

Hallie Q. Brown

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African American Suffragette and Elocutionist

“Said a Spartan father to his son who complained that his sword was too short — “Add a step to it!” Women, step forward! Grasp your opportunity, grapple at short range and the victory is yours.”

– Hallie Q. Brown, *Our Women Past, Present and Future* (1925) –

Brown got involved in the Women’s Suffrage Movement through her work in other social-political movements and interests such as the Anti-slavery Movement, Temperance Movement and education reform. According to Jackson and Givens, “she recalled hearing Susan B. Anthony present her ideas about civil liberties for women to the students of the university [Wilberforce]. Anthony’s convictions

regarding women's suffrage led Brown to become an organizer and crusader in the women's Christian temperance movement," (71). Known primarily for her work to improve the education for freed slaves (as her parents were both freed slaves and her mother was involved in the education system too). As a highly respected orator, she was asked to speak on behalf of causes including temperance and women's suffrage in significant venues, especially for a woman of color. For example, she spoke at the International Women's Christian Temperance Union conference in London in 1895. She also performed for King George and Queen Mary of England in 1897 (Kates, 57). She would also be appointed as a "representative [for the United States] to the International Congress of Women in 1897," (Kates, 57) in London, England.

So why did Brown follow the career path that she did? According to Jackson and Givens, a parade her family attended when she was sixteen years old in honor of Queen Victoria of England while living in Canada was a source of inspiration, "that she recalled into adulthood," (66-67). In *Tales My Father Told, and Other Stories* (1925), she wrote:

The twenty-fourth day of May was Queen Victoria's birthday, and it was befittingly celebrated with pomp and splendor throughout the Dominion of Canada. On one such occasion our family went to Chatham to participate in the festivities. Soldiers in gorgeous uniform marched through the streets which were decorated with many fluttering flags. Bands bore a large banner upon which was imprinted the face of the Queen. My eyes were fastened on that banner and I was unable to banish the picture from my mind (15).

As Jackson and Givens say in chapter 3 of their book *Black Pioneers in Communications Research* (2006):

To see a woman (of any race) held in such high regard was a first for young Brown. This event taught her that women could do much more than her immediate circumstances had shown. Brown was determined to enlighten others in much the same way as she had been on that day—yet for her it would occur from the podium (67).

Even though she was a well-respected speaker internationally, in her unpublished dissertation, *Hallie Quinn Brown: Black Woman Elocutionist* (1975), Annjennette McFarlin noted, "Although "Miss Hallie" as she was known by all, was recognized as one of the greatest elocutionists on two continents, Europe and America, she never made a history book, nor have any of her speeches ever appeared in any speech anthologies," (iv). This may have been true when McFarlin wrote her dissertation in 1975, since there has been more academic recognition of Hallie Q. Brown's contributions. For example, copies of her books have remained, as have memories noted by family, friends and colleagues over the years. Jackson and Given's book *Black Pioneers in Communication Research* features a chapter specifically

on Brown's elocution skills, and articles by Evans, et. al., Kates and McFarlin highlight her contributions to the communications field. However, for someone as prominent as she was, it is surprising that there isn't more written on her.

What were Brown's views on the role of women in society? In her booklet entitled *Our Women Past, Present and Future* (1925), she says the following:

*Ancient history regarded woman as in every way inferior to man, serving as minister to his necessities and appetites, useful as mothers, but unworthy of respect, confidence, or admiration, in fact, little less than a slave . . . In time the Home became **Sacred** and its holy ties elevated woman to a higher rank. Great progress was made in moral and social qualities and these attainments have become woman's field of power. Debarred from intellectual pursuits she became imperfectly developed. Strong in the moral and social mind; but mentally, deformed and weak. Her character and judgment lacked harmony, brought about by an unbalanced education, and her life, a few generations ago, was marked by the same discrepancy . . . (1).*

This quote demonstrates both her strong opinions on the place of women in society, and her eloquence in the expression of these ideas. Brown approached women's rights from a different perspective than others of her day, due to her race and the fact that she was the daughter of freed slaves. In the quote below Brown distinguishes "our women" from those represented by white suffragists when she says:

*Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Mary A. Livermore began their fight for liberty and equity, our women — although humiliated and hampered, as members of an enslaved race, social outcasts, deprived of the commonest education, handicapped by poverty — were in the field contending with the footmen . . . women have the greatest virtue when they engage in the affairs of their country, of humanity and of their God. That woman's cause is man's; they rise or sink together; dwarfed or Godlike, bond or free . . . We say to Our Women when discouragements come; when cruel prejudices chill your aspirations; when difficulties beset your pathway; **stand firm**, your courage and integrity will shine forth with an undimmed lustre . . . Our women have lighted a torch in the valley that shows the weakness and defects of the Castle on the Mount . . . (4).*

Brown makes the case that while white women started the fight for liberty, it is right for black women to join in and carry it forward. Her encouragement to "stand firm," was an inclusive call that resonated with both white and black women. Once again her eloquence shines through. [A full transcription from page 8 of *Our Women Past, Present and Future* (1925) can be found in the link below.]

Transcription of Pg. 8 of Our Women Past, Present and Future PDF
(<https://womensuffragemovementindayton.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/transcription-of-pg-8-of-our-women-past-present-and-future.pdf>)



The Life of “Miss Hallie”



(<https://womensuffragemovementindayton.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/hallie-q-brown-receiving-honorary-doctorate.jpg>)

Early Life

Hallie Quinn Brown known as “Miss Hallie,” was a world-renowned elocutionist and social activist. She was born to former slaves Thomas Arthur Brown and Frances Jane Scroggins on March 10, 1845 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Thomas Arthur Brown worked “as a steward and express agent on riverboats; the family

also had real estate from before the Civil War that gave them financial stability,” (Jackson and Givens, 66). Brown grew up in a home that “often served as a station on the Underground Railroad,” (Jackson and Givens, 66). In 1864, due to Frances’s declining health, the Browns relocated to Chatham, Ontario, Canada, where Thomas Arthur Brown became a farmer (Jackson and Givens, 66). They moved to Wilberforce, Ohio in 1870 so that Brown and her brother could continue their education at Wilberforce University. Her mother would become an occasional advisor and counselor to the students of Wilberforce University. Frances chose Wilberforce University because it was a college built to educate blacks, in contrast to the “racial prejudice and humiliation,” (Jackson and Givens, 67) their children had faced in the past. Brown earned a Bachelor of Science degree, graduating from the university in 1873.

Education and Career

Brown became an educator, focusing on improving the literacy levels of children who had been denied the chance during slavery, especially in Mississippi and South Carolina. Hallie served as the “dean of Allen University in Columbia, South Carolina from 1885 to 1887,” (Kates, 57). In 1886, she graduated from the Chautauqua Lecture School, which provided education and entertainment through lectures, concerts, and plays. This is where she expanded upon her elocution skills. From 1887 to 1891, she taught night school for African American adults in Dayton, Ohio. She served as “principal of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama from 1892 to 1893, and then returned to the Miami Valley as a professor at Wilberforce University,” (Jackson and Givens, 68). She later became a teacher in the Dayton Public School System and created an adult class for black migrant workers (Kates, 56). She would remain at Wilberforce University until it split from Central State University in the 1920s-1930s, ultimately choosing to move to Central State University (Jackson and Givens, 68).

Social and Political Activism

Education was not her only passion, she also participated in multiple other social and political causes. The Women’s Suffrage Movement was only one of her other interests. She founded the Colored Women’s League of Washington D.C. and later helped with merging this organization with the National Association of Colored Women (BACW). She also belonged to the World’s Women Christian Temperance Union, and the Ohio Council of Republican Women (Jackson and Givens, 71). She was also a well known lecturer and author, “speaking in the United States, England, Scotland and Wales,” (Jackson and Givens, 69-70).

Later Years and Death

Brown never married or had children, but she remained close with her nieces and nephews (Jackson and Givens, 71). There is a great deal of correspondence and photographs exchanged between them over the years in her collection at the National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center in Wilberforce, Ohio. She died on September 16, 1949 of coronary thrombosis at the age of 99 (Jackson and Givens, 72-73). Today there are two buildings in Wilberforce, Ohio named after her, the Hallie Q. Brown Memorial Library at Central State University and the Hallie Q. Brown Community Center in St. Paul, Minnesota. There is also a state historical marker honoring her and her work in Wilberforce, Ohio (Jackson and Givens, 73).



<https://womensuffragemovementindayton.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/hqb-memorial-library.jpg>



<https://womensuffragemovementindayton.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/hqb-memorial-headstone.jpg>

Photo 1 Citation: Hallie Q. Brown with handwritten note “To my dear niece — Lois Anne Brown from Aunt Hallie Q. Brown, July 24, 1925, Wilberforce, Ohio-Homewood Cottage.” c. July 24,1925 (National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center).

Photo 2 Citation: Hallie Q. Brown State of Ohio Historical Marker, n.d. (Ohio Historical Society).

Photo 3 Citation: Hallie Q. Brown receiving her honorary doctorate of law from Central State University, c. 1936 (National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center).

Photo 4 Citation: Hallie Q. Brown Memorial Library at Central State University, c. 1960 (National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center). ****NOTE: The library was destroyed by the 1974 Xenia tornado, it was later rebuilt. Her archival collection was also severely damaged and has not been reorganized at this time.*

Photo 5 Citation: Hallie Q. Brown Memorial Headstone at Massies Creek Cemetery (Tarbox Cemetery) in Greene County, Ohio, n.d. (National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center).

[Click here to view the Collections on Hallie Q. Brown \(https://womenssuffragemovementindayton.wordpress.com/collections/\)](https://womenssuffragemovementindayton.wordpress.com/collections/)

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