining in themselves as well. Very likely one factor that contributed to the integration of caregivers needs with play activities during this phase was the leadership of women, a factor that will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.

One unstated purpose that Philadelphia’s nineteenth century playgrounds served was as a new field of employment for women. In their nineteenth century forms, most playgrounds functioned not only as broadly educational spaces, but also as protected domestic ones. Thus, like settlement houses, playgrounds were understood to be both sites of reform and places in which women could exercise leadership under the guise of municipal housekeeping. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Board of Education was the dominant power within the playground movement in Philadelphia. Board of Education playgrounds were placed under the supervision of the Director of Kindergartens, by definition a female. Most of the philanthropic organizations advocating and supervising summer playgrounds were led by women as well. On a practical level, Mackenzie and her colleagues had successfully staked out playground supervision as another profession, like teaching kindergarten, for which females were (at least temporarily) understood to be particularly well suited. Though the cracks were beginning to show as more men became interested in playground development and new theories of play began to gain popularity, when the twentieth century began it remained virtually impossible to separate kindergarteners from playground development or kindergarten theories from understandings of play and its purposes.

**A Comment Regarding African American Absence**
As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the city's Black residents were not centrally involved in Philadelphia's nineteenth century play movement. Perhaps, of course, they were more present than current sources reveal. Assuming, however, that the absence I see in the documents I examined is reasonably reflective of actual circumstances, I suggest that the lack of African American leadership was likely the result of both practical and ideological factors such as racism. It seems quite likely that explicit racial exclusion from some of the groups which led the movement, a common practice in philanthropic organizations as well as social ones, was a contributing factor. In addition, placed within the context of the challenges of Black life in Philadelphia in the 1890s, it is very possible that playgrounds were just not as high a priority as addressing other issues such as housing and job discrimination. Varying beliefs regarding play and its values may also have played a role. In addition, the fact that Black children were not completely excluded from all Philadelphia play spaces could certainly justify Black adults in choosing to focus on other more pressing issues. 99

The last decade of the nineteenth century was a time of transition and upheaval for Philadelphia's African Americans, both those who were long-term residents and newly arriving southern migrants. Between 1890 and 1900 migration from the South increased Philadelphia's Black population 59% from 39,371 to over 62,000. 100 Although African Americans were still a small minority overall, (4.8% of the city's total population) the increase was significant in particular neighborhoods. In the Seventh Ward (the focus of DuBois' study), for example, between 1890 and 1900 White population went from 21,177 to 17,496 while the Black population
increased from 8,861 to 10,462. As another example, in the 1890s Black population increased in the area of Starr Garden and White population declined.101

The increased numbers brought higher levels of interracial and intraracial tension. White residents who had tolerated a few Black neighbors were rarely willing to tolerate more than a few. In addition, the new migrants were arriving from the rural South where they had had even fewer educational opportunities than many of Philadelphia’s poorest Black residents. Often these new immigrants were not readily welcomed by Philadelphia’s more established Black families, many of whom were struggling to maintain their tenuous hold on the businesses, financial stability and respect that they had worked hard to establish in previous decades. Given these challenges it is not hard to imagine that investment in playgrounds may not have seemed as important as investment in a variety of other social causes. Therefore, it is not terribly surprising that, despite the fact that African American visibility in the city was increasing, Black leaders are barely visible in the records of Philadelphia’s developing play movement.102

Given their relationships with the College Settlement and Starr Garden, Henry Phillips and Fannie Coppin, for example, certainly would have been aware of White efforts to promote the production of play space. Furthermore, leaders and members of Mother Bethel AME church could hardly have failed to miss the demolition of houses on a block adjacent to the church, or the many children playing there in the summer of 1898 and 1899. And yet no discussion of play or playgrounds appears in the Christian Recorder from 1888-1900. Kindergartens are mentioned. Schools are discussed, but (with the exception of a playground
reference in one brief article titled “German Schoolboy Life” published on January 15, 1880) playgrounds are not.103

Rev. Phillips did appear at least once at a public event in support of playgrounds104 and he was certainly concerned about child welfare and similarly laid blame on the “the streets.” He expressed in sworn testimony, for example, his concerns regarding the effects of some of Philadelphia’s neighborhoods on children, “who saw so many prosperous criminals and honest victims that it was hard for them to tell right from wrong.”105 But evidence suggests that playground production was not a high priority for him. In a book founded on the sources provided in the William Dorsey Collection in which Henry Phillips was prominently featured, historian Roger Lane included a fairly extensive list of Phillips’ varied areas of service.106 Though admittedly Lane did not claim that this list included all of Phillips accomplishments, it is likely that if play advocacy or playground production were of particular importance to Phillips, his participation would have been evident in both Dorsey’s scrapbooks and Lane’s summary of them. My own review of local newspapers revealed no additional evidence to suggest that Phillips, despite the role he played in the initial establishment of Starr Park, was actively involved in playground advocacy in the 1890s.

Fanny Jackson Coppin also appeared regularly in the Dorsey Collection, but neither Lane nor her biographer, Linda Perkins, mention any interest in playgrounds on her part. Ideological issues may well have impacted Fannie Coppin’s lack of participation as a seemingly insignificant interaction with Hannah Fox demonstrates. As early as 1888, the managers of the Institute for Colored
Youth hired Hannah Fox to evaluate the schools’ curriculum and teachers. At the time, one of Fox’s recommendations was that the school should add gymnastics instruction in part for its moral benefits. Some play advocates, including the College Settlement’s Hannah Fox, were motivated to support children’s play, at least in part, by theories of play that made close connections between physical and moral development, deeming moral development through physical activity as particularly appropriate for “uncivilized” or “savage” peoples (including African Americans), and children.

When discourses of civilization were linked to white supremacy, as they often were, they were understandably less likely to appeal broadly to African Americans when they were placed, as was often the case, in the category of “uncivilized.” Coppin’s biographer noted that the esteemed ICY principal was not convinced by Fox’s claim that gymnastic activity could impact students’ moral development, neither did she believe that she had time to devote to promoting physical activity, given her limited resources and high academic standards. As a kindergarten advocate, Coppin supported the use of playful pedagogical methods for young children, but this incident suggests that she would not have been likely to view the provision of play as her responsibility as an educator.

Though he made no mention of play or playgrounds in *The Philadelphia Negro*, W.E.B DuBois made at least one attempt to convince the African American community that play was a “right,” in a speech he gave to those in attendance at the General Conference of Negroes in July 1897. His speech, titled “The Problem of Amusement,” was published in two installments in *The College Settlement News* in
October, 1897. In the speech DuBois mentioned two issues, which, I suggest, may shed some light on factors that contributed to the lack of Black participation in playground development during this time. First, though a large part of his speech was designed to demonstrate that “the problem of proper amusement” for Black young people was an issue of growing concern, DuBois acknowledged from the outset that it could not be seen as one of the more “pressing of the Negro problems” of the day. Second, as was the case in many religious organizations as well (evangelical churches in particular), DuBois noted that both play and pleasure could be viewed as suspect by the Black churches, or even morally dangerous. The prohibitions and ambivalence about play that grew from these concerns could certainly have limited Black participation in play and playground advocacy.

Unlike most Philadelphia playground advocates, however, DuBois did not present play itself as of benefit to character development, but as an accompaniment or a balance to work, whether the academic work of the school, or wage work. Workers, employers and entrepreneurs alike recognized the importance of changes in labor laws, one result of which was the provision—to working youth and young adults—of leisure time, and often some disposable income. Commercial enterprises responded to these changes, creating amusement parks like Coney Island, developing nickelodeons and opening dance halls. Many middle class Americans, not only reformers and church-goers, thought these activities and others that were often widely appreciated by working-class Americans, were, at best, unappealing and, at worst, morally dangerous.

Using the terms “amusement,” “recreation” and “play” almost
interchangeably, he seemed most intent on arguing that many forms of amusement prohibited by Black churches were not as harmful as some in the Black community believed. Nowhere did DuBois draw connections between manual labor or industrial training and play or to the theories of moral development that many White advocates found so compelling.

National sources indicate that African American playground advocacy began later than White-led efforts, that is, early in the twentieth century though still prior to the creation of the Playground Association of America (PAA). A variety of scholarly studies have clearly demonstrated that middle class African American women were active in creating playgrounds for Black children in the early part of the twentieth century, often through the auspices of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) or the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). These efforts took place primarily, but not exclusively, in the South where even middle class Black children could find few places to play outdoors. In Philadelphia, in the 1890s Black children had some publically accessible play space available for their use and were at times given access to a variety of other play-focused activities. In addition to the issues discussed above, the fact that Black children were not completely excluded from all Philadelphia play spaces could certainly justify Black adults in choosing to focus on other pressing issues affecting the African American community.

Conclusion

By 1900, Philadelphia’s play advocates had established several dozen playgrounds designed to replace the moral and physical dangers of city streets with
protected environments that would facilitate children’s play. They had not been successful in garnering direct or extensive municipal support for playground development. In fact, the failed Dickinson Square Playground and the challenging politics surrounding its demise may well have slowed down the progression toward widespread public acceptance and municipal control of Philadelphia's playgrounds. However, the summer playgrounds funded and supervised through the Philadelphia Board of Education on the grounds of various public schools grew in number, establishing the provision of play as a responsibility of the public school system.

Educated [White] women were dominant in play advocacy, provision and supervision in Philadelphia in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The Board of Education playgrounds were supervised by the Director of Kindergartens, a job that increased in size and scope each year. Professional kindergarteners were assigned to each summer playground where they facilitated children’s free choice in their play, while seeking to guide them toward improved moral behavior, providing some direct instruction as well. With these women at the helm, nineteenth century playgrounds were designed primarily for children of school age and younger and to some extent their caregivers — whether older children or adults. Contrasting with Rainwater's description of early sand gardens, with the exception of the Children’s Playground in the Park, even the earliest of Philadelphia’s playgrounds usually included older boys and girls. But young children, rather than teens and adults, were the main focus. For nineteenth century playground advocates, play remained situated in the domain of childhood.

Playground advocates consciously sought to establish playgrounds as
educational institutions. Play within the confines of most of Philadelphia’s nineteenth century playgrounds was understood to be a means of character formation, especially beneficial to poor children who might otherwise be educated by “the street.” Within this context children’s play was guided and supervised, but the highly organized and directed play that would become popular with many twentieth-century playground advocates was not yet common practice. Meanwhile, the Children’s Playground, in contrast with virtually all of the other playgrounds that were established in Philadelphia in the 1890s, avoided presenting play primarily as a means to educational ends (either moral or academic). On the Children’s Playground play was constructed primarily as a means of producing pleasure, again specifically for children, with an occasional reference to the physical (and vaguely spiritual) benefits provided by fresh air and nature. Confined by the wills of its founders, the Children’s Playground in the Park would preserve this romantic view of childhood play throughout the twentieth century.

By the end of the next decade connections between parks, kindergartens and playgrounds, so clearly foundational in the 1890s, would be diminishing in importance and function. Playgrounds would begin to serve an increasingly wide age range in increasingly divided and specialized spaces and programs. And the establishment of the Playgrounds Association of America would diminish the impact of female leaders while helping to increase public and municipal levels of support for playgrounds in Philadelphia and elsewhere.
Chapter 4

Dominant Trends and Alternative Possibilities: Playground Development in Philadelphia, 1900-1912

Introduction

The years from 1900-1912 were very significant ones in the American Playground Movement nationally. According to play movement historian Dom Cavallo, the momentum that had been building in support of playgrounds in the early to mid 1890s began to diminish rather than grow in the early years of the twentieth century. As a result, by 1905, despite a decade of playground advocacy, only 87 playgrounds were known to be in operation across the nation and many, not unlike Dickinson Square Playground in Philadelphia, were already falling into disrepair. This situation raised a concern among advocates that without the mobilization of national leadership, the movement would fail.¹

As a result of this concern, several committed and relatively high profile play advocates (the majority of whom were from New York or Chicago) met to create a national organization to lobby for increased governmental and popular support for playground production and administration. Their efforts led to the creation of the Playgrounds Association of America (PAA) founded in 1906. Thus, in place of the multiple strands of nineteenth century play and playground advocacy, which tended to vary widely in relation to funding, leadership, programs, rationales and participants, a dominant strand began to emerge. This strand of play advocacy was shaped largely by the rationales put forth by PAA leaders and the efforts of PAA field workers, who energetically and effectively mobilized the nation in support of their
goals. The national movement was also much more closely tied to municipal and national leadership than had been the case prior to its emergence.²

The nationalization of the play movement brought with it increased financial and governmental support for playground development, leading to a rapid rise in playground production. By 1911, 257 cities sponsored 1,543 organized playgrounds and employed 4,132 play directors, a nearly eighteen-fold increase over 1905.³ But increased support for municipal playgrounds did not necessarily increase access for all children. The process of professionalization and nationalization in the field of play, supported by new developmental theories that emphasized adolescence rather than early childhood as the most crucial period of development, shifted young children from a place of central priority to a location on the sidelines of the movement. In addition, the increasing power of the PAA often decreased the influence of many female leaders who operated on a more local level and whose ideas, priorities and practices often diverged from those of the PAA. In Philadelphia, the influence of newly dominant rationales for play was evident, but its impact was not absolute. Instead, divergent rationales and priorities continued to exist alongside dominant views, demonstrating alternative possibilities to dominant trends.

Following an overview of trends in the mainstream movement from 1900-1912, this chapter examines the influence of these trends on the development of Starr Garden, the play spaces affiliated with the relocated College Settlement (including new branches that would be established during this time period) and Richard and Sarah Smith’s "Children’s Playground" in Fairmount Park. Starr
Garden’s path followed national trends fairly closely, resulting in the creation of a predominantly male-led model recreation program for all ages that shifted young children and girls to the sidelines. The College Settlement playgrounds, led by head worker Anna Davies, were female-led, multi-age, multifaceted spaces. While supporting the national trend emphasizing supervision of play, her work diverged from national trends as it included new efforts that specifically targeted the needs of young children and their caregivers alongside advocacy for the development of nearby Weccacoe Square into a municipal playground. Meanwhile, the Children’s Playground in Fairmount Park retained an exclusive focus on children age ten and under, excluding boys over ten, despite criticism from other play advocates (older girls were welcome, but mainly as caregivers for the youngsters using the playground). Taken together, the three spaces provide differing examples of how twentieth century American playground production could, and did, take shape on the ground.

**Dominant Trends**

Trends in the mainstream movement were recorded in nationally distributed publications produced by the PAA and its leaders. Beginning in April 1907, the PAA published a monthly journal, *The Playground*, and multiple brochures and pamphlets. In addition to authoring many PAA materials, several PAA leaders also published their own books and articles. These sources have provided a rich resource for historians, but have, at times, been mistakenly viewed as broadly representative of the American play movement and its participants generally. Taken alone PAA publications do not provide a sufficient or an accurate picture of American play
advocacy as a whole. Instead, these documents are representative of what I call here the dominant, or mainstream, strand of the play movement.

Most historians agree that there were significant shifts in patterns of American play advocacy as the forces of nationalization strengthened. The programmatic focus of the mainstream playground movement broadened extensively and almost immediately from a focus on supporting the needs of young children and their caregivers, with some provision for boys to play ball and a little gymnastics for older girls on the side, to efforts that targeted pre-adolescent and adolescent boys especially, emphasized team games and prioritized the recreational needs of adults as well. Movement leaders increasingly emphasized the importance of “recreation,” linguistically distancing themselves from the confines of childhood “play.” On the national level, it did not take long for these changes to be significant enough to warrant a name change for the PAA, which became the Playground and Recreation Association of America in 1911, only five years after the Playground Association of America was created.5

Ideological changes were reflected in a shift in the rationales that were put forth by play advocates to promote playground production. After the creation of the PAA, civic rationales touting play’s potential in the development of the nation were increasingly put forward in place of more individually-focused philanthropic goals that emphasized the ultimate perfectibility of the individual child touting play as essential to the child’s overall healthy development. These more civic oriented rationales provided justification for an increased emphasis on the need for municipal support. In many places and publications the emphasis on play as a
means of Americanization for new immigrants grew. These goals, which emphasized the superiority of Anglo-Saxon cultural traditions according to play movement historian Dom Cavallo were less closely aligned with Hall’s focus on individual development. These included, according to a recent article by education scholar Lester Goodwin, a level of concern about the importance of preserving, the strengths of “underdeveloped races” as a means of directing the “upward development of humankind,” rather than overcoming them with exclusively Anglo Saxon practices. Simultaneously, the use of public funds in support of the creation of playgrounds, swimming pools and recreation centers for middle and upper class citizens was justified by theories touting the importance of play and recreation for all American citizens, not only for immigrants and the urban poor.

Changes that occurred on both practical and ideological levels can be seen in local records as well as in PAA publications. In Philadelphia from 1900-1912, dominant trends were reflected most clearly on the ground at Starr Garden as it was placed under municipal control and transformed into the city’s first model recreation center. With leaders who no longer intentionally sought to meet needs in the Black community, it became a social center and site for the Americanization of Russian Jews especially. At the College Settlement, the trend toward attaching goals of Americanization to play space development were also in evidence as residents regularly established new small playgrounds on their own properties, while advocating municipal support of playground development on city-owned lots including Starr Garden and Weccacoe Square. Least inclined to adapt to new trends were the leaders of the Children’s Playground who during these years were
impacted most by the criticisms they received because they did not change their space, programs and policies so that they would align more closely with the preferences of new play advocates. Though by 1912 surplus funds would enable Children’s Playground trustees to join their colleagues in more directly addressing the need for play space in crowded urban neighborhoods without abandoning their original site, the movement’s nationalization had relatively little impact at the Children’s Playground in the Park.⁹

**Beyond Kindergarten Play**

The rapid increase in playground production and municipal support that occurred as the play movement nationalized, indicates that the men (and a few women) who founded the PAA rightly understood that more persuasive, civic oriented rationales were needed if the movement was to gain widespread support for playground production. But why had nineteenth century theories of play proved insufficient? In part, the close ties these theories made between play, women and young children limited their applicability.

Ideologically, advocates of nineteenth century playgrounds had found sufficient support for play space production and professional play leadership in kindergarten theory and pedagogy, particularly when these theories were strengthened by maternalist ideas of municipal housekeeping. Like kindergartens, day nurseries and social settlements, nineteenth century playgrounds were initially viewed as extensions of domestic space, where women were understood to have authority due to their biologically determined “natural” nurturing abilities.¹⁰ For the women who founded nineteenth century playgrounds, whether they worked as
volunteers or paid staff, playground development and supervision was often only one of many child-saving activities in which they were involved and was certainly one of a very limited number of professions open to women. Municipal housekeeping rationales, though they might be (and eventually were) garnered in support of an expansion of women’s roles to include the supervision of older children’s play, were understandably unappealing to male advocates.

Volunteer club women, professional kindergarteners [always female] and social settlement workers did not necessarily need additional theories of play to justify their work with young children in this new context; they were already closely tied to the education and development of children too young to attend school. However, their use of kindergarten theories of play served to strengthen the arguments they put forth. But age limits common on early playgrounds were challenged and generally abandoned in response both to the interest of older boys and adults and to growing concerns about the threat that “street play” of older boys and adolescents posed both to children and to their communities. If the argument were to be made that playgrounds were needed in addition to kindergartens, and if they were to include children well beyond the years of early childhood, new evidence of play’s importance was required. It was difficult to extend kindergarten theories in support of the importance of play beyond early childhood or to use them to justify the need for both kindergartens and playgrounds.

In the early years of the play movement some leaders who were not kindergarteners acknowledged the debt they owed to the kindergarteners who had so successfully made “learning through play” a key component in the teaching of
young children. For example, a 1911 article published in a Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia report titled “Why Teach a Child to Play?” began, not with new rationales, but by building off of the ground won by the kindergarten movement. In the article the author argued, essentially, that it should be self-evident that older children’s play needed direction since it was already accepted that younger ones needed to be taught to play correctly through “Mother Plays,” for example, a Froebelian term. This emphasis on directed play sheds light on an additional reason for the divergence of kindergartens and playground development. As the national play movement headed towards an emphasis on directed play, the kindergarten movement, under the leadership of Anna Bryan and Patty Smith Hill, increasingly moved away from Froebelian theories and methods toward curricula that de-emphasized the importance of directed play and focused on the facilitation of free play in early childhood classrooms.

Luther Gulick, the PAA’s first president, made it his task to promote a theory of play that made provision for play, and the professional control of play, essential not only for the development of individual children, but for the health of the nation and the entire human race. The linking of children’s play to the progress of both children and the nation made sense initially only when founded on an understanding of play that was based on the work of G. Stanley Hall and his popularization of a theory that is no longer considered to be credible (and, in fact, was largely discredited early in the twentieth century) - recapitulation theory.  

**G. Stanley Hall: Recapitulation Theory and the Play Movement**

G. Stanley Hall was the first American psychologist to study children
systematically and the founder of what would come to be known as the child study movement. Both Luther Gulick, the PAA’s first president, and Henry S. Curtis, its founding secretary, were strongly influenced by Hall’s recapitulation theory of play. Many of the concerns Hall expressed in *Youth: Its Education, Regimen and Hygiene* and other publications were reflected almost verbatim in the pages of *The Playground.*

From German evolutionary scholar Ernest Haeckel, Hall had acquired a commitment to the idea that through their play children “recapitulated” the development of the human race in evolutionary and historical order, beginning life as literal savages and progressing, through play, to a civilized state. As they progressed from birth to adulthood, children played out, or re-enacted, each stage of human evolution, proceeding from simple, “big muscle” actions that paralleled “primitive” or “savage” cultures to more complex forms of play representative of “civilized” modern life. That is, they “recapitulated” the progressive development of the human race. For Hall, a child’s physical and moral development was literally intertwined. Play itself, the very physical process of playing, educated the child, not academically (Hall advocated very rigid and non-play based instructional methods for academic subjects), but morally and socially. This mode of thought was not radically different from early kindergarten theories, which also stressed play as essential to moral development, but Hall’s theory emphasized the physicality of play in ways that kindergarten theory did not.

Building on earlier nineteenth century developmental theories that positioned White males, especially Anglo Saxon males, at the top of civilized society,
recapitulation theory positioned the [White] pre-adolescent and adolescent boy as most in need of both freedom to play and guidance within play.\textsuperscript{16} Puberty, successfully completed was, according to nineteenth century developmental science, a passage into leadership for White males, but served (for different reasons) as a developmental stop sign for women (who remained in a state of childlike purity) and people of color (who remained in a state of primitive savagery).\textsuperscript{17} Prior to puberty, the boy needed to act out his primitive and savage tendencies. Adolescence, then, according to recapitulation theory, was the most critical phase of development in which the older [White] boy learned to control his impulses rationally on his way to becoming civilized. It was the developmental stage that posed the greatest danger to society and therefore justified the highest level of public investment.\textsuperscript{18}

Because according to recapitulation theory play was the path to civilization not only for the individual child and but also for the whole of society, it provided a compelling rationale for play-focused programs, professional play leaders and the dedication of valuable urban space and municipal resources to play. Rhetorics connecting play and children’s development into ideal citizens dominated *The Playground* from 1907-1912. With this “scientific” foundation, PAA publications predicted that they could produce the ideal citizen (and therefore also the ideal nation) by providing children with the play environment, activities and leadership that they “naturally” needed.\textsuperscript{19} But recapitulation theory not only provided more civic-oriented goals for playground production, it also contributed to shifts in practice.
Four shifts had a significant impact on young children and women. First, there was a shift from a focus on the provision of space, to an increased commitment to intensive supervision and organization of play within the space. Second, adolescent boys — in particular White boys — became the primary target of playground programming and recipients of resources. Third, both age and gender divisions on playgrounds, already in place to some extent, became increasingly commonplace, not only in the physical space of the playground, but in the definition of specific activities as appropriate, or not. Finally, one result of these shifts was a change in leadership, from predominantly female, to increasingly male.

One of the first areas in which the influence of recapitulation theory can be seen in the early twentieth century American play movement is in the increased emphasis given to the importance of professional supervision and direction of play (often in the form of organized athletics) over the provision of space for free play. According to Hall, play was "natural" — the child had an instinctive need to play — but the outcome of play's work was not pre-determined. Playing in the wrong way at the wrong stage could be permanently detrimental. Furthermore, if children participated in inappropriate forms of play for their age or sex the health of American civilization was at risk. As a result of these concerns, many playground advocates were no longer satisfied with the provision of "breathing spaces" where children would have a safe place to play in congested neighborhoods. Leaders of the mainstream play movement, both nationally and in Philadelphia, began to pursue the creation of well-equipped model playgrounds staffed with trained play leaders who could teach children how to play which, in turn, would teach them how to be
productive American citizens. Though, as Ocean Howell pointed out, the need for and value of directed play versus free play was regularly contested even within the national movement, during the first decade of the twentieth century the emphasis on the need for trained play leaders and intentional direction of children’s play was dominant.

The impact of recapitulation theory can also be seen in a change of focus from the provision of play for young children of preschool or primary school age to a focus on promoting active play for pre-adolescent and adolescent boys. Early in his career Hall was clearly interested in children’s earlier years. He collected data from several kindergarten programs, and provided trainings for kindergarten teachers, in the 1890s; however, his two most well known books, Adolescence and Youth, published in the early twentieth century, focused on older children. In fact, his time with professionally trained kindergarteners seemed primarily to have fed his distaste for the “effeminate” methods of the kindergarten, methods he viewed as partly responsible for the weakening of civilized men because they failed to allow full expression of the savage stage of development. In contrast to the claims made by kindergarten advocates, Hall indicated that play in early childhood required little attention other than protection from excessive focus on small muscle activities for which young children were not yet prepared (an obvious critique of Froebelian kindergarten practices).

In addition, because dominant understandings of “civilization” were predicated on a view that “the pronounced sexual differences celebrated in the middle class doctrine of separate spheres were. . . an intrinsic and necessary aspect
of civilization” proper training in play required distinct gender boundaries. For Hall, girls’ development did not require participation in a phase of savage play, as did boys’. Nor did they require the same kind of competitive training to move through puberty. Instead, their journey was primarily one of what Putney described as “judicious physical training” that would prepare them for the challenges of motherhood. He, and many PAA members wanted girls to be healthy and strong, but they were concerned that participation in boys’ play could be highly detrimental.

Not surprisingly, the programs and play spaces that emerged from a commitment to this developmental model were then usually both age and gender segregated an attempt to avoid children’s participation in any inappropriate activities. Girls, for example, needed to be prevented from participating in competitive athletic programs, which would not prepare them for their role in managing the home while pre-adolescent boys needed opportunities to live out their savage instincts before they were trained as adolescents through team sports to choose the good of the team over their own individual desires. In this phase women were often hired to direct the play of young children and girls, but were regularly excluded from the highest levels of playground supervision and were prevented from supervising older boys, the targeted participants of most programs. Thus, the nationalization of the play movement also resulted in a gender shift in leadership.

There were other trends as well, including an increased focus on the promotion of physical education and the development of schools as sites for both
team sports and other extra-curricular activities. The promotion of playgrounds as sites for the Americanization of immigrants and training in self-government was widespread. The connection of playgrounds with manual training was not uncommon during this decade. These trends less directly impacted women and young children, specifically, however, so I have chosen not to discuss them here.\footnote{26}

In Cavallo’s words, “The recapitulation theory’s standing within the scientific community during the Progressive Era was dubious to say the least.”\footnote{27} However, it provided such a compelling explanation for the actions of children, and such powerful motives for promoting playground production, that its influence remained long after the theory itself was rejected or forgotten by play advocates. As late as 1928 a report given by one of Philadelphia’s play leaders, the director of Smith Children’s Playground, Phoebe Valentine, revealed the ongoing influence of the theory despite its lack of scientific support. In a report on neighborhood play programs given at the All Philadelphia Council on Social Work she admitted only that “we question the recapitulation theory,” but still referred to several of its key components in her presentation regarding the play needs of children of various ages.\footnote{28}

**The Philadelphia Playgrounds Association and Department of Recreation**

Phoebe Valentine was not the only one of Philadelphia’s play advocates to be influenced by recapitulation theory and trends in the national movement. Philadelphia was one of the first cities to establish an officially incorporated Playgrounds Association, not long after the playground movement was institutionalized nationally in the form of the Playgrounds Association of America.
Like their counterparts in the PAA, leaders in the Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia (PAP) promoted the importance of professional supervision and emphasized the civic benefits of play. They claimed that children could not be taught to be the kind of citizens play leaders wanted them to be, but with proper supervision the child could play “to its physical and moral betterment which makes for a more wholesome citizenship.”

Martin Brumbaugh, President of the Association, Superintendent of the Philadelphia Public Schools and later governor of Pennsylvania gave this description of the rationale for the playground movement in Philadelphia: “The Philadelphia Playgrounds Association from the beginning clearly defined its function to be provision for play for all the children of Philadelphia through municipal support, and under competent and trained supervision. No other type of play is for a moment encouraged by the association.” This threefold emphasis on 1) gaining public financial support for playgrounds and recreation centers, 2) providing trained play supervisors, 3) holding up the goal of developing an “exalted citizenship” which would be of benefit to all of society was firmly grounded in the national rhetoric of the PAA.

The incorporation of in the PAP in 1908 was followed by the creation of a Playgrounds Commission in 1910 and culminated in the establishment of the Philadelphia Department of Recreation in 1911. In general the goals evident in the publications and programs of these organizations mirrored those of the national movement. They advocated municipal support, insisted on the necessity of professional supervision, touted the civic benefits of play, and emphasized the
importance of targeting adolescent boys. The leadership of all three organizations was predominantly, and at times exclusively, male.\textsuperscript{33}

At the local level individual contexts and people influenced the ways that these trends were replicated, resisted or ignored in particular locations. On the ground in Philadelphia — at Starr Garden, the College Settlement Play yards and the Children’s Playground in Fairmount Park — the impact of dominant trends varied. Each of these organizations began and ended this era in a different location from the others not only literally, but also philosophically and practically in relation to the national play movement and its leaders. These differences had varied effects on potential and actual players and play leaders in each location. Returning again to the year 1900, the beginning of this era, the remainder of this chapter will examine the impact of national trends, and local leaders, on children’s access to play and play spaces in Philadelphia.

**Starr Garden Playground: 1900 -1912**

After the College Settlement’s Departure, Starr Garden’s development followed a fairly typical path from private to municipal control. First, the organization hired new playground leaders who took their cues from national movement leaders in New York, Boston and Chicago. Then, organizations more closely affiliated with local governmental leaders were given control of the space, first the Juvenile Protection Agency and then the Philadelphia Playgrounds Association, followed by the Philadelphia Playgrounds Commission. Finally, in 1911, Philadelphia’s Department of Recreation was established and Starr Garden was placed under its control (where it remains today). In just a little over a decade
it was transformed from a newly cleared city lot that offered little of interest to children or adults to a publically funded, model recreation center that included a brand new recreation building and renovated outdoor playground.34

Back in 1900 those most interested in Starr Garden (besides neighborhood residents) were the board, staff and volunteers of the Starr Centre Association, a new philanthropic entity founded with primary leadership from Susan Wharton to continue the work that the College Settlement had abandoned. After almost two decades of work in the neighborhood, Wharton’s passion was now clearly focused on the provision of financial services, or “thrift programs,” for African American residents especially. The Starr Centre began with programs that Wharton transferred from under the leadership of the College Settlement: the kitchen (an outgrowth of the St. Mary Street Library’s cooking classes), the penny lunches, the stamp saving bank, a short-lived co-operative Shoe Club, a Work Bureau, and the Coal Club.

It is perhaps not surprising that Wharton viewed the Starr Center as “a direct outgrowth of the St. Mary Street Library” as she stated in the organization’s first annual report, conveniently skipping over the Settlement years.35 Though her Quaker values prevented her from naming the organization after herself, Wharton was not about to give up her claim to the last 15 years of investment in the neighborhood when the Settlement moved.

Somewhat more surprising than Wharton’s claim was the fact that the organization’s charter specified that the Starr Centre would conduct educational and social programs “in the neighborhood of Starr Garden,” tying its mission directly to
Starr Garden despite the fact that these programs only rarely made use of the space. Since there is little evidence that the space itself was necessary to the organization’s core programs, most of which focused on the provision of financial services to African Americans, it seems likely that this intentional connection to Starr Garden reflected a strategy to prevent another exit like that of the College Settlement.  

The new Centre also sought immediately to increase its physical presence in the neighborhood by establishing a new resident house, (i.e. a settlement), which resembled other social settlements enough to warrant its later inclusion in the *Handbook of Settlements*, published by the Russell Sage Foundation in 1911, though Starr Centre leaders did not choose to affiliate again with the College Settlements Association. Unlike other Starr Centre programs, the purposes of this new settlement house centered on the provision of leisure activities for neighborhood residents. According to the first annual report, the “neighborhood house” was to provide a place for “young men and women who need a place to come for recreation; children let loose from school [who] want something besides the streets” and to make Sunday “a day of leisure from the occupations of the week; a day of good cheer with open library, with music, etc.”

*Creating Philadelphia’s First “Real” Playground, 1903-1906*

In May 1903 the Starr Centre board hired a young librarian Charles T. Walker, age 23 (already acquainted with the neighborhood through his previous work at the College Settlement branch of the Free Library) to expand the “social side of the Library work” for the summer. When the resident house was established, he became the first head worker. With Walker’s leadership the library expanded its
educational and recreational offerings. An important aspect of this expansion was the foray into “outdoor work” in the empty lot that was Starr Garden Park.

Charles Walker was a civic leader on the rise, connected to other Progressive reformers and committed to a range of child-saving methods. From 1903-1905 he was a driving force behind the playground’s development. When he arrived, Starr Garden Park was neither a garden, nor a park, but only a rather barren, open, city lot. By the end of 1903, Walker and board member Esther Morton Smith had formed the “Committee on Converting the Starr Garden into a Public Playground for Children” and had begun a round of meetings with city officials. As a result of their efforts they received permission from city authorities (though no financial support) to operate the park as a supervised playground in the summer of 1904.40

Demonstrating his connection to the nascent national play movement, in preparation for the transformation of Starr Garden, Walker traveled to New York to get ideas for equipment and activities from the founders of Seward Playground, one of New York earliest playgrounds.41 After his return and based on his recommendations, the Starr Garden playground was equipped with “parallel bars, flying rings, travelling rings, trapeze, striking bag, hand-ball court, basket-ball ground, quiot space, sand piles, swings, seesaws, and several small games” in time for the 1904 summer season. [Figure 3: “Plans Showing Alleys in the Vicinity of Starr Garden,” 190442] The following year they added a small baseball field, children’s gardens and an athletic field. They would be able to keep the playground open at least part of the winter of 1906 during which time they set up an “ice slide” and reported “good winter attendance.43
When the playground opened in 1904, Walker became its director and the Centre hired a new librarian. Though he recommended that they secure an athletic director to supervise older boys and a kindergartener to oversee the play of girls and younger children, due to a lack of funds, the playground opened without any additional staff supporting Walker. Instead, Mr. Hopkins, a police officer paid by the city, who reportedly enjoyed his role as playground supervisor, was assigned to playground duty seven days a week from 7 am to 6 pm.\(^\text{44}\) Some provision was made for boys through the help of the Centre volunteer gymnastic instructors and a part-time physical director who instructed two classes of boys once a week for eight weeks.\(^\text{45}\) In 1905, Walker left the Starr Centre and in his place the board hired Mr. John H. Chase as “Head Worker for Men and Boys” with direct responsibility for supervision of playground activities. Like Walker, Chase was clearly connected to the growing national play movement. For example, he stated that he expected to copy Chicago, New York and Boston in terms of equipment. Typical of patterns in other cities, he recommended a plan that included separate provisions for boys and girls along with increased professional supervision.\(^\text{46}\) He also introduced volleyball, hockey and tetherball and had the gardens removed to make room for more athletic games.\(^\text{47}\)

Between 1904 and 1907, the Starr Centre produced two promotional pamphlets, *The First Real Playground in Philadelphia* and *Starr Garden Open Air Gymnasium and Gardens*, to publicize this new aspect of the Centre’s work. These documents, along with the Centre’s annual reports, provide some evidence regarding the Starr Centre leadership’s sense of the playground’s purposes as well
as a few (mediated) glimpses of children’s experiences in the space. In *The First Real Playground in Philadelphia* Walker described Starr Garden in a way that emphasized its child-saving potential, the central purpose of the Starr Garden playground during these years. According to Walker, the playground would serve as a protected space for childhood play, its “fresh air and bright sunshine” offering a replacement for the “narrow streets . . . vile odors and unsanitary surroundings” of the surrounding neighborhoods. (The pamphlet included a photograph of one such street on the front cover). In addition, Walker anticipated that the Playground would provide children with access to a safe place for their playful activities, thereby preventing them from participating in more harmful pursuits.

Can we conceive of anything more grand in the most crowded and one of the worst districts of the city than the children in play protected from surrounding evil and being kept just as busy as bees, even though it is only by play. Have not all of us been kept from many evils by the play we indulged in so freely because we had the chance?

Furthermore, according to Walker, this pure space, like the pure, natural environment of the “seashore” or the “country” would provide tenement children with “that which belongs to childhood—sweet, innocent play.” These children might not have access to the newly idealized childhood of the middle class child, but its founders hoped that the playground could provide them with some level of access to childhood innocence and pleasure.

A variety of scholars have described the emergence during the nineteenth century of a view of childhood innocence and goodness that contained within it fears regarding the child’s vulnerability to corrupt (and corrupting) influences. As this view became increasingly popular, childhood came to be understood as
qualitatively different from adulthood, a time that required designated and protected physical and social spaces focused on promoting the child’s happiness and “natural” inclination to play. Children who did not experience a protected childhood were understood to be at risk personally and also to pose a risk to society. Seen from this perspective, a child’s lack of access to, or interest in, play was doubly alarming, harmful to children and risky for society.\textsuperscript{52}

In keeping with this focus on children and childhood, without exception all of the stories and photographs included in the pamphlets and reports produced by the Starr Center from 1904-1906 were of children playing, with the occasional glimpse of a playground supervisor. [Figure 4: “Horizontal Bars, Open Air Gymnasium”\textsuperscript{53}] In no instance did any of these playground leaders discuss the supervision of adults. Instead, adults were described in these publications only as spectators—the tailor who “stops to look as his offspring distinguishing himself in some sport of which has never had the opportunity even to learn the name” or the “wrecks of men” who “look with wistful, envious or wondering eyes at the boys who have the vitality to do such strenuous things.”\textsuperscript{54}

As had been true for Tsanoff and Mackenzie, Walker and Chase believed that supervision was essential to the playground’s beneficial and protective functions. They viewed Starr Garden as a professionally supervised playground. From their perspective, it was the influence of playground leaders that made the child-saving benefits of the playground possible. Minimally these documents suggest that it was the professional supervision, in addition to its location within a residential neighborhood (unlike the Children’s Playground) that justified labeling Starr Garden
as Philadelphia’s first real playground. “Morally [the playground] is a power,” Walker wrote. “The children are always under the supervision of some older person. Anything that does not belong to all that is decent is kept from permeating young minds.”

Revealing the early signs of a trend that would become dominant in the national movement, these sources also hint at a growing shift in thought regarding the meaning and purpose of the playground supervisor’s role. Though, in 1904 Walker stressed the benefits of adult supervision at Starr, the role of the supervisor as he described it was more akin to a moral gatekeeper than reflective of later ideals focused on the need for playground leaders to intentional train children in how to play. As early as 1905, the Starr Garden playground report demonstrated an increasing commitment to the idea that playground directors should not only supervise, but teach. The author of the playground section of that report, board member Arthur Shrigley, claimed that “under careful supervision, the boys and girls are really taught how to play.” The following year Chase expanded the emphasis on the importance of direct training through play with the image of a “play factory, one that was designed to produce productive American citizens.” (Though the “factory” metaphor was not used widely in the national movement, it fit the general citizen-making goals of the national movement well enough to warrant the inclusion of an article written by Chase in The Playground in 1909.)

**Women and Young Children at Starr Garden Playground, 1903-1906**

Importantly, sources related to Starr Garden from 1904-1906, also reveal gendered shifts in both leadership and focus that foreshadowed future trend in the
movement. For example, when Chase was hired as “Director of Men and Boys,” a woman, Jane P. Rushmore, hired prior to Chase, was the “General Manager” of the resident house and other programs but had no direct responsibility for playground oversight. This choice suggests that the board was building its rational for playground development on concerns regarding the play of older boys especially, rather than on kindergarten rationales that placed young children at the center of playground work. Furthermore, after Chase’s arrival, investment in both staff and equipment was increasingly biased towards the needs of older boys.\(^{59}\) When Chase described his plans for staffing the playground, for example, he recommended “one director for every team game . . . men of character and men who understand athletics . . . .” Almost as an afterthought he added, “We also need very much a lady director to take charge of the girls and tiniest lads.”\(^{60}\) In 1905, four men (and not women), in addition to Chase, were hired; the only female leader, Miss Rosa D. Weston, was a volunteer in charge of the playground gardens, whom Chase removed in 1906. Certainly, it is possible that Chase’s statement was more reflective of his assigned role as Headworker for Men and Boys rather than of a larger disregard for girls and young children. However, the result was that the provision of play opportunities for girls and young children received increasingly little focus.

In contrast to Chase’s actions, accounts authored by the two women most closely connected to the playground’s development from 1903-1906, Esther Morton Smith and Miss Weston, emphasized both the needs of young children and the importance of female supervisors. For example, when Esther Morton Smith wrote the 1904 report on the playground, she ended with an appeal regarding the needs of
“very young children” who “perhaps, more than the older ones, need someone to
guide and interest them in their play... a good kindergartner is essential if the little
boys and girls are to profit as they should by the Starr Playground.” 61 Similarly, the
likely author of the pamphlet titled “Starr Garden Open Air Gymnasium and
Gardens,” Miss Weston, also emphasized the needs of young children. 62

Carefully supervised play, especially among children who have so little training at
home, has a very real value. The smaller members of the community are
especially in need of care. Each child should have personal attention if possible.
The little children want an awning over the sand box, little swings, a sliding
board, a jouncing board, rope with which to jump rope, etc. There should also be
a caretaker for them. A summer Kindergarten would be delightful... Our ideas
of what can be done on the playground are not confined to having the boys turn
somersaults over the bars, and hang on rings...” 63

In addition, Miss Weston cited the need for tools and storage space to
facilitate the care of the children’s gardens, highlighting an aspect of playground
development that was led primarily by professional kindergarteners. These
differences suggest that had women been in charge of the playground’s
development the allocation of resources might have been more evenly distributed.

**Glimpses of Children on Starr Playground, 1904-1906**

As it was, children made use of all the activities available at Starr Playground.
Since many children worked or attended school during the day, highest attendance
levels during the school year occurred during the late afternoon and on weekends.

“After 4 o’clock and all day Saturday this square is one of the sights of the city. The
tenements and shanties disgorge babies, and from the public schools rush embryo
champions and circus performers to begin training,” wrote the author of *Starr
Garden Open Air Gymnasium and Gardens*. 64 The children represented in Starr Centre
documents and photographs were a rather diverse group, both Black and White,
preschoolers and school aged children.\textsuperscript{65} [Figure 5: Large Group of Children in Front of Hanging Rings\textsuperscript{66}]

When on site, boys took advantage of the hanging rings and “turn[ed] somersaults over bars, their enthusiasm demonstrated by their tendency to “cluster about the apparatus whenever there is a chance to swing on the rings or turn somersaults over the poles.”\textsuperscript{67} They were also the recipients of specific instruction regarding rules of play for athletic games and proper use of the apparatus. In 1904, basketball was especially popular with the boys and in the summer they reportedly regularly appropriated the swings in the morning before the girls had their turns in the afternoon.\textsuperscript{68} In 1905, baseball was introduced (only for the “smaller boys” due to the size of the lot) and there were classes for older boys who “became quite proficient in the use of the outdoor gymnasium.”\textsuperscript{69} Competitive sports (basketball, tetherball, volleyball and running) continued to be popular in 1906 and 1907.\textsuperscript{70}

The only reference to girls’ use of the playground during these years noted their regular use of the swings and their participation in tending garden plots during the two years when they were available.\textsuperscript{71} Though preschoolers were still present during these years (the 1905 report mentions that “babies playing in the sandbox” were among the many playground users) none of the additional equipment recommended by Miss Walker had been supplied.\textsuperscript{72} The activities of preschoolers (referred to as “babies” or “young children”) were rarely mentioned, though they were present in photographs in both pamphlets and were briefly mentioned in the 1905, 1906 and 1907 reports.\textsuperscript{73} By 1907 “small children” had been confined to one designated space within the large playground, reportedly to avoid “accidents from
rude play." [Figure 6: Group of Children in and Around Sandbox\textsuperscript{74}] However, given that there is no indication that they were provided with any additional equipment and no staff were hired to provide oversight or to enhance the activities offered, it seems more likely that this space confined rather than expanded young children’s access to play space. \textsuperscript{75} It is difficult to know how the children who used Starr Garden experienced the various changes that took place during these transitional years, but they would certainly have noticed the changes in equipment and activities as well as leadership.

\textit{Moving Closer to Municipal Control, 1907-1911}

Despite the playground’s increasing popularity, Starr Centre board members were questioning Chase’s competence by January 1907. By May, board members moved (with much relief it seemed) in the direction of handing the playground over to the newly organized Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia. The playground section of the Starr Centre’s annual report for the year 1907, explained that “[a]fter careful consideration,” the Starr Centre had decided “to relinquish the control that it had exercised [over Starr Garden Playground]. It seemed unfair to our other branches to divert so large a portion of our income to this one branch of work,” they explained. In addition, they stated that their decision had been “influenced by the fact that ‘The Philadelphia Playground Association’ had been formed, under whose direction our playground should naturally fall.”\textsuperscript{76}

The transition would not go forward quite as smoothly as the Starr board hoped, however. The next few years involved a succession of organizations providing supervision of the space and programs and ongoing changes in
equipment. The Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia was unable to incorporate until late in 1907, so for that year the Juvenile Protection Agency provided supervision of playground activities with help from the Civic Club.\textsuperscript{77} The newly formed PAP finally took charge in 1908, as the Starr Centre leadership had hoped, placing Starr Garden again under the supervision of Charles Walker in some sense since by that time he was a member of the PAP’s Board of Directors.\textsuperscript{78} The PAP added some additional equipment and a wading pool and extended the playground’s official hours of availability, in an attempt to move Starr Garden Playgrounds closer to the ideal “model” playground.\textsuperscript{79} The Playgrounds Association provided both male and female play supervisors, each with distinct roles. The male leaders were expected to work with boys and young men and the females with young children and girls.\textsuperscript{80}

The next organization to provide oversight was the Philadelphia Playgrounds Commission, a body created in 1910 entirely from members of the PAP. Given the task of completing an analysis of Philadelphia’s provision for play and recreation, they also took over supervision of many PAP playgrounds including Starr Garden.\textsuperscript{81} Finally, the creation of the Philadelphia Department of Recreation in 1911 led to yet another transformation of the space from a model playground into Philadelphia’s first municipal “recreation park” complete with a year-round recreation building as a prominent feature.\textsuperscript{82}

Starr Garden Recreation Park opened to hundreds of children and their families on July 7, 1911. Those who arrived on that day and in the months and years to follow had access to a state-of-the-art recreation building complete with shower
baths, club rooms and a large hall. Outdoors, the play space included a large wading pool with sand beach, various permanently installed playground apparatus and space for ball games and other activities. The Department of Recreation report for the year 1912 was filled with photographs of this model space, and described the recreation building at Starr Garden as a “beehive of activity” regularly occupied by a succession of classes, dances and entertainments of a variety which even includes wedding parties. ⁸³ Photographs support the text of the report, both of which highlight its role as a gathering place for young adults, Russian and Italian immigrants primarily.

As this description makes clear, once the playground had been transformed into a model recreation center, it was no longer a predominantly a children's space. Descriptions and photographs in the Department of Recreation Report include children only in the context of neighborhood holiday celebrations, while older teens and adults engaging in classes and clubs are prevalent. Though certainly children would still have used the swings, slides and new wading pool that were located on the grounds, overall the impression given is that the space had become a social center for teenagers and young adults, Russian Jews in particular. ⁸⁴ The annual report highlighted this change in priorities and participants. “The significant facts are the predominance of Russian Jews, the large increase in Italian young men in the evening who are employed by day, and the decrease in Italian girls who are customarily kept at home. It is certain that Starr Garden is a potent factor in Americanizing the younger generation of immigrants,” the report concludes. ⁸⁵ This shift was reflective of changes typical in other cities in which playground
development was progressing.

Clarence Rainwater saw the national phase of the American Play movement as beginning in 1906 with the creation of the Playgrounds Association of America, but the story of Starr Garden’s development suggests that the national movement had already begun to take shape prior to the establishment of the PAA. Walker’s multiple meetings with city authorities, his focus on the provision of supervision, and his trip to visit Seward Playground all indicate a high level of commitment to the ideals and practices of a movement that was transitioning from a local phase to a national phase. Chase further strengthened these connections, making reference to Chicago and New York directly as the model he hoped to follow in developing Starr Garden.

The author(s) of the Open Air Gymnasium pamphlet revealed a connection to national leaders as well, by beginning the pamphlet with a quote from Joseph Lee, later to become PAA vice president, “The boy without a playground is father to the man without a job.” Both Walker and Chase may be viewed as representatives of the mainstream playground movement in its formative stage, not only because they explicitly demonstrated their connections to play leaders in other cities and to the ideas of the mainstream movement, but also because they both continued to be active participants in the regional and national playground movement after leaving Starr. Walker became a member of the Board of Directors of the Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia and Chase later became a play director in Ohio, a position that gave him the opportunity to further publicize his “play factory” analogy in The Playground in 1909. During their short tenures at Starr Garden
supervision increased, boys were prioritized and girls and young children were increasingly relegated to the sidelines. Female leadership decreased as well.

**College Settlement Play Yards: 1900-1912**

Meanwhile, and somewhat ironically in contrast to Starr Centre board members who during these years gained responsibility for a playground they weren’t sure they wanted, Anna Davies, headworker of the Philadelphia College Settlement, faced a significant lack of play space at the Settlement’s new home about a mile southeast of Starr Garden at Fourth and Christian Streets. Having failed to procure a building with either indoor or outdoor spaces comparable to their former location adjacent to Starr Garden, Davies and her colleagues would spend a significant amount of time, energy and money in their first few years in their new location on the creation of outdoor play-yards on Settlement properties. At the same time she also continued to press city leaders to establish more public playgrounds, kindergartens and schools in the region.\(^90\)

As was the case for the Starr Centre, much of the work that began at 429 Christian Street, the College Settlement’s new residence, built on programs that had been established previously on Rodman Street (formerly St. Mary Street). For Settlement residents, “building on their previous work” meant facilitating clubs, classes, Saturday morning play hours and social events for immigrants along with some ongoing political reform, a combination typical of social settlements in other American cities as well.\(^91\) Unlike Susan Wharton, Anna Davies and the residents of the Philadelphia College Settlement (one of whom was Hannah Fox) viewed the provision of leisure activities and safe places for play to be central to their mission
and methods. These recreational activities required spaces that the Settlement no longer had.

According to Davies, the inadequacies of their new physical plant constituted an immediate, significant and practical problem in 1900, important enough to justify the prioritization of physical renovation over political reform for a time. “It is not so important to establish large and far reaching policies as it is to determine methods by which small and intensely practical improvements in plant and organization may be quickly realized. . . ,” wrote Davies in the March 1900 edition of the News of the College Settlement of Philadelphia, ”In general,” she continued, “what we have to do is this: First, to put into the best possible condition for our use our present quarters; second, to use them up to the limit of their capacity; third, to find out the most desirable and economic line of expansion as the pressure of growth makes itself felt. Though, in part, the focus was on improving living conditions for residents, the majority of Davies’ energy went toward the creation and acquisition of places for play.

She was largely successful, adding new play spaces every year from 1900-1904, though never as sizeable as what she desired. By June 1900, Settlement residents and volunteers were able to complete construction of their first outdoor space, a roof garden at Christian Street. Though not specifically designed for play, they used this new space for everything from English classes to club meetings to concerts. (In addition it provided a cool place for residents to sleep on sweltering summer nights.) In 1901 they outfitted the basement of Christian Street as a play room for “our rougher boys,” which they filled with gymnastic equipment
transferred from Stuart Hall, adding at the same time a sand pile, a morning glory box and two outdoor "shower baths" in the "tiny backyard." In 1902 a similar basement play space was established at a new branch house on Front Street. In 1903, back at 429 Christian Street, the Settlement lost a bid to purchase a nearby church property that would have provided them with space for a gymnasium and playground, but still managed to create their first small play-yard. The next year, the purchase and demolition of a “ramshackle house, an undrained privy vault and a wretched shed stable” provided the Settlement with another play-yard at a more recently acquired property, 435 Christian Street. This one was deemed more suitable for girls play than the first one had been since it was enclosed by less visibly open fencing, thereby protecting girls from the view of onlookers. Though no new playgrounds were built between 1905-1910, the Settlement did gain additional access to play space through an agreement providing them with daily use of the school playground adjacent to the Front Street branch, a property they eventually purchased.

**Connections to the Mainstream Play Movement**

Despite the successful addition of these play-yards, hope for more extensive provision for play had given way to resignation bordering on despair for Davies in 1904. After losing out on what had been a second hoped-for church property, no longer in use, Davies wrote despairingly that,

The head worker of the Philadelphia Settlement has finally determined the real function of the two graveyards in the vicinity of the Christian Street house. For four years she had believed that one or the other of them was intended as the site of a gymnasium and playground, to be own and managed by the Settlement until such a time as should find the city government. . . ready to municipalize such undertakings. . . . The repeated frustration of plans for acquiring one of the
cemeteries has proved that though condemned by the city authorities they still offer adequate space for buried hopes, that will probably be their only use to the Settlement.  

This statement reveals not only Davies’ frustration, but also a goal not stated in other reports, namely that the Philadelphia College Settlement leaders did not intend to keep any large play facility long term, but planned ultimately to transfer the hoped-for playgrounds to municipal control. In making this statement Davies demonstrated alignment with at least one of the goals of the nascent play movement.  

The 1905 report, in a section titled, “Suggestions for the Immediate Future Needs of Our Locality,” also revealed some level of commitment to another play movement goal, namely, the importance of high quality playground supervision. Several specific spaces were listed in the report as recommended sites for municipally financed playgrounds, among them being Starr Garden Park, Weccacoe Square (located at 4th and Catherine) and “every school yard of wards one to five.”  

Making it clear that spaces alone were not enough, Davies, again in alignment with dominant trends, emphasized the need for “play spaces financed and properly supervised by the city.” And in keeping with her support for proper supervision in 1908 she reported that though both Starr Garden and Weccacoe Square had been equipped for playground use by the city, from her perspective the “character of the supervision provided by the city might be bettered.”  

Like Walker, Anna Davies was also on a path that would lead to broader influence in Philadelphia’s efforts to promote play and recreation. She would, in 1917, be called on by the Smith Children’s Playground trustees to serve as a
consultant when they considered expanding their work to new neighborhoods, a
testimony to her reputation as a playground expert. In 1928 she would serve as a
member of the recreation committee of the Philadelphia Council on Social Work
alongside Smith’s Director and the Director of Physical Education for the
Philadelphia Public Schools. She had clearly started down this path in 1908 when
she raised the following critique of Philadelphia’s movement towards municipally
supported playgrounds and recreational programming:

We shall not very soon, in this city, reach a satisfactory condition in playground
matters. What we are doing is to furnish samples – schoolyards, small squares, little
play yards. By such arguments, sufficiently multiplied, we may come to a
comprehensive municipal programme such as has been adopted in Chicago,
where the city has displayed a wise and generous mind toward the recreation of
her children, small and large. ¹⁰⁸

By referencing Chicago, emphasizing the importance of qualified supervisors and
focusing on the goal of municipal control, Davies again aligned herself with other
play movement participants regionally and nationally.

It is very likely due to continued advocacy by Davies and others from the
Settlement, that Weccacoe Square was not entirely ignored as municipal efforts to
develop playgrounds and recreation centers in Philadelphia moved in the direction
of creating much larger model recreation centers, some in more prosperous
neighborhoods. Still, despite initial efforts in 1908, the development of Weccacoe
Square from 1908 to 1912 had been minimal. Unlike Starr Garden, it was not
included in the Philadelphia Playgrounds Commission’s 1910 recommendations for
further playground development. ¹⁰⁹

Having begun agitation for the square’s development as early as 1905, it is
likely that Davies and her associates increased their efforts when, in 1911, they
acquired several additional buildings on Queen Street, adjacent to their original location on Christian Street, which provided them with 90 feet of frontage facing Weccacoe Square.\textsuperscript{110} The College Settlement reported that in 1912 the city had “established the Weccacoe Square playground”\textsuperscript{111} at which point Settlement residents and volunteers also began to make regular use of it for community festivities such as carnivals and pageants, events that were increasingly common playground activities.\textsuperscript{112} Weccacoe was included in the Philadelphia Board of Recreation’s 1913 report as one of its official playgrounds, playground “No. 6.” The report described it as “a small open space, which after various vicissitudes [was] coming into its own,” a description that suggests that it was probably still poorly equipped, a situation that contrasted sharply with Sherwood Recreation Park, a new recreation centre “surrounded by the most substantial citizens of West Philadelphia.” Sherwood’s costs and attendance figures for the year 1912 exceeded all other playgrounds with the exception of Starr Garden.\textsuperscript{113} Still, Weccacoe was used by almost 60,000 people that year for ball games and other activities.\textsuperscript{114}

One final transformation of outdoor space was enacted by the Settlement at the end of this time period, in 1912, when they constructed a “Babies Rest Yard” where babies could sleep in shaded hammocks while their caregivers, often older sisters who were still children themselves, could rest or play nearby. Sometimes parallel kindergarten classes were held for caregivers and alongside simplified versions for their younger charges.\textsuperscript{115} Though not a place specifically designated for play, I include it here because it shows how flexibly Settlement women could be in responding to the needs of children. The Baby Yard provided a safe space for both
babies and their caregivers, one that included some provision for their physical needs as well as provision for play.

**Players and Programs**

According to Settlement reports, neighbors appreciated and used the play spaces that Settlement residents created, regardless of their imperfections. According to Davies’ annual report for 1903, one neighbor described their first play yard as “the best thing you ever did.” At the time of the report, the play space had been open for four months and was “used, literally, morning, noon and night” for a wide range of activities including basketball, drive ball and even modified versions of baseball and tennis. Younger children made use of two swings and a portable see-saw and “comments on it from all those coming into relation with it—parents, children and residents—show that no opportunity which we can command is so highly and so generally valued,” wrote Davies.  

Philadelphia College Settlement reports from 1903-1912 included regular descriptions of the patterns of constant use at all of the Settlement play-yards. The author of an article printed in the *News* for July 1904 exclaimed, “It is a constant amazement to see how many persons can use to fair advantage such limited spaces for exercise and play.” When the Settlement gained use of the yard at the school adjacent to Front Street they scheduled play hours for different groups to prevent overcrowding. An article titled “Possible Uses for a Small Play Yard,” published in the *News of the College Settlement* in June 1908, described how boys eight to twelve years old would wait while “three, four and five-year-olds [played] with balls, beanbags, horse lines or trains.” The older boys would then play baseball,
basketball or other such games. Then, after the boys finished their ball games, they might be followed by a group of girls “who have spent their day in the store or factory” who came to play basketball after work; older boys might follow them for boxing before the yard would be closed at 9:30 pm. On summer playgrounds and at the Baby Rest Yard once it was created, “little mothers” gladly made use of toys, games and sports while their younger siblings slept in shaded baby hammocks.

Some scholars have argued that few children were interested in playing on Progressive Era playgrounds due to the limits play leaders placed on their actions and activities. Children certainly could and did make use of a variety of spaces for play, including city streets; however, Settlement reports complicate the picture somewhat, demonstrating both that in some cases or at particular times, children who chose to participate in playground activities also expressed a preference for the less supervised play spaces. For example, one report included a story of a boy who attended a settlement sponsored picnic, but then left early because he wanted to play “Cop and Lady Bum,” a game that Settlement leaders did not allow. What this story suggests is that children’s preference for unsupervised street play did not preclude their use of and interest in supervised play programs or places constructed especially for play.

In the case of the College Settlement, the limitations of space often required adaptations of favorite games, which may or may not have been as enjoyable as the games in their traditional forms. Rather than choosing to stay away, children adapted their games to the spaces as needed, an indication of what little access they had to more suitable locations for their games as well as a clear demonstration of
the flexibility of both play and children. For example, the low ceilings of the basement playrooms at both Christian and Front Street required creative adaptations. At Christian Street tall boys were at a disadvantage in the basement gymnasium where the “traveling rings hang so near the floor as to be of little use unless one can hold himself doubled up while traveling.” Clearly some boys did manage to do just that in order to make use of the equipment available. Front Street children learned to play “basement basketball,” a testament to the appeal of having any place to play the game as it required some creativity in a room with 7 ½ foot ceilings. “I shall be glad to know of another place in the world where basketball has been adapted to a cellar 20 X 25 by 7 ½ feet. If it has been done we must forfeit our claim to originality,” wrote Davies. In the play yards miniature versions of baseball and football were popular as well.

**Alternatives**

Unlike Starr Garden or Weccacoe Square, the College Settlement play-yards were too small to be of interest to city leaders. As a result, they did not transition to municipal control. Therefore, they retained, and in at least one case developed, characteristics less reflective of dominant trends. Like the games played within them, these spaces were adaptable. Not only did they serve the needs of diverse players, they were capable of holding within them a variety of beliefs about play and its purposes as well.

Overall, the playgrounds of the College Settlement were responses to practical problems, more than they were material representations of specific ideologies of play. According to Allan Davis, and others, social settlement workers
were “practical idealists.”125 In this instance that description seems to fit the women of the Philadelphia College Settlement well. They certainly did not create model playgrounds as defined by leaders of the PAA. It is true that the Settlement’s play-yards shared some traits of a model playground: access to the spaces was controlled and they were always supervised by adults, but these were not the highly regulated playgrounds that Gulick and Curtis advocated. Nor did they reflect the PAA’s emphasis on boy’s play as did the early versions of Starr Garden created by Charles Walker and John Chase.

College Settlement playgrounds did not follow the developmental progression of the American play movement as Clarence Rainwater described it: from sand gardens for young children to multi-age, multi-use recreation for all. They provided recreational opportunities for children, youth and some adults from the beginning. There was no increase in the emphasis given to boys or adolescents from 1900-1912. “Older boys,” a term often used to refer to teenagers, had always been “on the radar;” a 1902 report stated, for example, that they saw their first play yard as being particularly important for both little children and older boys,126 and the first College Settlement play space included a basement playroom for boys with a sandbox for preschoolers outside of it. But the importance of boys play neither diminished nor increased in these years. They did not appear more frequently on the playground schedule or receive additional attention in reports, nor were they the recipients of a disproportionate amount of resources.127

If any group received more focus than others in College Settlement play-yards, it was younger children rather than teens, though that was not the case in
other programs such as Settlement clubs and classes where enrollment was roughly equal. In the College Settlement Report for the year 1908, for example, Davies emphasized the importance of playgrounds (along with kindergartens and public elementary schools) for the training of children aged four to twelve specifically. When play times were scheduled, kindergarten students were given their own designated time in addition to designated time on the schedule for other preschoolers. In addition, the construction of the Baby Yard demonstrates an intentional prioritization of very young children and their caregivers that was largely absent in national play movement priorities.

**The Children’s Playground in the Park: 1900-1912**

The Children’s Playground changed very little from 1900-1912 in terms of ideology, programs, participants or leadership, though for several years additional equipment was added on a regular basis. Well into the twentieth century, Smith’s programs (what few there were) and equipment still located play primarily within the domain of early childhood and domestic life, emphasizing play’s intrinsic value as a source of pleasure, essential to early childhood and to the healthy development of individual children. Founded in decidedly middle class romantic ideas about nature, child development and play, in this view the core of mission of Smith Memorial Playground, or “The Children’s Playground,” was to support children in playing as they wished (within reasonable limits of safety and propriety, of course). As a result of these commitments, the Children’s Playground served far fewer purposes (and proportionally fewer people) than the College Settlement and Starr Garden playgrounds, though in a much larger space. [Figure 7: Children’s
Playground, Grounds, 1904\textsuperscript{129}

The “amusements” provided for the children who came to play at Smith continued to constitute the core program during these early years along with access to “pure air” and open space. Though on opening day the outdoor equipment at Smith had consisted of commonly available items, the superintendent kept adding new and unique features. The fall of 1901 brought the construction of a large, figure eight shaped concrete concourse used for wheeled vehicles like tricycles, wagons, velocipedes (precursors to the bicycle) and roller skates.\textsuperscript{130} [Figure 8: Children’s Playground, Concourse, 1904\textsuperscript{131}] By 1905 they had added a merry-go-round, a croquet ground and a large, enclosed wooden slide (still in use today!). [Figure 9: Children’s Playground, Slide, 1905\textsuperscript{132}]\textsuperscript{133} By 1907, outdoor equipment in addition to the above included “two small [slides], a giant stride, one line of Dentzel swings, parallel bars, one twenty foot bouncing board, ten see-saws, baseball and basket ball grounds” and a very large wading pool which Park Superintendent J. Foster Ogden indicated was “widely enjoyed by all” except some of the mothers and teachers who, from the superintendent’s perspective, did not want to fully supervise their children once they entered the playground.\textsuperscript{134} By 1907 Ogden deemed the playground’s equipment to be adequate. No significant changes were made to the outdoor space from 1907-1912, beyond the regular planting of additional trees.\textsuperscript{135}

The Playhouse changed very little either, after the initial adjustments and additions that were made soon after it opened in 1899. Its basement playroom was used for riding toys, the main floor for quieter activities like reading and listening to music, and the second floor was equipped for the play of toddlers especially, with
rooms for sick or sleeping children available as well. [Figure 10: Children’s Playground, Reading Room, 1902136] (The third floor was the residence of the superintendent’s family.) The kitchen was so popular that a new one was added in 1905 to increase capacity. In 1909 they added a large aquarium to the basement, but no additional improvements appear in annual reports.137

**People and Activities**

Attendance at Smith grew steadily during these years from an annual attendance of 57,500 in 1901 to 128,500 in 1907 hitting its highpoint of 143,500 in 1908, at which point it remained fairly stable until 1912 when it decreased slightly, a situation that Ogden attributed to the change in the trolley route in addition to the increased number of playgrounds available in city neighborhoods.138 Average daily attendance in the summer months grew from 375 per day in 1902 to 930 per day in 1907. On national holidays such as Memorial Day and Labor Day attendance numbers could reach as high as 4,000 in one day.139

In winter, when outdoor equipment was stored in the basement playroom, which was too cold for use, attendance numbers were much lower and a few programs were added in order to attract participants.140 Singing, story hours and illustrated talks were offered on Saturday afternoons. These events were more attractive to children than regular access to the play house alone, as demonstrated by the fact that average attendance on the days that special entertainment was provided was at least triple the average on other days, but attendance numbers in winter rarely exceeded 100 children, much lower than what was common in the summer.141 Other activities in winter included sledding on the surrounding hills.
and skating on the river.\textsuperscript{142} More boys made use of the facilities in winter than girls.\textsuperscript{143}

Despite the park administration’s intentions, there is evidence to suggest that Smith Playground served quite a few unaccompanied children. Sometimes it just was not possible to exclude children who wanted to come in. With just over six acres to supervise, Ogden could not spend all of his time patrolling the fence and often children took advantage of the situation, as was the case on May 30, 1901 when Ogden noted that there were many children on site without caretakers and “fully one third came over the fence.”\textsuperscript{144} Even if he could, the superintendent did not seem to be inclined to reject children who managed to come alone. Though he recorded multiple instances when he turned away older boys or visitors without young children in their care, he did not record a single instance in which a child was turned away solely because s/he came without an adult.\textsuperscript{145}

Both Ogden, and the Park’s head trustee, William Gest, believed that the playground was intended to benefit poor children especially, though the only indication that this might also have been the intention of Mrs. Smith is found in the fact that the will specified that no admission fee should be charged.\textsuperscript{146} In journal entries Ogden consistently expressed his frustration when there were too many children of means in attendance and too few of the poor, and his delight when poor children did arrive and enjoy themselves. For example, on Feb. 22, 1900 he wrote, “This being a holiday we have had a good company. The children have been, with few exceptions, poor and have greatly enjoyed the comforts and amusements of this their own building.” Similarly on May 10, 1900 he wrote of his pleasure in greeting
a kindergarten class from a low-income neighborhood stating, “These we were glad to receive for they were all poor children, of the class for whom the building is intended.” Annual reports from 1902-1912 reveal that the extension of the services of Smith to the poor was a continual challenge. Though Gest’s 1902 trustee report indicated that, “the attendance of the poorer children has been steadily on the increase,” it also confirmed that “the children have generally been of the middle class.” It was a statement that remained in the reports throughout this time period. Reflecting on the year 1904 in a report to the trustees, for example, the superintendent noted as a success an increase in the attendance of children coming to the site from “the congested sections of the city;” however, in the same report he added that “the expense of transportation continues to be the one great hindrance in obtaining the best results among the very poor.” Only one demographic was clearly barred from participation, namely boys over ten.

And as had been true at playgrounds in other cities since 1886, older boys were persistent in their attempts to gain access to this unique play space. J. Foster Ogden, noted repeatedly that preventing older boys from entering the grounds was a constant struggle beginning as early as July 31, 1899 when he wrote “have great difficulty in enforcing the rule not allowing boys over 10 years in the building. It is remarkable how many large and well developed boys come who are ‘only nine.’” In multiple entries Ogden complained about the efforts made to keep older boys out or send them out once they got in as on July 2, 1900 when he stated that “One of our chief duties this day has been to keep the place clear of large boys.” Their exclusion, it seems, was often, but not completely consistently enforced and at least
initially may have been limited to the play house and not the grounds. There are instances recorded when groups arrived bringing older boys who were not allowed to enter the playground, but this was not always the case.

Clearly many boys were not in favor of the rule excluding them and they made their wishes abundantly clear by lying, climbing over the hedges and fences, arriving as caregivers of younger children and consistently badgering the superintendent for entrance.\textsuperscript{151} Cavallo and others have argued that very few children ever made use of the playgrounds built during the playground movement because the children preferred the freedom of street play to the more controlled and organized play required by play leaders. However, the actions of these boys at Smith Playground demonstrate the opposite pattern—children trying to get in when they were excluded. Smith was not unique in this way either, however, as stories from other cities and other playgrounds contain similar instances.\textsuperscript{152}

In fact, the actions of pre-adolescent and adolescent boys had a significant impact on the direction taken by movement leaders who by the time the national Playground Association of America was established in 1906 were focusing the bulk of their efforts on boys. This focus was encouraged by new theories of child development as well, but without the persistent action of the boys themselves it is unlikely that it would have gained such momentum. Their actions, however, had little impact on the policies of Smith Playground. Smith’s leadership remained committed to upholding the Founders’ preference that older boys be excluded. The trustees’ annual reports stated repeatedly that experience had proven that the plan to exclude older boys was a good one.\textsuperscript{153} It was this policy that received the most
criticism from the city’s newest play advocates, the leaders of the PAP and members of the playground commission.

**Play Movement Critiques**

Prior to the establishment of the PAA, the goals of the Children’s Playground were more closely aligned with those of many mainstream play advocates than they would be after 1906. At the turn of the century, close connections between kindergartens and playgrounds remained and many play advocates still viewed play as closely tied to early and middle childhood, rather than adolescence. In addition, despite its remote location, Smith’s first supervisor and the head trustee of the memorial fund that supported the playground both emphasized their commitment to serving the poor, a goal also closely aligned with the goals of other child-saving reformers at the turn of the century. As a result, Smith playground received some public commendation and support from local and national play leaders.

On May 30, 1900, Ogden recorded in the playground’s daily journal that a visitor from Boston had told him, “that after all that Boston has done for children, the ‘hub’ must yield the palm to the city by the Delaware, and look to East Fairmount Park for a model Children’s Day Home.” Given Boston’s reputation as the originator of play advocacy in the United States, this was quite high commendation. A quotation included in the Playground’s annual report in 1905 indicated that there were Philadelphia play leaders who were impressed as well. According to the report, Miss Elizabeth O’Neill, Philadelphia’s Supervisor of Public Playgrounds, described Smith Memorial Playground as a “magnificent example of true beneficence... which shall forever testify to the blessing and enrichment of
thousands, perhaps millions, of lives of little children... the most beautifully situated and most ideal in all its arrangements and equipment of any playground in this country." This commendation would be almost completely reversed by the Philadelphia Playgrounds Commission Report only five years later.

Between 1907 and 1910, the Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia followed national trends, focusing on the needs of older boys in particular. Smith playground stayed its course, continuing to exclude boys over ten, a fact that did not lead to a high approval rating with Philadelphia’s most prominent playground advocates. Both PAP’s 1909 report and the Playgrounds Commission Report (1910) included critiques highlighting Smith’s limitations. The first critique was rather mildly stated:

It seems strange that this ideal playground is of no use to that class of children needing the effects of a good environment and sympathetic direction most: i.e. boys in their pre-adolescent years. But rule No. one of the playground says: In accordance with the will of the founder, boys over the age of ten years will not be admitted. We wonder if a sympathetic revision of this rule, or a more liberal interpretation of the will of the founder which states, “his preference is that male children over ten years of age be excluded from the playground” might not result in giving the boys over ten years a chance to enter this paradise at least once in awhile.

However, when this plea failed to bring about the desired change in policy, the Philadelphia Playgrounds Commission (whose members were all from the PAP) escalated the conflict to a new level describing Smith Playground as virtually “useless.” The first part of the report completely omitted Smith Playground in a broad overview of existing playgrounds and recreation spaces located in Philadelphia’s Fairmount Park. But they did not stop with this subtle omission. A few pages later, the authors of the report stated that “accessibility is necessary to
success, as evidenced by the comparative uselessness of the Smith Memorial Playhouse, which is situated too far within the park and too distant from the homes to be of service to the smaller children, for whom it was intended."\textsuperscript{158} In J. Foster Ogden's twelfth annual report to the Trustee of the Smith Estate he expressed his regret regarding the criticism the Playground received during 1910.\textsuperscript{159} However, no policies were changed in response to it.

Of course this critique ignores the fact that Smith Playground was created for children \textit{and their} caregivers, to improve their experiences as visitors to Fairmount Park. For that purpose it remained quite useful, though few preschoolers would venture there on their own. Attendance remained stable and Ogden reported that visitors continued to “pass favorable comment upon the building, grounds and the general equipment for the safety and comfort of all guests.”\textsuperscript{160} The facilities continued to be used frequently by charitable organizations throughout the city as well as families and there were many days it was full beyond capacity.\textsuperscript{161}

Available comments from guests were very possibly skewed toward the positive since they were recorded by Ogden and in trustee reports, still, attendance numbers alone clearly indicate that Smith was not “useless” though it was also just as clearly not meeting the goals of many of the leaders of the play movement or even its own leaders. It is interesting to note that these critiques did not emphasize the playground’s lack of success in consistently serving poor and working class children, a critique that would have been easily supported, and one which Smith Playground’s leaders made of themselves. Instead, the interests of young children and their caregivers were protected during a season of playground production that for young
children usually resulted in decreased rather than increased access to resources that supported their play.

Tensions seem to have lessened somewhat by 1911. There was no mention of Smith Playground in the report of the Philadelphia Playgrounds Association for that year and Ogden’s report was much more upbeat, describing the year as one with “gratifying results.”\textsuperscript{162} Perhaps the other play movement leaders were distracted by more important developments in the city’s playground movement, including the establishment of the Board of Recreation.\textsuperscript{163} However, it is even more likely that their criticisms died down because city officials had asked (or were planning to ask) the trustees of Smith Playground to consider purchasing and supervising playhouses and playgrounds in congested urban neighborhoods in addition to continuing the work of the Children’s Playhouse and Playground in Fairmount Park. This request led the Fidelity Trust Company, trustee of the estate, to petition for permission to use some of the trusts’ funds for this purpose. The petition was submitted on May 14, 1912.\textsuperscript{164}

**Conclusion**

By 1912 the playground movement was no longer in a stage of formation. Boundary lines in the professional turf of play had been drawn. In some ways they were still not rigidly defined, but they were visible.\textsuperscript{165} What most participants now called the “Recreation Movement” was entering a period of solidification in which play and recreation as professional fields, as municipal responsibilities, as essential components of childhood and of the non-working hours of adults, and the spaces in which these activities took place, became such a common aspect of American life.
that they seemed never to have been absent.

As this overview of the development of three Philadelphia playgrounds from 1900-1912 shows, the dominant strand of the American Play Movement, institutionalized nationally in the PAA and locally in the PAP and Philadelphia’s Department of Recreation, represented only one version of play advocacy in early twentieth century America. It was a very successful version on many levels, resulting in a vast increase in playground production and public funding. However, in general, dominant trends decreased the influence of female play advocates, whose perspectives often differed from their male colleagues, and shifted young children from a place of prominence on playgrounds to a more limited role on the sidelines.

Trends, both ideological and practical, did influence playground production on the ground in Philadelphia, but the influence was not all encompassing. Even as the dominant movement gained power, there were play leaders in Philadelphia with characteristics less representative of the mainstream movement who continued to serve different purposes and players. A view of these non-dominant patterns provides evidence of alternative paths of play advocacy that at times did, and if followed more consistently, could have produced different results.

Of the three playgrounds discussed here, Starr Garden followed the dominant pattern most closely. Beginning in 1904 it moved in the direction of predominantly male leadership, hiring staff who intentionally emulated playground advocates in Boston, Chicago and New York who were building new rationales and practices based on G. Stanley Hall’s recapitulation theory of play. Hall’s theory promoted the
idea that male adolescence, and not early childhood, was the phase of development when play investment was most needed and that male leaders were necessary components of the proper training of boys. As its leaders began to apply these ideas to the development of Starr Garden, boundaries of age and gender were strengthened and access to play opportunities for girls and preschoolers decreased, as did the influence of female leaders. Had the priorities of the women most closely connected to the playground been supported, young children would likely have found themselves with expanded rather than increasingly diminished access to the resources offered there and the very popular gardens would not have been destroyed to make room for organized sports.

Seemingly less committed to a particular ideology of play than to the community in which they worked, head worker Anna Davies led College Settlement residents in ongoing efforts to create and supervise play spaces that served multiple subsets of the population and a variety of purposes, some more in line with dominant trends than others, without severing ties to the mainstream play movement. The College Settlement’s basement playrooms and outdoor play-yards can be seen to some extent as physical representations of the Settlement’s commitment to respond in practical ways to the social and physical needs of the surrounding community. In these spaces children and adults of all ages and both sexes received essentially equal attention and resources.

Women like Anna Davies were able to hold onto the field of recreation as a place where they could work (though this fact was probably largely influenced by the low salaries that made the retention of male recreationists difficult), but there is
little evidence to indicate that they ever regained the level of influence over policy, programming and participants that they had held in the earlier stages of Philadelphia’s playground movement. The consistently flexible model of play space production that Davies developed, had it become dominant nationally, might have prevented the movement from dividing the turf of play into increasingly distinct categories that were less reflective of and responsive to the daily lives of children and parents than they could have been. Unlike the impression given by the distinctly-focused institutions and professions that developed out of the play movement, for parents, children and community members play and recreation, family and community life, childcare and education, recreation and sport were not separated by the rigid boundaries that play’s professional division into Departments of Recreation, programs of physical education, early childhood education, organized sport and a myriad of other categories indicated that they should be.

Yet another possibility is represented by Smith Playground’s development. In part, the story of Smith Playground from 1900-1912 is a story of the power of financial funding (and funders) to influence policy and practice. Empowered by ample financial resources, Smith Playground’s leaders retained a commitment to provide play space for young children specifically, as their funders had instructed them to do, despite critiques from other play advocates. Perhaps in part due to the ways that Smith, in retaining its domestic character, supported distinct gender roles and also due to the consistency of positive experiences with the original model, even Smith’s male leaders seemed entirely disinclined to reshape the organization’s methods or priorities. As a result, Smith remained one of only a few playgrounds in
Philadelphia in which young children retained a place of primary importance.  

In addition, Smith was a place that defined free play, that is, play without professional guidance and direction, as intrinsically valuable. The relative value of free versus directed play was one that would continue to be debated in both of the now essentially divided professional play-focused territories of early childhood education and community recreation, among others. The fact that within a period of only a few years Smith could be defined as an exemplary playground and then as a “useless” playground by play professionals without changing in any significant ways or losing participants demonstrates how flexibly the terms “play” and “playground” could and can be used to support very different goals —goals reflective of conflicting ideologies and political agendas. These years were transitional ones when private charity workers still held their ground, though they would soon be superseded by increasingly professional directors of children’s play.

Finally, one alternative form of playground provision absent from the mainstream movement stands out in these stories, namely the practice of caring for caregivers, not just for children. As demonstrated by Smith Playground and the College Settlement Baby Yard, public (or semi-public) provision of play for young children could also be tied to provision of support for their caregivers. To some extent both Smith and the Baby Yard served as extensions of the home, places designed to protect young children and to support their (predominantly female) caregivers. Both places, unlike typical municipally-run playgrounds, reflected an understanding of the challenges inherent in caring for babies and toddlers. Both were designed to lighten that load. One (Smith) did so primarily for middle class
mothers and professional caregivers. The other (the Baby Yard) served poor and working class mothers by providing a safe place in which their daughters and babies, and they themselves upon occasion, might play and rest. Both places helped caregivers primarily through the provision of a space designed to meet the needs of their younger charges as well as their own needs. It seems to me that this alternative strand of playground development, if pursued and supported, could have resulted in much more creative, affordable and widespread child care alternatives for families and children than the limited options that were and are provided for American families in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Many valid critiques of playground advocates and play organizers have been raised by other scholars, and certainly there were circumstances in which being the recipient of the attention of play advocates and leaders, as a young adolescent, for example, may not have been beneficial, as Cavallo and others have argued. However, in neighborhoods where resources were greatly needed and access was desired, being ignored was rarely an improvement. Nonetheless, young children and female play leaders experienced increasing invisibility as nationalization and professionalization processes defined and refined the dominant strand of American play movement. There are unexplored possibilities presented in these stories of non-dominant play “movements.” At least one additional story remains to be told.

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I return to the beginning and seek to place the experiences of African American children and families, largely absent from PAA publications until after World War I and from parks movement literature until after 1910, within the context of the broader American play movement from 1900-
1912. Black children’s access to play and play space during these years was directly impacted by the beliefs and goals of those around them, who were influenced by national trends, not only within the play movement, but outside of it. Like their White counterparts, African American children needed advocates who viewed play as worthy of investment. They also needed advocates who had sufficient power and access to resources to be able to see that their ideas were enacted. But in addition, Black children needed advocates who believed that African Americans had potential equal, or at least almost equal, to that of Whites. Very rarely were these three criteria met.
Chapter 5

Intentional Inclusion: African Americans and the Establishment of Philadelphia’s Play Culture, 1900-1912

Introduction

Preschoolers were not the only demographic to lose rather than gain access to play space during this time of transition in the American Play Movement, a time of prolific production of playgrounds across the nation. Viewed neither as candidates for Americanization nor as potential civic leaders, African American children were given very little attention in the rationales presented by playground advocates nationally and minimal access to play facilities in the Northern states where they were first established. Both Black children and African American adults are also largely absent from play movement scholarship.1 To date only one study, published in 1985 by historian Jeffrey Pilz, focused specifically on African Americans and the playground movement.2 In this study, Pilz argued that “The recreational needs of Black America were addressed only after the pressures of migration, war [WWI] and Jim Crow, and urban violence were brought to the fore nationwide.”3 Given the fact that play advocacy began prior to the establishment of the PAA, Pilz’s observation, even if largely accurate, does not support the conclusion that African Americans were completely excluded from playground production, supervision and use prior to World War I.

Other studies of early twentieth century African American social work and activism provide additional evidence that the story of the PAA relative to African Americans is not the story of the entire playground movement. Elizabeth Lasch-
Quinn’s and Floris Barnett Cash’s studies of African American participation in the Social Settlement movement, Dorothy Salem’s study of Black women activists, and Gilbert Osofsky’s study of Progressive Era reformers in New York provide ample evidence that playgrounds were created for and supervised by African Americans before World War I—in Georgia, Louisiana, Alabama, Florida and New York, to name a few locations. D. Audrey Wakefield’s unpublished 1989 master’s thesis noted in passing that Black playground teachers were working in Washington D.C. as early as 1906. In addition, Andrea Hinding’s unpublished 1973 master’s thesis demonstrated that in two New Jersey towns African American children were participating in playground activities though they were generally absent from public reports and photographs at the municipal level.

Taken together these studies demonstrate Black presence and participation in American play advocacy and playground production and use, but provide very little detail regarding the shape and form taken by African American involvement. In particular, the stories of Black children’s playground access and their experiences in play-focused programs and designated play spaces prior to World War I have yet to be told. Given the gap in the historical record, the limited and mediated glimpses of African American experiences provided by records from Starr Garden, the Philadelphia College Settlement, and Smith Playground, supplemented by newspaper articles and records from other Philadelphia organizations involved in early twentieth century playground production, serve the important purpose of making the invisible visible and expanding current understandings of the Black American childhoods.
In Philadelphia, the story of Black children and the play movement in the first dozen years of the twentieth century is not, as was the case with the Playground Association of America (PAA), one defined primarily by exclusion. Though after 1912 playground production in Philadelphia would increasingly primarily benefit the city’s White population, from 1900-1912 patterns of inclusion and exclusion, segregation and integration were still in flux allowing Black children and adults several points of access to designated play spaces and play-focused activities. In fact, early twentieth century efforts to develop and conduct playgrounds initially increased African American access to programs and places dedicated to play. Beginning in 1904, the Black children who remained geographically near to Starr Garden (as well as newly arriving Black migrants) benefitted from private and public investment in the establishment and improvement of Starr Garden as it was transformed from a newly vacant lot to the city’s first model recreation center. From 1909-1912, African Americans who had moved several blocks farther west made regular use of Coxe Playground (named after the donor), a temporary playground site that was established under the auspices of the Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia, and continued under the Department of Recreation. Black Philadelphians regularly continued to make use of Smith playground during these years as well.

The fact that Black children occupied some space in the movement and on Philadelphia playgrounds during these years, both literally and figuratively, is significant for at least two reasons. First, the initial inclusion of Black Philadelphians denaturalizes their later exclusion, especially because their
decreasing priority and visibility in the play movement and on Philadelphia playgrounds occurred at a time when the Black population in Philadelphia was rapidly expanding. Second, though African Americans never occupied a central place in Philadelphia’s White-led play advocacy efforts, their presence indicates that they, too, were participants who helped to shape the American play movement when it first began. Thus, their stories have the potential to provide a more complex picture of the ways cross-racial relationships impacted the production of these new and innovative public spaces as well as shaping experiences of the people who used them and the programs affiliated with them.

With these issues in mind, this chapter is focused on two multi-faceted questions. First, what level of access did African Americans have to Philadelphia’s early twentieth century playgrounds and affiliated activities (such as summer “outings” and neighborhood gardens) and what factors expanded or limited their access during these years? Second, when Black Philadelphians gained access to new play-focused innovations, spaces and experiences, what can be known regarding their experiences and how did their actions and reactions help to shape the development of Philadelphia’s play and playgrounds? I begin with a brief discussion of the context within which Black participation in Philadelphia’s early twentieth century play movement occurred.

**African American Life in Early 20th Century Philadelphia**

Often referred to as the “nadir” of African American history post-slavery, the first decades of the twentieth century, were, in general, a time of increased exclusion for African Americans, not only in the South, where Jim Crow laws were
institutionalizing practices of racial segregation, but in Northern cities as well. As I have already discussed, racial segregation and discrimination were not new practices in Philadelphia and the surrounding region. In recreational spaces as elsewhere, patterns of racial inclusion had existed alongside instances of race-based exclusion throughout the nineteenth century.

On Philadelphia’s few existing playgrounds in the 1890s and in play-focused programs affiliated with them, Black children had fairly high access. They were permitted entry to Smith playground beginning on Opening Day in 1899. In its nineteenth century form Starr Garden Park, prior to its expansion, was also open to and used for play to some extent by both Black and White children under the auspices of the St. Mary Street Kindergarten and the St. Mary Street Library in the 1880s, and the City Parks Association, the College Settlement and the Culture Extension League in the 1890s. But at the same time most “outings” sponsored by the Culture Extension League benefitted only White children and the demolition of buildings enacted to make way for Starr Garden disproportionately affected Black children, limiting their access to Starr Garden and its affiliated programs.

The 1890s ushered in some significant and lasting changes that would continue to impact Black Philadelphians well into the twentieth century. Due to migration from the South, between 1890 and 1900 Philadelphia’s Black population increased by almost 60%. Across Philadelphia and the region as more African Americans moved in from the southern states, the practice of excluding Black Philadelphians from spaces open to other residents became increasingly commonplace. Places designated for recreational use were no exception to this
rule. Though in the 1870s and 1880s many public events in Philadelphia had been available to Blacks as well as Whites, according to recreation historian Brian Alnutt, “a trend toward increased exclusion [was] clearly evident in Philadelphia and throughout much of the North from the late 1890s onward as commercial theaters, dance halls and even playgrounds and public parks became ever more strictly segregated.”

In this climate, for play and playground advocates to be successful in providing access to Black children they had to believe play was important and intentionally commit to providing play access to African Americans, and they had to have access to power and resources themselves. Furthermore, for the White leaders of Starr Garden, the College Settlement and Smith Playground to maintain a commitment to the provision of services for Blacks required not only a conscious choice, but also a strong defense against the critiques of outsiders and proactive efforts to overcome external barriers. These attributes came together briefly in relation to Starr Garden and the play-focused programs of the Starr Centre, theoretically in relation to Smith, to a limited extent in relation to municipal playgrounds and not at all at the College Settlement.

**Priority and Access: The Starr Centre, 1900-1912**

The organization that first established Starr Garden as an equipped and supervised playground in 1904 was the Starr Centre. The story of the Starr Centre’s development during these years is important despite the fact that the paths of Starr Garden and the Starr Centre would diverge after 1906 when various municipal organizations took over supervision of the playground because it was the Starr
Centre leaders who ensured that Black children were welcomed both on the playground and in the other play-focused programs they established. Black children were prominently featured in both playground-focused pamphlets—*The First Real Playground in Philadelphia* and *Starr Garden Open-Air Gymnasium and Gardens*—describe its early development. Thus, they provide some of the earliest and most detailed descriptions of African American children’s playground experiences available.¹² [Figure 11: Group of Children Around Swings¹³]

Wharton’s decision to leave the College Settlement and create the Starr Centre was directly tied to her commitment to provide services to African Americans. Under her leadership, the Starr Centre continued, or perhaps more accurately, revived, an explicit emphasis on serving “colored” people.¹⁴ She made this commitment clear in the Centre’s annual reports. In its first report, Wharton began by describing the newly reorganized Starr Centre as a “direct outgrowth of the St. Mary Street Library endeavoring to reach the same population for whom the Library was started in 1884.” She went on to explain that they chose the name “Starr” in order to directly associate the Centre work with the work of Theodore Starr, the Starr Garden and the Starr Bank, noting that they intended to work with “the same class of people” as Theodore Starr had done.¹⁵ These statements imply that the welfare of African Americans was to be a priority in the work at the Starr Centre as it had been in the organizations mentioned.¹⁶ In 1902, Wharton confirmed more explicitly that helping African Americans was a key reason for the existence of the Starr Centre, stating in the report from that year, “We especially desire to help the colored people, and the problem of how to help them is ever before us.”¹⁷
With these goals in mind, African American leaders Rev. Henry Phillips and Fanny Jackson Coppin, returned to work with Wharton again. Phillips became a board member and Fanny Jackson Coppin participated in committee work related to a lecture series provided under the auspices of the Coal Club.\textsuperscript{18} Though she was by that point a resident of the College Settlement at its new location, Hannah Fox, still the principal at James Forten school, was a board member as well.\textsuperscript{19} Further demonstrating their intentional focus on addressing issues related to Black American life, in 1900, the Board of Directors added a “Committee on the American Negro,” a nod back to the Colored Information Committee of the College Settlement that had been responsible for bringing W.E.B. Du Bois to Philadelphia in 1895.

The priority given to African Americans by Starr Centre leaders was represented in both the text and photographs of annual reports and in pamphlets published during these years as well. Black children were regularly and prominently featured. The overall impression given by the images included in these reports was that Black children were regular participants in Starr Centre programs (though they were not often in the majority except in the case of the Coal Club which soon had an exclusively Black adult membership). Especially during the first few years of the Centre’s existence, if only one African American child was present in a group photo s/he was likely to be found front and center in the photograph. Thus, at times, the presence of Black children in photographic images may have exaggerated the weight of their presence in actual programs.\textsuperscript{20} Still, the images clearly demonstrate both that African American children did participate on some level in a wide range of Starr Centre activities and that Starr Centre leaders sought to highlight rather than to
downplay their presence.\textsuperscript{21}

Starr Centre reports published between 1900 and 1912 also demonstrate that White Centre leaders, especially Wharton, were quite aware of the downturn in public opinion towards African Americans and were witnesses to its negative effects on Black life. It is likely that their sensitivity to these issues was due especially to the close contact and long-term relationships Wharton and other “friendly visitors” had built with African Americans because of their weekly visits to poor and working class Black families in conjunction with the collaborative work they did with more elite African American leaders. Detailed knowledge of the results of DuBois’ and Eaton’s studies was likely also a contributing factor.

On several occasions, Starr Centre leaders made use of annual reports to respond to critiques indicating that they were wasting time and resources working with “colored people and the ‘unworthy poor.’”\textsuperscript{22} In 1905, for example, Charles Walker followed a description of an overnight trip taken with a Black boys’ club by noting that “some spoke discouragingly of taking such a group to a place like Ocean City, we [sic] took the chances and now feel very much pleased with the result accomplished.”\textsuperscript{23} This entry and others highlight how difficult it was for White volunteers and staff to maintain a commitment to the provision of services for African Americans while outside (and perhaps inside as well) critiques of their work continued to mount.\textsuperscript{24}

Wharton’s contributions to Starr Centre reports were often written in a defensive style during these years, especially in 1906 and 1907. The Centre’s 1906 report included Wharton’s three-page defense of the “Negro Branch” of the Starr
Centre, in which the Coal Club was dominant. In this extended essay, she directly challenged popular negative stereotypes of Black people. One brief excerpt provides a sense of the tone and content of Wharton’s argument:

There is a cry all over our country against the negroes [sic], in the daily papers, among those who should be their friends. They are [said to be] thriftless, immoral, lazy, illiterate, they are also dishonest and easily influenced, unreliable in every respect . . . . What we want to say is: There are all kinds of colored people. Take six people at random from the Coal Club and find out how different they are for their outward circumstances, their inner life. They should be treated as you and I are treated, viz; as individuals.25

Highlighting the hypocrisy of Northern donors who generously supported African American causes in the South, but were unwilling to contribute to the wellbeing of near neighbors, she went on to say, “We are well aware that with all the indifference, not to say ill will felt for this race, there are few people in the North anxious to do something for them in the North.”26 Finally, she concluded with her response to critiques specific to their ongoing attempt at settlement work, “We have been told so often that ours was not a place for settlement work and that it was a pity to spend one’s self for such as these, but I think we may well say ‘Who is thy neighbor? Has he fallen among thieves? Hast thou the power to help him?’”27

The following year, in 1907, in order to provide additional evidence for her arguments, Wharton again went far beyond simply reporting about the work done by the Starr Centre programs in that year. Instead, she included a section written by Black University of Pennsylvania scholar and Eighth Ward Social Settlement Resident Richard R. Wright, Jr. in which he presented an overview of the unique challenges of Black life in Philadelphia and detailed the many accomplishments of Philadelphia’s African Americans before concluding with the argument that the
"ambitionless portion" of the Black population needed “the best philanthropic care that the city can give.” The same year the Centre produced a pamphlet authored by Wright titled, *The Newspapers and the Negroes*. In 1910, the Centre’s manager, Jane Rushmore, reinforced Wharton’s earlier arguments blaming racism rather than Black people for the deteriorating circumstances of many Black Philadelphians. “In the struggle to rise above their present level,” Rushmore stated, “race prejudice is always vigorously pushing them back from the vantage ground they are slowly gaining.”

Though none of the critiques, stereotypes and misunderstandings Wharton and Rushmore addressed were directly tied to the Starr Centre’s recreational or play-focused programs in particular, their comments clearly demonstrate an intentional commitment to meeting the needs of African Americans through Starr Centre programs. In addition, they highlight the adverse context within which continued advocacy for Black access to play-focused programs and play space was situated during these years.

**Prioritizing Play at the Starr Centre**

Though the needs of African Americans were of primary importance to Starr Centre leaders, provision for play and play space remained secondary concerns. Wharton was most interested in teaching thrift and providing educational services with the goal of promoting “independence and self-respect” among Philadelphia’s Black residents. Despite this fact, from 1900-1912, there were at least three aspects of the work of the Starr Centre that in some way centered on the provision of play (broadly defined): a kindergarten, the loosely affiliated recreational activities
Wharton described as "secondary" to the organization’s primary goals—activities such as children’s clubs, games in the library, and especially summer “outings”—and the activities of Starr Garden Playground (from 1903 to 1906, while it was under the auspices of the Starr Centre). With few exceptions, African American children had access to all of these activities.

The Starr Center’s kindergarten program had its start as a summer program in 1901, its second year of independent operation. Whether based on racial bias or an accurate assessment of the situation regarding the needs of African American children, the Starr Kindergarten’s creation was due to Wharton’s perception that they “seemed in greater need of helpful influence than their White neighbors.”

Racially integrated from its inception, reports and photographs demonstrate that Black children were consistently present in the kindergarten program from 1901-1912, though at times the text of the report and photographs of the kindergarten provide conflicting evidence regarding the extent of their participation. For example, in 1901 the text of the annual report stated that, in the newly formed kindergarten class, “a large proportion were colored.” However, the photo published in the report showed a kindergarten group in which few appear clearly to be African Americans. In 1902 only three of 29 children in the photograph are visibly “colored” and there is no mention of race or ethnicity in the text. In 1904 and 1905, African American participation was reportedly higher than it had been previously, above fifty percent in both years. In 1904 the kindergarten teacher’s report stated that sixteen of twenty-nine children on the roll were “colored,” but the only photograph included was of one child sitting alone [Figure 12: “Little
Kindergartener”34. In 1905 the teacher claimed that, “During the year’s work attendance has been excellent, especially among the colored children. The lowest number of colored children on roll has been 15 out of 21.”35 No photographs of the class were provided, however. After 1905, Starr Centre kindergarten reports no longer included a discussion of race. However, photographs indicate that Black children continued to participate, though in small numbers. As late as 1912 the kindergarten was still described as a program “for neglected children Black or White.”36

Though kindergartens were common aspects of late nineteenth and early twentieth century summer playground work, the Starr kindergarten differed from these programs in that it was conducted indoors and was not connected to any outdoor space, except for the fact that the children were taken on six weekly trips to Fairmount Park that summer. Starr Garden was largely usable at the time and (unlike the College Settlement’s previous kindergarten program) the Starr Centre was not situated directly adjacent to the park. These factors likely contributed to the indoor focus. It may also be that the more school-like setting of an indoor space more closely aligned the program with education rather than what Wharton would have considered to be play without a clear purpose, and thus, was more in keeping with her goals. Whatever the reasons, it never became a playground-based summer kindergarten. Instead, the kindergarten program continued into the fall and became primarily a school year program, and summers were given over to the provision of “outings,” led by a substitute kindergarten teacher. These kindergarten outings were very popular, paving the way for the expansion of outings to members of other
Starr Centre programs.\textsuperscript{37}

The library also re-opened in 1901 and was used by several hundred children daily. School-aged children were the predominant participants and according to the report many of the children came to play. “By no means all of this number take books out daily,” the report stated. “Many come to read or play games. … Such games as dominoes, checkers, etc. have been available for those who would play quietly, and a few dissected maps have proved both enjoyable and instructive and have been in great demand.”\textsuperscript{38} In 1902 the library added a story hour to the collection of games.\textsuperscript{39} The year 1906 brought with it requests for more “games and a suitable place to play them.” The author of the report for that year suggested that the latter issue could be solved if they could open a “play room” in the evenings.\textsuperscript{40} Photographs from 1904, 1906 and 1908 show a few Black children making use of the library, demonstrating that they were participants. They were not, however, visibly present in library photographs after 1908.\textsuperscript{41} Though the evidence is inconclusive, their absence suggests that perhaps clubs and outings were a larger draw for the Starr Centre’s African Americans than indoor games.

In 1903 the Starr Centre’s club work began, with oversight from Charles Walker. Though reports from 1903 to 1910 provide little detail regarding the nature of these clubs, it is clear that from the earliest days of the Centre’s club work that some of the clubs (like the Colored Boys Fife and Drum Corps) were racially segregated, while others were integrated. They generally were segregated by gender and age as well as race. When programs were segregated, the intention seemed to be to provide equal access to all children rather than to deny access to a
particular group. For example, when children’s gardens were added in 1905, they were assigned evenly to White and Black children and also evenly divided between boys and girls. Furthermore, the Starr Centre report stated that children “were allowed to choose their plots, so that no charge of discrimination could be made.”\footnote{42}

Similarly, in 1911 there were two gymnasium classes, one for Black boys and one for White boys.\footnote{43} [Figure 13: “Regular Attenders of a Gymnasium Class”\footnote{44}]

Segregation was, however, more the rule than the exception when the Starr Centre offered day-long or overnight summer “outings.” Beginning in 1903, “outings” became an integral part of the Centre’s summer work. The description of the 1903 outings as trips to “places which were open for our children,” suggests that mixed-race outings were attempted, but limited by external race discrimination. Later reports indicate that after 1903 outings (other than those taken with the kindergarten classes) were usually segregated by both race and gender.\footnote{45} In 1904 and 1905, the implication made by Starr Centre reports was that African American boys did not participate in the multiple day trips provided to White boys.\footnote{46} Though both Black and White boys were taken on overnight camping trips, girls (White or Black) were not given any access to overnight outings during these years.\footnote{47}

Black children’s access to day trips was increased if their parents were members of the Coal Club, originally founded to enable members to purchase coal cooperatively at more reasonable prices, but which by this time functioned as a social club for its members as well. Annual Coal Club outings began in the summer of 1904. By 1906 a tradition of an annual, multigenerational picnic at the Smith Children’s Playground was well established.\footnote{48} Coal Club outings were by definition
racially exclusive, since by 1905 all members were African Americans.\textsuperscript{49} It is interesting to note that these pleasure and play-focused activities — along with the Club’s monthly meetings, which were described in 1909 as “occasions for singing, a social opportunity, with tea and cake” — became increasingly central to the work of the Coal Club despite their rather impractical purposes and the fact that the club’s stated mission still focused on the provision of financial rather than social services.\textsuperscript{50}

By 1905 Centre staff had also managed to secure access to summer homes where Coal Club members were able to go for a vacation if they could provide half of the expense.\textsuperscript{51} The popularity of the summer outings and vacations provided by the Coal Club is indicative both of the value many Black Philadelphians placed on having access to play, playgrounds and affiliated activities and of the external constraints African Americans faced as well. According to Cindy S. Aron’s history of vacations in the United States, \textit{Working at Play}, in the early twentieth century the practice of “going on vacation,” previously the habit of White wealthy Americans only, was just beginning to be extended to middle class African Americans and working class Whites.\textsuperscript{52} The inclusion of this new activity is an indication that some of the Coal Club families were gaining financial stability and seeking to participate in this new American pastime.\textsuperscript{53} Their continued use of these services is, in part, a demonstration of the limits placed on Black people even as they escaped poverty. Aron noted that segregation by race, class, ethnicity and religion (Jews) was the norm at vacation destinations in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Therefore, middle class and elite Black Americans who began to follow the new trend of “going on vacation”
faced multiple limitations. In this instance, the Starr Centre provided African Americans with a service not available to White members, probably because Wharton recognized that Whites could more easily gain access to vacation residences without Starr Centre help.

Though camping trips, Coal Club outings and African American family vacations may, at first glance appear to have little to do with the play movement, it is important to remember that definitions of play remained flexible and could be expanded to cover a wide range of pleasure-focused activities. Even within the play movement, play could be defined in a variety of ways. In fact, a closer look at future Philadelphia Playground Association and PAA programs reveals that these Starr Centre programs were on the leading edge of what would become future trends in the movement. Soon after transferring most of their playgrounds to the Department of Recreation, for example, the Playgrounds Association shifted its focus to the provision of summer camps for Philadelphia boys and girls. And by the 1920s the PAA (by then the Playground and Recreation Association of America) had established a “Vacation Service Bureau.”

More obviously connected to the nascent play movement during these years, however, was the Starr Centre’s development of Starr Garden as a playground. Having been in use as a supervised, but temporary, summer playground in 1898 and 1899 under the auspices of the College Settlement, in 1900 the expanded Starr Garden was little more than an open, rather barren, city block. Though destined to become, in 1911, the city’s first “Recreation Park,” it languished, largely neglected, for the first two years of the twentieth century. In 1900, Starr Garden was still
located in a densely populated neighborhood, known for its poverty, though it was populated increasingly by Russian Jews and recent migrants from the rural South. Children likely used the space for informal play from 1900 to 1903; however, no adult investment occurred until 1903 when the Starr Centre led a few outdoor activities in the space during the summer. In 1904 they received permission from the city to develop the lot as an “open air gymnasium and playground.” The Centre also provided funding and oversight for the playground in the summer of 1905 and 1906 before returning control to the city.

African American children were regular participants on the Starr Centre playground and were featured in playground-focused Centre propaganda. In The First Real Playground in Philadelphia, only one child, an African American boy, received specific attention. In the second pamphlet, “Starr Garden Open-Air Gymnasium and Gardens,” six children were referenced by name, three of whom were described as “colored.” Wharton would likely have sought high visibility, based on her personal priorities, for Black presence in publications describing Starr Centre programs. So, these brief references cannot be read as evidence that Black children used the grounds as often or more often than White children. However, the pamphlets do indicate that Starr Centre policies and staff not only permitted and probably encouraged Black children to play at Starr Garden, but also that the children were not otherwise prevented (by parents, work or neighbors) from doing so upon occasion.

As discussed in Chapter Four, Starr Centre’s supervision of Starr Garden was short-lived and multiple transitions of leadership followed. From 1907 to 1910
Starr Garden was gradually improved under the leadership of the Juvenile
Protection Agency and then the PAA. In 1907 City Councils added “swings, see
saws, giant strides and an outdoor gymnasium,” equipment very similar to what had
been provided by the Starr Centre. By 1910 the Playgrounds Association had added
a fence, provided professionally trained play supervisors (male and female) and
began planning for additional improvements. By 1911, Starr Garden Playground
would become the first municipal recreation park in the city, complete with a year
round recreation building and outdoor wading pool. Based on the fact that a later
Board of Recreation report indicated that African Americans were present at Starr
Garden in 1912, it is reasonable to assume that during these interim years African
Americans continued to make use of the facilities available there.

Though not affiliated with the Starr Centre, the story of Black involvement in
Philadelphia’s playground movement cannot be complete without a discussion of
Coxe Playground. Established in 1909 by the Playgrounds Association of
Philadelphia (PAP), Coxe playground was located at 18th and Bainbridge, in a
neighborhood that was increasingly dominated by African American residents,
many of whom had moved there from the Starr Garden neighborhood. The Coxe
property was deemed a “temporary” site from its inception, since it was expected to
become a site for a children’s hospital, but reports indicate that it was viewed by
both the PAP and the Board of Recreation as having been quite successful during its
years of operation. Under the PAP supervision, Coxe playground was provided
with equipment almost identical to that of Starr Garden, “an out-door gymnasium,
horizontal ladder, swings, see-saws and giant stride for boys; swings, see-saws and
giant stride for girls and a sand box for the little folks.” In the winter of 1910, it was the only playground at which the ball field was flooded for ice skating. Attendance in its first year of operation was 46,313. By 1912, it was one of the thirteen playgrounds under the care of the Board of Recreation; attendance for that year reached over 80,000, despite the fact that by then it was described as poorly equipped. Though from 1904-1912 Black children were underrepresented on many other playgrounds including the growing number operated by the Board of Education, during the years when both Coxe Playground and Starr Garden were in operation and open for Black use, and the Starr Centre’s Coal Club offered multiple outings to a growing Black membership, many of Philadelphia’s Black residents, especially those living in the fifth and seventh wards where these playgrounds were located, likely had better access to designated social and physical play space than some of their White counterparts.

**Access for All: the Children’s Playground, 1900-1912**

While Starr Garden and Coxe playground offered Black children who lived in downtown Philadelphia access to play space near their homes, during this same time period, the Children’s Playground in the Park (Smith Playground) provided a destination site for play. Because it was not based in a neighborhood dominated by a particular racial/ethnic group or in a region inhabited only by poor and working class residents, in some ways Smith Playground served a more diverse group of children than even Starr Garden. Children and families of all classes, ethnicities and parts of the city, including African Americans from the Starr Centre’s Coal Club and kindergarten, made use of the facilities and programs.
On January 1, 1904, an unpublished superintendent’s report from J. Foster Ogden to the trustees of the Children’s Playground demonstrated that he considered their liberal admission policy to be both important and unusual in comparison with other playgrounds at that time.

The growth and increased popularity of the Playground is not to be accounted for by mere chance, but for good and sufficient reasons, one of which is the fact that there is no discrimination in creed, color or nationality, which recommends it to parents of all classes, superintendents and matrons of homes, orphanages, and all benevolent organizations which have for their object the betterment of child life in the City. Given the fact that the Children’s Playground was used most often by middle class families, Ogden may have overestimated the impact of this policy on attendance numbers; however, it clearly indicated that African Americans were viewed as potential and actual participants at the Children’s Playground. In addition, Ogden’s statement indicates that he and the Smith trustees had to maintain some level of intentional commitment to the provision of a non-segregated site in order to facilitate the ongoing participation of Black children and families. They knew that policies of racial exclusion were being enacted elsewhere and yet they did not attempt to change Smith policies in this regard.

Undoubtedly, Smith’s leaders faced fewer challenges to their policy than did Starr Centre or even College Settlement leadership for several reasons. Its generous six-acre property ensured that groups who did not want to interact with each other, rarely needed to do so, thus decreasing any racial tension that may have existed. The distance of the playground from most urban neighborhoods made the Children’s Playground relatively, though not entirely, inaccessible for many of Philadelphia’s poorest children, both White and Black. Though middle class African
Americans made use of the playground upon occasion, there would have been little concern that its clientele would ever be predominantly Black or poor. The pressure of Black migration, so significant for the Starr Centre, was not mentioned by Ogden or in any other Smith documents. Neither is there any mention of Children’s Playground leaders receiving criticism for serving African Americans. Philadelphia’s Fairmount Park (where the Smith’s playground was located) remained available to all Philadelphia residents; therefore, it is possible that the Smith leaders would have had difficulty enacting an exclusionary policy had they wanted to do so. Still, playground staff certainly could have made Black children and families feel unwelcome and unwanted. It appears that they attempted to do the opposite.

Ogden may well have been more committed to racial diversity than Smith’s trustees. African Americans were rarely captured in photographs of the Children’s Playground chosen for publication in the trustees’ annual reports. In fact, without access to Ogden’s journal entries and superintendent’s reports (and records from the Starr Centre’s Coal Club), one could easily conclude that African Americans were largely absent from this space. Though from 1907-1909 report lists of organizations that had made use of Smith included some with the descriptor “(colored)” following the name (similar descriptors were also used for various denominations and other religious affiliations), only four children who are visibly African American appeared in any report photographs between 1900-1912. Two Black toddlers were present in a photograph of a multiracial day nursery group (with White caregivers) in the 1902 report [Figure 14: “Holiday Group, Children’s Playground,” 1902] and two
were present in a photograph of the wooden slide amidst dozens of White children in the report for the year 1905. In 1906, two young African American women holding White babies appear in a very large photograph of a “holiday group” composed mainly of babies and young children (all White). No visibly Black families appear in any Smith Playground photographs. [Figure 15: “Holiday Group (Children’s Playground),” 1906]

The presence of African Americans — described alternately as “colored” or “children of Africa” — was noted several times a year for most years from 1900 to 1912 in the superintendent’s brief daily journal entries (as was the participation of Russian Jews, Germans and various other ethnic groups). For example, on April 26, 1900, Ogden wrote, “Our number has again been one hundred, a wild set, colored by nature and dirt” and on May 27 of the same year, “The four hundred in attendance were for the most part orderly. Color [was] given to the occasion by a group of Africa’s sons and daughters.” On July 4, 1903, he stated, “Have had the extremes of colored children, the best and the worst.” On August 31, 1908 “Our organized companies have been one picnic (colored) and one section of children from the Home of the Holy Child (colored) ….” On July 13, 1912, Ogden noted that the “colored people are much in evidence.” These references clearly demonstrate that African Americans were permitted access and at various times made use of that access.

Given the deteriorating status of African Americans in Philadelphia and the nation during these years, it is significant that there is no noticeable bias in the way that African Americans are represented overall in Ogden’s journal entries in
comparison to other ethnic or racial groups. Generally, they were just as likely to be described in positive or neutral terms as were other groups. In contrast, Germans stand out in these journals as the group most consistently praised for being accommodating, orderly and respectful, and Russian Jews were most often singled out for critique.

Despite its remote location, both poor and middle class African Americans made use of the unique facilities at Smith Playground from 1900 to 1912. Poor African American children arrived at Smith under the auspices of various charitable organizations, including the Starr Centre, as participants in organized “outings.” More well-to-do Black families were also present at Smith upon occasion, perhaps challenging negative stereotypes at times, as on the day when the supervisor noted that “the colored families here were examples of order and cleanliness to the White.” Like their White counterparts, they had full access to the model equipment provided, including a giant wooden slide, large playhouse, merry-go-round and sand pavilion.

Perhaps most importantly, patterns of use by Starr Centre groups suggest that frequency of use by African Americans did not necessarily correlate precisely with the importance Smith’s liberal admissions policy had in the lived experiences of African American residents. As more recreational spaces in the region that had previously permitted both Black and White participants began to exclude African Americans, Smith stood out as one particularly appealing space that remained available to all Starr Centre members. Ogden’s welcoming attitude, combined with a lack of welcome in more and more places, very likely contributed to the fact that
Starr’s interracial kindergarten visited regularly in the summer months, and the Children’s Playground became the only site used for the Coal Club’s annual picnics, events that were popular with its members young and old. 79

For some members these may well have provided their only opportunity to spend a day away from the challenging environment in which they lived and to share in a new cultural phenomenon, “the summer outing.” Several annual reports suggest the relative importance of these outings to Coal Club members. In 1907, for example, the report described a 75-year-old man who had been persuaded to attend by his wife. According to the report, “he said that he had not been on an ‘excursion’ before in 40 years, and had never enjoyed himself more.” [emphasis in the original] 80 The following year, A.C. Morrison, a Coal Club visitor, said that she had overheard a member who was trying to convince a friend to join the club by saying, “The ladies have such grand picnics for us in the summer,” emphasizing that she viewed the annual picnics as a primary benefit of membership in a club that was founded to provide members with access to reasonably priced coal. 81 These stories suggest that African Americans did not need to visit Smith frequently for its presence and availability to be considered highly valuable.

**Absent African Americans: College Settlement, 1900-1912**

Though less geographically distant than the Children’s Playground in the Park, after their move in 1899 the College Settlement became an organization that offered little of value to Black Philadelphians. From 1900-1912 Philadelphia College Settlement residents focused their efforts almost entirely on the provision of services for White, European immigrants. One example of the effect of this shift on
African American children who had previously been participants in Settlement activities was the disappearance of the Rosebud Club. The Rosebud Club, whose members were African American girls, was still in existence in 1899, just prior to the Settlement's move. It was no longer included in the Settlement's list of clubs and activities in the first newsletters they produced in 1900. According to Katz & Sugre in 1898 15% of all patients visited by Settlement nurses were Black compared to 4% in 1900. This change in the racial make up of the Settlement's participants supports the possibility that their move was predicated, at least in part, on the desire to decrease African American participation in their program, as suggested by scholar Katz & Sugrue (and implied by Wharton in early Starr Centre reports). Whatever their motives, the effect the Settlement's move had on Black children's access to the multiple play spaces created in the first decade of the twentieth century was the same; Black children rarely, if ever, used College Settlement playyards. Therefore, its records offer little insight into their experiences.

From 1900 to 1912, African Americans were conspicuously absent from the annual reports, newsletters and pamphlets produced by the Philadelphia College Settlement, providing a clear contrast to Starr Centre publications during the same time period. Though headworker Anna Davies once mentioned in The News of the College Settlement that “the Negro” was one of several types of boys who might conceivably enter the College Settlement's hoped-for gymnasium and “emerge later as a variant [form] of a common American product,” there is little evidence that suggests that Black children were ever actually included to any significant extent in Settlement workers' visions of Americanization or any of their other goals. The
only African American person mentioned in the *News* articles I reviewed was an adult man. Most likely the janitor, his presence was briefly noted in a piece written for the *News* by one of the Saturday morning volunteers. The volunteer wrote,

> In front of what I soon found to be the Settlement House was a crowd of boys whose only aim in life, when they caught sight of me, seemed to be to seize my bundle, push me up the steps, ring the bell and then throw me precipitately into the arms of the colored man who opened the door.\(^8\)

Placed on the periphery of the story, the man was never mentioned again in any reports. All other discussion of race or ethnicity in Settlement publications made reference only to White European ethnicities – Jewish, Russian, Polish, Italian and Irish, but not to “Negros.”

One additional story included in the report for 1905 reinforces the impression that the College Settlement was not a place where Black children would have felt welcomed. Between 1900 and 1912 only two references to “Negros” appeared in the Settlement’s annual reports. The first instance occurred in the 1905 report in which the author casually mentioned some Jewish boys’ nicknames, which included “Slave” and “Good Nigger and Bad Nigger.” She then went on to explain that the latter two were “dark-skinned Hebrew children of opposite characters in boys [sic] morals” whose mother was often referred to as “Mrs. Nigger.”\(^8\) No comment was made regarding the inappropriateness of these titles; rather they were presented simply as an amusing anecdote. It is hard to imagine that Susan Wharton, despite her own racial prejudices, would have allowed a comment like this to go unchallenged.

Marta Gutman argued that “emphasizing personal prejudice” in order to explain his actions as park’s commissioner could lead to incorrect conclusions.\(^8\) It
is important to note here as well that blaming the personal prejudice of the women (and later some men) of Philadelphia’s College Settlement, for the organization’s shift in focus may give too little weight to the political practicality of their choices. Though it is likely that racial prejudice played a role in the move, these were women who sought access to a political system from which they had traditionally been excluded. An association with African Americans was not likely to help them to gain the political power they sought in support of their social reform goals. They were also more likely to gain financial support by focusing on the Americanization of immigrants, an increasingly popular concern for middle class and elite White Philadelphians. Their strategy was effective enough to lead to lasting change and institutional growth, but it meant also that the College Settlement’s successful advocacy for and production of playgrounds and play-focused programs from 1900-1912 was of little, if any, benefit to Black children.

**African Americans and the Board of Recreation**

The establishment of Philadelphia’s Board of Recreation in 1911 was not necessarily good news for African Americans. Though the Board’s first annual report indicated that African Americans were still permitted access to Starr Garden in 1912, their presence was not presented in the Department’s report as being particularly important or valuable. Included in the Department of Recreation’s report was an attendance chart for August 29, 1912. According to the chart, on that day African Americans made up between 6% and 15% of the overall population in attendance at any given time. Given African American movement out of this neighborhood and their overall proportion in relation to the population of
Philadelphia (about 5.5% in 1910), this is a relatively high percentage.\textsuperscript{90} However, although the list of participants indicates that there were still African Americans present, photographs and descriptions included in the Board of Recreation’s Report paint a picture of a space that was rapidly becoming a community center for Russian Jews.\textsuperscript{91} Commenting on the attendance chart, the Board of Recreation report stated, 

The significant facts are the predominance of Russian Jews, the large increase in Italian young men in the evening who are employed by day, and the decrease of Italian girls who are customarily kept at home. It is certain that Starr Garden is a potent factor in Americanizing the younger generation of immigrants.\textsuperscript{92}

Thus, whereas Starr Centre reports always referred directly to African Americans and the importance of the Centre’s work among them, Department of Recreation reports emphasized the large numbers of European immigrants who made use of Starr Garden, and its potential as an Americanizing influence for these newcomers. In addition, though the Department of Recreation report included multiple photographs of Starr Garden there are no visibly African American participants present in any of the images, providing quite a contrast to Starr Centre report photographs from 1900 to 1912 in which African Americans were consistently visible.\textsuperscript{93} Combined with the poor facilities described at Coxe, this presentation of Starr Garden indicates that though they were still physically present, African Americans did not rank as high on the Board’s list of priorities as other Philadelphia residents.

**Wharton’s Departure**

African Americans became less of a priority at the Starr Centre during this time period as well. In 1905 the Starr Centre Association had established a Medical Centre, a branch of the work that would rapidly expand and ultimately surpass and
outlive many of the programs started prior to its arrival. By 1908 a second medical center had been established in “Little Italy” at Seventh and Catherine, a physical representation of a shift in focus from African Americans to the needs of immigrants despite, or perhaps because of, the influx of Black migrants from the American South into the fifth and nearby seventh wards. This shift in focus, along with the movement of some of the St. Mary Street neighborhood’s original Black residents several blocks west of Starr Garden in the vicinity of 17th and Bainbridge, led to what was perhaps the most surprising change of 1912. Founder Susan Wharton resigned from the board and prepared to start yet another charitable organization, the Whittier Center.

When Wharton left, she took her cherished thrift clubs with her, but none of the play-focused programs, and set up at a new location in the heart of a growing working class African American neighborhood at 17th and Bainbridge, a region that included many former St. Mary Street residents. In part, her decision may be connected to the fact that the physical space of Starr Garden, now filled with the faces of Russian Jews, could no longer symbolize a commitment to African Americans. Thus, leaving St. Mary Street was no longer an act predicated on the abandonment of African Americans’ needs and concerns, as it had been when the Settlement moved to Christian Street a decade earlier. Jane Rushmore later stated her understanding that Wharton’s move was a direct result of resistance from the Starr Centre board to maintaining a focus on African Americans.

These situations foreshadowed the increasingly limited access to municipally-run playgrounds and recreation centers that Black Philadelphian’s
would experience in the coming years. Even prior to the end of the first decade of the twentieth century Black children were underrepresented on public school summer playgrounds provided by the Board of Education. By 1913 the only municipal playground that had been used predominantly by Black children no longer existed and the most complete recreational facility in Philadelphia was “surrounded by the homes of the most substantial [White] citizens of West Philadelphia.”

**African American Experiences and the Shaping of a Play Movement**

Though by the end of 1912 Black access to Philadelphia playgrounds was beginning to decrease, the above stories demonstrate not only that African Americans had access to several of Philadelphia’s early twentieth century playgrounds and organized play-focused activities, but also that many Black children and adults regularly chose to make use of these innovations. In doing so, Black children and adults played a role in shaping Philadelphia’s emerging play culture and play environments. The remainder of this chapter will explore further the shape and texture of Black children’s experiences of play on Philadelphia playgrounds from 1900-1912, reflecting on how their participation in play activities within these specially designed spaces both reflected and impacted their APS lived experience of childhood more broadly. In addition, I suggest ways in which African American participation affected the shape and eventual success of Philadelphia’s play movement.

Not surprisingly, there are few sources that offer access to African American children’s experiences of Philadelphia’s playgrounds, or those of Black adults for
that matter. Certainly the vignettes provided in the Starr Centre’s playground pamphlets, images from Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia reports and attendance figures from the Smith Children’s Playground and the Board of Recreation do not allow me to draw broad conclusions. And I cannot argue that they are representative of other cities. However, these sources do provide snapshots of the experiences of African Americans on Philadelphia playgrounds that justify some preliminary conclusions regarding the ways in which Black children’s experiences of play might converge with or diverge from those of their White counterparts in important ways.97

Though it seems almost too obvious for comment, it is important to begin by saying that, like their White counterparts, Black children in Philadelphia in the first decade of the twentieth century —despite poverty, racial segregation, work, school or other hardships — played. And, when given the opportunity, many Black children chose to play on supervised playgrounds or to participate in organized outings. At Starr Garden and Coxe Playground, Black boys tried out flips and other feats using the outdoor gymnasium, preschoolers played on the swings and in the sandbox, and older girls took flying leaps on the giant stride.98 At least two young Black girls joined with other visitors to the Children’s Playground as they tried out the wooden slide in its inaugural year.99 In 1906 Coal Club visitor A. C. Morrison reported that “The sliding boards, swings, merry-go-rounds, sand piles and other amusements which are provided for free by the management of the Children’s Playground were enjoyed by the children to their hearts’ content.”100 In the summer of 1907 Ms. Morrison reported that, “The wading pool... was hugely enjoyed by the children,
one little boy thinking it was also a swimming pool.”

A few African American children were provided with access to overnight excursions as well. In 1903 nineteen African American boys who had never left their neighborhood “for a period longer than a day” were taken to Ocean City where they camped on the beach and “had plenty of free country on which to play,” given their distance from the town itself. “And play they did,” wrote Walker, “There were all kinds of games, bathing, shell gathering, walking and naturally the fife and drum all day long. They were active to their heart’s content from morning to night.”

Though this was a segregated trip, it provided the boys with the opportunity to participate on the front edge of a new recreational trend—camping—a trend from which most African American children would be excluded for several decades afterwards. In reference to early twentieth century participation in vacationing by African Americans and working Whites, Cindy Aron argued that the practice of going on vacation, though it was segregated along lines of class, race and religion, produced a “collective cultural experience that crossed class and racial lines.”

Similarly, these boys returned home having participated in an experience of the joys and challenges of camping; it was an experience they shared with a growing number of their White contemporaries.

Though there were connections, Black children’s play experiences were not equivalent to those of their White counterparts. African American children were impacted by the racial biases (and discomforts) of White employees and volunteers in ways that their White peers were not. Significantly, most, if not all, of the playground supervisors in Philadelphia at this time were White. Even the most
liberal among them, including those who worked at the Starr Centre, often revealed stereotyped views of Black children and adults and expressed racial prejudice toward them even as they intentionally included them in Starr Centre activities. For example, in 1900, Coal Club visitor M. E. Young described one of the women she visited by drawing on a romanticized and idealized vision of slavery in the south,

...the door is opened by a woman whose dusky face is wreathed in a blue checked bandana, at the sight of which, due to the typical negro features, visions of southern cotton fields, strains from the old banjo, and the murmur of the Swanee [sic] River float for an instant before the mind.\textsuperscript{105}

While this was perhaps not a particularly negative description of the woman, it demonstrated an acceptance of an increasingly popular, romanticized view of plantation life and slavery that failed to account for the inherent degradation and the many atrocities of the system, and stereotyped ex-slaves as in need of continued White leadership and supervision. Another of the Coal Club visitors, M. Naomi Gaskill, was more explicit. She stated in 1904 that the weekly collections made by Coal Club visitors were very important because the method was “particularly applicable to... those who cannot respond in any great degree to intellectual opportunities. In the Starr Centre it has been very successful for eleven years among the colored people.”\textsuperscript{106}

These were not the only examples of the subtly racist and overtly paternalistic tendencies of the White staff and volunteers of Starr Garden. Revealing a commitment to a different racial stereotype, the author of the pamphlet “Starr Garden Open-Air Gymnasium and Gardens” described how a twelve-year-old African American boy, so poor that his shirt was “split up the back like a locust” experienced life as a “cakewalk.” “His White teeth gleam in an expansive, continued
smile that never leaves his face, even when he stops to land one on the jaw of some boy he does not fancy” she wrote. Though simplistic and paternalistic images of both White and Black children appear in this report, this brief description suggests that this child’s actual needs and emotions were made invisible by the layering on of a racial stereotype that made his situation seem less concerning. Evidence that this view of Black children had a broader impact on playgrounds outside of Starr Garden is provided by a fictional account of a playground written just a few years prior to the creation of Starr Garden, *Playground Toni* by Anna Chapin Ray, in which the only African American character, Linkie Jefferson, is characterized as happy and content despite his poverty.

The Starr Centre’s head resident and playground supervisor from 1904-1905 Charles Walker’s accounts of Black children’s experiences and actions indicate that he retained a commitment to the status quo of race relations, even as he also participated in challenging it to some extent. For example, in a pamphlet about the playground, he specifically emphasized that the playground provided access to and could benefit Black children. To further support his point he described a Black boy’s play and then compared it to what Walker appeared to view as the more morally advanced play of White children. “The colored boy has his chance also,” Walker wrote in 1904,

Now he is falling in line with the White boys, plays their games and is feeling some of the freedom that belongs to him. He is fast leaving the games and pastimes that are a stigma to the race and is becoming more noble than he was a year ago.

As further evidence of the power of the playground to evoke the transformation of Black children’s play, Walker went on to describe a scene in which a Black boy’s
“play” at Starr Garden demonstrated his improved character. The example he chose is telling in that it reveals the boy’s performance of acts of service to White children and indicates a desire to receive the supervisor’s affirmation, more clearly than it demonstrates the boy’s own pleasure in exercising his “freedom” to play.

Only today [sic] a little chap with his little homemade wagon came up to Mr. ------- and said, “I’se ridin’ all the little White chil’ren, and givin’ ‘em all a turn.” It was most interesting to watch him for a long time riding all the baby White children.

What Walker clearly did not do in this description was to challenge the boy’s assumption that it was his role to give rides (in his wagon!) to White children. In fact, the implication is that this boy’s acceptance of a role of servitude was part of what Walker found encouraging.

Not surprisingly, the tone of Walker’s reports suggest that having close social contact with African American children was uncomfortable for him, demonstrating that Black children may at times have experienced an awkwardness in relation to playground supervisors that their White counterparts did not. For example, during the summer of 1904, Walker took some of the African American boys from the Starr Centre camping. In his glowing report about the trip he added the comment that “The Director of this trip ate at the same table as the boys, played, walked and bathed with them, thus coming into personal relations with them.” This was not a statement he felt it necessary to make in relation to the overnight excursion he took with White boys.

Black children were not immune to racial biases either. The concerns of one African American girl, Myra Smith, were also described in detail in a Starr playground pamphlet (as was her “astonishing coiffure”):
Her hair is laid off in the most regular of blocks, exactly like a checker board or the miniature plan of a city. A row of tight braids, resembling spikes, frames her race, and the end of each spike is gay with a small but brilliant bow.

“Who’s goin’ to swing me?” demands Myra.

“Tell that girl over there to swing you.”

“Dat girl? Dat red-headed girl? No sah. No red-headed girls swings me. If I let that red headed girl swing me, I fall out and brek may neck, sure. Red-heads is bad luck.”

With the assistance of a tow-haired girl Myra is shortly sailing through the air like a Black-bird, a beautific smile on her face. [indented in the original]112

Evidently pushing the swings was a regular area of debate at Starr Garden. On at least one occasion the conflict escalated to the point that the intervention of the playground’s designated police officer was required in order to get “the White girls to swing the colored and vice versa.” The dispute was resolved by the officer who designated one day for Black girls to push White girls and the next for White girls to push Black girls. Notably, it was not suggested that they push each other without reference to race.113

Though both White and Black children would have been affected by racial tension and conflict, at Starr Garden and on Smith playground Black children’s experiences were also shaped by the fact that they were in the racial minority numerically. In some photographs only one or two children who were visibly recognizable as “Black” were present. As a result, African American children who used these programs and places would have been less likely than their White counterparts to feel comfortable, safe and “at home.” This situation may also have prevented some Black parents from allowing their children to make use of the facilities. Coxe playground’s de facto racial segregation may well have provided a more supportive play environment for this reason and may also account for its immediate popularity with nearby neighbors as noted in the PAP report for 1909:
“The playground has been very successful from the moment it was opened, and it is very much appreciated by the neighbors.”

The Coal Club’s summer excursions, also racially segregated, though their destinations were not, were extremely popular with both children and adults. Participation in both the club and the excursions consistently grew from their beginnings in 1903 until Wharton’s departure in 1912. According to one Starr Centre report children were so “enthusised when an outing or picnic is announced” that the Centre staff were “besieged by more applicants than [could] possibly be handled.” When necessary, children convinced reluctant parents to register for the picnic. In 1904, Coal Club visitor Naomi Gaskill described how persistent and creative children could be in seeking the opportunity to join in a picnic. When a woman referred to as “Mrs. B” said that she could not attend because she could not manage her three children herself. Her son “spoke up and said, ‘Mama isn’t Miss Gaskill going; she will help you with your children.’” According to the report when the next picnic day arrived, “Miss Gaskill took both of the children in the morning and the mother brought the baby in the afternoon.”

According to the Starr Centre’s 1905 report, another Coal Club member complained that her children began to pester her to sign up as soon as the summer picnic was announced. Starr Centre reports are full of stories describing the pleasure experienced by the adults who played and picnicked as well. Recognizing that children’s lives are not separate from the adults who care for them, the benefit that a mother, father or grandfather derived from these times of “play” would likely also have provided an additional benefit to the children in their care, as well as
providing families with shared experiences of play.

Because they were present, African Americans participated in shaping the play movement and establishing playgrounds as public spaces that to this day are deemed to be a public good and a symbolic representation of American ideas of protected childhood. In the words of historical geographer Elizabeth Gagen, I hope to avoid taking “these necessarily partial fragments of text to represent disproportionately significant acts.” However, as she went on to say in relation to her discussion of the influence of girls on playground reform in Massachusetts, “In spite of the representational politics of the archive, and the limited (and limiting) evidence available, children's contribution remains a significant, if inconspicuous, aspect of playground reform.” I believe that the same is true of the African American children and adults discussed here.

Through their participation, there are also some indication that in specific instances African Americans influenced the opinions and actions of specific White Philadelphians in ways that had a more direct impact. J. Foster Ogden of the Children's Playground commented that on July 5, 1909 “the colored families here were examples of order and cleanliness to the White.” It seems Charles Walker’s biases were challenged by his interactions with the African American boys he took camping, admitting that he had been concerned about taking these boys “of the very lowest strata” on such a trip, but he returned with great enthusiasm to report on the “high words of commendation” their conduct garnered in the town they visited. It is possible that positive experiences like these influenced Walker to continue to intentionally promote play opportunities for African Americans in his role as a
founding member of the board of directors of the Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia, the organization that was responsible for establishing Coxe Playground. In 1911, a newspaper article titled “Many Sections Will Celebrate the Nation’s Birthday: To Hold Fifty Distinct Programs in Different Parts of the City,” Walker was in charge of the committee that planned the activities for what was described as the “Negro District” celebration. Finally, it seems highly unlikely that Wharton and the Coal Club visitors would have continually expanded their play-focused offering had Black members not encouraged them to do so.

Finally, to be successful, Philadelphia’s play movement needed broad public support. Play advocates justified the production of new playgrounds and ongoing municipal support of particular kinds of play-focused activities based on attendance figures especially. This situation provided ordinary people, including children of all racial and ethnic identities as well as African American adults, with the power to have as much, or more, influence on the development of Philadelphia’s play movement as did municipal and philanthropic leaders. As had been the case at the St. Mary Street library, public use of Starr Garden, Coxe Playground and the Children’s Playground was not mandatory. Neither was participation in activities sponsored by the Starr Centre or other play-focused charities required by law or custom. Because participation was voluntary, activities were continued and space and equipment maintained or discarded primarily based on their ongoing popularity. Though other rationales such as reported reduction in crime or trolley car accidents were often mentioned in play movement propaganda as well, playgrounds and recreation centers, and the expanding array of services offered
through these places, were justifiable as public expenses only if the public chose to use them.

**Conclusion**

From 1900-1912, beliefs about race, play, children, gender, age and education intersected increasingly to limit access to play and play spaces for certain subsets of the population while expanding access for others. Records from organizations affiliated with Starr Garden and from the Smith’s Children’s Playground in the Park, demonstrate that in the first dozen years of the twentieth century Philadelphia’s Black residents had access to at least two exemplary, racially integrated play facilities where they played alongside, if not always with, White children. In addition, they had access to several play-focused programs and activities through the Starr Centre and temporary access to a playground started by the Playgrounds Association and later placed under the Board of Recreation that served African Americans predominantly. Through the Starr Centre, Black children and adults participated in a wide range of cutting edge play-focused activities including overnight camping trips and summer vacations. For several years, Starr Garden and Coxe playgrounds provided many Black children with a neighborhood play space. At the same time, Philadelphia’s Children’s Playground provided a destination outside of Philadelphia’s emerging Black ghettos that offered access to pleasure-focused play experiences in a public space rarely available to African Americans in the early twentieth century. African Americans were not excluded from the play movement in Philadelphia from 1900-1912.

Taken together, stories from these early twentieth century Philadelphia
playgrounds show, however, that Black children’s access to designated play spaces and programs in the first decade of the twentieth century was especially dependent on the beliefs and values of people who had sufficient power and resources to garner financial and political support for the production and ongoing maintenance of space for play. By the end of this time period there were indications that as more playgrounds and recreation centers were placed under the supervision of the Philadelphia Board of Recreation Black children’s options for participation were diminishing.

Susan Wharton’s commitment to the welfare and education of African Americans protected Black children’s access to Starr Garden initially, but to do so long term would have required that she, or someone else with sufficient influence and access to resources, view both Black children and play as worthy of protection. When Wharton saw some value in the provision of play and recreation, she had the power and resources needed to provide continued access to play space and recreational programs for Black children and families and in fact she did so through the Coal Club for several years. However, play was never her primary commitment and there is no indication that she made any attempts to support or advocate for the production or protection of play spaces for Black children after 1906 when the Starr Centre transferred Starr Garden to the city. By 1912, she had left the neighborhood in which Starr Garden was located, putting most of her efforts into addressing the need for adequate housing options for African Americans.

The women of the College Settlement believed that play was important and potentially transformative, and that designated play spaces were a necessity in
crowded neighborhoods. However, some evidence suggests that they lacked a corresponding belief in the importance and potential of African Americans, or, at minimum, did not think that working for their welfare was a strategically wise choice. Therefore, though they were responsible for the creation of several play spaces and influenced the city’s establishment of others, they did little to expand or protect African American children’s access to play space from 1900 to 1912. Similarly, though the Department of Recreation did not explicitly oppose the production of programs and spaces dedicated to African American use, their failure to intentionally prioritize the integration of Black Philadelphians into their plans, resulted in a decrease in the number and quality of play spaces that were accessible to Black residents by 1912.

The Smith’s Children’s Playground in the Park remained on the edges of the play movement, mirroring its geographical location on the outskirts of the city. Less pressured by the forces of migration and immigration, and without the financial pressures faced by many play movement playgrounds, the Children’s Playground was never closed to Black families or groups. At a time when recreational spaces across the region were increasingly likely to exclude African Americans, Smith’s liberal admissions policy preserved an important place for Children’s Playground in the play life of Black Philadelphia.

Admittedly Black children’s experiences on Philadelphia’s early twentieth century playgrounds were constrained by race in ways that did not affect their White counterparts. They faced the challenge of White biases from some of their most supportive allies. Their opportunities were more limited and their play
constrained at times by broader cultural forces that continued to encourage Black children to prepare for lives of manual labor and servitude. Still, they played and at times when they played in proximity to or to some extent with White children and adults they were able to challenge prevailing notions of Black inferiority.

If the play movement was primarily a means of social control, which produced a variety of negative outcomes for participants, then the exclusion of Black children might well have worked to their advantage. In relation to African Americans specifically, according to Jeffrey Pilz, for example the use of “organized recreation as a means of social control was successful in that it kept Blacks in their place – the ghetto. Humanitarian motives of the reformers behind the movement also served to keep Blacks out of the mainstream of society by providing them with minimal recreation facilities in the ghetto.” Philpott made a similar argument in relation to Chicago specifically, arguing that settlement workers helped to draw, rather than erase, the color line. While their conclusions may be accurate to some extent, they fail to account for the perspectives and actions of the African American children and adults who made use of these facilities and programs.

Black Philadelphians, both children and adults chose to take advantage of the resources and programs that were available to them, whether racially segregated or not. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that they valued the opportunities provided. Along with their White peers, Black Philadelphians showed up often on playgrounds and participated regularly in play-focused activities, demonstrating to city officials that these places and programs were popular enough to be worthy of public support. Though barely visible on the national scene, and not active in
visible roles on Philadelphia’s leading play advocacy organizations, Philadelphia African Americans helped to establish playgrounds and other play-focused activities as essential components of American culture.
Conclusion

To His Honor, Mayor Blankenburg: The wise guidance and generous appropriation of your administration and those of your predecessor, Mayor Reyburn, have advanced Philadelphia from backwardness to a leading position among American cities operating Playgrounds. . . .

DURING THE CALENDAR YEAR 1912 THE ATTENDANCE AT THIRTEEN SUPERVISED MUNICIPAL PLAYGROUNDS AND RECREATION PARKS TOTALED 1,371,315 PERSONS. IN 1906 THERE WERE NO MUNICIPAL PLAYGROUNDS WHATSOEVER. [bolding and capitalization in the original]
—First Report of the Board of Recreation, Philadelphia, 1913

In the quotation above it is clear that in 1913 Philadelphia had some leaders who were enthusiastic about playgrounds. Between 1857, when George Stuart founded the Colored Mission Sabbath School on the site of what would become Philadelphia’s first municipal recreation park, and 1912, a transformation occurred, not only in the landscape of particular Philadelphia neighborhoods and parks, but also of popular views regarding children’s play and its purposes. Prior to 1913, play had been an activity that was generally tolerated, although not viewed with any particular esteem. By 1912, play had become important and playgrounds were well on their way to becoming ubiquitous in American life, as they emerged from their varied origins as spaces auxiliary to kindergarten programs, as subsidiary aspects of parks, or as the site of German-style physical exercise. Coinciding with these changes was the creation of the Philadelphia Board of Recreation, a clear demonstration that the provision of play and playgrounds had been established as a legitimate public responsibility.

Regardless of whether, and how, playgrounds have served less than ideal purposes at times (which they certainly have), their preservation as shared public
space is generally deemed to be of continued value today. By closely examining the origins of playground development in Philadelphia, following especially the paths of early childhood educators (all female at the time), young children and African Americans (some of whom also fit in one or more of these categories), this study shows that early childhood educators (Black and White), African American adults, and children of diverse backgrounds contributed to creation and expansion of Starr Garden and other processes that paved the way for the prioritization of play and playgrounds in early twentieth century Philadelphia. Thus, they have made a lasting and valuable impact on the landscape of Philadelphia in ways that have previously been unrecognized.

Beyond making the invisible visible in the records of the play movement, what has the inclusion of early childhood educators (kindergarteners), African Americans and young children added to current understandings of play and playground development? First, it highlights the important role that professionally trained early childhood educators played in establishing early playgrounds and suggests that when professional early childhood educators were sidelined in the transformation of the movement from one focused on children’s play to the more age-neutral provision of “recreation,” there were losses as well as gains. Second, this study demonstrates that Philadelphia African Americans, though barely visible on the national scene and not active in visible roles in Philadelphia’s leading play advocacy organizations, helped to establish playgrounds and other play-focused activities as essential components of Philadelphia culture. Though the sources consulted here reveal little regarding specifically how their actions and ideologies
converged or diverged with those of White reformers and early childhood educators, they challenge the notion that play-focused pedagogical practices were only appealing to White Americans. Finally, the story of Philadelphia's early play movement demonstrates that the production of designated space for play and the creation of play-focused programs did not consistently benefit all children, or communities, equally. Instead, it had both positive and negative effects. The specific nature of these effects was dependent on the goals, beliefs, values and resources of particular play and playground advocates and, in particular, how closely their purposes and the strategies they used to implement their ideas aligned with the goals and needs of both those targeted as participants and those who were excluded.

**Early Childhood Educators**

Importantly, this study highlights the essential role that professionally trained early childhood educators, all women, played in establishing early playgrounds. As playground work grew in status and the city increased its investment, the kindergarten women who led the movement in its early stages lost power and influence. As the value of play and playgrounds was more broadly recognized and their popularity increased, these women were overshadowed by the mostly male leaders of the municipal and national movements of the twentieth century. Evidence from Philadelphia suggests that as professional early childhood educators (and young children along with them) were sidelined the creative possibilities of programs that integrated early education, informal childcare and support for caregivers and parents were never fully explored.
**African Americans**

Furthermore, this dissertation has shown that several of Philadelphia’s first and most highly trained professional kindergarteners were African American graduates of the Institute for Colored Youth. Though they were not permitted to teach in public school kindergartens when Philadelphia’s first kindergartens were established, these women were leaders in the creation of Froebelian play-focused kindergarten programs, as was African American community leader Rev. Henry Phillips, who facilitated the creation of the first two African American led kindergarten programs in the city and influenced White reformer Theodore Starr to support these programs as well as to establish the Starr Garden Park/Playground in its earliest form. Understanding the significance of African American participation in promoting play as education in early childhood contexts requires further research to shed light on how these educators implemented, and perhaps adapted, play-focused pedagogical techniques in their classrooms.

In addition, this study demonstrates that Philadelphia African Americans, though barely visible on the national scene and not active in visible roles in Philadelphia’s leading play advocacy organizations, helped to establish playgrounds and other play-focused activities as essential components of Philadelphia culture. It confirms what other scholars have implied only in passing—namely, that Black children and adults participated in the American play movement prior to WWI, when the PAA established the Bureau of Colored Workers and a variety of segregated programs. Again, further research is needed to understand how African American views of play and playgrounds converged with or diverged from those of
White play movement advocates, and why African American adults are not visibly present in records of playground production and advocacy as well, but it can no longer be claimed that play and playground advocacy prior to WWI was exclusively the domain of White reformers. While recognizing their early presence, the story of African American participation on early playgrounds in Philadelphia also indicates, however, that Black Americans were not included in the Americanizing and citizenship-building rationales that led to increasing national support in the early twentieth century. Thus, in Philadelphia, Black leaders access and influence diminished as the municipal and national movement gained momentum.

It is important to note as well that kindergarten advocacy, and to some extent playground development in Philadelphia, despite their flaws and inconsistencies, were to some extent interracial projects. Recognizing the limits placed on Black Philadelphians in the late nineteenth century, but refusing to be defined by those limits, Rev. Henry Phillips and Fannie Jackson Coppin creatively pursued their goals for Black children’s education through their relationships with White philanthropists Theodore Starr, Susan Wharton and Anna Hallowell (among others) and the organizations they founded. Although these were not equal partnerships, at the time, they did lead to beneficial results for Black children. In particular, Susan Wharton’s role in this narrative demonstrates that in regard to addressing race-based societal inequality, an intentional commitment on the part of those in power matters. By contrast, the story of College Settlement leaders showed that it is equally possible to contribute to the disempowerment of others without consciously intending to do so.
Shedding light on how the seemingly benign space of the playground has often reflected rather than resisted dominant structures of power, supporting the status quo rather than reform, the story of Philadelphia’s early play movement demonstrates that the production of designated space for play did not consistently benefit all children, or communities, equally. African American children were disproportionately represented among those who lost their homes to make way for Starr Garden’s expansion, for example. In 1898, when middle class residents in the neighborhood surrounding Dickinson Square viewed the establishment of a playground as undesirable, likely due to its connection to reform-focused objectives targeting the poor, they had the power to prevent its construction. But in 1912, when playgrounds and recreation centers were deemed desirable, the city’s new Board of Recreation invested large sums of money, creating one in a location “surrounded by the most substantial citizens of West Philadelphia,” while Black residents saw their temporary playground (Coxe) disappear.

Supporting the arguments of other scholars who have argued that children were not only influenced by play reformers, but also influenced the direction and impact of the America play movement—through their participation in the programs offered, their use of designated play spaces and through their resistance to and avoidance of both as well. The children of St. Mary Street, White and Black, made clear to the founders of the St. Mary Street library that they wanted provision to be made for active play as well as the more passive activity of reading, for example. Older boys challenged their exclusion from the Children’s Playground in the Park, unsuccessfully for the most part in that location, but they gained inclusion on most
playgrounds elsewhere in the city as they did across the nation. Though evidence is scarce, sources studies here suggest that children’s actions in the racially-mixed spaces of Philadelphia’s playgrounds often reflected the racial tensions in the city at large. Despite their youth, they were not innocently unaware of racial stereotypes.

In addition, these stories demonstrate that Black children in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Philadelphia played, just as other children did. They played in the library when they were supposed to be quickly examining books. They played at Starr Garden after school. They played on Coxe playground. In doing so they demonstrated their resilience, and challenged, consciously or unconsciously, those who would place them outside of the category of “normal” American children. In telling their stories, I hope I too have contributed to normalizing these children and their experiences, without downplaying the injustices of the context within which they played.

Certainly, there are important questions that this study did not answer. It did not attempt to evaluate whether particular kinds of play served their intended functions. We do not know, for example, from the evidence presented here, whether the children who argued over the use of the swings at Starr Garden did in fact learn to cooperate, as their play leaders hoped they would. Still, this dissertation has proceeded from the premise that a historical study of play advocacy and playground development in Philadelphia can make a valuable contribution to contemporary discussions and debates regarding play, play spaces and their purposes.

I include here a quotation taken from the conclusion of education historian Paul Violas’ book, *The Training of the Urban Working Class* because I believe it so
aptly describes the role that historical studies can most usefully play in the
evaluation of current ideologies, policies and practices—that is, that historical
critiques do not and cannot dictate solutions, but they can raise important questions
about current issues. Along with Violas, I willingly acknowledge that “… the past
rarely marches unaltered into the present to exercise a controlling influence over its
progeny.”

This means that a program developed for purposes that a contemporary critic
might have considered objectionable may now function in different and more
acceptable ways. Professionals should examine the objectives of their chosen
fields in light of the questions that have evolved from historical analysis. They
will then be in a reasonable position to decide whether to accept the present in an
unqualified manner, to work for reforms, or if they believe the present condition
of the field is beyond redemption, to leave it.”

When it comes to play-focused initiatives, practices and policies, current
discourses of play that assume it is inherently and universally beneficial, offering a
wide variety of functional purposes to the player, tend to cover up important
debates and disagreements that need to be resolved and to ignore contextual and
cultural differences that should be considered in an evaluation the potential benefit
of a particular initiative or practice. As Philadelphia’s story shows, unexpected or
unnoticed play advocates may have the potential to influence important changes or
adaptations that could go unnoticed or untried without their input, unintended
outcomes can result when planners fail to consult the targeted participants,
including children themselves. It makes sense to question the value of play and
spaces designed for play, not because of a disregard for their potential influence on
the lives of children, families and communities, but in recognition of it.
INTRODUCTION


Smith, *Children and Play, 213-217*.


As a “White” person, I have chosen to follow the lead of African American scholars and friends to determine what term (or terms) are deemed most respectful and appropriate in making reference to Americans whose ancestral origins can be traced to the African continent, including those (like Rev. Henry Phillips) who resided in other locations, such as Jamaica, prior to settling in the United States. I use the terms “Black” and “African American” interchangeably as this is the most common practice among my African American colleagues and friends, and also because the term “Black” highlights the ways in which any visible appearance of “color” has been used to define individuals as members of a racial group regardless of differences in cultural or ethnic origin. Following the lead of W.E.B. DuBois, I capitalize the term “Black,” as he did the term “Negro.” He explained his choice by stating, “I shall, moreover, capitalize the word, because I believe that eight million Americans are entitled to a capital letter.” W. E. B. DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899). Reprint edition with introduction by Elijah Anderson (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 1. I have chosen to capitalize “White” as well, following the example used by Beverly Daniel Tatum in ‘Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations about Race (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

For example, Dominick Cavallo, Muscles and Morals: Organized Playgrounds and Urban Reform: 1880-1920 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); Paul S. Boyer, Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920, (Cambridge,


15 Rose, A Mother’s Job; Beatty, Preschool Education in America.

16 Chudacoff, Children at Play; Goodman, Choosing Sides (New York: Schoken Books, 1979), 49; David Nasaw, Children of the City: At Work and at Play (Garden City, N.Y: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1985); Riess, City Games.


24 Regarding African American presence and kindergartens, Beatty, *Preschool Education in America*, 108-9, 160-61; Cunningham and Osborn “A Historical Examination of Blacks in Early Childhood Education.”


27 Rose, *A Mother’s Job*; Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*;


CHAPTER 1

1 Starr Centre, *History of a Street* (Philadelphia, PA: Sign of the Ivy Leaf, January 1901), 47, Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC9, Box 7, Barbara Bates Center for the Study of the History of Nursing, School of Nursing, University of Pennsylvania (hereafter cited as BC). This document is a pamphlet produced by the Starr Centre (later known as the Starr Centre Association) in which the history of a wide range of philanthropic efforts in the neighborhood were documented retrospectively. It was produced after the departure of the College Settlement by the organization (Starr Centre) that Wharton founded in order to continue the neighborhood work. It includes brief historical accounts of the many and varied philanthropic efforts that took place in the neighborhood, starting with Stuart’s Sunday School.

2 Ibid., 47, 49.

3 Ibid., 50.


6 I will use the first two terms (“play movement” and “playground movement”) interchangeably throughout this dissertation. I have chosen not to use the third term in general, primarily because it did not become popular until after 1912, when this dissertation ends.

7 See Cranz, *Politics of Park Design*, 61-100; Hardy, *How Boston Played*, especially chapter 4; Violas, *Training of the Urban Working Class*, especially chapters 4-9; regarding reformer Jacob Riis’ success in establishing school playgrounds, see Cavallo, *Muscles and Morals*, 25; regarding the impact of the play movement on
urban planning, see also Spain, How Women Saved the City, 14; Suzanne Spencer-Wood, “Turn of the Century Women’s Organizations.”

8 The Playground was later called Playground and Recreation and then Recreation. This change is evident in the collection of the journal housed at the Library of Congress.


10 Rainwater, Play Movement, 13-44. See also for example, Dickason, “Origin of the Playground,” 83-98; Kadzielski, “As a Flower,” 171-73.

11 Rainwater, Play Movement, 1-4.

12 Rainwater, Play Movement, 13-44.


15 “Free Kindergartens,” Friends’ Intelligencer (1853-1910) 38, no. 47 (Jan 07, 1882): 741. http://search.proquest.com/docview/90999029?accountid=13626. A complete run of the Friends’ Intelligencer is available in The Quaker Collection, Haverford College, Haverford, PA (hereafter cited as QCHC). According to this article, on Jan 7, 1882, the program served mostly White children. However, when Susan Wharton referred to the early years of the library program founded in the kindergarten and industrial school in 1884, she said that the St. Mary Street school served Black children primarily. Starr Centre Association, The Growth of the Starr Library (Philadelphia, n. d.) Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, 8, MC9, Box 14, BC.


17 Bromley’s Atlas of Philadelphia, 1885.


22 Franklin, Education of Black Philadelphia, 12.

Lane, William Dorsey’s Philadelphia, xii.

Lane, William Dorsey’s Philadelphia, xii.

Lane, William Dorsey’s Philadelphia, 111.


Lane, William Dorsey’s Philadelphia, 111-112.

Lane, William Dorsey’s Philadelphia, 238. According to a historical marker in front of the church building, the church is still housed on its original site on a plot of land continuously owned by African Americans longer than any other in the United States.

John F. Sutherland, “Housing the Poor in the City of Homes,” 175-177.

Starr Centre, History of a Street, 32.


Starr Centre Association, The Second Annual Report of the Starr Centre: A Continuation of the St. Mary Street Educational and Social Work (Philadelphia, November 1901), 5-6, Annual Reports Collection, Box 84, UA (also available in Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC 9, Box 4, BC); Starr Centre Association, History of a Street, 7.

Starr Centre, History of a Street, 11.

Lane, William Dorsey’s Philadelphia, 238.


Ibid.
51 Starr Centre, *History of a Street*, 12.
56 Rev. Henry L. Phillips, “An Address at the Unveiling of a Memorial Window,” 6, HSP.
57 Lane, *William Dorsey’s Philadelphia*, 249.
60 Initially the vestry was all White. Lane, *William Dorsey’s Philadelphia*, 249. See also Starr Centre, *History of a Street*, 21-22.
63 Lane, *William Dorsey’s Philadelphia*, 249.
66 Phillips, “An Address at the Unveiling of a Memorial Window.”
Starr Centre, *History of a Street*, 41.


“The Quaker City,” *New York Globe*, June 14, 1884. See also Starr Centre, *History of a Street*.


89 Beatty, Preschool Education in America, 17.
90 Beatty, Preschool Education in America, 59.
92 “Hallowell, Anna, 1831-1905,” Dictionary of Quaker Biography, QCHC.
93 Franklin, Education of Black Philadelphia, 5. See also McDaniel and Julye, Fit for Freedom, 136-8.
97 Durham, Free and Public Kindergartens, 4.
99 See Beatty, Preschool Education in America, 2.
101 Ibid.
102 Starr Centre, History of a Street, 43-44.
105 Ibid.
106 Starr Centre, History of a Street, 47.
107 Ibid., 48.

114 “Local News,” Christian Recorder (Philadelphia, PA), May 11, 1882, African American Newspapers Collection, Accessible Archives, http://www.accessible-archives.com/collections/african-american-newspapers/the-christian-recorder/. For evidence that the St. Mary School mentioned in the article is the day nursery program that Starr helped to establish; see also Starr Centre, History of a Street, 43-45, in which the same kindergarten teacher is named.


CHAPTER 2

1 Kathryn Muhs (secretary to the dean) to Albert J. Kennedy, June 4, 1946, SW0144, Albert J. Kennedy Papers, Box 6, fldr. 55, SWHA.


4 Ibid.

5 Michael B. Katz and Thomas J. Sugrue, “Introduction: The Context of the Philadelphia Negro,” 4; St. Mary Street College Settlement, *An Account of the St. Mary Street College Settlement of Philadelphia from April 1 to September 15, 1892 together with the Eighth Annual Report of the St. Mary Street Library from November 1, 1891, to April 1, 1892*, (Philadelphia, 1892), 8, Annual Reports Collection, Box 11, UA.

6 Katz and Sugrue, “Introduction, The Context of the Philadelphia Negro,” 4. Regarding African Americans and the Settlement movement, see Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, *Black Neighbors*. To be fair, it should be noted that Settlement workers also had to live in the neighborhood, which was not only multi-racial, but plagued by poverty and crime, a situation which may have heightened their discomfort with the location. Having not examined the St. Mary Street Library reports, Katz and Sugrue
claimed that it was the establishment of the Settlement that resulted in the extension of services beyond the African American community though White children had made use of the Library’s programs for many years prior.

7 Katz and Sugrue, “Introduction: The Context of the Philadelphia Negro,” 17. This change is also evident in documents produced by the Philadelphia College Settlement, which will be discussed in detail in this dissertation.


9 Albert J. Kennedy to Mr. Edward W. David, June 27, 1945, SW0144, Albert J. Kennedy Papers, Box 6, fldr. 55, SWHA.

10 “Re. Susan P. Wharton,” Letter from Jane P. Rushmore to Friend, Feb. 5, 1945, SW056, National Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers, Box 239, fldr. 504, SWHA.


13 Letter from Dr. Charles F. Judson to Albert J. Kennedy, July 20, 1945, SW0144, Albert J. Kennedy Papers, Box 6, fldr. 55, SWHA.


15 Ibid.


17 St. Mary Street Library, St. Mary Street Library (Philadelphia, 1886), 1-2, Settlements Collection, Box 6, SSC. See also V.P. Franklin, “Operation Street Corner,” 197-200.

18 Michael B. Katz, In the Shadow of the Poorhouse.”


22 Starr Centre, History of a Street, 8.
Starr Centre Association, *Growth of Starr Library*, 8. This pamphlet, in which this description appears, was written as a first-hand account. Its author was most likely Wharton. Of the founders, she was most centrally involved in the Starr Centre at the time when the pamphlet was produced, which was between 1899-1907 according the scrapbook in which it is located in the Bates Center Archives.

Starr Centre Association, *Growth of Starr Library*, 8. In Starr Centre, *History of a Street*, 56, Wharton stated that the fee was 5 cents initially.


St. Mary Street Library, *St. Mary Street Library* [annual report] (Philadelphia, 1886), 1-2, Settlements Collection, Box 6, SSC.


St. Mary Street Library, *St. Mary Street Library* [annual report] (Philadelphia, 1889), 6, Settlements Collection, Box 6, SSC.


St. Mary Street Library, *St. Mary Street Library* [annual report] (Philadelphia, 1888), 3-4, Settlements Collection, Box 6, SSC (also available in Octavia Hill Association, Free Library of Philadelphia Pamphlets Collection, Box 400, UA). See also St. Mary Street Library, *St. Mary Street Library* (Philadelphia, 1889), 3-11; St. Mary Street Library, *St. Mary Street Library* [annual report] (Philadelphia, 1890), 3-9, Settlements Collection, Box 6, SSC; St. Mary Street Library, *St. Mary Street Library* [annual report] (Philadelphia, 1891), 12, Settlements Collection, Box 6, SSC.

Starr Centre Association, *Growth of Starr Library*, 8-9; St. Mary Street College Settlement, *An Account of the St. Mary Street College Settlements of Philadelphia from April 1 to September 15, 1892 together with the Eighth Annual Report of the St. Mary Street Library from November 1, 1891, to April 1, 1892*, 6; Starr Centre, *History of a Street*, 56.

St. Mary Street Library, *St. Mary Street Library* [annual report] (Philadelphia, 1887), 10, Settlements Collection, Box 6, SSC.


St. Mary Street Library, *St. Mary Street Library* (Philadelphia, 1888), 3-4. Given out annually, the badges were “made of blue or red ribbon with the words ‘St. Mary Street Library’ printed on them in gilt letters and provided the holder with admission to the game room and all other activities.” See also St. Mary Street Library, *St. Mary Street Library* (Philadelphia, 1889); St. Mary Street Library, *St. Mary Street Library* (Philadelphia, 1890), Settlements Collection, Box 6, SSC.


Lane, *William Dorsey’s Philadelphia*, 146.

Ibid.


St. Mary Street Library, *St. Mary Street Library* (Philadelphia, 1890), 11.


St. Mary Street Library, *St Mary Street Library* (Philadelphia, 1889), 27.
The effect of keeping white teachers in our colored schools, 

According to Lane, “The 1880s, especially, witnessed great capital expenditures on building [by AA churches], and by the turn of the century a Black population...
officially measured at something over sixty thousand supported roughly sixty
different stone churches and uncounted numbers of smaller ones in rented halls.
Historic Mother Bethel, meanwhile, was the only major institution left in the Fifth
Ward increasingly abandoned to Italians, Jews and other European Immigrants.”
84 Lane, William Dorsey’s Philadelphia, 135-156.
85 Lane, William Dorsey’s Philadelphia, 135-148.
86 Ibid.
American Newspapers Collection, Accessible Archives, http://www.accessible-
archives.com/collections/african-american-newspapers/the-christian-recorder/.
88 “The James Forten School,” Christian Recorder (Philadelphia, PA), March 8, 1888,
89 Thomas Murray, “For the Christian Recorder. The Colored Schools,” Christian
Recorder (Philadelphia, PA), October 10, 1878, African American Newspapers
90 Lane, William Dorsey’s Philadelphia, 156.
91 Lane, William Dorsey’s Philadelphia, 157-158.
92 St. Mary Street College Settlement, An Account of the St. Mary Street College
Settlement of Philadelphia from April 1 to September 15, 1892 together with the
Eighth Annual Report of the St. Mary Street Library, 7.
93 St. Mary Street Library, St. Mary Street Library (Philadelphia, 1891), 3.
95 Franklin, Education of Black Philadelphia, 55.
96 Lane, William Dorsey’s Philadelphia, 157.
97 Lane, William Dorsey’s Philadelphia, 158.
98 Board of Education, Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Schools of the
City of Philadelphia for the Year 1895 (Philadelphia: Berk & McFetridge Co., 1896),
74-75; Lane, William Dorsey’s Philadelphia, 158. See also Sutherland, “Housing the
Poor in a City of Homes,” 181; Starr Centre, History of a Street, 84-86.
100 Perkins, Fannie Jackson Coppin, 152-158.
Association, Third Annual Report of the College Settlements Association: From
September 1, 1891 to September 1, 1892 (Philadelphia: Avil Printing and
Lithographing Co., 1892), 50, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania.


109 The lack of attention paid to African Americans by settlement workers was a central argument in Lasch Quinn, *Black Neighbors*. A more positive evaluation, though one that still admitted a lack of attention paid, was given by Allen Freeman Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890-1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 94-98.


111 St. Mary Street College Settlement, *An Account of the St. Mary Street College Settlement of Philadelphia from April 1 to September 15, 1892 together with the Eighth Annual Report of the St. Mary Street Library; Starr Centre Association, The Annual Report of the Starr Centre* (Philadelphia, January 1900), Annual Reports Collection, Box 84, UA (also available in Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC 9, Box 4, BC). See also St. Mary Street College Settlement, *Second Annual Report; St. Mary Street College Settlement, Third Annual Report; St. Mary Street College Settlement, Fourth Annual Report; St. Mary Street College Settlement of Philadelphia, The Fifth Annual Report of the St. Mary Street College Settlement of Philadelphia: Continuing the Work of the St. Mary Street Library* (Philadelphia, 1896), Settlements Collection, Box 6, SSC. Regarding the work of other settlements, see also Lasch-Quinn, *Black Neighbors*; Davis, *Spearheads for Reform*. 
Settlements!Collection

American#Newspapers, 1886; St. Mary Street Library, St. Mary Street Library, St. Mary Street Library, St. Mary Street Library (Philadelphia, 1887); St. Mary Street Library, St. Mary Street Library, St. Mary Street Library (Philadelphia, 1888); St. Mary Street Library, St. Mary Street Library, St. Mary Street Library (Philadelphia, 1889); St. Mary Street Library, St. Mary Street Library (Philadelphia, 1890); St. Mary Street Library, St. Mary Street Library (Philadelphia, 1891).

St. Mary Street Library, St. Mary Street Library (Philadelphia, 1891), 4.


“Home Notes,” College Settlement News 1, no. 6 (Sept 1895): 5, Settlements Collection, Box 5, SSC.

“The Starr Garden Park,” College Settlement News 1, no. 1 (April 1895): 4, Settlements Collection, Box 5, SSC.

St. Mary Street College Settlement’s Fourth Annual Report (1896) stated that the plan was for one-third of the lot to be a playground and two-thirds a park. St. Mary Street College Settlement, Fourth Annual Report, 16. An article titled, “Starr Garden Park,” printed in the News, had stated previously that the plan was for half playground, half park. College Settlement News 1, no. 1 (April 1895): 4.


St. Mary Street College Settlement, Fourth Annual Report, 17.

In October 1896 it was reported that, “[t]he only sign of progress in the Starr Park during the last month has been the drawing in of considerable dirt to fill up depressions in the ground which became lakes during the recent rains.”


“Neighborhood Notes,” College Settlement News 2, no. 12 (March 1897): 2, Settlements Collection, Box 5, SSC.

“The College Settlement,” College Settlement News 2, no. 6 (Sept 1896): 3, Settlements Collection, Box 5, SSC.

“Neighborhood Notes,” College Settlement News 3, no. 3 (July 1897), 5, Settlements Collection, Box 5, SSC.
“Concerts in the Yard,” College Settlement News 3, no. 5 (Sept 1897), 6, Settlements Collection, Box 5, SSC; “Club Notes,” College Settlement News (June 1897), 4, Settlements Collection, Box 5, SSC.


Starr Centre Association, Growth of the Starr Library, 12; St. Mary Street College Settlement, Fourth Annual Report, 16.

Starr Centre Association, Growth of the Starr Library, 13; St. Mary Street College Settlement, Fourth Annual Report, 17.

St. Mary Street College Settlement, An Account of the St. Mary Street College Settlement of Philadelphia from April 1 to September 15, 1892 together with the Eighth Annual Report of the St. Mary Street Library, 8.


142 A pamphlet produced by the Star Kitchen listed the settlement kindergarten as being all White while the James Forten School is described as “colored and white.” Star Kitchen Pamphlet. (Philadelphia, October, 1899), page titled, “Penny Lunch Children at the Ramsey School,” Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC 9, Box 14, BC.

143 “Clubs and Classes,” *News of the College Settlement of Philadelphia* 1, no. 3 (August 1899): 3, Settlements Collection, 3, Box 5, SSC.

144 St. Mary Street College Settlement, *An Account of the St. Mary Street College Settlement of Philadelphia from April 1 to September 15, 1892 together with the Eighth Annual Report of the St. Mary Street Library*, 22-23.

145 Letter from Dr. Charles F. Judson to Albert J. Kennedy, July 20, 1945, SW0144, Albert J. Kennedy Papers, Box 6, fldr. 55, SWHA.


148 “Some Facts About the Fifth Ward,” 3, no. 3 (July 1897): 1, Settlements Collection, Box 5, SSC.


150 The Star Kitchen formerly the College Settlement Kitchen and Coffee House: The Second Annual Report, (Philadelphia, Star Centre Association, [1897?]), 3, Annual Reports Collection, Box 84, UA.


153 Ibid.

154 Michael B. Katz and Thomas J. Sugrue argued, “Never intended as a wholly black institution, the Settlement found its demography almost certainly had been altered by the movement of whites out of the Seventh Ward and the increasing migration of blacks. Faced with the identification of the Settlement as a black institution, the executive committee voted to move to an area with a far smaller black population.” Katz and Sugrue, “Introduction: The Context of the Philadelphia Negro,” 17.


157 Tatum, "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" 11-12, 158 Davis, *Spearheads for Reform*, 94-102.

159 Thomas Lee Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, 276.

CHAPTER 3


5 Rainwater, *Play Movement*, 58-9. Today the playground goes by the name of SMITH: The Kids Play Place in the Park. See the website at smithplayground.org/

6 Website for the City Parks Association, http://www.cityparksphila.org/about/history.


Press, 1974), 306-324. Also available at
http://www.archive.org/details/pittsburghdistri00russ.

9 Tsanoff, Children’s Playgrounds, 28. Also in 1893, a small step towards the establishment of summer playgrounds was taken by the Board of Education when, at the request of the College Settlement, it ran a summer kindergarten program in Stuart Hall. City Councils facilitate further development (again at the request of the Settlement) by condemning the properties adjoining Starr Park as a first step towards its expansion. Dudley, “Philadelphia Settlement: Report of the Head Worker,” in College Settlements Association, Fourth Annual Report, 26.

10 Mrs. Cornelius Stevenson, “Third Annual Address by Mrs. Cornelius Stevenson, President of the Civic Club,” January 9, 1897, 16, Annual Reports Collection, Box 11, UA; see also Mackenzie, “Playgrounds in Cities.”

Clarence Rainwater credits the WCTU with the first request and the Cultural Extension League with the request that led to the opening of four playgrounds in 1895. Rainwater, Play Movement, 50. However, the Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia reported in 1909 that the opening of the playground was due primarily to the agitation of the Civic Club “endorsed by various other organizations.”

Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia, Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia 1909, 12, Annual Reports Collection, Box 76, UA. Constance Mackenzie did not mention the Culture Extension Club at all in her 1897 speech about the playground movement in Philadelphia, but did discuss the involvement of the Civic Club. Mackenzie, “Playgrounds in Cities,” 156-7. All of these organizations worked together to some extent. It was noted in both a Civic Club document and Tsanoff’s book that Civic Club members attended a meeting hosted by the Culture Extension League “in the interest of playgrounds” on March 4, 1895. Mrs. Cornelius Stevenson, “Third Annual Address,” 17; Tsanoff, Children’s Playgrounds, 29.


Richard Smith, will dated May 25, 1891, SMPP; Sarah A. Smith, will dated May 25, 1891, SMPP. The Smith’s only son, Stanfield, had died on December 31, 1890 at the age of 40, just prior to the creation of their final wills. Their only grandchild had died long before his father, at the age of three. Jim Stratz, email message to Hope Zoss, June 17, 2007, forwarded to the author, June 17, 2007. Content of email based on Stratz’s visit to Laurel Hill Cemetery where the Smith children are buried.


"American" (Philadelphia, PA), Sept 9, 1897, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers, Gale Digital Collections.

22 Tsanoff, *Children's Playgrounds*, 139.


28 Age restrictions are not discussed in newspaper articles or by Tsanoff, and Mackenzie does not refer to age limits as a characteristic of Philadelphia’s playgrounds at this stage, though all imply a focus on younger children rather than adolescents.


30 “The Playgrounds Closing,” 2.

31 Tsanoff, *Children's Playgrounds*, 3, 127.


Some of the other organizations involved, according to Tsanoff, were the Women's Health Protective Agency, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and Rodef Shalom. Tsanoff, *Children's Playgrounds*, 135.


Rainwater, *Play Movement*, 22-44.

“Playgrounds for the Young,” *North American* (Philadelphia, PA), June 26, 1897


“Neighborhood Notes,” *College Settlement News* 3, no. 3 (July 1897): 5.


Rainwater, *Play Movement*, 52. This focus also supported, if temporarily and often under some level of male supervision, an expansion of women’s leadership into this new professional realm.


Tsanoff, *Children’s Playgrounds*, 9, 133.


Tsanoff, *Children’s Playgrounds*, 12.


56 “Playgrounds Assoc. 1909,” 14.


60 Photographs, Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC9, Box 11, BC. Photographs from the early twentieth century show that for many years the natural aspects were not implemented, demonstrating that these aspects of the plan were considered less important.

61 Tsanoff, *Children's Playgrounds*, 12.

62 Goodman, *Choosing Sides*, 9


64 Schenker, “Women and Children's Quarters in Golden Gate Park,” 297.

65 Richard Smith, will dated May 25, 1891, SMPP.


67 “Children’s New Playground in the Park," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 12, 1898, Free Library of Philadelphia. James H. Windrim, the architect of both the playhouse and the monument, attributed the vision for the playhouse to Mrs. Smith.

68 Richard Smith, will, SMPP.


71 “Richard Smith’s Monument: He Bequeaths Half a Million for a Splendid Memorial in the Park,” North American (Philadelphia, PA), October 13, 1894, 19th Century Newspapers, Gale Digital Collections. See also Memo re. Smith Family, SMPP.


75 Journal No. 1, July 23, 1899, 16-17, SMPP.


81 Journal No. 1, July 20, 1899, 16, SMPP; Journal No. 1, July 27, 1899, 18, SMPP;

82 Fidelity Trust Co., Children’s Playhouse and Playground, Report for the Year 1902, 21; Fidelity Trust Co., Children’s Playhouse and Playground, Report for the Year 1905, 18; Fidelity Trust Co., Children’s Playhouse and Playground, Report for the Year 1907, 25. All at SMPP.

83 Journal No. 1, July 24, 1899 - July 28, 1899, 9-18, SMPP.

84 Journal No. 1, July 23, 1899, 18, SMPP.

85 Journal No. 1, August 1, 1899, 19, SMPP.

86 Journal No. 1, August 5, 1899, 20, SMPP.


88 Cavallo, Muscles and Morals, 25.
A variety of scholarly studies have clearly demonstrated that middle class African American women were active in creating playgrounds for Black children in the early part of the twentieth century, often through the auspices of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) or the YWCA. These efforts took place primarily, but not exclusively, in the South, where even middle class Black children could find few places to play outdoors. Rouse, *Lugenia Burns Hope*, 29-30, 71; Lasch-Quinn, *Black Neighbors*, 183; Cash, *African American Women and Social Action*, 49; Jones, “Struggle Among Saints,” 160-187.


Lane, *Dorsey’s Philadelphia*; Franklin, *The Education of Black Philadelphia*.


Lane, *Dorsey’s Pennsylvania*, 416-419. Lane’s account was admittedly only a brief summary based on his analysis of the William Henry Dorsey Collection, an extensive collection of newspaper clippings pertaining to Black life in Philadelphia, in which Phillips was among those most often mentioned; still, he mentioned a wide range of activities and causes with which Phillips was involved. He noted Phillips’ particular concern for children, which led to the creation of a home for crippled children, the kindergartens discussed in Chapter 1. Lane also mentioned that Phillips’ support for industrial education, founded the Progressive Workingmen’s Club with its gym, baths, and lecture, ministered to local prisoners and served the neighborhood poor through the establishment of a Coal Club and Free Ice Fund.
For an excellent discussion of the diverse ways that “civilization” could be understood by turn-of-the-century Americans, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*. Women in Culture and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 23-31. Bederman notes, for example, that the discourse of “civilization” could be and was appropriated by a variety of different people in different ways. “On the one hand, middle- and upper-class white men effectively mobilized ‘civilization’ in order to maintain their class, gender, and racial authority, whether they invoked primitive masculinity or civilized manliness. . . . People opposed to white male dominance invoked civilization to demonstrate the importance of women’s advancement. African Americans cited civilization to prove the necessity of racial egalitarianism.” *Manliness and Civilization*, 23.

Dr. W. E. Burghardt DuBois, “The Problem of Amusement,” *College Settlement News* 3, no. 6 (October 1897): 1-6, Settlements Collection, Box 5, SSC.


DuBois, “Problem of Amusement,” *College Settlement News* 3, no. 6 (October 1897): 3; DuBois, “Problem of Amusement [concluded],” *College Settlement News* 3, no. 7 (November 1897): 6-7. See also Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*.


CHAPTER 4

The title of the PAA publication was changed from *The Playground* to *Recreation* in 1932. My review of the collection of this journal at the Library of Congress confirmed the year when this change in title occurred.


According to Goodwin, Hall's version of Social Darwinism retained a commitment to preserving the unique strengths of “underdeveloped races” as a means of directing the “upward development of humankind.” “G. Stanley Hall and an American Social Darwinist Pedagogy: His Progressive Educational Ideas on Gender and Race,” *History of Education Quarterly* 52, no. 1, (February 2012): 91-97. Thus, though he may have agreed with an evaluation of Anglo-Saxon culture as superior to others, he was not an advocate of broadly imperialist actions that aimed to obliterate the uniqueness of other cultures. This view would not have directly supported the perspective taken by many play movement leaders, some of whom had been trained by Hall, who increasingly presented Anglo-Saxon cultural practices as superior methods for the moral and character education of children of varied racial/ethnic/cultural backgrounds.

Hall’s emphasis on muscular development as a means of character education was one of those that supported this aspect of playground rhetoric. For a summary of several other influences, see Cavallo, *Muscles and Morals*, chapter 2. For primary document evidence of these trends in Philadelphia, see Tsanoff, *Children’s Playgrounds*, 121; Board of Recreation, *Philadelphia Playgrounds* (January 1, 1913), 4, Free Library of Philadelphia Pamphlets Collection, Box 50, UA; Board of Recreation of Philadelphia, *Philadelphia’s Progress in Playgrounds and Municipal Recreation*, (Philadelphia: Board of Recreation, January 1, 1914), 14, Free Library of Philadelphia Pamphlets Collection, Box 50, UA.

“In re. Estate of RICHARD SMITH, Deceased. October Term, 1895, No. 334. Petition For Leave to Acquire Sites and Erect Buildings Theron for Playgrounds for Children Outside of the Limits of Fairmount Park in the Orphan’s Court for the County of Philadelphia,” May 14, 1912, 1, SMPP.


Deborah Valentine, “Race, Rhetorics of Play and the American Play Movement,” (unpublished paper submitted to meet course requirement, Play Seminar, Rutgers-
It is interesting to note that Hall actually advocated very rigid and non-play based instructional methods for academic subjects. Play’s educational benefits were limited to physical and moral or social realms. See also Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 97-100; Cavallo, *Muscles and Morals*, 55-60; Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

Beatty, *Preschool Education in America*, 75.

Hall, *Youth*, 2-3.


Valentine, “Race, Rhetorics of Play and the American Play Movement.”


Hall, *Youth*, 79. See also Beatty, *Preschool Education in America*, 75.


Violas, “The Play Movement,” 137-143; Valentine, “Race, Rhetorics of Play and the American Play Movement.”


Ibid., 4.


36 Ibid., 2.


39 Minutes of the Starr Centre Board of Directors, May 19, 1903, 79, Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC9, Box 1, BC (hereafter cited as Minutes, Starr Centre Association).

40 Minutes, Starr Centre Association, Feb. 9, 1904, 93-95; Starr Centre Association, *Report of the Starr Centre* (Philadelphia, 1904), 8-10, Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC 9, Box 4, BC (also available in Annual Reports Collection, Box 84, UA); Starr Centre Association, *Starr Garden Open Air Gymnasium and Gardens*, (Philadelphia, [1905?]), 4-5, Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC9, Box 14, BC.


42 Starr Centre Association, *Report of the Starr Centre* (Philadelphia, 1905), n.p., MC9, Box 4, fldr. 41, BC.

43 Starr Centre Association, *Report of the Starr Centre Association: Continuation of the St. Mary Street Library Founded 1884* (Philadelphia, 1907), 28, Annual Reports Collection, Box 84, UA (also available in Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC 9, Box 4, BC).


46 Minutes, Starr Centre Association, May 8, 1906, 5-6.


49 Starr Centre Association, *First Real Playground in Philadelphia*. Wharton described one of these “evils” in a fundraising letter—breaking windows. Letter by Susan P. Wharton, n.d., Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, Box 14, BC.

50 Starr Centre Association, *First Real Playground in Philadelphia*.


55 Starr Centre Association, *First Real Playground in Philadelphia*.


57 Starr Centre Association, Report of the Starr Centre Association: Continuation of the St. Mary Street Library Founded 1884 (Philadelphia, 1906), 9-10, Annual Reports Collection, Box 84, UA (also available in Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC 9, Box 4, BC).


62 The Starr Centre Association pamphlet titled *Starr Garden Open Air Gymnasium and Gardens* does not list an individual author, but sections of it so closely resemble Miss Weston’s garden report published in the *Starr Centre Annual Report for 1905* that she is likely the author of the pamphlet as well. See R.D. Weston, “1905—Children’s Gardens,” in Starr Centre Association, Report of the Starr Centre Association (Philadelphia, 1905), 11-12.


64 Starr Centre Association, *Starr Garden Open Air Gymnasium and Gardens*, 9. See also Starr Centre Association, *First Real Playground in Philadelphia*. 
The poverty of some of the children is evident in descriptions of their clothing. “Ikey” was described as “splendid in a sweater which seemed to be principally armholes,” wore spiked running shoes “a couple of sizes too small.” “Peter’s” shirt was “split up the back like a locust.” Starr Centre Association, *Starr Garden Open Air Gymnasium and Gardens*, 6.

Photograph, Large Group of Children in Front of Hanging Rings, Starr Center Association of Philadelphia Records, MC 9, Box 11.

Re. boys activities, see Starr Centre Association, *Starr Garden Open Air Gymnasium and Gardens*, 8, cover [photo], 13. See also Letter from Susan P. Wharton, n.d., Scrapbook, Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC9, Box 14, BC.


Photograph, Group of Children in and Around Sand Box, Starr Center Association of Philadelphia Records, MC 9, Box 11.


Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia *Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia 1909*, 18. From 1908-1909, the playground was open from April through December. Its hours of operation were from 8:00 am to 9:30 pm in summer and during after school hours in the spring and fall.


See the list of activities in College Settlement of Philadelphia, *Fourteenth Annual Report* ([Philadelphia?], 1905), 12, 19-27; The College Settlement of Philadelphia, *Eighteenth Annual Report* ([Philadelphia?], 1910), 13. Starr Centre reports from the same time period occasionally mentioned the need for a hall or a gym to allow for large group activities, but the lack of these spaces had little impact on their core programs. Once the Starr Centre acquired a resident house and more rooms for the library, they had little need for additional space until they established a new branch for their medical work with Italian immigrants in 1908.


Anna Freeman Davies, “Headworker’s Letter,” *News of the College Settlement of Philadelphia* (March 1900): 1, Settlements Collection, Box 5, SSC.

Howell, “Play Pays,” 961-65, 987-88. Ocean Howell argues, in contrast to Dom Cavallo, Cary Goodman and others, that Progressive Era playgrounds must be understood, not only as programs that promoted organized play and recreation, but as urban spaces. A view of the Philadelphia College Settlements outdoor play yards and basement play rooms supports that contention, at a minimal level at least, because in many cases it was not possible for programs or activities to exist without the provision of space.

As was the case with Starr Garden, often the creation of these new spaces involved the demolition of old ones. In the case of the first play-yard, created in the space behind 429 Christian Street in 1903, the eviction displaced two large families from their “shanties,” homes they had been renting from the Settlement. One family consisted of ten members: father, mother, grandparents and six children aged 10 months to 13 years, who lived in 3 rooms, each 15 x 8-10 feet, one room above the other (a typical Philly trinity). Another large family lived in an identical house. They were Irish: mother, father, three children, grandparents, a boarder and possibly an aunt, according to the Settlement rent collector. According to a Settlement report, “The building was old, unsanitary and unsightly, quite below the present requirements of the city’s building regulations and too tumble down to take improvements.” Though the plumbing was described as being in very poor repair, each house did have a toilet. As was typical in reports describing improvement such as this one, the value of the buildings that were being demolished and of the homes, inadequate as they were by Settlement standards, to the people living in them is given no place in the story. There is no discussion in Settlement documents that indicates that these families were given help relocating. “The Evolution of the Play Yard,” News of the College Settlement of Philadelphia 1, no. 11 (June 1903): [2-3], Settlements Collection, Box 5, SSC.

115 “Babies Rest Yard, August 1912,” *News of the College Settlement of Philadelphia* (September 1912): [pages unclear], Settlements Collection, Box 5, SSC.
117 “Possible Uses of a Small Play Yard,” *News of the College Settlement of Philadelphia* 2, no. 4 (June 1908): 6, Settlements Collection, Box 5, SSC.
118 Ibid., 6-7,
125 Davis, *Spearheads for Reform*, xiii


Fidelity Trust Co., *The Children’s Playhouse and Playground*, Report for the Year 1902, 10, SMPP. See also other Children’s Playhouse and Playground reports 1902-1913, SMPP.


Journal No. 2, Memorial Day, 1911, SMPP.

See for example, Journal No. 1, November 21, 1901, SMPP; Journal No. 1, January 3, 1902, SMPP; Journal No. 1, March 25, 1905, SMPP.

Journal No. 1, February 27, 1904, SMPP. Compare to Journal No. 1, February 29, 1904, SMPP.

Journal No. 1, November 29-30, 1901, SMPP.

See for example, Journal No. 1, January 24, 1903, SMPP.

Journal No. 1, May 30, 1901, SMPP.

Journal No. 1, Aug 7, 1899, Jan 22, 1900, March 9th, 1901; Journal No. 2, March 18, 1909; Memorial Day, 1909, SMPP. See for example, Fidelity Trust Co., *The Children’s Playhouse and Playground*, Report for the Year 1905, 15, SMPP.

Richard Smith, will dated May 25, 1891, SMPP.

Journal No. 1, May 10, 1900, SMPP.


J. Foster Ogden to the Trustees of the Estates of Richard and Sarah A. Smith, Superintendent’s Fifth Annual Report, Jan. 1, 1904, SMPP.

Journal No. 1, July 2, 1900, 64, SMPP.

See for example, Journal No. 1, August 14, 1899, 20; Journal No. 1, May 6, 1905, SMPP

See Gagen, “Too Good to Be True,” 60.


Fidelity Trust Co., *The Children’s Playhouse and Playground*, Report for the Year 1902, 10, SMPP. See also other Children’s Playhouse and Playground reports 1902-1913, SMPP.

CHAPTER 5


2 Pilz, “Beginnings of Organized Play.” For works that note African American presence in passing, see Suzanne Spencer-Wood, “Turn of the Century Women’s


6 Andrea Hinding, “Utilities and Ultimates,” 53-55. See also Spencer-Wood who mentioned in passing (without providing evidence beyond one photograph) that neighborhood playgrounds were often racially integrated. “Turn of the Century Women’s Organizations,” 131. Several more recent play movement scholars have successfully used case studies to highlight the activities of other non-dominant groups within the playground movement, namely, women, girls and [White] working class adults. See Peterson, “Voting for Play,” 145-175; Dickason, “Origin of the Playground,” 83-98; Roy Rosenzweig, “Middle-Class Parks and Working Class Play: The Struggle Over Recreational Space in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1870-1910,” *Radical History Review* 21, Fall (1979): 31-46; Elizabeth Gagen, “Too Good to be True,” 53-64. Black children’s activities have received only minimal attention.


13 Photograph, Group of Children Around Swings, Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC9, Box 11, BC.
16 In this same report Wharton included an answer to the question she stated that they had been asked many times, “... shall we continue to spend ourselves and the public money in trying to help this locality ...?” She began a section titled “The Answer” with a reference to “the contrabands” (runaway slaves) who filled the area before the Civil War and to the work of Whitall, which was entirely focused on with African Americans. Starr Centre Association, *Annual Report of the Starr Centre* (Philadelphia, 1900), 4-5.
21 Especially given the fact that in many cases Black children appear to be strategically placed so as to be noticeable, their visibility in annual report photographs demonstrates again the intentionality of Wharton and her colleagues both in meeting the needs of African Americans and in seeking support for this aspect of their work from the financial supporters who were the target audience for these reports and pamphlets.
24 Some of the pressure Wharton felt likely hit very close to home as the White Quaker community, long among those most supportive of African Americans,
became less so. Perkins, *Fannie Jackson Coppin*, 222-224; see also Donna McDaniel and Vanessa Julye, *Fit for Freedom.*

36 Starr Centre Association, *Report of the Starr Centre Association* (Philadelphia 1905), 15; Starr Centre Association, *Report of the Starr Centre Association* (Philadelphia, 1906), [2], 25. One reason for Black children’s lower level of participation may have been that the hours—9:00-12:00 in the morning—were unrealistic for working mothers, and for Black mothers in particular, who were most likely working long hours as laundresses or cooks. Starr Centre Association, *Starr Centre at Work* (Philadelphia, 1912), 12, Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC9, Box 4, BC.


44 Ibid., 6.

45 Starr Centre Association, *Annual Report of the Starr Centre* (Philadelphia, November 1903), Annual Reports Collection, Box 84, UA (also available in Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC 9, Box 4, BC).


50 Starr Centre Association, *Report of the Starr Centre Association, The Negro Branch of the Starr Centre* (Philadelphia, 1909), Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC9, Box 6, BC. By 1911 the monthly gatherings were attended by 300-400 men, women and children. Starr Centre Association, *Coal Club Branch* (Philadelphia, 1911), Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC9, Box 6, BC.

51 In 1908 it was mentioned that the organization needed to obtain a summer home “for its colored people.” Though they never managed to purchase a summer house, the Centre continued to be able to find places they could use each summer. Starr
Clothing worn in photographs of the Coal Club provides some evidence of this change in status, as does the fact that several families managed to pay the fee required in order to make use of the offer of a week away. In addition, the reports include carefully written thank you notes from some the vacationers, indicating both an understanding of middle class etiquette and educated skill in written communication. In addition, reports note that many of the original members had moved out of the “slums” into better neighborhoods. Starr Centre Association, *Report of the Starr Centre Association* (Philadelphia, 1905), 16; Starr Centre Association, *Report of the Starr Centre Association* (Philadelphia, 1906), 18 [photo], 26-7; Starr Centre Association, *Report of the Starr Centre Association* (Philadelphia, 1907), 27; Starr Centre Association, *Starr Centre Association* (Philadelphia, 1911), 12; Starr Centre Association, *Starr Centre at Work,* (Philadelphia, 1912), 4.


Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia, *1911 Summer Camps,* Annual Reports Collection, Box 50, UA; Playgrounds Association of Philadelphia, *1912 Summer Camps,* Annual Reports Collection, Box 50, UA.


Susan Wharton. Letter labeled “1906-07 appeals” in scrapbook, Starr Centre Association of Philadelphia Records, MC9, Box 14, BC.


Starr Centre Association, *Open Air Gymnasium and Gardens; Starr Centre Association, First Real Playground in Philadelphia.*


Board of Recreation of Philadelphia, *Philadelphia Playgrounds* (January 1, 1913), 10, 20. While this number was far less than the Starr Garden Recreation Parks, 300,006 participants exceeded the annual attendance at many of the Board’s other playgrounds.

See Journal No. 1, April 28, 1900, 146; Journal No. 1, August 28, 1901, 121, SMPP; see also *The Children’s Playhouse and Playground, Report for the Year 1907,* 13, SMPP.

J. Foster Ogden to the Trustees of the Estates of Richard and Sarah A. Smith, Superintendent’s Fifth Annual Report, Jan. 1, 1904, SMPP.

Ibid.

Fidelity Trust Co., *Children’s Playhouse and Playground, Report for the Year 1902*, between page 22 and page 23.


Fidelity Trust Co., *Children’s Playhouse and Playground, Report for the Year 1907*, [27].

See Journal No. 1, April 28th 1900; Journal No. 1, Aug. 11, 1901; Journal No. 1, April 18, 1902; Journal No. 1, May 23, 1903; Journal No. 1, April 9, 1905; Journal No. 1, July 1, 1907; Journal No. 1, July 19, 1908; Journal No. 2, May 28, 1910. Both journals are located at SMPP.

Journal No. 1, July 4, 1903; Journal No. 1, August 31, 1908; Journal No. 1, July 13, 1912.

Regarding African Americans, see Journal No. 1, August 5, 1902, 163. Regarding Jews see for example, Journal No. 1,” July 26, 1903, 207 and Journal No. 1, August 11, 1901, 117. Regarding Germans, see Journal No. 1, August 5, 1902, 163.

See Journal No. 1, August 5, 1902, 163. Participants labeled with religious or ethnic terms, such as Catholics, Methodists, Irish, Italians, Chinese, Syrians and a variety of Protestant denominations, are all mentioned in various descriptions, but without consistent positive or negative connotations. See Journal No. 1, Sept. 9, 1899; Journal No. 1, April 28th 1900; Journal No. 1, July 8, 1900; Journal No. 1, July 10, 1902; Journal No. 1, June 1, 1903; Journal No. 1, Sept. 4, 1906.

Journal No. 2, July 5, 1909.
From 1903-1908 the presence of groups from the Starr Centre was noted by J. Foster Ogden each July. See Journal No. 1, July 1, 1903; Journal No. 1, July 28, 1905; Journal No. 1, July 13, 1906; Journal No. 1, July 26, 1907, Journal No. 1, July 10, 1908. These outings from Starr to Smith were also noted in Starr Centre reports. Starr Centre Association, Report of the Starr Centre Association (Philadelphia, 1905), 16; Starr Centre Association, The Starr Centre Association (Philadelphia, 1908) 21.


When reports from the College Settlement are compared with the figures provided by the visiting nurse who worked for the Starr Centre, they also confirm that the Settlement's contact with Philadelphia's African American population decreased significantly after the move, while the Starr Centre's increased, at least temporarily. Davies, “Philadelphia Settlement: Report of the Headworker,” in College Settlements Association, Tenth Annual Report of the College Settlements Association: From October 1, 1898 to October 1, 1899 (Boston: A.T. Bliss & Co., 1899), 51-52, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania.


Anna Freeman Davies, “Headworker's Letter,” News of the College Settlement of Philadelphia 1, no. 4, (March 1900) 1, Settlements Collection, Box 5, SSC.

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Gutman, “Race, Place and Play,” 532-561.

Board of Recreation of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Playgrounds (January 1, 1913), 4, Free Library of Philadelphia Pamphlets Collections, Box 50, UA.

Sutherland, “Housing the Poor in the City of Homes,” 179.

Board of Recreation of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Playgrounds (January 1, 1913), 6; Sutherland, “Housing the Poor in a City of Homes,” 180.

Board of Recreation of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Playgrounds (January 1, 1913), 6; Starr Centre Association, Report of the Starr Centre Association (Philadelphia, 1905), 16;
319


94 The Whittier Centre, *The Whittier Centre, 1863-1913* (Philadelphia, 1913), Wharton Centre Collection, URB 30, Box 1, UA.


96 Board of Recreation of Philadelphia, *Philadelphia’s Progress in Playgrounds* (January 1, 1913), 8; Board of Recreation of Philadelphia, *Philadelphia’s Progress in Playgrounds* (January 1, 1914), 15. Spending reports indicate that rather than providing improvements at Coxe, large portions of the department’s funds for that year were used to build a new model recreation center in a wealthy White neighborhood. In part, this choice could be justified by the fact that Coxe was a temporary site. However, though a plan for its replacement had been suggested by the Philadelphia Playgrounds Commission in 1910, it had not been executed by the time of the Department of Recreation’s 1914 report. Board of Recreation of Philadelphia, *Philadelphia Playgrounds* (January 1, 1913), 10, Free Library of Philadelphia Pamphlets Collection, Box 50, UA; Public Playgrounds Commission, *Playgrounds for Philadelphia: Report of the Public Playgrounds Commission*, (Philadelphia, 1910), 40, Free Library of Philadelphia Pamphlets Collection, Box 50, UA.

97 Most of the time, Starr Centre pamphlets presented Black children as children, imperfect, interesting and playful, similar to their White counterparts. For example, the story one Black boy, Rastus, age 10, described him as the “local Bad man.” According to the pamphlet, he had been arrested for “heaving bricks,” but went on to say that he was also capable of providing helpful services such as getting a beanbag out of a tree when the task required “skill and daring.” Starr Centre Association, *Open Air Gymnasium and Gardens.*


100 Fidelity Trust Co., *Children’s Playhouse and Playground*, Report for the Year 1905, 27.


102 Fidelity Trust Co., *Children’s Playhouse and Playground*, Report for the Year 1902, 8, 12.


When I first came across a photograph of this scene in the Bates Centre archive, having not yet read the text quoted here, what struck me most about it was that it demonstrated interracial use of the playground. However, when I gave a talk to a group of predominantly African American middle schoolers in Philadelphia and showed the picture, one eighth grade girl had a totally different reaction. What she noticed was the Black child acting like a servant to the White children. Her reading of the information provided by the image in light of this text seems to me to be quite accurate. This experience demonstrated for me the incredibly valuable role that children might play in historical research. I am indebted to her for this insight.

Ibid.


Elizabeth Gagen, “Too Good to be True,” 62.

Ibid.


CONCLUSION

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