



Hallie Quinn Brown

Biography

Hallie Quinn Brown was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1845, the daughter of two former slaves. Her father, Thomas Arthur Brown, became known as “Mr. Brown, the walking encyclopedia.” Brown’s mother, Frances Jane Scroggins, was also well educated; she was an unofficial advisor and counselor to the students of Wilberforce school, a private, coed, liberal arts college. Both Thomas and Frances were actively involved with the Underground Railroad. Her parents’ commitment to the cause would later influence the organizations Brown founded and participated in.

Brown’s family moved from Pittsburgh to Canada in 1864 and then to Wilberforce, Ohio, in 1870. In Ohio, the author experienced her first all black school at Wilberforce University. Brown graduated in 1873 with a Bachelor of Science degree. After graduation, she began teaching on the Senora Plantation in Mississippi and went on to teach on several plantations during her life. Her efforts focused on improving the literacy levels of black children who had been denied the chance during slavery. Several years later she moved onto Columbia City Schools and then to Allen University in Columbia. Brown served as the Dean at Allen University and was appointed principal of Tuskegee Institutes in Alabama from 1892-1893, where she worked with Booker T. Washington.

Brown began traveling in 1894 as a lecturer and public speaker for African American culture and temperance. Her travels stopped in 1899, but not before she lectured before Queen Victoria. She spoke at the 1895 convention of the World’s Women’s Christian Temperance Union in London and was a representative for the United States at the International Congress of Women in 1899.

Quick Facts

- * 1845-1949
- * African-American short story writer, elo-cutionist, teacher, and activist
- * Founded the National Association of Colored Women

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In addition to her speeches, Brown authored several prose collections. Brown's works commonly address such topics as the importance of history and of social change, often using African American vernacular to stress these messages with the goal of helping to educate. As Susan Kates writes, "Brown recognized that social change could only come through an educational venture" (Kates 69). Using African American vernacular, Brown displays the importance of her heritage and her effort to explain the difficulties blacks faced with language.

Bits and Odds: A Choice Selection of Recitations contains a variety of poems and short stories. In the short story "Apples," Brown writes, "Well, you know dat de apple tree was the sacred vegetable ob de garden ob Eden till de sly an' insinuating seaserpent crawled out ob de river. . ." Here, Brown uses African American dialect as she describes the biblical story of Adam and Eve, not only to show the importance of her heritage but also to educate people of other ethnicities about the struggles with language that some African Americans had. *Bits and Odds* contains several pieces of literature contextualized by historical events. For example, Brown includes a poem entitled, "The Black Regiment: The Battle of Port Hudson, 26, May 1863," by George H. Bakers. This poem reminds readers of the role black soldiers played in the civil war. Baker writes, "Oh what a shout there went from the black regiment." Kates writes, "The inclusion of such selections indicated Brown's commitment to keeping this history alive for black and white audiences alike" (Kates 65).

In *Elocution and Physical Culture*, Brown places her emphasis on teaching and describing the rhetoric of speech. Brown states, "Breath is life, breath is speech. It is the chief source of power." Author Jane Donawerth comments on her attitude: "Brown is surer of her right to claim this power . . . and I think her claim is her strategy for social change." Brown traces the origins of speech through motherhood and folktales, reflecting the importance of heritage in Brown's life.



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In *Homespun Heroines*, Brown tells the life story of 60 black women. She writes in the introduction, “This book is presented as an evidence of appreciation and as a token of regard for the history-making women of our race.” Within this collection, Brown includes a description of significant events in each of the women’s lives, along with things they have accomplished and a photograph of each woman. Every article begins with the birth of a distinguished woman and concludes with a statement about the life each has led. Brown presents the information in a factual manner, but uses a narrative style, making the book both educational and enjoyable to read. As Josephine Turpin Washington comments in the foreword, “The result is a work which not only furnishes useful information, but what is even more, inspires to finer character growth and racial development.”

Tales My Father Told is an attempt to preserve family history and to present a particular moral viewpoint. Brown’s lifetime spanned an era when African Americans had to face daily attacks on their heritage. These same individuals were regarded and referred to as being lazy, inefficient, weak and inherently immoral. Brown tries to break these stereotypes. In this particular book, the characters are used to illustrate her father, Thomas Brown, and the ways in which he helped many struggling individuals. Her father is depicted as a quietly courageous and eminently principled man who assisted women to freedom and equality. The women he assists to freedom are concerned foremost with the preservation of their virtue and insist on their human right to liberty. Many of Brown’s books are educational as well as entertaining for her readers. Her concern for her culture and the intellect of her people, her commitment to her religious belief, and her dedication to present a more accurate image than the less than complimentary view of black individuals in the twenties are all quite evident in her work.

In 1893, Brown was the principle promoter of the organization of the Colored Women’s League of Washington, D.C. She also founded the National Association of Colored Women that same year. She became the 7th National President from 1920 to 1924 and acted as its honorary President until her death in 1949. During the time she served as the President of the N.A.C.W. , she pursued two major projects: one was dedicated to the maintenance of Fredrick Douglass’ home as a memorial in Washington, D.C. , and the other was the establishment of the Hallie Q. Brown Scholarship Fund for the education of women.



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In 1900, the A.M.E church elected Brown as the Secretary of Education. She was the first woman to serve as a “daughter of the church.” Brown acted as a powerful force in the fundraising for Wilberforce from 1903 to 1910. She served as the President of the Ohio Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs from 1905 to 1912. Brown was active in Republican politics during the 1920s and addressed the party’s national convention in 1924, which led to her campaign work among African American women, which was backed by President Coolidge.

Brown’s legacy continues through her scholarship fund for the education of women, the Hallie Brown Community House in Minnesota, the Hallie Q. Brown Memorial Library in Ohio, and through all of her greatly respected and admired speeches and books. Hallie Brown was an author of an earlier time, but her work is now becoming of renewed interest to many individuals.

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