

THE MAKING OF A MODERN EDUCATION: METHODISTS AND CLAFLIN UNIVERSITY, 1869-1913

DAVID T. MITCHELL

To many the education of the past has been too theoretical and visionary, and has educated men out of their spheres rather than into them, while the new education seeks to be broader, more practical, and more useful.

—*Catalogue of Claflin University, 1888-1889*

In 1901, the Freedman's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) evaluated the previous thirty-six years of its work in the South. Cognizant of the progress made and the work still to be done, Freedman's Aid Methodists were most pleased with how they had employed their version of "modern education" as an instrument for social uplift. "During all these years" the report declared, "not a single student or graduate has ever been charged with crimes against virtue." One of the goals had been to "secure good English scholars, as opposed to Latin and Greek scribblers who [could] not speak their mother tongue" and "especially prepare well-trained teachers." The result was the organization had placed more teachers into public schools in the South than had any other benevolent organization. The other primary interest was industrial education, of which Freedman's Aid schools had offered the most extensive training in industrial techniques and graduated more students than "any institution or set of institutions in the South."¹

While there was much to celebrate, there were grave concerns about the future of black education. One by one, Southern states had regained control of their political, social, and cultural institutions, and they had systematically disfranchised their African-American citizens. Since the 1890s, lynching had been on the rise, fewer blacks could vote, and school attendance was down. In South Carolina, some Methodists supported black education, but others were highly suspicious of "free" or "modern" education, particularly when it derived from Northern interests. White Southerners had long resented the presence of outsiders in their state, and they viewed education as one of the primary mechanisms for wielding power. However, for most of the state's Methodists, black education was theater for the reconciliation of progress and tradition, playing out in the pulpit, religious and secular media, and on campuses like Claflin University.

The Fight over Public Education

Some resisters to black education were economically and politically

¹ United States, Report of the Commissioner of Education made to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1902, vol. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903), 299.

motivated. In 1885, the colleges of Erskine, Furman, Wofford, and Newberry protested South Carolina University's practice of offering free tuition, explaining that those who wished to attend denominational colleges were suffering an unjust burden, not only paying full retail but also subsidizing scholarships for secular education. Although most leaders of these religious institutions did not specifically target African Americans, in their attempts at self-preservation, they viewed black education as an acceptable casualty. In 1895, the Reverend John Kilgo, President of Trinity College, questioned the sincerity of free school advocates, claiming that a free education amounted to little more than political patronage. He wrote, "Benevolence is always to be commended, but the most vicious results have often been produced in the name of philanthropy. Judging by the methods of bestowing free scholarships, it is doubtful whether there is a benevolent intention behind them."²

Other resistance was racially driven. Reverend W. P. Lovejoy complained that "our Northern critics . . . suppose, without sufficient data, . . . that the negro is a much finer specimen of a human being, morally, mentally, every way, than he is . . ."³ Another minister suggested that since "the Northern people have the money, and claim to have the philanthropy," the best solution would be for "four or five million negroes to move up into the Northern States." Then Northerners could "let colored ladies sit in the same parlors and pews with white women, and put colored children in the same schools and desks as white children."⁴

In 1886, the *Southern Christian Advocate* ran a series of editorials both for and against the Blair Education Bill, legislation that would have provided Federal money for primary school education for both black and white children.⁵ Opponents argued that such "misplaced charity" would "do more harm than good," robbing citizens of their "independence and self-reliance."⁶ The bill never passed, lacking support from Southerners who did not want blacks to receive federal education funding and Northerners who didn't want their taxes to fund Southern schools, but some Methodist leaders believed that it was the duty of government "to supply primary education as a *sine qua non* of the preservation of free institutions."⁷ In 1900, the *Southern Christian Advocate* blasted state politicians, who, in their efforts to obstruct the "education of the negro," had killed the state Compulsory School Bill, ". . . willingly [closing] the door . . . upon white children."⁸ Even if the bill had passed, the newspaper argued, the "moral and intellectual superiority of the

² John C. Kilgo, "Education and Pauperism," *Southern Christian Advocate*, September 5, 1895 (South Carolina United Methodist Collection, Wofford College, Spartanburg, SC).

³ W. P. Lovejoy, "The Difficulties Surround the Race Problem in the South," *Southern Christian Advocate*, July 31, 1890.

⁴ W. M. Leftwich, "The Race Problem," *Southern Christian Advocate*, August 21, 1890.

⁵ See, Daniel Crofts, "The Black Response to the Blair Education Bill," *Journal of Southern History* 34 (1971): 41–65; Allen Going, "The South and the Blair Education Bill," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44 (1957): 269–290.

⁶ "Federal Aid to Education," *Southern Christian Advocate*, June 10, 1886.

⁷ *Southern Christian Advocate*, January 14, 1886.

⁸ *Southern Christian Advocate*, February 8, 1900.

white race” would remain intact, for it “would be a practical impossibility to give the negroes [*sic*] schools in any way comparable with those of the whites.”

While white Southerners remained apprehensive of black education outside the realm of their control, they cautiously accepted Northern philanthropy benefitting whites. Through the state denominational newspaper, the *Southern Christian Advocate*, Methodist leaders urged their members to practice racial moderation and support expanding education. Although South Carolinians resented Northern philanthropy that helped the Freedpeople, when State Superintendent Hugh Thompson announced the opening of a state teacher’s institute in Spartanburg, offering free tuition to white South Carolinians, Methodist leaders cheered.⁹ The General Agent of the Peabody Fund had contributed \$5,000 to the Institute, and subsequently, the state Methodist newspaper did not suggest rejecting the northern money, writing that, “[this is] an important era in our educational progress. It means better teaching and better schools, a more intelligent understanding of school work and its proper performance. Every parent in the State has an interest in the successful issue of this new enterprise.”¹⁰ After a few relocations, in 1895, with broad support throughout the State, the Institute re-located to Rock Hill, South Carolina, and was named Winthrop Normal and Industrial College.¹¹

Methodists and the Promises of Modern Education

Allston Earle believed that African Americans had benefitted from education. After he had attended the 1895 Greenville District Conference, the Methodist minister shared his findings with readers of the *Southern Christian Advocate*. Earle was impressed by the surprising intelligence and the commendable behavior of these African-American Methodists, who demonstrated modesty both inside the church and on public streets. Referencing Booker T. Washington’s famous speech at the Atlanta Cotton Exposition, Earle argued: “Disguise or try to get around it as we may, the negroes, in the past thirty years, have made great progress, and as a race are still making strides onward.”¹² With blacks poised to continue their advance, and with so many whites indifferent to education, this “ought to drive white folks to serious reflection.”

When Earle spoke of racial progress, he meant industrial education, often called the Hampton-Tuskegee philosophy of education. This was the brainchild of a Northerner, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, who, in 1868, had founded Hampton Institute in Virginia as a place to train new black teach-

⁹ Department of Public Instruction, *Eleventh Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Education of South Carolina*, by Hugh S. Thompson (Columbia: Calvo and Patton, State Printers, 1879), 37.

¹⁰ “The Normal Institute,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, July 31, 1880.

¹¹ Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman & the Reconstruction of White Supremacy*, The Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 2000): 230.

¹² Allston Earle, “Some Impressions Made by a Recent Colored District Conference,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, September 19, 1895.

ers. He believed that college was for moral and vocational training, which promised both technical and life-management skills. Students were taught how to function in an undemocratic society where blacks operated at the bottom of the social hierarchy. In 1881, his most famous pupil, Booker T. Washington, founded Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute and became a tireless evangelist for practical education. During a decade when many Southern states enacted Jim Crow laws, Washington gave a speech at the 1895 Atlanta Cotton Exposition, offering a compromise to white, Southern business owners—hire more black industrial workers, and in return, we will teach our students Christian values, thrift, and acquiescence.

These were not new ideas but ones that had been altered to meet the needs of an industrial economy operating in a bi-racial society. The origins stemmed from the Age of Science and Reason, emphasizing observation and inquiry over authority and tradition. These ideals fueled political, economic, and social revolutions around the world. One of the most influential philosophers of education, John Locke, theorized that, placed in the right environment, common citizens were as capable of learning as the aristocracy.¹³ Children were blank slates that could be molded into bright, intelligent citizens. The promise was a more modern, relevant education to prepare young people for the challenges of a new economy, brought on by a new industrial age that had finally reached the United States and had transformed the North.

While Northern schools looked to Europe for educational inspiration, for a number of reasons, antebellum Southern colleges resisted these changes.¹⁴ While the South has a long history of higher education, college was primarily for the elite, and the academic focus was on reciting the classics. Traditionally, universities, especially those in the South, equated knowledge with rote memorization. Institutions operated under the assumption that students had successfully completed college preparatory training, so professors rarely lectured or held formal classes. Instead, exams were often comprised of public recitation; students spent much of their semester practicing their rhetoric among peers. In Professor Robert Barnwell's 1861 course, *History of Moral Philosophy*, junior-level students were asked to draw upon their extensive memories, responding to a litany of who, what, where, when, and how questions: "What schools sprung from Socrates' instructions?"; "What is the character of Christian Ethics?"; and "Who were the Schoolmen?"¹⁵

Planters sent their sons to the University of South Carolina for moral and social reasons. Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown explains that because

¹³ John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (London: A. F. Churchill, 1693).

¹⁴ Although James Leloudis focuses on North Carolina, which had a slightly different societal arrangement than South Carolina, his study of late nineteenth and early twentieth century educational pedagogy applies more broadly to the New South, in, James L. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920*, The Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 1996).

¹⁵ "1861. April Examination of the Junior Class, Upon the History of Moral Philosophy," University of South Carolina Exams, 1854-1917, University Archives, Digital Collections, University of South Carolina Library.

of “Southern honor,” a belief system predicated on personal conduct and preserving social hierarchy, students cared little about book learning or impressing professors.¹⁶ College was a rite of passage where students focused on cultivating their manners and developing oratorical skills that would distinguish them among peers and, thus, uphold the family name.

Elites were not the only Southerners unimpressed by the promises of modern education. To evangelicals, Enlightenment ideals were not democratic but calamitous, undermining Christian beliefs and, in one case, fueling slave insurrection in Haiti. While the average white South Carolinian had little use for Latin or Greek, he did equate the study of the classics with Christian education. Since the Second Great Awakening, more South Carolinians were interested in personal spirituality, which among other things meant reading the Bible daily. To them, literacy was a conduit for eternal salvation.¹⁷ Evangelicals, of whom Methodists were most prominent, believed that learning the three R’s—reading, writing, and arithmetic—was important for self-reliance and spiritual development.

To the extent that rural children received schooling, this was the responsibility of local communities, most often under the guise of common schools. Children studied in one-room schoolhouses alongside others of various ages. Headmasters were generally men picked by local communities, primarily for their moral virtues rather than educational qualifications. Most white Southern Carolinians preferred hiring from within the community because it kept outsiders from dictating curriculum and pedagogy. And with good reason: since the 1830s, Northern calls for education reform, including curriculum alterations and publicly funded schools, made Southerners anxious they would lose control of their children’s education.¹⁸ With sectional hostilities rising, Southern evangelicals augmented their educational commitment by expanding Sunday schools and establishing denominational colleges. Historian Daniel Stowell argues that, following the Civil War, as Northerners poured into the South with a mandate to enact “God’s judgment” and remake the region into their own image, Southerners had “a genuine concern over the religious and intellectual training of Southern youth,” and therefore, “devoted extraordinary efforts to the reestablishment of their [denomination-

¹⁶ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford UP, 1982).

¹⁷ For more on education and evangelicalism, see Wilbur J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1941), 171-174; Charles A. Israel, *Before Scopes: Evangelicalism, Education, and Evolution in Tennessee, 1870-1925* (Athens: U Georgia P, 2004); William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930*, The Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 1992); Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920*, The Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 1990); Randy J. Sparks, *On Jordan’s Stormy Banks: Evangelicalism in Mississippi, 1773-1876* (Athens: U Georgia P, 1994).

¹⁸ Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2005), 54-55.

al] colleges.”¹⁹

While Southern Methodists grappled with how best to preserve their traditions, ironically, under the auspices of northern Methodists, Freedman’s Aid Society schools were among the first Southern colleges to implement the modern curriculum. Initially, these schools focused on teacher training, and as Historian Ronald Bluchart asserts, the language of education was steeped in a scientific language of efficiency, order, and management.²⁰ Within the first five years of Reconstruction, many Southern states, including South Carolina, had implemented a statewide school system mirroring that of the North.

The Claflin Experiment

One of the largest and most successful Freedman’s Aid Society schools was Claflin University.²¹ Founded in 1869, it featured a broad, comprehensive curriculum. The shortest course of study was the two-year grammar school program, which initially focused on literacy, but by 1879, it had become “a first-class preparation for entering upon the normal school course . . . with a respectable library of more than one thousand volumes and valuable apparatus for experimental lectures on the sciences.”²² When Methodists first began the university, it had been the only course of study, providing knowledge vital to full participatory citizen and self-reliance.

In 1872, the South Carolina government merged its new land-grant college, South Carolina Agriculture and Mechanical Institute, with Claflin, offering an expanded curriculum of teacher training along with increased science and engineering. University administrators declared that, “for the sake of greater economy and efficiency, the two institutions, while distinct in every other particular, are operated practically as one.”²³ By the 1880s, both the Normal Institute and agriculture and mechanics were three-year programs. The capstone degree was four years of classical humanities. Even the liberal arts degree offered electives to those who preferred “more of the sciences, less of classics.” The curriculum mirrored Northern educational trends first adopted in the 1830s and federalized with the 1862 Morrill Act, which not only established foundations for land-grant universities but also shifted traditional higher education’s focus from solely on classics such

¹⁹ Daniel W. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877* (New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 114.

²⁰ Ronald E. Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 2010), 149.

²¹ For more of Claflin’s history, see Charlestine Romelle Fairley, “A History of Claflin College,” Thesis (Ph.D.), University of South Carolina, 1990; Vivian Glover, *Men of Vision: Claflin College and Her Presidents*, (Orangeburg, SC: Claflin College, 1995); and Blinzy Gore, *On a Hilltop High: The Origin and History of Claflin College to 1984* (Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company Publishers, 1993).

²² Thompson, 9-10.

²³ Claflin University, *Catalogue of Claflin University, and College of Agriculture, Orangeburg, S.C., 1883-1884*, (Charleston: Walker, Evans and Cogswell, 1884), <https://archive.org/details/catalogueofclaf100claf>.

Latin, Greek, and Rhetoric to one with heavy supplements of science and mathematics.²⁴ Claflin became one of the first colleges in South Carolina to experiment with liberal education.

Pedagogy also evolved, but the student experience resembled a mixture of progress and tradition. Traditionally, universities utilized parochial pass or fail evaluations, but Claflin professors evaluated students on a 100 point scale, with 60 being the minimum passing grade. Numeric evaluations—grades—were a revelation to college life, offering measureable comparisons between students. Often, professors posted grades publicly for all to see. Each year, the faculty awarded prizes recognizing exemplary students. For African Americans, performance-based evaluations offered the prospect of equality, or at the very least, a more democratic society where talent and ingenuity trumped social connections.

Students became more actively engaged in their education. Professors asked students to solve math problems on chalkboards, point out African countries on circular globes, and identify plant species in the nearby woods. However, in the early years of the university, student examinations still resembled the vestiges of the Old South. *The Orangeburg News* reported that during spring 1873 examinations, teachers put students through “the ordeal of a severe and scarching [*sic*] examination in a manner creditable to more pretentious institutions.”²⁵ The bulk of testing occurred in four large classrooms, where students were evaluated based on their fields of study. Similar to white universities, recitations took place in front of one’s peers, offering a support network of friendly faces during these trials. However, because of Claflin’s many benefactors and its state funding, annual examinations were followed by public exhibitions given by the students. These consisted of declamations, recitations, and dialogues, interspersed with music. The music, according to one report, “included a number of slave melodies, which were rendered with characteristic pathos.” Visitors included university trustees, state officials, and Bishop Gilbert Haven, who optimistically remarked that, “there was no reason why, in a few years, there should not be a demand from the North for teachers and professors among the colored people of the South.”

Students enrolled in both practical and theoretical classes. Since many had difficulty paying for their educational expenses, acquiring skills such as tailoring, carpentry, or horticulture gave students the means to earn income while taking classes that prepared them for the ministry.²⁶ When founded in 1869, Claflin students could not take industrial courses, but after 1872, the University received \$7,500 in state aid, funding the science and agriculture curriculum that trained students in bookkeeping, surveying, and farming

²⁴ Leloudis, 53.

²⁵ “Claflin University. The Annual Examination at Orangeburg,” *The Orangeburg News*, (Orangeburg, SC), June 21, 1873, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026920/1873-06-21/ed-1/seq-2/>.

²⁶ James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 1988), 243.

techniques. Those enrolled in the Normal Institute could choose either scientific or classical training in their third year.

From 1879 to 1895—the year South Carolina separated the state land-grant school from Methodist-held Claflin—the University catalogs reveal a dramatic shift in the curriculum from liberal education to industrial training. In 1883, first year A&M students took Mathematics emphasizing spatiality, English rhetoric, and theories of agriculture. In the second year, they learned drafting, surveying, and natural science. The final year, students studied physics, chemistry, geology, and civil government. One brief paragraph summarized the University’s “Industries;” there were auxiliary programs where young men could learn carpentry or work on the college farm “and thus meet a portion of their expenses.”²⁷ The Women’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, North, created a Girls’ Industrial Home in connection with the University, where students learned home economics. These practical skills served students well past their degree, as for instance, when a low-paying job as a minister might necessitate the need for supplemental income. However, none of these auxiliary programs were curriculum components.

Six years later, Claflin looked very different, offering courses in agriculture, art decorations, blacksmithing, bricklaying, cabinet-making, carpentry, clay modeling, cooking, crocheting and point lace, home economics, mechanical drawing, dress-making and fitting, steam engineering, gardening, glazing, laundering, millinery, nursing, painting, plastering, printing, sewing, shoemaking, and tailoring and dyeing. While the University still offered the Bachelor of Arts with either a classical or scientific emphasis, all students were “required to engage in one or more industrial pursuits, during their entire course of literary training.”²⁸ Claflin would offer “no attempt at teaching a full Theological Course;” those who wished for ministerial training were referred to Gammon Theological Seminary, in Atlanta. That year, there were 179 Normal Graduates, while only 3 completed the Bachelor of Arts.

Philanthropy in Higher Education: Economics, Cultural Authority, and Race

There were both economic and cultural explanations for Claflin’s rapid curriculum changes. In 1882, John Slater gave one million dollars exclusively earmarked for black industrial education in the South. The following year, Claflin established its Manual Training Department, financed by the Slater Fund. During the 1880s, many denominational black colleges received Slater money but limited their expansion of vocational programs, preferring to emphasize liberal arts. Because of their unusual circumstances as a private Methodist school and a state-funded Land-Grant institute, Claflin administrators had too many vested outside interests to offer cursory

²⁷ *Catalogue of Claflin University, 1888-1889*, 29.

²⁸ *Catalogue of Claflin University, 1888-1889*, 44, 52.

attention to industrial education.

Slater Fund administrators were responsible for engineering the program. They were a mix of Northern and Southern leaders from religious and business backgrounds. Among the notable: Baptist minister Wallace Buttrick would go on to chair the Rockefeller Foundation's General Education Board, which poured millions of dollars into the South's education system. Alabama Baptist J. L. M. Curry was a classically-trained intellectual who served as a professor and President of Howard College and was a tireless advocate of Southern education. Methodist Atticus Haygood had been a minister, writer of Sunday school literature, President of Emory College, and would later become Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

Religious beliefs shaped the Fund's scientific and industrial objectives. Methodists eventually reconciled their faith with a modern, liberal education, but there were growing pains. After hearing a "scientific sermon" on the ideas of Herbert Spencer, who coined the term "survival of the fittest," one Methodist complained that these ideas relegated man to an animal driven by instinct, without a spiritual nature, and the freedom to choose.²⁹ While recognizing that civilizations have an obligation to study natural science, one Methodist writer argued that, "if we derive—as many do—our philosophy of life . . . from atheistic science, and then we employ the vast resources of that science to make our nation rich and strong, what will we then have . . . but a conjunction of wickedness and power."³⁰ In referencing Harvard and Yale, J. G. Holland asked if, "in the current discussions of the relations of Christianity to science," the public had forgotten, "to whom and to what, are the institutes of learning . . . indebted for their existence?"

In 1886, Methodist W. D. Kirkland conceded that the State would provide primary education, but he proposed a solution to secularized universities and scientific institutes—intermediate college, "the finishing school of the people, the training school of political, social, and domestic morality, and the hope of Christian education."³¹ Carlisle Fitting School was an example of how Methodists marched forward with one foot in the past. Founded in 1892 at Bamberg, South Carolina, the school prided itself on developing a young man's character. Headmaster Hugo Sheridan declared that public schools delivered "one-sided education," that trained "the mental faculties . . . according to the most approved methods of the modern school, but the moral man is left to pine and die amid the unhealthy influences by which humanity is surrounded."³² Sheridan reminded parents to remain steadfast and "guard well every avenue of approach to their family circle, lest by . . . school room influence, the little ones of their families imbibe the fatal poison and become thoroughly impregnated with principles foreign to their father's religion."

²⁹ "A Scientific Sermon," *Southern Christian Advocate*, June 29, 1874.

³⁰ *Southern Christian Advocate*, September 9, 1874.

³¹ W. D. Kirkland, "The Church Colleges," *Southern Christian Advocate*, September 2, 1886.

³² Hugo Sheridan, "What School and Teacher for our Children?" *Southern Christian Advocate*, August 20, 1895.

Carlisle appealed to white families who wanted their sons to become educated and remain Methodists. The school was an auxiliary of Wofford College, so expectations were that some of these graduates would continue their education in Spartanburg. Because finishing schools had to produce students who could compete with public school graduates around the state, Sheridan promised that his students would receive a “first-class” education that was “principled” while also being “thorough, practical, and progressive.”³³

White Methodists in South Carolina cautiously embraced modern education for their own children, but questioned whether or not African Americans had the intelligence or the moral authority to engage in intellectual pursuits. This belief was not limited to South Carolinians; it was a national phenomenon legitimized by the country’s leading authorities on black education. In spite of recent black achievements in higher education, Slater Fund administrator (and northerner) Wallace Buttrick commented that, “I recognize the fact that the Negro race is an inferior race and that the Anglo-Saxon is the superior race.”³⁴ In describing African Americans, Atticus Haygood characterized them as “child-like,” but an “improved and bettered race” than the “descendants of the wild Africans,” who “needed protection against the worst instincts of the strong race.”³⁵ J. L. M. Curry once wrote, “White supremacy does not mean hostility to the negro, but friendship for him.”³⁶

While most Methodists eventually supported industrial training for African Americans, they disagreed with each other and with some philanthropists about what constituted the best education. Advocating for denominational colleges, W. D. Kirkland warned against the “tendency to make all education an apprenticeship to industrial pursuits,” suggesting that Methodists should not become consumed with the pursuit of material possessions and, “. . . this lowering of culture [*sic*] standards.”³⁷ In his essay, “What Hampton Means by Education,” Albert Shaw argued that Blacks must continue to do a large share of the “hard work that goes with Southern economic advancement,” and that while vocational education for blacks should continue, it was more important to educate “the white race than the black, because the white race [was] dominant . . .” and responsible for the whole system with which “other races may also hope to improve and prosper.”³⁸

Northern Methodists were also conflicted. In addition to literacy and teacher training, the missionary schools of the Reconstruction-era had of-

³³ Hugo Sheridan, “What School and Teacher for our Children?” *Southern Christian Advocate*, 20 August 1895.

³⁴ Anderson, 92.

³⁵ Atticus G. Haygood, *Our Brother in Black: His Freedom and His Future* (New York: Phillips and Hunt; Cincinnati: Walden and Stowe, 1881), 12, 33, 35.

³⁶ Edwin Anderson Alderman and Armistead Churchill Gordon, *J.L.M. Curry: A Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1911), 426.

³⁷ W. D. Kirkland, “The Secular Idea in Education,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, August 21, 1890.

³⁸ “What Education is Doing for the Negro,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, September 6, 1906.

ferred religious instruction and ministerial training as part of their original charters. Many of the original founders of Claflin were hesitant to fully endorse the single-minded pursuit of industrial education. To them, education was more than vocational training. It fostered a language of emancipation—for Methodists, this embodied their faith—they were educating by empowering the Freedpeople with the free-will to make their lives better. Latin, Greek, and English rhetoric provided a necessary background for ministerial training, and fine arts, especially music, had long been a curriculum emphasis. Methodists believed their system had worked for forty years and, while they remained committed to vocational instruction, they also adamantly wished to preserve their Methodist heritage. In 1904, while testifying to the General Education Board, Wallace Buttrick recommended that none of John D. Rockefeller's monies go to private denominational colleges that refused fully to adopt the Hampton-Tuskegee model. In *The Education of Blacks in the South*, Historian James Anderson best captured Buttrick's words:

Denominational schools still have a mission and for many years will continue to have. But they should have well-trained—modern trained—educators as principals, they should be “Hamptonized” as far as is practicable, they should largely eliminate Latin, Greek, etc., to say nothing of piano music and the like, they should teach agriculture and related industries with constant and growing appreciation of the educational values in such courses; in a word, they should “choose an object” and direct all efforts to the accomplishment of that clearly defined and clearly seen object, viz. [*sic*]—such training . . . shall make of him a producer—a servant—of his day and generation in the highest sense.³⁹

At Claflin University, the debate over vocational training and liberal arts began in the 1890s. During the previous decade, the state established Clemson Agricultural College of South Carolina but it was white-only. When the Federal Government passed a second Morrill Act in 1890, mandating state funding for a separate Colored Agricultural and Mechanical college, this forced an institutional change. For twenty-three years, Claflin had operated under an unusual arrangement, whereby a Southern state institution functioned within a Northern-controlled Methodist college. In 1896, the South Carolina General Assembly “declared against the Union of Church and State,” and separated the Agricultural and Mechanical Institute.⁴⁰

Claflin's shifting emphasis from vocational training to liberal arts was not immediate. At a time when Americans, both white and black, debated the idea of black education, Claflin functioned with a mix of pragmatism and aspiration. Because of economic and regional realities, the university did not disavow vocational training; in fact, enrollments grew. In 1902, grammar school students were still required to take two hours and fifteen minutes of manual training each week, compared with seventy-five minutes of vocal music. Although Claflin was never “Hamptonized,” it did continue to receive appropriations from the Slater Fund. In 1908, the University

³⁹ Anderson, 134.

⁴⁰ *Catalogue of Claflin University, 1901-1902*, 50.

completed Tingley Memorial Hall, funded by Mr. S.H. Tingley in memory of his wife, Adelia, “who was a devoted friend of the colored race and of all wise movements for their moral, industrial, and educational advancement.”⁴¹

At the same time, the higher education curriculum expanded and became more popular. The Class of 1902 included 54 liberal arts, 50 college preparatory, and 289 Normal and Industrial graduates.⁴² By 1913, there were 93 liberal arts, 274 college preparatory, 527 Normal and Scientific, and 10 Business College graduates.⁴³

Conclusion

Since the 1870s, Claflin had been a Methodist staging ground for black education in South Carolina. In the earliest years, the university encapsulated the hopes and dreams of Reconstruction—the idea that education was a democratic promise. Northerners had faith that their state-of-the-art education system would transform the South, much as it had the North in the 1840s and 1850s. Methodist reformers believed that Claflin provided an opportunity to bring their ideas about education into the twentieth century.

South Carolina Methodists were less certain about the promises of progressive education. Most rejected the State’s attempts to expand public education, at least until African Americans could be legally excluded. White Southerners were apprehensive of northern intervention into their affairs, and at times, they were willing to sabotage their own progress in the name of disfranchisement.

The Methodist leaders in South Carolina looked for opportunities to find common ground. On the one hand, church members still valued their ministers’ guidance but had become increasingly parochial, hostile, and violent toward African-Americans. On the other hand, Northern reformers made sense when they argued for racial tolerance and economic progress, but those ideas also undercut religious authority. By advocating for industrial black education, state leaders were able to promote the economic and moral benefits of education, while also re-affirming the South’s racial hierarchy. A few of these leaders helped shape national education trends by working with Rockefeller’s General Education Board.

Claflin also held lessons for South Carolina’s white religious colleges. As state funded institutions embraced more secular instruction, religious schools like Wofford looked for ways to compete for students seeking a twentieth-century education. While parents wanted their children surrounded by like-minded believers, they also recognized that students in religious schools might one day compete for jobs against state school graduates. For almost fifty years, Claflin had survived by offering African Americans its vision of a modern education—part spiritual, part ideological, and part practical. This vision was a model that most denominational colleges, both black

⁴¹ *Catalogue of Claflin University, 1912-1913*, 65.

⁴² *Catalogue of Claflin University, 1901-1902*, 50.

⁴³ *Catalogue of Claflin University, 1912-1913*, 68.

and white, embraced well into the next century.

The trajectory of Claflin University reflected the developing, changing ideas of how white South Carolinians envisioned both black education and modern education. The university's positive track record of graduating engineers, scientists, and farmers compelled the State's white leaders to embrace modernity with the creation of Clemson Agricultural College in 1893. Claflin's successful Normal College supplied Governor Benjamin Tillman with the political capital to build a permanent home for Winthrop Training School for (white) teachers. In both cases, the success stories of African-American graduates convinced white leaders to embrace more progressive education for themselves, and to exert more control over black education. In the twentieth century, Claflin would once again remake itself. Partially because of leadership changes within the university, but also because it shared the city of Orangeburg with South Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical Institute (now South Carolina State), Claflin returned to its roots as a liberal arts college.