GENDER & AMERICAN CULTURE

COEDITORS

Linda K. Kerber

Nell Irvin Painter

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Nancy Cott

Cathy N. Davidson

Thadious Davis

Jane Sherron De Hart

Sara Evans

Mary Kelley

Annette Kolodny

Wendy Martin

Janice Radway

Barbara Sicherman

The University of

North Carolina Press

Chapel Hill & London

gender AND JIM CROW

WOMEN AND THE POLITICS OF WHITE SUPREMACY IN NORTH CAROLINA, 1896–1920

GLENDA ELIZABETH GILMORE

HOSTOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE LIBRARY

one

PLACE AND POSSIBILITY

"Some would say that woman is good in her place. This reminds me of what some white people say of the Negro: that 'He is good in his place.' "[1] Sarah Dudley Pettey challenged the idea of "place," not simply through words such as these but also through her acts. She was an African American woman, the daughter of slaves, who lived in obscurity in a small North Carolina town. In 1896, when she wrote these words, Dudley Pettey thought she saw the day coming when a person's place would depend not on sex or color but on energy and ability.

Since historians enter a story at its end, they sometimes forget that what is past to them was future to their subjects. Too often, what they lose in the telling is what made their subjects' lives worth living: hope. This is a book about hope, about African American women such as Dudley Pettey whose alternative visions of the future included the equity in society they had learned to expect in their families, schools, and marriages.[2] Their progressive visions, if realized, would have ended white supremacy. These were lives on the cusp of change.

With a less prosperous white elite than Virginia or South Carolina, a fast-growing, but ferociously struggling, middling group of people of all hues, and some chance for two-party government, North Carolina's people con-

tested power—economic, social, and political—more openly and more heatedly than many other southerners. In the western mountains, this upper South state resembled its neighbor eastern Tennessee, with pockets of bitter Unionists, an entrenched Republican Party, and a sparse African American population. In the east, where plantations produced cotton and tobacco, black majorities voted in the 1880s and 1890s, and rough port cities could only aspire to the grandeur of Charleston or Savannah. Inhabitants of the crossroad Piedmont hamlets, where whites barely outnumbered a growing black urban population, struggled to turn their locations into a reason for existence and then, as now, looked toward Atlanta with a mixture of envy and disgust.[3] North Carolina's geographical, economic, and historical diversity resulted in close gubernatorial and national elections and a legislature bristling with Republican representatives, not to mention the odd Prohibitionist or Silverite. Shared power among political parties meant that legal segregation came late to the state—not until 1899 did the state legislature demand that railroads provide Jim Crow cars—and that disfranchisement trailed the 1890 Mississippi law by a decade.[4]

Black North Carolinians realized the precariousness of their position even as they imagined the future. North Carolinian Charles Chesnutt, a child genius whose precocity and fair complexion often led whites to draw him into conversation, learned, along with his daily lessons in German and Latin, the depths of southern white prejudice. In his teenage years in the 1870s, before whites perfected Jim Crow institutions, Chesnutt confided to his diary the absurdity of walking around in a place where the color line moved under his feet. Later, after he had left North Carolina and became a renowned novelist, Chesnutt borrowed from mythology to describe his memories of the limited social space assigned African Americans in his home state. He compared white North Carolinians to Procrustes, the innkeeper at Attica, who indulged his fetish that each guest be made to fit his bed perfectly. If one was too short, Procrustes stretched him to new dimensions. If another was too tall, Procrustes simply cut off his legs so that he fit just right.[5] According to Chesnutt, African Americans in North Carolina slept each night in similarly circumscribed spots. "It was a veritable bed of Procrustes, this standard which the whites had set for the Negroes," Chesnutt commented. "Those who grew above it must have their heads cut off, figuratively speaking—must be forced back to the level assigned to their race." On the other side, the lynch rope swayed. "Those who fell beneath the standard set had their necks stretched, literally enough, as the ghastly record in the daily papers gave conclusive evidence."[6] There would be little rest for African Americans as the century drew to a close.

Nonetheless, even as black North Carolinians saw repression creeping across the South in the 1890s, they hoped to turn the tide in their own state.

Reading their story from beginning to end, rather than teleologically, we can see—as they did—that North Carolina could have been the pivot upon which national race relations turned. If people like Sarah Dudley Pettey and Charles Calvin Pettey had been able to hold their ground in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the trend toward disfranchisement and segregation might have been reversed and the history of the twentieth century rewritten. Certainly, black men and women in the state were equal to the task. Many enjoyed fine educations, economic success, and political power, and they saw clearly the danger that awaited them. They tried everything possible to save themselves. Their counterstrategies lay bare two lost worlds: one actual, the other woven from hope.

African Americans hoped that their success would offer testimony to convince whites to recognize class similarities across racial divides; they hoped to prove to whites that they could be Best Men and Best Women. Instead of undermining white supremacy, however, postbellum black progress shored it up. White men reordered southern society through segregation and disfranchisement in the 1890s because they realized that African American success not only meant competition in the marketplace and the sharing of political influence but also entailed a challenge to fundamental social hierarchies that depended nearly as much upon fixed gender roles as they did on the privileges of whiteness. Black progress threatened what southerners called "place."

Place assembled the current concepts of class and race into a stiff-sided box where southern whites expected African Americans to dwell. Southerners lived under a caste system in which skin color, class, and gender dictated the pattern of every daily interaction. For example, African Americans riding in carriages irritated white North Carolinians because such luxury challenged the connections of race, class, and place. How could whites maintain the idea that African Americans were lowly due to laziness if some African Americans worked hard enough to purchase carriages?[7] By embracing a constellation of Victorian middle-class values—temperance, thrift, hard work, piety, learning—African Americans believed that they could carve out space for dignified and successful lives and that their examples would wear away prejudice.[8] As African Americans moved to North Carolina's hamlets and cities to pursue professions and commerce, urban African Americans of the middling sort became increasingly visible at a time when most whites worked diligently to consign blacks to the preindustrial role of agrarian peasants. In one generation, African Americans moved from field hands to teachers, from carpenters to construction bosses. Freedpeople equipped themselves to compete with whites in business, the professions, and politics. Often education, buttressed by strong religious beliefs, made the difference. Black men and women embraced

Christian ideals, filtered through Victorian sensibilities, as standards of equity and morality in an effort to break the southern caste system.[9]

African American women helped make those accomplishments revolutionary. Women were integral components of economic gain, generational change, and ultimately civic participation. Educated black women believed progress would flow logically from predictions they had first heard from parents, black ministers, and northern missionary teachers. They expected advancement on three fronts: in living standards, in opportunities for women of both races, and in white attitudes toward African Americans. Raised by ex-slave mothers and grandmothers, the first and second generations of freedwomen saw racial progress as inclusive, not exclusive, of those less fortunate.[10] In a racially charged atmosphere, black women knew that private acts and family-based decisions could be used against them. They carefully considered each move, since a fleeting whim, if acted upon, could furnish whites "proof" of the capability or deficiency of an entire race.[11]

Charles and Sarah Pettey represent the extraordinary potential of ordinary African Americans in the first three decades of freedom. If we begin the story by adopting one family as a guide, we can trace hope's meaning as it beams through slavery's vicissitudes and Reconstruction's raw light to the moment of possibility before disfranchisement. The marriage of Sarah Dudley and Charles Calvin Pettey brought together two people convinced that race and gender discrimination were vestiges of the past, anachronistic feudalisms that would melt like snow under the rays of an upcoming age of reason. An examination of their lives reveals the ideals and hopes that made up their vision of a New South never to be born. Their story provides an opening wedge for understanding a group of men and women who saw themselves as the future of their race but who have virtually disappeared from the historical record.

Beginning with a close look at one family is bound to prompt questions concerning typicality. A historian can rescue a woman from oblivion, painstakingly reconstruct her life and her ancestors' lives, and finally make modest claims for her experience, only to face the charge that if the subject is *that* interesting or important, then she must be unrepresentative. However, a hierarchical presumption lurks in the typicality argument: average people are simply average; only their leaders are exceptional. Therefore, if the subject is interesting, she must be atypical. This study operates from a different premise: that every story would be interesting if we could recapture it and that each one has something to teach us. Writing history by grinding away the nuances of each person's experience produces the typical; in real life, we see individuality more readily. The world in these pages belonged to many women; here it is articulated by a few whose voices, by pluck or by chance, happened to survive.

Historians have used generational models to explain the dynamics of immigrant families, and the rage for genealogy testifies to the explanatory power of family narrative in many people's lives. Slavery, however, waged a war on the institution of the family, and the rupture between slavery and freedom cleft historical memory, often separating historians of African Americans from evidence of powerful family strategies over time. Yet what might be lost to documentation often loomed large in individual consciousness. Sarah Dudley Pettey is a case in point. The first member of her family to be born in freedom, her optimism and outspokenness sprang from the hopes and fortitude of three generations that came before her. To understand her, one must understand them.

Edmund Pasteur, Sarah Dudley Pettey's paternal great-grandfather, was born around the time of the American Revolution. John Carruthers Stanly of New Bern, North Carolina, the largest black slaveholder in the South, bought Pasteur sometime before the War of 1812. Stanly had himself been born a slave. His slave-trading father, a white man, had purchased his mother, an African Ibo woman, and impregnated her during the middle passage. The Stanly family later freed the son, who bore his father's name. Edmund Pasteur's African heritage remains unknown, but it may have been quite recent to him, given North Carolina's slave-trading patterns. His mother, or even Edmund Pasteur himself, might have been born in Africa, or his ancestors might have been enslaved in the Caribbean for a generation or more.[12]

It is impossible to know what kind of master Stanly proved to be, but at least he allowed Edmund Pasteur to hire himself out in the busy port city of New Bern. By 1815, Pasteur had saved enough money to buy his freedom, an action Stanly supported. Then, after three years of freedom, Edmund Pasteur had saved $750 to purchase a mulatto woman and her thirteen-month-old baby—his wife, Dinah, and his daughter, Sarah—from his original owner. Dinah, who was thirty-nine at the time, may have been her owner's daughter and had been married to Edmund for at least fourteen years. Despite Edmund Pasteur's manumission, her owner had allowed her to continue their relationship. However, the slaveholder's decision to sell Dinah and Sarah clearly owed more to avarice than to kindness since the $750 bought only a middle-aged woman and a suckling baby, not Richard, Edmund and Dinah's fourteen-year-old son, who remained enslaved.[13]

One word hints at Edmund Pasteur's thoughts on slavery and his family's condition. Pasteur later recounted that he had finally "ransomed" Richard, just as the boy was about to be sold into "slavery in remote

countries."[14] Edmund never thought of himself, Dinah, Richard, and Sarah as property or as members of a degraded class of people who belonged in slavery. They were people who had been kidnapped, had lived through it, and now had ransomed themselves. Through his incredible efforts, Edmund Pasteur came to own his entire family, but they remained his slaves. In 1827, he petitioned the court to manumit Dinah, now fifty years old, Richard, twenty-two, and Sarah, nine. In this last and crucial effort, it seems that Edmund Pasteur failed.[15]

Thirteen years later, in 1840, Sarah Pasteur, by that time a young woman of twenty-two, gave birth to a baby boy, Edward Richard Dudley, Jr., named for his father, who was most likely a mixed-race free man.[16] Although Edward Dudley is listed in the census as a white man, the large Dudley family included many light-skinned people of African descent who married whites. Roughly one of every four "blacks" in New Bern was free in 1860, and free people of color made up 12 percent of the total population.[17] These astounding figures suggest a community teeming with complex racial interactions, a place where "black" and "white" were fluid, not frozen, categories. The port city on the Trent and Neuse rivers provided both wage labor and the opportunity to live off the fruits of the sea, advantages that attracted freed and runaway slaves and landless whites. Edward Dudley supported himself as a fisherman.[18] Pasteur and Dudley may have lived together openly, or their relationship may have been more clandestine. Even though Sarah Pasteur belonged to her father, as a slave she could not marry. Three years later, in 1843, Sarah and Edward had a second son, James.

The curse of slavery under which Sarah Pasteur had lived for twenty-five years struck now with the death of her father, just when she was most vulnerable. In the years after the Pasteurs' manumission attempt failed, slavery's institutional shell had hardened as white southerners grew to fear abolitionism and insurrection. In the 1830s, those few slaveholders who chose to emancipate their slaves encountered greater difficulties, and it must have been nearly impossible for a black man to free his slave family.[19] In 1843, after Dinah had died and Richard had vanished, Sarah, with a three-year-old and a baby, had cared for her father to the end in the small house that he owned. After her father's death, her lover Edward Dudley either could not or would not help but only watched as Sarah and his two children were sold as slaves.

Edmund Pasteur had paid dearly for his loved ones, but the white court-appointed executor of his estate sold Sarah and her two children cheaply, for $377 on credit, to Richard N. Taylor of New Bern, who owned a cotton mill and a fleet of schooners.[20] Being appointed executor was literally a license to steal: the proceeds of Pasteur's "property"—the house, Sarah,

and the two children—went to the executor since Pasteur had no legally free heirs. The oldest boy, Edward Richard Dudley, Jr., was three, the youngest, James Dudley, only a few months old. Six years later, it appears that the boys' free father married a white woman and had a son, to whom he gave the same name as one of his slave sons: James. To Sarah, this must have been the unkindest cut of all.[21]

In the two decades of her family's enslavement, Sarah Pasteur secretly taught her children to read and write, and she must have provided great love and great hope. After secession, Sarah probably had a pipeline to the latest news by eavesdropping on meetings of the Confederate Soldiers Relief Society, over which her owner's wife presided during 1861. Confederate soldiers' relief in New Bern was short-lived, however, as whites scrambled to evacuate the city in January 1862 with the approach of Union troops. The Taylors fled with their slaves and spent the Civil War in Salisbury well to the west, where they put Edward to work in a tobacco factory. Salisbury stubbornly clung to the Confederacy even after Lee surrendered. A week later, General George Stoneman burned down the city. Finally, the period of the Pasteurs' captivity ended. Sarah Pasteur was forty-eight at the time, twenty-two years a slave. Her kidnapped boys emerged as free men, and they headed for home.[22]

The oldest, Edward Dudley, was twenty-five. He could read and write and was soon practicing a lucrative trade in New Bern as a cooper, which he probably learned in the tobacco factory. Dudley quickly assumed a leadership role amid the chaos of the Federal-occupied town. He joined a Masonic lodge and served on the police force.[23] A pillar of Saint Peters, the first African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion church in the South, Dudley headed the statewide Grand Lodge of Colored Good Templars, the first black branch of an international temperance order.[24] Sometime between 1862 and 1868, Dudley married a biracial woman named Caroline, who, like him, had learned to read and write in slavery. She joined her husband as a Good Templar.[25] The Dudleys taught their children to take pride in their African American roots and to take their places among the best people, regardless of race. Edward Dudley's place was in politics.

Dudley's experience as a black man serving as a lesser official in the Reconstruction South—a good citizen doing his duty—complements portraits of famous black Reconstruction leaders and counters white fictions about boisterous black swindlers taking over state legislatures. His daughter, Sarah, born in 1869, learned her political lessons at her father's knee. Members of Sarah's generation of African Americans were raised to expect full civil rights, a generational experience repeated only by those who came of age after the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

African Americans' continuous involvement after Reconstruction in

Thought by her great-great grandchildren to be a portrait of Sarah Pasteur, this is more likely a photograph of her daughter-in-law Caroline Dudley, taken in the late 1860s. Courtesy of Allene Dudley Bundy, New Bern, North Carolina.

eastern North Carolina local politics—through campaigning, voting, appointment, and election—meant that the violence and legal codification of segregation in the late 1890s represented cataclysmic ruptures in the fabric of black civil rights, not simply the institutionalization of repression.[26] If historians later took Jim Crow's career to be strange, African Americans at the time found it unbelievable. They expected reverses, even pitched battles, but they never expected to be counted out of the electoral process completely. The careers of Dudley and his daughter illustrate the ebb and flow of black political life throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and prove that it was not over until it was over: that is, until the 1900 constitutional amendment disfranchising African Americans.

This is not to say that some times were not better than others. The period from 1888 to 1894 seemed particularly bleak, even though African Americans continued to serve in the state legislature throughout the period.[27] In 1877 the legislature had seized the power to appoint local officials to counter black votes in the eastern part of the state. For two years, the legislators appointed justices of the peace, who in turn appointed other

local officers; from 1879 until 1894, the justices of the peace appointed county commissioners, who then dished up the remaining slices of pie.[28] Black and poor white officeholders persisted, however. After 1888, the state legislature tightened its control on local offices by forcing officials to post high bonds that might prevent poor men from serving.[29] Raleigh's control proved onerous to both poor whites and African Americans, and "home rule" became an issue that crossed racial lines.[30] As they attempted to prevent African Americans from holding local offices, legislators trailed the boundaries of the Second Congressional District around eastern North Carolina in an attempt to contain black voting strength in national elections. Craven County fell within the borders of the "Black Second," and the Dudleys' neighbor, African American George White, became their congressman.

In many of the state's cities and eastern rural areas, African Americans took an active part in local politics, despite the obstacles the legislature placed in their paths. Edward Dudley served on New Bern's common council and was a city marshal. He won election to the state house of representatives in 1870, when seventeen other African Americans gained seats in the house and three in the senate. Two years later, he returned for another term.[31] Even more significant than Dudley's elections was his appointment as justice of the peace in New Bern from 1880 to 1884 since by appointing Dudley the legislature acknowledged his political power in state and national politics through the Republican Party. Dudley's tenure points up the system's flexibility and hints at a lack of resolve among all whites to exclude African Americans from politics.[32] The white *New Bern Weekly Journal* acknowledged as much in 1886 when it pitched the Democratic Party to African Americans: "Drawing the color line is wrong in principle. . . . Why seek to array one race against another? The negroes are citizens, and have the right of suffrage."[33] They might not have been happy about it, but white men had to reckon with black votes. Democratic appeals for African American votes resulted in few converts, however, and use of such a strategy abated in the early 1890s.

Tentative interracial alliances characterized politics in the century's last two decades. Dudley, for instance, forged a close alliance with white congressman Orlando Hubbs, and he maintained his loyalty to Hubbs when Hubbs battled African American James O'Hara for the nomination to the Second Congressional District seat in 1882. Dudley's opposition to O'Hara ran deeper than simply repaying any political debts to Hubbs. As statewide leader of the black Good Templars, Dudley despised O'Hara because he had attended an antiprohibition convention when the issue came up in the state in 1881.[34] Hubbs lost his fight for the nomination, and O'Hara relieved Dudley of his post as deputy collector of federal revenues. Dudley

cemented the breach forever by calling O'Hara a "creature of the mob, organized for the sole purpose of 'sending a Negro to congress.'" "Thank God," Dudley concluded, his own principles counted for more than race and he had "never worshipped at the shrine of color." Dudley's hatred of O'Hara led him to support another white man, Furnifold Simmons, to replace him in Congress in 1886. When Simmons took the seat—he won Craven County by only forty-five votes—he recognized his debt to the district's African Americans.[35]

African Americans also knew they had carried Simmons's election. As one put it, O'Hara "got bit by his own dog."[36] Two years later, however, Simmons's own dog bit him, as white voters accused Simmons of being too responsive to black constituents. Simmons attributed his 1888 defeat to his failure to draw the color line, a lesson he would never forget.[37] Ironically, Dudley, who "never worshipped at the shrine of color," helped launch the career of the man who at the century's end would disfranchise him on account of color. African American votes counted until then.

If politics was a part-time passion for Edward Dudley, his family was a full-time one. His brother James also lived in New Bern, and his mother lived with him and Caroline. When the couple had a daughter in 1869, they named her Sarah, for her grandmother. Baby Sarah was the first member of the Pasteur-Dudley family born in freedom, even though more than a half century had elapsed since Edmund Pasteur ransomed himself. The year after Sarah's birth, Edward Dudley was elected to the legislature, after which he returned home most months to farm and to teach school.[38] Two boys and five girls followed Sarah. Edward Dudley's farm was worth $600 in 1870, and he approached farming as he did everything else, with high-spirited competition. He won prizes for his produce, including an eggplant two feet wide and pumpkins five feet tall.[39]

Sarah Pasteur and Caroline Dudley taught Sarah Dudley to read and write before the little girl was six. Literacy was the most valuable gift Pasteur had to give, first to her sons in slavery, then to her granddaughter in freedom. The family certainly needed no coaxing to enter the schoolroom after American Missionary Association teachers flocked to New Bern in the late 1860s and established at least five private schools, which supplemented the short public school year. Education had given hope to the Dudleys in slavery, had provided them with an advantage in Reconstruction, and would propel them into the future. By the time Sarah Dudley entered the classroom, New Bern's black public schools were graded, a northern innovation still unknown in white southern schools, and the teaching force included local African Americans.[40] Temperance societies dominated extracurricular life at each school.[41] After she completed the six grades the school system offered, Sarah Dudley attended the coeducational

New Bern State Colored Normal School, a state-funded teacher-training school that combined high school work with pedagogy courses.

One year later, thirteen-year-old Sarah left home for Scotia Seminary, a Presbyterian school for women in Concord, North Carolina, 200 miles to the west. There the biracial faculty oversaw a curriculum calculated to give students the knowledge, social consciousness, and sensibilities of New England ladies, with a strong dose of Boston egalitarianism sprinkled in. Mary McLeod, who followed Sarah Dudley to Scotia five years later, recalled that her northern white teachers there taught her that "the color of a person's skin has nothing to do with his brains, and that color, caste, or class distinctions are an evil thing."[42] Scotia's white founder, Luke Dorland, modeled the school on Mount Holyoke. He intended it to be a place where students learned to do as well as to think. Dorland believed that "skilled hands must be directed by a sound mind in a sound body, motivated by a zeal to serve others."[43] The cooking, music, and needlework that students learned along with their Latin was to be employed to their own ends, not in domestic service for white people. A Scotia woman would "make a good housewife as well as a good school teacher," and the cornerstone of Sarah's dormitory bore the words, "Head, Heart, and Hands."[44] When Sarah arrived, she joined 139 other young women students, who ate, lived, and studied with a faculty of white and black women teachers.[45] Her roommate was Lula Pickenpack, a slightly older girl from Charlotte who already had a serious suitor, Charles Calvin Pettey.

Sarah Dudley graduated with distinction from Scotia in 1883 and returned to New Bern as an assistant principal of the black graded public school. During her first teaching year, the average monthly salary of the state's 700 black teachers was $22, a little less than that of white teachers but the highest salary a black woman could earn anywhere.[46] Each school term lasted only four months, and in the summer, Dudley attended a month-long teacher-training session at the New Bern State Colored Normal School. The next year, she moved up to vice principal in the public school system and associate principal of the summer normal school under George White, who would soon become her congressman.[47]

Sarah Dudley kept in touch with Lula Pickenpack and Charles Pettey, who were now married.[48] Pettey stood 5 feet 8 inches tall, "with short arms and legs, a long body, a prominent receding forehead, cheeks indicative of Indian descent, complexion of an Indian . . . his black hair nearly straight."[49] Pettey had a piercing, direct gaze, a dashing mustache, and a beautiful singing voice. Despite his probable triracial mix, Pettey's racial identity was always African American, and he had been born in slavery in Wilkes County in the northwestern section of the state in 1849.[50] After the Civil War, Pettey farmed during the day and worked as a cobbler and

basketmaker at night. He traded his handicrafts, along with ferry rides across the Yadkin River, to white people for reading lessons. After he could read, he hoarded every penny. Finally, in 1872, at age twenty-three, he put on a pair of shoes he had made, dressed himself in a suit sewn from fabric he had spun, pocketed $95 in savings, and walked ninety miles to Charlotte to enroll in college.[51]

The college, Presbyterian-supported Biddle Memorial Institute, offered classical training for men who wanted to be teachers or ministers, and there Pettey learned to read Latin and Greek. The institute did not insist on denominational fealty, and Pettey remained a member of the AME Zion Church. On weekends, he began preaching in the countryside, making "appointments," first at one crossroad and then another. Starting out on a Friday night, he would walk more than fifty miles in forty-eight hours. Pettey worked barely four months after graduation as head of a black public school in Charlotte when he became an elder in the AME Zion Church and discovered he would have to move to South Carolina to assume his new post. From his South Carolina base, Pettey established a normal school, built a national name for himself in the church, and with John Dancy, a prominent churchman, contributed to the *Star of Zion*, a denominational newspaper that soon became one of the twelve most important black newspapers in the nation.[52]

Sometime after 1881, Charles and Lula Pettey departed on a great adventure. Along with Alexander Walters, who would later help found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Pettey led a band of black colonists to California. They settled near San Francisco, founded a community named Petteyville, and spread out to establish AME Zion churches. Pettey became pastor of the downtown Stockton Street church.[53] Lula and Charles had two daughters, the first of whom they named Sarah. Lula died in 1887, and Charles was left with the two young girls.[54] He soon became bishop with responsibility for Texas, and in 1888 a conference brought him back to North Carolina and a reunion with Sarah Dudley. Within a year, they married and set up their home in New Bern.[55]

The recovered bits of the Petteys' life together confound notions of the South as an isolated, parochial place where African Americans existed as shadows, bent wraiths who shuffled subserviently along wooden sidewalks. Like many other successful black families in North Carolina's urban areas, the Petteys lived a deliberately conspicuous life. "There are plenty of carriages in New Bern," noted the black-owned *Raleigh Gazette*, "owned principally" by African Americans. Sarah Dudley Pettey rode around town in a black carriage drawn by a high-stepping mare. Charles Pettey sported silk top hats. At her table, Dudley Pettey served roast bear, lobster cutlets, and

Russian salad with sauce tartare and provided finger bowls.[56] The trappings of the Petteys' lives particularly annoyed white New Bernians, who termed the Petteys' society "colored swelldom." But "colored swelldom" had room to exist in New Bern, to rent reception rooms at the town's best "white" hotel, to shop in the best stores, and to host white townspeople at special programs in Saint Peter's AME Zion Church.[57]

The Petteys' group of affluent African Americans in New Bern contrasted with the population of James City, a virtually all-black town of 2,500 across the river. A comparison of the two reveals class differences, some of which can be traced back to the moment of freedom. James City represented the vestiges of a contraband encampment during the Civil War. African Americans who had fled there as slaves during the Federal occupation twenty-five years earlier had, of course, come with nothing. Across the river in New Bern, newly emancipated African Americans like Edward Dudley had advantages over them. Dudley knew the local people, he could read, and his barrels were in demand. John Stanly, the black slaveholder, had moved to Ohio, but his remaining New Bern relatives were even better off than Dudley. These initial differences carried over into the next generation: John's daughter, Sara, went to Oberlin College and Sarah Dudley went to Scotia Seminary, but in James City, young women went to work.[58]

Black people, whether they lived in New Bern or James City, certainly recognized variations in economic and educational standing; the important question is what those differences meant to them. Was class position the result of heredity? Were such gradations permanent? Should those who had become successful close ranks in order to exclude others?

Many southern whites would have answered "yes" to all of the above questions. Within that group of mostly backward-looking heirs of southern planters, class position was a matter of breeding—blood would tell. To maintain one's standing, one simply chose a marriage partner wisely. Amid the poverty of the postbellum economy, some southern whites tried to engineer their class system to run on heredity rather than on the economy. They remained tied to the land, and some managed to retain a degree of political power—though in North Carolina fewer did so than in the lower South. Their constrictive family bonds grew thick and tangled as the century progressed, and a part of white society froze looking back over its shoulder at a mythical antebellum romance. By the end of the century, some influential southerners, for example, Thomas Dixon, Jr., grafted the vines of hereditary class privilege onto pseudo-Darwinism to produce a mutant class system dependent upon fixed racial and gender categories. Who you were, more than what you did, mattered to these white southerners.[59]

But a growing group of white southerners would have answered "no" to each of these gatekeeping questions. This nucleus saw social position not

as hereditary and inflexible but as broachable, if not exactly fluid. For the most part descendants of antebellum yeoman farmers and petty slaveholders who had emerged impoverished after the war, these young southerners grew restless as the Bourbons who "redeemed" the state in the 1870s held it in limbo for the next two decades by painting change as anathema to the southern way of life. Middle-class white men in the 1870s began to prepare for occupations that would lift them out of rural poverty and to lobby the state to educate its white citizens. To these men and women, merit mattered; the best men should lead, regardless of their birth.[60]

As white men recast class by arguing for the capability of educated and industrious people, African Americans furnished living proof of their theories. Because education represented the key to class mobility, African Americans came to see it as nothing less than sacred, a spiritual duty that fell more heavily on women because of motherhood. Dudley Pettey connected class, gender, and education directly when she argued, "In the civilization and enlightenment of the Negro race its educated women must be the potent factors." Clearly "civilization" represented *her* version of manners and morals, those middle-class values that she learned from her family, church, and Reconstruction teachers. Yet she also foresaw class aspirations brokered by educational achievement as inclusive: "Ere long Ethiopia's sons and daughters, led by pious, educated women, will be elevated among the enlightened races of the world."[61]

In Reconstruction schools, middle-class identity, then, was something to be learned and, in turn, taught. Girls like Sarah Dudley attended Scotia Seminary with girls who were dirt-poor orphans and with others who were simply dirt-poor, like Mary McLeod, the fifteenth child of slave parents. McLeod's home was so humble that when she arrived at Scotia, she had never climbed a flight of stairs or used a knife or fork.[62] Yet she learned skills of self-presentation that ultimately gained her a federal post and Eleanor Roosevelt's friendship. Although Sarah had been born free to a prestigious black politician, her husband, her father, and her beloved grandmother, like her James City neighbors, had been born slaves. Only a very few "aristocrats of color" used heredity to signify class standing.[63]

Differences in color might have mattered to some but not to most educated black North Carolinians setting out to prove their race's ability. Light-skinned people married darker people, politicians came in all hues, and the black press bragged most loudly about the intellectual achievements of very dark men such as Joseph Charles Price, the founder of the AME Zion Livingstone College.[64] Sarah Dudley Pettey, obviously of black and white heritage, attributed her success to her family's love and her education, not to her light skin. Sarah and Elizabeth Delany, born to educators at Saint Augustine's College in Raleigh in the 1890s, described their

light-skinned mother's choice of their brilliant dark-skinned father this way: "Some colored women who were as light as Mama would not have gotten involved with a dark-skinned man, but Mama didn't care. She said he was the cream of the crop, a man of the highest quality."[65]

Upon the founding of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs in 1896, Sarah Dudley Pettey lauded the organization's mission while deploring its use of the word "colored." She attributed its origin to the "softening" of the word "nigger" to "you colored people" in the antebellum South. All people are colored, she argued, "from the fairest blonde to the darkest hue of humanity." Far better to use the term "Afro-American . . . as it designates both the races and countries from whence we, the amalgamated race, came." It was typical of her to speak forthrightly of racial mixing; on another occasion, she argued that the word "Negro" was useless because it denoted "one type of the African race without mixture." By clinging to "Afro," she showed her pride in her African heritage; by linking it with "American," she held whites accountable for both slavery and miscegenation. When an African American writer proposed "affirming we are 'Americans, pure and simple,' " Dudley Pettey retorted that if "we [were] Americans, pure and simple," there "would be no class legislation against us; there would be no need of separate schools and churches."[66] To Dudley Pettey, race prejudice worked like class prejudice: it created false divisions among worthy human beings.

Black writers in the late nineteenth century regularly referred to racial segregation as "class legislation," and they saw race as one marker among many. Thus, to consider class among African Americans apart from the racial caste system in which they lived is to take too myopic a view. In real life, race, class, and gender never sorted themselves into convenient categories of analysis. Moreover, as Charles Chesnutt reminds us by invoking Procrustes, how African Americans viewed class differences among themselves mattered less in determining their wider opportunities than how whites saw those differences since it was whites who allotted the social space available.[67]

Whites tried to order the world to prevent African Americans from rising. When some blacks nevertheless achieved success, whites set off alarms. Whites preferred the Uncle Remus of the farm to the "colored swelldom" of the cities, and it was in the state's cities that black success showed most. After 1879, the percentage of black-owned urban property in the state increased at a time when the value of farms decreased and town lots grew more valuable. Wilmington ranked second in the South in black property ownership among cities with populations of 10,000 to 25,000. Only 5.6 percent of North Carolina's African Americans owned homes in 1870; by 1910, the figure had risen to 26 percent.[68] It must have seemed as if

Sarah Dudley Pettey, circa 1900. Courtesy of Corine Pettey, New York, New York.

African Americans were cornering the real estate market in North Carolina's towns and cities. In Wilmington, for example, many African Americans lived in "fine" houses with "pianos and servants and lace curtains to their windows."[69]

Because her husband served as bishop of the Texas, Alabama, and Louisiana district, Sarah Dudley Pettey spent little time looking through her lace curtains. Their honeymoon took them to Europe, California, and Mexico. In England, the archbishop of Canterbury received them and U.S. minister Robert Lincoln presented them at the Court of St. James. Their visit to rural Ireland prompted Charles to write an article comparing the South's racial situation to Ireland's ethnic strife caused by British home rule.[70] After Pettey became bishop of the Allegheny-Ohio Conference in 1896, they spent several months each year in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and the District of Columbia.[71]

Their five children—two boys and three girls—were born at two-year intervals, and Pettey's two daughters lived with them in New Bern as well. Traveling extensively, serving as her husband's secretary, and, beginning in

Bishop Charles Calvin Pettey, circa 1895. From the *Star of Zion*, 13 Dec. 1900.

August 1896, writing a bimonthly column for the *Star of Zion*, Sarah Dudley Pettey had to employ the organization of a field marshal. One of Sarah's sisters and one of Charles's cousins shared their household to help care for the children, and Sarah's brother, George, lived next door with his own growing family.[72]

Charles and Sarah made each other happy, and their devotion to one another spilled over into public life. He was extraordinarily proud of her, saw her as his equal, and bragged about her to his colleagues. Once, in an editorial in which Charles was bowing out of a long theological debate with readers of the *Star of Zion*, he promised, "Madam Pettey, who has been reviewing . . . the Greek testament scriptures . . . will remain at my desk; . . . I am quite confident that she will be able to keep off all intruders."[73] She certainly was able, it turned out, since she subsequently accused a bumptious theological adversary of misrepresenting Charles's position just to vent "the great drops of gall escaping from the puncture in his swelling spleen."[74] Sarah and Charles made a formidable team.

The Dudley-Pettey marriage suggests mutual cooperation and equal