



JANE

The Life of

**PAULI
MURRAY**

Rosalind
Rosenberg

GROW

Jane Crow

Jane Crow

The Life of Pauli Murray

ROSALIND ROSENBERG

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For Gerald Alan Rosenberg (in memoriam)
and
Jeffrey John Parish

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The inspiration for this biography came from Ruth Bader Ginsburg, whom I met in 1974 at a Columbia University faculty seminar. I was a newly arrived assistant professor of history. Ginsburg, Columbia Law School's first tenured woman professor, had already achieved fame as the country's leading feminist legal advocate. Serving half-time as head of the Women's Rights Project at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), she had expanded the Supreme Court's understanding of the Fourteenth Amendment to protect not only against discrimination based on race but also discrimination based on gender. As a young feminist, I wanted to understand the legal change Ginsburg was engineering; as a historian, I was curious about its roots. Over the next five years, until she left to become a judge on the Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit, and intermittently thereafter, Ruth patiently answered my questions.

For many years, the knowledge she imparted made it no further than my classes in women's and legal history. Then, in 1992, I included Pauli Murray, as the precursor to Ginsburg's reinterpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment, in my book *Divided Lives: American Women in the Twentieth Century*. When I learned that Murray's papers were being processed at the Schlesinger Library, I began research trips there that would last two decades.

Many scholars helped me along the way. My Barnard colleague Nancy Woloch lived with this manuscript from beginning to end. Over lunch and in each other's offices, she helped me think through any number of tricky interpretive problems. She read every word and offered astute criticisms, especially on sections that dealt with protective labor legislation.

Susan Ware accepted my first essay on Murray in her collection of American biographies, *Forgotten Heroes* (1998). In 2002, she included my contribution on Murray's concept of the "conjunction" of race and gender in a collection she called a "Dialogue" on Murray for the *Journal of Women's History*. Most

generously of all, she undertook the job of whittling an early draft of this book down to a more readable size.

On an early research trip to the Schlesinger Library in 1997, I encountered Daniel Horowitz. Working at an adjoining table on the Betty Friedan Papers, he came across a receipt from Murray for typing she did for Friedan in the mid-1950s, before either was well known. Alerting me to this wonderful nugget, Dan went on to offer sage advice on my developing project. By the end he had read every page of this book and provided detailed comments, which made it far better than it otherwise would have been. Helen Horowitz helped in another way. Her biography of M. Carey Thomas and subsequent book on “rereading sex” showed me how to use the books and articles that subjects read for insight into their evolving sense of their own gender identity and sexuality.

Clarence Walker, whom I met when I joined the faculty at Wesleyan University in 1982, remained a close friend even after he moved to the University of California at Davis. Clarence expressed an immediate interest in Murray’s life and proved both a wonderful sounding board and a bottomless well of bibliographic recommendations in black history and the histories of gender and sexuality.

Several scholars’ work on Murray greatly enriched my own understanding of her life and careers. Linda Kerber, who taught at Stanford in the late 1960s when I was a student there, gave me confidence that I could make it through graduate school. Later, she helped me to see the importance that Murray (and Dorothy Kenyon) attached to mandatory jury service for all women as necessary to full citizenship. Anne Firor Scott encouraged me at an early stage of my research, and her edited collection of letters between Caroline Ware and Murray provided an important guide to Ware’s crucially important role as a mentor.

Susan Hartmann, another fellow researcher at the Schlesinger Library, enhanced my understanding of Murray’s career at the ACLU. Joyce Antler’s research on Murray’s life at Brandeis gave me an insider’s view of life as a female professor there. Glenda Gilmore set Murray within the broader context of youthful radicalism in the 1930s and 1940s. Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor gave fair warning as to the difficulty in understanding Murray’s sexuality; Patricia Bell-Scott expanded my understanding of the friendship between Murray and Eleanor Roosevelt. Doreen Marie Drury’s dissertation and articles on Murray’s struggles with her gender identity and sexuality gave me valuable insight into Murray’s psyche. Serena Mayeri analyzed the strengths and limitations of Murray’s “reasoning from race” as well as her central place in negotiating between supporters and opponents of the ERA. Sarah Azaransky probed the intersection of race and gender in Murray’s religious thought. Kenneth Mack and Sanford Levinson helped me understand how radical was Murray’s approach to the Thirteenth Amendment.

At Barnard College, my colleague Herb Sloan, the in-house expert on the history of the US Constitution, pioneered a seminar on the Fourteenth Amendment and, seeing my interest, passed it on to me. Herb, as well as others in the history department, including especially Bob McCaughey, Mark Carnes, Lisa Tiersten, Joel Kaye, and Deborah Valenze, encouraged me from the start, with unfailing patience as this project, begun in the twentieth century, continued well into the twenty-first. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to these colleagues, as well as to Provost Liz Boylan and President Judith Shapiro, who funded much of the research.

My colleague Vivian Taylor and our students in the Barnard Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program listened to me talk about Murray over the years and offered wonderful suggestions. Thanks especially to Alex Wright and Elvita Dominique for their comments. I am grateful as well to the students in my Fourteenth Amendment seminars and women's history classes, who helped me to clarify what I was trying to say about Murray.

My advisee, Kyle Lukoff, who took me on a four-year journey of gender questioning in his time at Barnard, proved particularly helpful. Arriving as Karen in 2001, he realized by the end of his sophomore year that he was trans. By the end of his junior year, he was asking friends and teachers to call him Kyle and to use masculine pronouns when referring to him. We talked at length about Pauli Murray, whose portrait hung in my office, and Kyle helped me better understand the commonalities as well as the differences between someone who struggled with gender identity in the 1930s and someone who did so almost a century later.

Student research assistants in the Barnard history department saved me untold hours through their work on my behalf. Thanks above all to Anne McGrath, who scanned thousands of pages of documents so that I could read them as many times as I needed to, wherever I happened to be. As someone who always seems to take notes on the wrong parts of a document the first two or three times through, I am grateful.

A number of people enriched my understanding of Murray's life through interviews. Jay Topkis and Ann Thacher Clarke Anderson, as well as Ruth Bader Ginsburg, remembered Murray from her time at Paul, Weiss in the late 1950s. Barbara Paul Robinson recalled the lonely lives of female students at Yale Law School in the early 1960s. Hasan Kwame Jeffries shared his research on the voter registration campaign in Lowndes County, Alabama, in 1965, and Charles Morgan Jr. explained Murray's pivotal role in the case of *White v. Crook* (1966). Sonia Pressman Fuentes recalled Murray's experience at the EEOC. Larry Fuchs told me of Murray's contribution to Brandeis in the tumultuous period of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Suzanne Wolf Post described the origins of the Women's Rights project at the ACLU. Mary Wyatt Norris helped me understand Murray's personal life in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and Karen Watson Ross shared memories of her great aunt in Baltimore in the early 1980s.

Schlesinger Library directors Nancy Cott, Susan Ware, and Jane Kamensky all helped me over the years, as did the wonderful Schlesinger staff, who guided me through Murray's papers. Not only is the Murray collection beautifully organized, but it also includes a correspondence index that led me to letters I would otherwise have missed. Early on, archivists at the Howard University Manuscript Collection made available Murray's papers on her time at Howard Law School, as well as papers that Caroline Ware donated there. The archivists at the Harvey Mudd Manuscript Collection at Princeton provided access to the ACLU papers and tracked down briefs that I thought had gone missing. At Smith College's Sophia Smith Archives, archivists helped me with research on the career of Dorothy Kenyon. Walter Ferber of the Walter Reuther Library sent me papers and oral histories on important labor figures. The Southern Oral History Project at the University of North Carolina helped me mine their wonderful oral history collections. James Pelzer, clerk of the court, appellate division, second department, Brooklyn, New York, granted my request to study Murray's application for admission to the bar of the State of New York. David Handy at the US Justice Department provided Murray's FBI report.

Librarians at Columbia University Library tracked down obscure articles and sent them to me in digitized form. Through the library's access to Proquest Historical Newspapers, I was able to search dozens of newspapers for articles related to my research.

Susan Petersen Kennedy and Maria Campbell offered encouragement and sage advice at many points along the way. Susan Ferber, my editor at Oxford University Press, together with the two anonymous readers she selected to critique my manuscript, improved this book dramatically, as did my copy editor, Patterson Lamb, and production editor, Maya Bringe.

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My sons, Clifford and Nicholas Rosenberg, lived with this book from the beginning. Clifford, a French historian, set Murray's experience in global

perspective for me. Nick, a psychotherapist, provided insightful psychological commentary all along the way.

My grandson, Henry Noah Rosenberg, and my granddaughter, Jasmine Sooyeung Park Rosenberg, have not read any part of this book, but each has brightened my life beyond measure. Somehow the writing always went better, after spending time with them.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAUW	American Association of University Women
ACLA	Amalgamated Clothing Workers of American
ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
AFL	American Federation of Labor
AJC	American Jewish Congress
BFOQ	Bona Fide Occupational Qualification
CCPR	Committee on Civil and Political Rights [of the PCSW]
CIO	Congress of Industrial organizations
CLSA	Commission on Law and Social Action of the AJC
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
CPO	Communist Party Opposition
CPP	Convention People's Party [of Ghana]
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
ERA	Equal Rights Amendment
ESCRU	Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity
ETS	Episcopal Theological Seminary (Cambridge, MA)
FEPC	Fair Employment Practices Committee
FLSA	Fair Labor Standards Act
FOR	Fellowship of Reconciliation
FTM	Female to Male Transsexual
GTS	General Theological Seminary
HEW	Department of Housing Education and Welfare
HUAC	House Un-American Activities Committee
ILGWU	International Ladies Garment Workers Union
LWU	Laundry Workers Union
LWJB	Laundry Workers Joint Board
MOWM	March on Washington Movement

NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NALC	Negro American Labor Council
NCC	National Council of Churches
NCCN	North Carolina College for Negroes
NCNW	National Council of Negro Women
NCW	National Council of Women
NLRB	National Labor Relations Board
NOW	National Organization for Women
NPC	Negro People's Committee to Aid Spanish Refugees
NUL	National Urban League
NWP	National Woman's Party
PCSW	President's Commission on the Status of Women
OPA	Office of Price Administration
PM	Pauli Murray
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SFSC	San Francisco State College
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
STFU	Southern Tenant Farmers Union
TYP	Transitional Year Program [at Brandeis University]
UNC	University of North Carolina
VTs	Virginia Theological Seminary
WDL	Workers Defense League
WPA	Works Progress Administration
WTUL	Women's Trade Union League

A NOTE ON PRONOUNS AND OTHER WORD CHOICES

In early drafts, I experimented with the use of male pronouns in writing about Murray in her twenties and thirties, the years in which her sense of self as male was strongest. I then experimented with gender-neutral pronouns such as “ze/hir/hirs” for her forties on. But my efforts ultimately struck me as ahistorical. Murray lived in a gender-binary culture. To use male pronouns for someone assigned female at birth in a time when that was not culturally possible, or gender neutral pronouns when, even to this day, no consensus exists on what those pronouns should be, I concluded, would undercut the immensity of the struggle in which Murray was engaged and the significance of her contributions.

Where references to race, sex, and gender are concerned, I have found squaring modern use with historical practice easier, because there is a greater consensus on usage. Murray viewed “Negro,” in its capitalized form, as a badge of honor, and she used “Negro” and later “Euro-African-American” in her speeches and writings long after the broader culture had embraced “black” and “African American.” I honor Murray’s preference by quoting the words she used, but in writing about her and others of African descent, I generally use “black” and “African American.”

“Gender” and “sex” are a little trickier. Murray, in common with others of her generation, used sex to refer to sexuality, as well as to both the biological and cultural differences associated with being categorized as male or female. I have followed modern practice in limiting “sex” to the discussion of sexuality. Whereas Murray spoke of sex differences, I write about gender differences, and whereas Murray referred to transsexuals, I say transgender persons.¹

Introduction

On a trip to Baltimore in 1919 when Pauli Murray was eight, her aunt, namesake, and foster mother, Pauline Fitzgerald Dame, took advantage of being in a big city to buy her a winter outfit. Aunt Pauline headed for the girls' department of a clothing store, but Pauli insisted on shopping in the boys' section instead. There she found a chinchilla coat with red lining and a Tyrolean hat. A firm believer that children should be allowed to make their own decisions, Pauline bought the outfit and allowed Pauli to wear it, despite the laughter it elicited from neighbors and schoolmates back home in Durham, North Carolina. She also allowed Pauli to wear the broad-brimmed soldier's hat someone gave her at the end of World War I wherever she liked. Except to church. According to Pauli, "That was the one place Aunt Pauline drew the line." Church aside, Pauline Dame cared more about fostering independence than she did about upholding conventional norms of middle-class black respectability. Thus encouraged, Pauli Murray grew up to be an activist, lawyer, poet, professor, and priest, who challenged other well-settled conventions, mostly in obscurity, but with transformative effect.¹

In the 1950s, Murray's legal scholarship on race discrimination encouraged Thurgood Marshall to shift course and attack segregation directly as a violation of equal protection in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). In the 1960s, her attacks on the federal government for failing to protect women against gender discrimination persuaded Betty Friedan to join her in founding a National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for women, which Friedan named NOW (National Organization for Women). In the early 1970s, Murray's concept of Jane Crow—the depiction of gender discrimination as analogous to race discrimination—propelled Ruth Bader Ginsburg to her first Supreme Court victory, establishing a woman's constitutional right to equal protection in *Reed v. Reed* (1971). And in the late 1970s, Murray became the first black female Episcopal priest, in the process extending her critical thinking on race and gender to the realm of theology.²

Murray accomplished all this while struggling with what we would today call a transgender identity. Since at least her childhood choice to wear boys' clothes,

Murray had felt “queer,” “in between,” outwardly female but inwardly male—a “boy-girl” in Aunt Pauline’s words. In some ways, her gender-nonconforming persona made it difficult to win the recognition she might otherwise have achieved, but it also made possible her most important insight: that gender was not, any more than race, a fixed category.³

Fortunately for her biographer, Murray was a pack rat. At her death, she left to the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College at Harvard University more than 135 boxes of diaries, interviews, scrapbooks, organizational minutes, papers, speeches, articles, poems, sermons, medical records, pictures, audiotapes, books, and letters (those received, as well as copies of those sent). These papers are remarkable not only for their breadth but also their depth. Murray kept detailed notes, for instance, on her conversations with doctors during her repeated hospitalizations for acute emotional distress. Murray also left early drafts of a family history, *Proud Shoes* (1956), and drafts of an autobiography, initially entitled “Jane Crow.” This title conveyed economically the external threat Murray faced from race and gender discrimination, as well as the internal conflict she experienced from these intersecting oppressions.⁴

Orphaned at three, Murray viewed her pack-rat impulses, family history, and autobiography as a way to connect with her absent parents, as well as to understand what she enigmatically called “my confused world of uncertain boundaries.” In the process she developed a keen sense of her place in a civil rights movement that stretched back to the early nineteenth century. She belonged to people who mattered; people who stood for education, equality, and freedom; people who had made sacrifices to secure those rights for themselves and others. Their example inspired her to do the same and to detail the effort.⁵

Murray’s personal papers reveal that her uncertainty over boundaries was rooted in more than her parents’ early deaths. She suspected from early childhood that she was really a boy. From at least the age of eight, she favored boys’ clothes, boys’ games, boys’ chores. In college, she cropped her hair. Then, days after her twentieth birthday, in an attempt to be a “normal woman,” she married on an impulse. The marriage lasted a weekend. Trying to understand why something in her fought against sexual relations with a man, Murray read every scientific book and article she could find on the science of sex. She concluded that she was a “pseudo-hermaphrodite.” Had she been born several generations later, she might have embraced a transgender identity. But in the 1930s, she had no such language, nor a social movement that would have supported her use of it. Instead, finding herself sexually attracted to feminine, heterosexual women, she suffered recurring nervous breakdowns when the objects of her affection could not accept her as the heterosexual male she felt herself to be. She begged doctors for hormones to give her a more masculine voice and appearance. They refused. About to undergo an appendectomy, she asked a surgeon to search for

“secreted male genitals.” He found none. She worried about her mental health. So did the doctors. One pronounced her schizophrenic. Her gender troubles sometimes immobilized her; they often put off those who might have helped her. Ultimately, they inspired insights that were to change her life and the lives of others.⁶

In the 1950s, around the age of forty-five, Murray ceased her medical campaign, even as hormones and sex-change surgery began to be available. She had come to see her trouble with “boundaries,” her sense of herself as “queer,” as strengths, qualities that allowed her to understand gender and race not as fixed categories, but rather as unreasonable classifications. A series of experiences facilitated this change: an operation for a hyperthyroid condition, which had long amplified her emotional turmoil; the psychotherapy she undertook to help her write her family history; the beginning of professional success, first as a writer, then as a lawyer; a deepening of her Episcopal faith, which convinced her that God had placed her in the middle to be useful to others; and, most important, the love and acceptance of a woman, Irene Barlow. No longer did Murray believe that one had to be either female or male; one could be both, a person in between, more male than female perhaps, but with qualities of both. The two decades that followed proved to be her most productive.⁷

Murray’s experience of race and class reinforced her skepticism about the boundaries most people took for granted. She once wrote of her “inability to be fragmented into Negro at one time, woman at another, or worker at another.” She experienced her gender, race, and class as so interconnected that her feeling of in-betweenness in one reinforced that feeling about the others. Born into a mixed-race southern family, and raised by a grandmother and aunts who could have passed for white, she attended school with children darker than she. Her grandmother admonished her to comb her hair and stay out of the sun so as not to look “niggerish.” Her black classmates taunted her as “You half-white bastard! You dirty-faced Jew baby! Black is honest! Yaller is dishonest!” Throughout her childhood and into the first couple of years of college, race preoccupied Murray more than class, but with the onset of the Great Depression class came to the fore.⁸

Class had always been there in the background, intertwined with her mixed racial heritage. Murray descended from what she called a “Euro-African-American” mix of white, anti-slavery Quakers; Episcopalian slave owners; mixed-race slaves; freedmen farmers; and Cherokee Indians. Her family, though poor, taught her that she belonged to a proud, respectable, educated elite. Growing up within an ever more restrictive system of Jim Crow, in North Carolina, Murray learned that she also belonged to society’s lowest caste. At fifteen, she fled to New York.

Murray worked her way through Hunter College, embraced radical politics, and joined the labor movement. Class led back to race, as her radical training

and identification with beleaguered workers during the Depression inspired her to join the civil rights movement twenty years before most whites recognized that the struggle existed. In 1938 she applied to graduate school in sociology at the University of North Carolina, where one of her white great-great-grandfathers had been a trustee. The university denied her application on account of race. Two years later she challenged, without success, race discrimination in public transportation in Virginia. That same year, with the help of Eleanor Roosevelt, she entered a two-year campaign to save the life of a Virginia sharecropper, Odell Waller, who was on death row. He was executed despite their efforts. In 1941, these defeats drove Murray to Howard Law School, where she hoped to accomplish as a civil rights lawyer what she had failed to achieve as an activist. Not that she abandoned her organizing efforts altogether. In her second year of law school, she led the first successful restaurant sit-in in Washington, DC, two decades before sit-ins would spread across the South.

Murray graduated from Howard Law School in 1944, first in her class and the only woman. Her senior seminar paper, "Should the *Civil Rights Cases* and *Plessy v. Ferguson* Be Overturned?" laid out a strategy to strike down segregation as a violation of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. Her classmates laughed when she first advanced her argument. At a time when litigators believed that the most they could achieve was to make segregated facilities more equal, her proposal seemed radical, even reckless. And yet, just a few years later, Thurgood Marshall's team used her paper as they prepared to argue *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).⁹

Race led back to gender. Belittled from her first day at Howard, Murray coined the term Jane Crow to stand for the double discrimination she faced as a black female. Two decades would pass before she put this concept to practical use, for it took that long to win the professional recognition she needed to take the next step. She did so in 1962, when Eleanor Roosevelt asked her to serve on John F. Kennedy's Presidential Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW). Roosevelt hoped that Murray's background in civil rights and labor, as well as law, would enable her to break a deadlock in the women's movement, between those who supported an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and others who feared that the ERA would invalidate protective labor laws for women workers. Murray persuaded the commissioners that a tailored litigation strategy under the Fourteenth Amendment offered a more realistic path to equal rights for women than could the ERA. She added that such a strategy need not jeopardize protective labor laws. Arguing that sex was analogous to race, Murray proposed that lawyers follow the same approach that had been used in *Brown* to overturn laws that discriminated against women. She recommended an attack on discrimination against women on juries, for example, and maintaining maximum-hour,

minimum-wage, and other laws for women that she believed to help even out the playing field between male and female workers.¹⁰

The commissioners agreed. So did American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) attorneys, who asked Murray to work with them on the Alabama juror-selection case, *White v. Crook*, which they won in federal court in 1966. That same year Murray persuaded Betty Friedan to help her found NOW. Building on these legal and organizational achievements, Ruth Bader Ginsburg persuaded the Supreme Court in 1971, in the estate-executor case *Reed v. Reed*, that sex discrimination violated the Fourteenth Amendment. Acknowledging her debt to Pauli Murray, Ginsburg put her name on the brief.

As Murray challenged the supposedly fixed boundaries of race and gender, she continued to worry about class, specifically the impact of her proposed reforms on working-class women, the poorest of whom were black. In addition to her work on the PCSW, Murray played a key role in adding “sex” to Title VII in 1964. She argued that women could attain equality in hiring and promotions without losing the laws that shielded them from exploitation by employers. In the case of conflict, she predicted, courts would require that protections in place for women be extended to cover men. In this she proved naïve. Within a decade, protective labor laws would vanish in the United States, just as black women were finally breaking into the service industries the laws had covered. To Murray’s dismay, victory against Jane Crow succeeded for professional but not for working-class women, especially women of color.

In 1970, Murray wrote, “If anyone should ask a Negro woman in America what has been her greatest achievement, her honest answer would be, ‘I survived!’” In many ways her own survival was her most remarkable achievement, and it bound her in her final years to assist poor black women. In 1973, following the death of Irene Barlow, Murray abruptly left a chaired, tenured professorship at Brandeis University—a position she had fought hard to achieve and had held for only two years—to enter divinity school. In her writings and sermons, she reinterpreted biblical writings to show, through the stories of Eve, Hagar, and Mary, an alternative to the traditionally patriarchal readings of those texts. In the process, she laid the foundation for what would become known as Womanist Theology, a theology attentive not only to the struggles of women of color but also to the poorest among them.¹¹

Becoming one of the first female Episcopal priests, and the first black female priest, in 1977, Murray achieved some celebrity but no regular employment. She worked as a supply priest, filling in for others from time to time. She volunteered at a nursing home for black women. She preached widely, broadening her mission as she did so to include a search for racial reconciliation and the celebration of diversity in all its forms. She used her identity as someone in between, someone who had trouble with “boundaries,” to serve as a bridge between white and

black, male and female, rich and poor, believer and materialist, and to fight for the acceptance of all people society denigrated as different.

Many LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning) activists have claimed Murray as an icon, but Murray was extremely guarded in her public—and for the most part her private—comments about her gender identity and sexual orientation. Some of those closest to her were astonished to learn, long after her death, that some believed she was a butch lesbian or a trans man. Although a pioneering leader in both the civil rights and feminist movements, Murray insisted to the end of her life that nontraditional gender identity and sexual orientation were private matters that should be protected as part of the campaign for human rights, not used for the purposes of separate organizing efforts. She never joined the Daughters of Bilitis, worried with Betty Friedan that radical lesbians within NOW might destroy the nascent organization, and kept identification of what she called her “boy-girl,” “pixie,” “imp” self from all but a very few intimates.¹²

The closest she came to a public announcement of her gender identity was through her dress and the name she adopted in college. Rejecting “Anna Pauline Murray,” the name on her birth certificate that identified her as female, she chose instead the gender-ambiguous Pauli Murray. Under that name she challenged all of the boundaries that shackled her from birth, as a poor, black, female person—labels that had long deemed her and those like her unworthy of human rights.

PART I

COMING OF AGE, 1910–1937

A Southern Childhood

“Small, Afraid, and Silent”

Born at home in Baltimore, on November 20, 1910, Pauli Murray was the fourth child to arrive in the Murray household in five years. By the time she was three, her mother, Agnes, had borne two more. Agnes was, by all accounts, a loving, skilled, and efficient mother. Trained as a nurse, she could handle challenging medical crises as well as multiple domestic chores. But her closely spaced pregnancies left too little time for her body to recover and insufficient energy for Pauli, a child in constant motion. Murray later remembered standing in the family’s kitchen in Baltimore, when she was three, “entangled in my mother’s billowing white skirts to which I clung as she went about her work.”¹

In the early years of her marriage, Agnes Murray had been able to look to her husband, William (Will) Murray, a teacher, and later principal, for support. But as her maternal and domestic cares mounted, his mental health deteriorated. For several years he had experienced spells of immobilizing depression. Worse, he displayed unpredictable, violent outbursts. She began to worry for her safety and that of her children. That worry ended on March 26, 1914, not many weeks after Pauli’s only memory of her, when Agnes suddenly died and Pauli was taken away.²

No one would have predicted this outcome when Agnes Fitzgerald and William Murray married in 1903. A mixture of European, African, and Native American ancestors had bestowed on them both striking good looks, set off by wavy black hair and light brown skin. Well educated, healthy, and hard-working, they seemed destined for middle-class success.³

The Fitzgeralds and the Murrays

Agnes Fitzgerald Murray was born on Christmas Eve, 1878, near Durham, North Carolina, the fourth of five daughters and one son of Robert and

Cornelia Fitzgerald. Hers was an educated but poor family, whose roots sank deep into the northern soil of Quaker freed people on her father's side and the southern soil of Episcopalian planters and slaves on her mother's. Her father had left Ashram Institute (later Lincoln University) in Pennsylvania to fight for the Union in the Civil War. In an early battle, he suffered a bullet wound to his temple and temporary blindness. At the war's end, inspired by the Freedmen's Bureau, he moved to North Carolina to teach former slaves. There he met and married Cornelia Smith, the spirited daughter of a white lawyer, Sidney Smith, and a slave, Harriet, whom Sidney brutally and repeatedly raped. Harriet's owner, Sidney's unmarried sister, Mary Ruffin Smith, refused to send Cornelia to the slave quarters of the plantation where they all lived but instead raised her in the house, taught her needlework, and baptized her in the Episcopal Church.⁴

Robert and Cornelia had high hopes for their six children. They educated them all, despite terrifying raids from the Ku Klux Klan, which tried to drive Robert from the school he built, and despite the return of blindness from



Figure 1.1 The Fitzgerald Family, circa 1895. First row, left to right: Cornelia Smith Fitzgerald, Robert George Fitzgerald, and Roberta Annette Fitzgerald. Back row, left to right: Mary Pauline Fitzgerald, Agnes Georgia Fitzgerald, and Sallie Fitzgerald. Estate of Pauli Murray, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

Robert's war wound, which eventually forced him to give up teaching. With his children's help, Robert made bricks and farmed, but enjoyed little success. To support the family, Cornelia took in sewing and sold whatever she could, including at one point the family's cow. The eldest daughter, Pauline, left school at fourteen and became a teacher. Marie, the second daughter, took her cue from their mother and became a skilled seamstress. Sallie, the third daughter, followed Pauline into teaching.⁵

Agnes wanted to be a nurse, but Robert and Cornelia objected. The physical demands, indignities, and health risks of the work made nursing an unsuitable career for the daughter of a respectable black family. Agnes had her mother's fiery personality, however, and persisted. During a visit to her sister Pauline, who had married and was teaching black children in Hampton, Virginia, she learned of the newly opened Hampton Training School for Nurses, which promised an up-to-date medical education. She wore down her parents' resistance and enrolled. While a student there, she met William Murray in 1901.⁶

Pauli Murray's father, William Henry Murray, was born in 1872 in Reistertown, Baltimore County, the eldest of four children—three boys, followed by a sister—to parents of mixed race. His father, Nelson Goucher, was the child of a black slave and her white owner; his mother, Annie Price, was the child of a mulatto slave and her white master. At some point, perhaps with Emancipation in 1865, Nelson completed his liberation from slavery by changing his surname to Murray, the name of one of the most prominent African American families in Baltimore and Washington, DC.⁷

Nelson became a waiter and later a church sexton. Annie washed the fine linen of wealthy whites. William waited tables with his father and carried laundry back and forth for his mother, but whenever his parents could spare him, he worked with a private teacher to learn to read and write. When the family moved to Baltimore, he attended one of the few black public schools then available. Completing the equivalent of the eighth grade at the age of sixteen, he became a teacher. William's brother Lewis, the family's third child, followed William into teaching. The second son, Joseph, remained a waiter. The family's one daughter, Rosetta (Rose), after a failed early marriage, lived with her parents.⁸

Like many other teachers, William taught in the winter and returned to school in the summer, to earn the credits that would qualify him for a better placement. To continue his education, he entered the federally funded preparatory school at Howard University in Washington, from which he graduated in 1899, at the age of twenty-seven. At that time, only 6 percent of all Americans earned a secondary school degree; only half of 1 percent of all blacks did so. In 1897, while still at Howard, William married a classmate, Florence Gray, whom he credited with inspiring him to "follow a systematic line of work." But he lost her and their new baby in childbirth, three years later.⁹

In the summer of 1901, William enrolled in classes at the Hampton Institute's Normal School to earn credits he needed to qualify for the position of principal. Hampton's white founder and president, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, had developed the school's approach, based on his belief that blacks were not as highly evolved as whites and therefore not as educable. Armstrong aimed to produce teachers who would train their charges in steady work habits, practical knowledge, and Christian morals. Raised in the Methodist Church, Murray shared Armstrong's commitment to hard work and moral rectitude, but disagreed strongly with his racial views and educational goals. Convinced that his students were every bit as capable as white children, William taught them poetry and urged them to aspire to a better life. He refused to let them accommodate themselves to their subordinate place in southern society, as Armstrong, and Armstrong's most famous student, Booker T. Washington, thought they should. That said, William needed credits in pedagogy to advance his career, so he took the classes.¹⁰

Pauline and Sallie Fitzgerald, as well as their cousin, Sadie, were also students at Hampton that summer. They met "Mr. Murray" in several of their classes and introduced him to Agnes. Smitten, William corresponded with her after his return to Baltimore that winter, and when Agnes graduated from nursing school with the class of 1902, he went to Durham to ask her parents for their permission to marry her. He charmed the whole family. They admired his energy, scholarly ambition, and skill at the piano, as well as his light-skinned appearance.¹¹

"In Sickness and in Health"

Pauli's parents married the following year at Emmanuel Methodist Church in Durham. Turning to her groom, Agnes promised to "obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him in sickness and in health" so long as they both should live. The congregation sang, "A triple chord is not easily broken." Six months later, having settled in Baltimore, Agnes persuaded William to join the Episcopal Church.¹²

The young couple belonged to a growing community of African American professionals in a city with the country's third largest black population, after New York and New Orleans. They owned their own row house at 1330 Argyle Avenue, a brick home with polished marble front steps, and another nearby from which they collected rental income. They played an active role in both their black church and interracial civic groups, and they frequently entertained relatives who passed through the city.¹³

Agnes's youngest sister, eighteen-year-old Roberta (Bertie), who found Durham "dull," lived with the newlyweds for a while and reported the exciting

news of life in Baltimore to her sisters back home. "We went to a charity meeting the other night and there were white and colored ladies . . . there" eager to hear a Dr. Chizzelle discuss the work that their interracial group should do "among the poor." Although Bertie reported some concern about money in the Murray household, she promised her sisters in Durham that the next time they passed through Baltimore, "I will . . . see that you are introduced to some of the swell 400 of the elite and you will have a no. 1 time."¹⁴

A series of personal tragedies brought Agnes's eldest sister, Pauline, to the Murrays' home in 1904. Married in Durham in 1899, Pauline had gone with her husband, Morton Dame, to Hampton, where she taught and gave birth to a baby girl, Venus, in 1900. Venus lived a week. Three years later, Pauline lost her fair-skinned husband. Morton, who held a law degree from Howard University, was discouraged by his inability to mount a successful legal practice as an African American and decided to start over as a white man. Pauline, so fair-skinned as to be mistaken regularly for white, could easily have joined him. Pregnant again, she must have felt strongly tempted. She refused, however, to break with her natal family. Her younger brother, the fair-skinned Tommie (the family's third child), had left home a decade before at age nineteen and had not been heard from since. As the oldest, most serious, most responsible Fitzgerald child, Pauline could not compound her parents' misfortune. She returned to Durham, where she gave birth to a son, Robert Fitzgerald Dame, in March 1903. Nine months later, he died of meningitis. Pauline took a teaching position in the suburbs of Baltimore and moved in with Agnes and Will. She never saw her husband again but later heard a rumor that he had built a successful career as a white lawyer in a neighboring state.¹⁵

Pauline was with the Murrays in August 1905, when Will fell ill with typhoid fever, complicated by encephalitis. "We keep the head and neck packed in ice bags all the time as the head is the seat of the worst trouble," Agnes wrote her parents. "I have been up both day and night since he has taken his bed two weeks ago." Bertie also fell victim to typhoid fever around the same time and died.¹⁶

Will survived, but he was not the same. The family believed that his illness led to his mental deterioration, and since encephalitis can cause brain damage and personality changes it may well have done. From 1905 onward, Will struggled against the demons that threatened to overwhelm him. Writing helped. Throughout his career, he had delighted in teaching students poetry, and he wrote some of his own. In his notes, Will declared his hope that he might "stimulate and encourage" others who "may take heart, and in time give the world something rare and beneficial." Often, he stayed up late at night in his study, laboring over his poetry and studying his books, while drinking coffee and smoking.¹⁷

Despite Will's efforts at self-control, his violent outbursts continued and indeed seemed to worsen after Pauline returned to Durham to care for her aging

parents in 1908. Frightened by Will's rages, Agnes repeatedly gathered up her children and fled to Durham. No sooner would she arrive, then she would get word that a Murray relative had committed Will to the local mental hospital, and she would race home to seek his release. By 1910, the violence had become so bad that during one of her trips home, the Fitzgeralds urged Agnes to divorce Will. She returned to Baltimore with that intention, or so her family thought. Instead, she became pregnant once again. The result was Anna Pauline Murray, named for her paternal grandmother, Annie, and for her aunt and godmother, Pauline.¹⁸

In February 1912, Agnes, pregnant with her fifth child, returned once again to Durham with the children, including fifteen-month-old Pauli. Deeply concerned about her younger sister's physical and emotional state, Pauline plucked little Pauli from the train when the rest of the family returned to Baltimore. Pauline vowed to keep her godchild until Agnes gave birth and recovered. She did so for fifteen months, until Pauli was two and a half.¹⁹

During that time, Agnes and Pauline kept in touch by letter. In one, Agnes wrote of her failing strength and money worries. "Pauline, is little Pauline still using her diapers?" Agnes nervously asked her older sister, when Pauli was

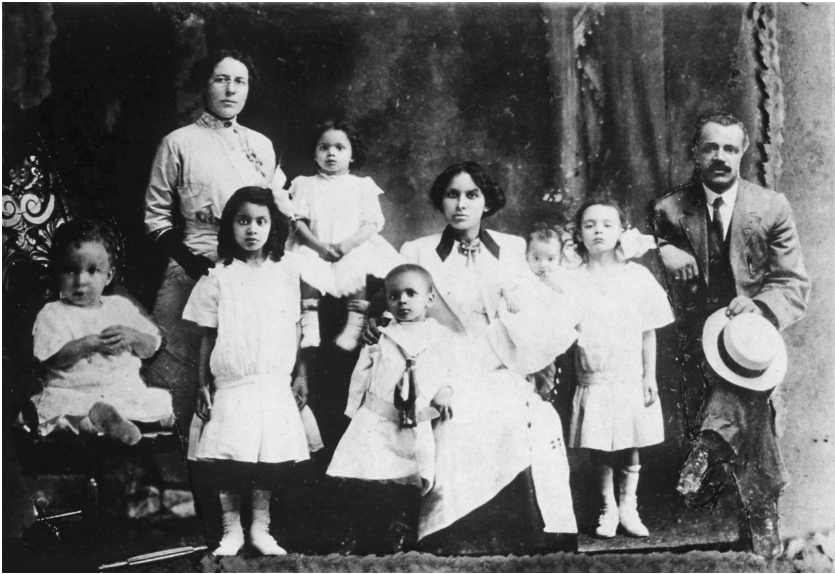


Figure 1.2 Family Portrait, circa 1912–1913. Left to right: Pauline Fitzgerald Dame, Grace Murray (standing), Pauli Murray (seated), William (leaning against his mother), Agnes Murray (seated), Rosetta (held by Agnes), and Mildred. William Murray (father) was not present, but a photograph of him was added later on the right, as was a picture of Robert (later known as Raymond), the youngest child (on the left). Photographer: Arthur L. Macbeth. Estate of Pauli Murray, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

twenty-three months old. "I do hope you will train her to use the chamber [pot] for all these children require so much to be done for them, and I am not strong. . . . I let Mrs. Dial go, as times are so extremely hard, and I need that money so bad, to get so many needful things," Agnes continued. Agnes's expanding family put added pressure on her, but so too did the failure of southern legislatures to maintain equality between black and white educators' salaries, as blacks were disenfranchised. In 1890, black teachers had made roughly the same as comparably qualified whites. By 1910, they made only half.²⁰

At about this time, Pauline and Agnes had a formal photograph taken of them and the children. Standing on the left is Pauline, an imposing, protective presence. Immediately to her right sits the toddler Pauli, squarely facing the camera. The other children—Grace, Mildred, and William Jr.—are arranged beneath them and around their seated mother, Agnes, who holds baby Rosetta in her arms. Will was absent, but someone later inserted his picture. By then, or soon thereafter, Agnes discovered she was pregnant with her sixth child (Raymond). As Will's violent outbursts continued and as her health deteriorated, Agnes's relatives urged her anew to divorce him, but she refused.²¹

Orphaned

In March 1914, thirty-five years old and pregnant with her seventh child, Agnes collapsed at home one morning and died of a massive cerebral hemorrhage. A stroke was uncommon in one so young, although the incidence was somewhat higher among pregnant women. Whether the family physician, Dr. Wright, had suspected additional pregnancies might put Agnes's life at risk, he would probably not have said anything, much less provided guidance on ways to prevent conception. Professional ethics, concern over respectability, and state law would likely have silenced him.²²

For some time, middle-class, white, urban wives had been circumventing state obscenity laws, passed in the 1870s, which prohibited the sale of contraceptive devices and even dissemination of information about them. The national average of births per mother, seven in 1800, had declined to 3.5 in 1900, and somewhere between two and three for middle-class, native-born, urban whites. The number for middle-class African Americans, by contrast, remained somewhat higher, reflecting how recently they had lived under rural conditions, the importance they attached to respectability in a white society that assumed them to be immoral because of their color, and the widespread association of contraception (especially condoms) with prostitution.²³

The Murrays' neighbors, aware of Will's violence and shocked that a mother so young could die, except in childbirth, whispered that Agnes had committed

suicide. The family refused to believe that, but they did conclude that Will was too ill to care for six children on his own. The three older children remained with him. Will's younger sister Rose and brother Lewis, who lived nearby, claimed the two babies, although Agnes had never trusted them to care for her children. What to do with Pauli remained an open question. Agnes had written to Pauline, shortly before her death, that she wanted her older sister to take Pauli, should anything ever happen to her, but there was at least some discussion of keeping the three-year-old with the other children. When Pauli was given the choice of where to go: with her father and the older children or with Aunt Pauline, she chose her aunt, the one adult who had made her feel "secure" in her young life. She then burst into tears. No choice was a good one. Long after, Pauli committed to poetry her sense of helplessness over the "unhappy circumstances" that culminated in her mother's death. She felt "small, afraid, and silent among the eternal spheres."²⁴

Pauli remembered nothing of her father from this time. Only later did her sister Mildred, four years her senior, reveal what happened next. Increasingly depressed, Will stopped going to work and stopped paying the mortgage on their home. The bank foreclosed on both houses he owned. There remained a little money, on which Will relied to feed his children and pay the rent. He shopped for groceries and hunted game to eat, but his relatives worried about him. Finally, an uncle, Joe Spriggs, intervened and called the police. Will attacked the officers with a razor as they removed the children. Rose and Lewis added them to their household. With the help of Dr. Wright, Joe Spriggs committed Will to the local mental hospital, Bay View, in 1917, and a year later to Crownsville State Hospital for the Negro Insane.²⁵

Murray later told an interviewer that the "most significant fact of my childhood was that I was an orphan." Except for one visit to her father when she was eight, she did not interact with her parents after the age of three. And yet, the period before her mother's death shaped her life. Pauli was an unusually bright and sensitive child, who witnessed, and perhaps experienced, domestic violence during the period when children begin to form their gender identity. She was an early talker and had things to say even in the midst of tragedy. "You just wait till my Aunt Pauline comes. She'll straighten everything out," she declared when told of her mother's death. Murray later wrote extensively about her family, but one topic she never broached was the possible significance of her father's violence for her emerging sense of self. Instead, she painted an idealized image of her father, the immaculately dressed teacher, school principal, scholar, poet, pianist, intense chain smoker, and coffee drinker; and of her mother, the beautiful, sweet-tempered but occasionally fiery woman who gave her life to the physical well-being of others. The most revealing thing Murray said about these unchanging figures was that they had left her with a profound uncertainty about

what she called “boundaries.” Most of the world accepted as self-evident the difference between male and female. Pauli never did. Her inability to take that, or any other conventional boundary, for granted provided the source of her deepest anguish, but also of her most significant insights throughout her life.²⁶

The Homestead

In March 1914, Pauli returned to Durham to live in the house that her Fitzgerald grandfather had built in the 1890s, just above an area known as the Bottoms. When Grandfather purchased the one-acre plot, it lay on the outskirts of town and offered attractive possibilities for expansion. He had taken out an option to farm the uphill field behind the property line and to exploit the clay deposits on the property for a brickyard. The forested area on the other side of the plot offered yet further opportunities, should his brickmaking business develop.²⁷

Over the next two decades, however, the city encroached from both directions. Shacks to shelter poor blacks in Durham’s flourishing tobacco industry replaced the forested Bottoms, and the city cancelled Robert’s hillside farming and clay-digging option to give Maplewood Cemetery, for whites, the space to expand. As graves inched ever closer to the house at the bottom of the hill, the run off from decomposing bodies drained over the family’s property, and the house began to sink. There was not much that Grandfather could do about the situation. He had lost whatever political leverage he had in the years around 1900, when conservative white Democrats passed a series of amendments that disenfranchised virtually all black men.²⁸

The house was a simple one, “a story and a jump,” as he described it. It had six rooms, two bedrooms upstairs under the sloping roof, with half windows and sloping ceilings. The ground floor had a parlor and another bedroom divided by a narrow hallway, which ran from the front door to the dining room and kitchen at the back of the house. Each room had a fireplace, which fed into one of two chimneys at either end of the dwelling. The house had simple furnishings and cold running water, but no bathroom or electricity. The parlor, the room Pauli loved best, provided the house’s one touch of elegance, with its three-piece set, upholstered in red brocade, and the artifacts of family pride: the bookcase, overflowing with books and magazines, portraits of her mulatto great-grandfather Thomas Fitzgerald, with his twinkling eyes, and of her white great-grandmother Sarah Fitzgerald, with her prim, sad look. On the mantelpiece sat grandfather Robert Fitzgerald’s three-masted model schooner—a symbol of Yankee bravery from his days in the navy. Above it hung great-aunt Mary Ruffin Smith’s painting of a mother-of-pearl fountain, cascading from a silver basin—a mark of genteel refinement. Outside, wisteria flowed over the front porch. Old elms and young



Figure 1.3 Durham House, 906 Carroll Street, 1910–1918. Estate of Pauli Murray, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

fruit trees populated the garden. Honeysuckle and morning glory vines covered the sagging fences. This homestead represented the family’s heritage and achievements, but also the ever-present risk that they might slide into the Bottoms.²⁹

In this household, Pauli was the center of attention of her elders, who imparted her earliest lessons in the meaning of race. Those lessons quickly turned into training in class and gender, for the three were so intertwined that instruction in one inevitably entailed cautions about the others. The Fitzgeralds, she learned, were members of the “respectable poor,” a family that, despite its obvious poverty, was of a higher class than the blacks in the Bottoms, by virtue of their lighter skin color, educational achievements, home-owner status, and cultural values. They were people of refinement, courage, and unflinching devotion to duty. Beyond these shared values, significant differences in personality separated the adults in the household. Navigating among them proved to be the key challenge of Pauli’s young life and provided her first lessons in the complexities inherent in the concept of race.³⁰

First Lessons

Grandfather Robert held the position of honored family patriarch. A military man, he had treated his children like soldiers and insisted that they march, not walk, as they carried out his orders. At the same time, his blindness had created

“a basis for interdependence and reciprocal relationships” in the family. The women of the family learned to be sensitive to his needs without making him feel inadequate.³¹

Rocking with his little granddaughter on the front-porch swing, Grandfather told her of the Quaker schools he had attended in Delaware and Pennsylvania, the anti-slavery meetings he had gone to with Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass, and the time he had sat on a platform with Susan B. Anthony. He recounted his battles in the Civil War and his struggles in his second war against ignorance. He taught her, as he had taught others before her, with a stern emphasis on correct speech—a good in itself but also, implicitly, a weapon against race prejudice and a defense of class standing. By his example, Grandfather also countered the prevailing concepts of men’s and women’s work. He was proud to have entered a profession 90 percent of whose members were women. Devotion to his principles had come at a cost, to be sure. In the Civil War, he had risked his life to defy racial prejudice, battle slavery, and secure his own citizenship. Afterward, he had sacrificed his future economic prospects to teach others. For years, the Union he had loyally served had resisted awarding him the pension that was his due. The southern state he had adopted repeatedly denied him his basic civil and political rights. The employees he hired to help him in his blindness proved to be thieves. In many ways, life had defeated him, but he remained unbowed. He was a proud man of color, an intellectual, and a man of standing in the community, albeit a man without much in the way of worldly goods.³²

As a child, Pauli “resented” her grandfather’s strictness, as well as his privilege in the household. When she was five or six, she uttered her first passionate protest against inequality the morning Aunt Pauline served her one “tiny” pancake for breakfast, after giving her grandfather three good-sized ones. And yet, she admired his dedication, courage, and ideals, and would one day write a book that celebrated his life.³³

Aunt Pauline, who claimed primary responsibility for Pauli, most resembled her white great-aunt, Mary Ruffin Smith, in coloring and physical appearance. But in values and bearing she was her father’s daughter. Stern, erect, unflappable in a crisis, she was effectively the head of the household by the time Pauli arrived. She taught her godchild to face down danger, meet unpleasant challenges, and obey orders. She was “a doer,” Pauli later recalled, “a woman of few words, who was intensely practical and who seldom smiled.” She was also “strict” and “never allowed me to dawdle over my chores or to evade responsibility for misdeeds.” Once when Pauli was about five Aunt Pauline took her to dinner at the home of friends. Pauli asked for a second helping of meat. Aunt Pauline said no. The hostess assured her friend that there was plenty. Emboldened, Pauli repeated her request. Pauline firmly reminded her that no meant *no*. Stubbornly, Pauli asked once more, at which point, her aunt led her to another room and “whipped” her.

Pauli recalled only two other whippings, one for lying and the second for disobeying an order that she must never stop to play on the way home from school.³⁴

Despite her strict discipline, Aunt Pauline was unusually sensitive to children's needs. She encouraged Pauli to express herself and allowed her to make her own choices, even when those choices seemed odd, for a girl. Pauli played with dolls, lining them up as pupils in her pretend schoolroom when she was sick, but she preferred to play with her male Fitzgerald cousins, from whom she learned "skills normally associated with boys." Pauli was a regular "tomboy," an athletic girl who liked to be outdoors. As time went on, however, Pauline began to see that Pauli's sense of boyness went deeper. Pauli hated to wear dresses, so her aunt allowed her to wear pants. When Pauli declared her dislike of sewing and cooking, Aunt Pauline allowed her to cut and stack wood and to take on a newspaper route. So accepting was Pauline of her young niece's eccentricity that she called her "'my little boy-girl,' quite innocently and openly to other people."³⁵

Aunt Sallie, who, like Pauline, taught at the local grade school for black children, competed for Pauli's affection. No less understanding of Pauli's "boy-girl" self, she had the added attraction of being more artistic, imaginative, and entertaining than Pauline. In contrast to her sister's plain fare, Aunt Sallie's meals were works of art and well worth eating, if one could endure the wait for them. Sallie was the aunt in whom Pauli confided as she grew older, but she lacked Pauline's organization, as well as her consistency.³⁶

For many years, Sallie showed no sign of wanting to marry. She valued her independence, her teaching, and her work in the church. But two years after Pauli's arrival, when Sallie was almost forty, the Reverend John Ethophilus Grattin Small, an Episcopal priest from Barbados, persuaded her that she could make a greater contribution to the church as his wife. Her parents and sister were horrified. Each suitor for a Fitzgerald daughter's hand had to pass both a professional and a color test. The Reverend Small was very dark. Sallie married him anyway and bore two sons, James and then Joshua, who became Pauli's godson. Pauli spent a good bit of time at the Smalls' rectory, a more fun-loving place than her grandparents' home, and a place where the burden of color weighed a little lighter.³⁷

Though the aunts had very different personalities and feelings about color, they tried to convey a consistent message of racial pride. Their salaries were half those of their white peers, but they were respected as leaders in the black community and guardians of the next generation. They were "race women," who, though they could have passed for white, cast their lot with "the colored race" and worked all their lives for its betterment. They subscribed to the NAACP's journal, the *Crisis*, and followed closely the news it reported. To them, race was a matter of commitment and character, a view Pauli adopted.³⁸



Figure 1.4 Left to Right: The Reverend John Ethophilus Grattin Small, James Fitzgerald Small, and Sallie Fitzgerald Small, circa 1920. Estate of Pauli Murray, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

Of all her caregivers, Pauli loved “Granma” Cornelia best. Cornelia was affectionate and demonstrative, the “heart” of the family. She rocked Pauli in her arms, called her “Baby,” “petted” her, and slipped her treats when Aunt Pauline was not looking. Cornelia was also volatile, as her favorite child, Agnes, had been, and as Pauli was in her turn. “Grandmother and I were . . . nervous and excitable, easily stampeded, as vulnerable to imaginary terrors as we were to real dangers,” Pauli later recalled. “We were the sensitive exposed ones who can’t stand pressures, took everything to heart, were torn by conflicts and cried out in protest when we were wronged or hurt, whether anyone heeded or even heard us.”³⁹

Though born a slave, Cornelia never thought of herself as one. Nor did she feel any less a Smith when Mary Ruffin Smith left her a mere 100-acre life estate in unimproved land when she died, while leaving the bulk of the family fortune to the whites-only University of North Carolina, where her father had been a trustee. Neither the fact of slavery nor Aunt Mary's injustice ever stopped Cornelia from taking pride in her pedigree: "You got good blood in you," she told Pauli, "folks that counted for something—doctors, lawyers, judges, legislators. Aristocrats, that's what they were, going back seven generations right in this state."⁴⁰

Grandfather Robert hated this kind of talk and stormed out of the room whenever Cornelia broached the subjects of the University of North Carolina or the Smith aristocrats. But to Cornelia these ancestors lived on in herself and in her descendants. One could see it in their features and hear it in their voices. Her lawyer father may have been a rapist, but he also "had a voice that could hold you spell bound for hours," Cornelia declared. Pauli believed her, especially when she heard her lambaste a black neighbor who had the temerity to set foot on her front lawn.⁴¹

Many people regarded Cornelia as "flighty and contentious," but Pauli admired her as a strong figure who had sacrificed to feed and educate her children. When Pauli was six, her grandmother fell victim to pellagra, a disease that induced vomiting, debility, dementia, and terrible body sores. Aunt Pauline called in Dr. Caldwell, a revered black doctor from Chapel Hill, who had made a study of pellagra. Through his clinical experience and wide reading, he had come to discount the prevailing view that the disease was contagious or the product of poverty per se. The problem was a combination of Cornelia's diet and the water at the Homestead. Early in motherhood, Cornelia had assumed the habit of giving whatever meat, milk, and vegetables she could produce to her family, while she subsisted on cornmeal and molasses. As Italian researchers had recently discovered, people who consumed mainly corn, as peasants in much of Italy did, suffered from pellagra if the corn they ate had been prepared in soft water from clay soil. The very soil that had inspired Grandfather to buy the Homestead property for his brickyard had helped make Grandma sick. Dr. Caldwell recommended that the family feed her a diet rich in meat, milk, and vegetables. He also ordered that they find a limestone well and give her water from it three times a day. Pauli, little as she was, volunteered for the task and thereby helped save her beloved grandmother's life.⁴²

For all her love and coddling, Cornelia also gave Pauli her most unsettling first lessons in race. Sensitive to the privilege that her own white skin conferred and determined, in her way, to protect her "Baby" from the consequences of being darker, Cornelia, more than any other member of the family, must have been the one to speak the words Pauli later remembered as the most wounding

in her young life: “Brush your hair, child, don’t let it get kinky! Cold cream your face, child, don’t let it get sunburned! Don’t suck your lips, child, you’ll make them look niggerish!”⁴³

Pauli gained a more positive understanding of race when she accompanied her grandparents and aunts to gatherings at “The Maples,” a nearby grand, eighteen-room mansion that belonged to her great-uncle Richard Fitzgerald. While Grandfather had fought in the Civil War and pioneered public school education in North Carolina, Uncle Richard had built his own brick-making business and amassed considerable wealth. Though Pauli was poor, her great-uncle’s wealth, together with her grandfather’s heroism in the Civil War and her aunts’ honored position as teachers, combined to reassure her about her racial and class status: “All about me among my own kin was evidence that a Fitzgerald was *somebody*.”⁴⁴

West End School

Pauli embarked on life beyond her Fitzgerald clan when she began to accompany Aunt Pauline to school. Durham’s West End School stood on Ferrell Street, across the road from Liggett & Myers’ tobacco warehouses, near the Southern Railroad tracks. A graded public school for colored children, it was a major improvement over the ungraded schools that persisted in rural areas, but it lagged far behind the neighboring white school. Weather-beaten, with peeling paint, the two-story wood building was so dilapidated that the wind howled through it on windy days. To reach the privies in the basement, the children had to wade through standing, fetid water. In contrast, the white children had a new brick building, surrounded by a lawn and a fence.⁴⁵

Technically, schools did not allow children to enter before the age of six. Fearful of complaints from parents, Aunt Pauline insisted that Pauli sit at the back of the room and not participate in any lessons. Pauli learned anyway and could read by the end of the year. Pauline also took her niece along with her to night school, where she taught adults who had not had the chance to learn to read or write as children. Falling cotton prices, the scourge of the boll weevil, and the brutality of white-dominated southern agriculture drove many blacks into towns, where they hoped to find jobs. In Durham, many went to work in the tobacco sheds and attended school afterward. Little Pauli was put to work cleaning erasers and helping older students with their lessons.⁴⁶

Newly at ease with words, Pauli proceeded to read the Bible to her grandmother and the news from the *Durham Morning Herald* to her grandfather. On her own, she plowed through the family library, reading *Dying Testimonies of the Saved and Unsaved*; *Up from Slavery*; *Chambers’s Encyclopedia*; *Works of Paul*

Laurence Dunbar; and *The Remarkable Advancement of the Afro-American Negro from the Bondage of Slavery, Ignorance, and Poverty to the Freedom of Citizenship, Intelligence, Affluence, Honor and Trust*. Having exhausted the resources at home, she moved on to the Durham Colored Library. The librarian led her to the children's books, where she was delighted to find *The Boy Allies* series, about boys in World War I, and a set of nature books about a boy named Frank: *Frank the Young Naturalist*, *Frank in the Woods*, and *Frank on the Prairie*. One year she won the prize for the most books read.⁴⁷

When finally allowed to enter regular classes, Pauli delighted her teachers with her quick mind and won steady A's. Deportment was another matter. She was never deliberately disobedient; she just had more energy than her teachers thought any child, particularly a girl child, should have. She bobbed up and down in her seat, waving her hand to recite. She talked behind her teacher's back, passed notes, and stirred up her classmates. Her third-grade teacher had to take Pauli with her whenever she left the classroom on some errand, as she dared not leave Pauli behind for fear the child would have the entire class in an uproar by the time she returned.⁴⁸

Pauli differed from her classmates in other ways. She was left-handed at a time left-handed children were forced to use their right hand. "You're doing it all wrong," family members told her. Even the usually sensitive Aunt Pauline proved inflexible on this point. Pauli dutifully learned to write an awkward script with her right hand, but on her own, she developed a beautiful, clear script with her left. And then there was sewing and cooking. "I would have enjoyed working with a hammer and tools, but cooking and sewing seemed beyond me," she later complained. One year she had to make a dress. The lopsided result, which she had to wear in a public ceremony "was so humiliating it put an end to my efforts on the sewing machine." Finally, Pauli faced the problem of color. "Too dark at home," she was "too light at school." Whenever conflict at school ended in taunting, her classmates yelled, "You half-white bastard, You dirty-faced Jew baby! Black is honest! Yaller is dishonest." Pauli's inability fit in, in either gender or racial terms made her resentful of familial and state efforts to make her conform to standards that made no sense to her.⁴⁹

Encountering Jim Crow

Initially confined either to the family's front porch or Aunt Pauline's classroom, Pauli began to explore the wider neighborhood and the city beyond as she grew older. Durham was known as the capital of the black middle class in the early twentieth century, and yet, black people never knew when whites would turn on them with a shotgun or a lynching rope.⁵⁰

Pauli first encountered that danger in the summer of 1917, in the midst of fetching fresh limestone water from a neighbor's well. Suddenly, she heard screaming and noticed everyone running toward something. Under strict orders from Aunt Pauline to return immediately with the water, she nonetheless went to look. Down the hill and through a forested area she found the body of John Henry Corrigan, a boy not much older than she, dead of a bullet wound. He must have strayed too close to the land of a white man, who suspected that neighborhood black boys were stealing his watermelons. John Henry's little brother had witnessed the shooting, but a white male jury would not believe anything he said. After a while no one spoke of the matter anymore.⁵¹

Pauli never saw anyone lynched, but whispered reports went out from time to time, and she lived in fear of violence. The rate of lynching actually declined from its peak in the 1890s through the years of Pauli's childhood, in part because of the exodus of blacks from rural areas to towns, but by World War I a subtler form of social control tightened its grip: legally imposed Jim Crow laws. In the wake of the Supreme Court's ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) that states could require separate public accommodations for whites and blacks, so long as they were equal, the conservative, white-dominated state legislature in North Carolina passed a series of segregation statutes. In 1899, it segregated railroad cars and in 1907 streetcars. In 1908 it prohibited black and white children from attending the same schools. In 1921, it declared miscegenation a felony, and in 1925, it passed a law requiring that seats on all buses be segregated by race.⁵²

By the time Pauli was old enough to lead her grandfather to town to cash his pension check of \$25 a month, she saw "things which Grandfather could not see—in fact had never seen—the signs that literally screamed at me from every side—on streetcars, over drinking fountains, on doorways: FOR WHITE ONLY, FOR COLORED ONLY, WHITE LADIES, COLORED WOMEN, WHITE, COLORED." The incongruity of cashing a check that represented the government's recognition of her grandfather's service amid state-imposed segregation struck her forcibly.⁵³

As Pauli grew older, she mounted her own private protest, supported by Aunt Pauline. She walked or rode her bicycle rather than take a Jim Crow streetcar, and she gave up movies rather than climb the back stairs to the segregated "peanut gallery." Once when a fair-skinned cousin came to visit and took Pauli into town for company, the cousin asked Pauli to wait outside while she went into the stores on Main Street on the theory that she would get better service if the clerks thought she was white. When Aunt Pauline heard the story, she exploded and told Pauli she was never to accompany that cousin again.⁵⁴

For a child who loved school as much as Pauli did, the worst part of segregation was the separate and unequal schools. "Each morning I passed white children as poor as I going in the opposite direction on their way to school. We

never had fights; I don't recall their calling me a single insulting name. It was worse than that. They passed me as if I weren't there." For Pauli, the hardships she endured were not nearly as bad as the contrast between what she and her classmates had and what the white children had, together with the clear message from the white that blacks were nobodies.⁵⁵

Not all whites looked through her. She later remembered the friendliness of their long-time postman. Mr. Pritchard, of Pritchard and Jones Shoe Store, praised her intelligence and urged Aunt Pauline to allow her to express herself freely. And there were the Greenbergs, who kept a grocery store near Aunt Sallie and her new husband. The Smalls shopped there and found the Greenbergs friendly, even more so after the Jewish family learned that Reverend Small could read Hebrew. For the most part, however, Pauli learned to be wary of whites.⁵⁶

The End of an Era

The summer Pauli was eight, Aunt Pauline took her to Baltimore for a long promised visit to see her siblings. The visit did not go well. Aunt Rose had told the younger children that she was their mother and the older children that they must never indicate otherwise. When Pauli spilled the beans, her younger sister and brother cried out in protest. Rose started to punish her, but Aunt Pauline intervened. She would not allow Pauli to be penalized for telling the truth. Matters deteriorated further when Pauline told Rose that she intended to take Pauli to visit her father at Crownsville Mental Hospital for the Negro Insane. No one in William Murray's family had visited him since his commitment two years earlier. Pauli's older sister Mildred, who had been especially close to her father, saw Aunt Pauline's plan as her one chance to see him, but Aunt Rose refused to let her go, so Pauline and Pauli set off, on their own, carrying a basket of cigarettes and muffins.⁵⁷

Pauli had imagined a joyful reunion with the parent whom her aunt said she resembled in many ways—especially in her intelligence and restless energy. They arrived. They waited. Then, almost at the end of visiting time, a guard brought her father out. Though forty-seven, William Murray looked old. Affectless and unkempt, he did not recognize Pauli and said nothing to her. She could not bring herself to say anything to him. He talked only to Aunt Pauline and only of himself. By way of explaining his lateness and disheveled appearance, he made reference to his temper. There had been an outburst, for which he was being punished. Pauli's one memory of her father, as of her mother, was of a silent exchange, tinged with fear. After the trip to Baltimore, Pauline adopted Pauli so that there could be no question about her custody. Pauli asked if she could call her Mother, and Pauline agreed.⁵⁸

The trip to Baltimore ended abruptly with a telegram from Durham. Grandfather was gravely ill. Pauline and Pauli rushed home, reaching Durham two days before he died in August 1919. Although Robert Fitzgerald had been blind and dependent, he had provided a sense of stability and security. After his death, Grandmother Cornelia lost her moorings and began to relive the terrors of the Ku Klux Klan. It did not help that the KKK was once again on the rise. Provoked as much by the massive immigration of Catholics from southern and eastern Europe as by the black migration into southern and northern cities, the second Klan staged a last ditch defense of the white, Protestant way of life.⁵⁹

At night, Cornelia barricaded the doors and windows, put her husband's guns under her bed, and waited. Sometime in the middle of the night, she would start to scream, convinced that the KKK was outside, preparing to burn down the house. These ravings so bothered Aunt Pauline that she could not complete her class preparations. She finally moved out of the house for a time to live with Sallie. Pauli, alone with her beloved, deranged grandmother, huddled under her bedcovers each night, waited until Cornelia fell into one of her brief periods of sleep, and then escaped to a friend's house. In time, the terrors subsided, but not before they had reinforced Pauli's fears that violence might erupt at any moment.⁶⁰

In 1921, when she was ten, Pauli began spending summers with her Aunt Sallie and her family in a rural area of Maryland to which the Episcopal Church had sent Reverend Small. Pauli helped care for James and Joshua. In a letter to Aunt Pauline, she mentioned that Sallie would not allow her to go to the store. "Mother as you say there are lots of little girls raped between Washington and N. Y., so Aunt Sallie doesn't let me go to the store as there is a thick woods between here and there." That level-headed Pauline put such fears into her adopted child's head seems out of character, but she may have been worried by Pauli's newest scheme: to go to school in New York. All around, families were picking up and moving north—friends, even cousins. If she lived in New York, Pauli believed, she could go to an integrated school and sit wherever she liked on the bus or at the movies. Pauli made clear that she was still thinking about this possibility, because the next sentence in her letter home read, "I'd like the NY Education but Mother I am afraid of being raped or assaulted."⁶¹

Actual violence disrupted Pauli's life when she was twelve. A white guard murdered her father at Crownsville in 1923. Only years later did she learn the full story. William Murray had been doing well; indeed, he was about to be released, when a Polish guard began to bait him, sticking a piece of flypaper on his nose. William tore it off and lunged at the guard. The guard said he would get him later. And he did. That afternoon, he dragged William to the basement and in front of others clubbed him to death with a baseball bat. The hospital sent William's body home to Baltimore. Pauline and Pauli returned for the funeral.

Pauli grew up in the shadow of her father's mental illness. Her earliest experience of his violence, reinforced by the knowledge of his violent death, led her to worry throughout her life that she would one day "go berserk and do harm to people around me."⁶²

The summer following William Murray's death, Grandmother Cornelia died, while Pauli was with Aunt Sallie. When Pauli learned that Cornelia was failing, she volunteered to stay with the boys, so that Aunt Sallie could return to Durham. Thirteen-year-old Pauli's offer to care for her nephews on her own, together with her grandmother's death represented the beginning of the end of her childhood. She still had her aunts, but the one person who had coddled and petted her was gone.⁶³

Hillside High School

Pauli completed the sixth grade at West End School in 1921, when she was only ten. Students who continued past grade school entered the seventh grade at Whitted High School, which burned down mysteriously that year and had to be replaced. Pauli had the good fortune of entering the eighth grade at Hillside, a brand new brick building, with an auditorium, which doubled as a gym, and a cafeteria.⁶⁴

Pauli was lucky to go to high school at all. In 1899, the Supreme Court had sanctioned racial discrimination in school funding in *Cumming v. School Board of Richmond County Georgia*. Two years before, Georgia had closed its only black high school and redirected the school's budget to hire more teachers for lower grades. Justice John Marshall Harlan, the Court's most reliable supporter of civil rights, ruled for the majority that the plaintiffs had failed to prove that the closing of the high school was racially motivated, even though half the school-age population was black and the remaining two high schools admitted whites only. Legally, white school boards could do as they pleased. As a result, most of the South still had no high schools for blacks when Pauli entered Hillside.⁶⁵

Even the privileged few like Pauli who made it to high school lost out in educational funding to their white peers. As Pauli reported in the school newspaper, *Hillside SKI HI*, some students wanted to study French. The local white schools had French books, but the school board refused to provide them to Hillside. Undaunted, she and her friends decided to raise their own funds by selling Christmas cards. In doing so, they were following a black tradition, pioneered by Grandfather Fitzgerald and others of his generation, of raising private funds for the basic school supplies that their white peers took for granted.⁶⁶

For Pauli's high school class, job opportunities remained so limited that many classmates, seeing no advantage in further schooling, simply dropped out. Boys

in particular grew discouraged. Of the forty students who graduated, only three were male. Girls could look forward to jobs as teachers or clerical workers in the black community. Boys would find little opportunity outside of agriculture or the tobacco plants, even with a high school degree.⁶⁷

Those students who remained were the first to spend four years in the combined middle and high school. Most black high schools ended with the tenth grade, but Hillside added an additional, eleventh grade, as well as chemistry and commercial courses. The principal recruited college-trained teachers from prominent black schools, including Wilberforce and Howard. They introduced a host of innovations: art exhibits, a glee club, boys' and girls' basketball, a school newspaper, and a yearbook. They also founded a debating team, which competed with schools across the state. The school provided so many activities that for the first time in her life, Pauli's grades in conduct improved. Apart from one unfortunate episode in the spring of eleventh grade, when a teacher caught her in the midst of an eraser fight, she made it through high school with only minor lapses. An all-round athlete, she played forward on the girls' basketball team and served as its manager. She especially liked the fact that the star boy basketball player, who coached the girls, allowed them to play by boys' rules, which meant using the entire court. A member of the debating team all four years, editor-in-chief of the newspaper, president of the literary society, and secretary of her class, she had plenty to do.⁶⁸

Pauli never asked for money from her Aunt Pauline but earned her own from the time she was eight: cleaning for her Aunt Sallie, selling newspaper subscriptions, and delivering papers. In high school she typed insurance forms at the black-owned North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company and worked as "an office boy" for the black newspaper, the *Carolina Times*. At the *Times*, she performed any jobs that needed doing: "custodian, sweeper, cleaner, editor." To her great delight, the editor published her first literary effort, "The Angel in the Desert," as a serial. Pauli later remembered this first publication with some embarrassment as a "lurid little novel" created from the very stereotypes that had bedeviled her childhood. Her heroine was a blond girl with blue eyes, the villain a sister with dark hair.⁶⁹

In 1926, aged fifteen, Pauli graduated first in her class. Her yearbook picture showed a confident young person, hair bobbed, nicknamed "Paul." For a "boy-girl," the 1920s was a good time to come of age. Young women all over the country were embracing the greater freedoms they associated with masculinity: cutting their hair, shortening their skirts, adopting male nicknames. Pauli's friend Violet Louise Perry went by "Jack." For most young women, these male affectations represented a youthful protest against what they viewed as the exaggerated femininity of their mothers' generation. But Pauli's choices represented a still deeper sense of male identification. Whereas her friends planned to be

stenographers, social workers, teachers, and occasionally doctors—all helping professions, she announced that she would “study law,” her great grandfather Sidney’s career. Her friends shortened their skirts; she mostly wore pants. Her female classmates continued the self-abnegating tradition of their mothers’ generation in the yearbook mottos they offered: “Give to the world and the world will give back to you”; “Let your character be your staff”; and “Think twice before you speak.” Pauli, by contrast, announced, “The best I can do to help others is to be the best I can myself.”⁷⁰

To be the best that she could be, Pauli resolved to go to college. Aunt Pauline encouraged Pauli to enroll at the North Carolina College for Negroes, founded in Durham in 1910 by her good friend Dr. James E. Shepherd. But Pauli wanted to leave the South. Her teachers thought she should attend black Wilberforce College in Ohio and voted to award her a small scholarship to get her through her first semester. Pauli turned it down. She wanted to go to New York City.

Pauli had been talking about going to school in New York for at least the past five years. Aunt Pauline had taken her on a trip there the summer before Pauli entered eleventh grade to visit Cousin Maude Womack, who lived with her family in Queens. Pauli loved the excitement and freedom of New York: the skyscrapers, Coney Island, the Statue of Liberty. Most of all she loved being able to sit anywhere she liked on the subways, streetcars, and buses, as well as in the theaters. Inspired by a teacher, Miss Nash, who came back to Hillside from summer classes in New York wearing a letter “C,” for Columbia, on her stylish sweater coat, Pauli planned her escape.⁷¹

Escape to New York

The Wages of Jim Crow

When Pauli reached Columbia with her Aunt Pauline in the summer of 1926, she discovered not one college but many, spread across a large urban campus. Most of Columbia's graduate schools, including Teachers College, where Miss Nash had attended summer classes, accepted women as well as men. Not so Columbia College. If Pauli wanted a bachelor of arts degree, she would have to attend the university's undergraduate college for women, Barnard. Pauli objected. To her, attending a college for women would just be exchanging segregation by race for segregation by gender. Her objections were soon rendered moot. A few words with the Barnard registrar revealed that Aunt Pauline could not afford the college's tuition. The fee of \$300, plus a comparable amount to cover living expenses, would come to two-thirds her annual salary, at a time when few colleges, even elite ones, provided much financial aid. Worse, Pauli could not meet Barnard's entrance requirements. One of the consequences of having been educated in the Jim Crow school system was that she had completed only eleven grades. Barnard required twelve years of preparation, including a number of classes that Hillside had not offered. Sympathizing with the dejected aunt and niece, the registrar suggested they try Hunter College, the city's public college for women, and wrote down instructions on how to get across town to 68th Street and Park Avenue.¹

Pauli had never heard of Hunter, not to mention its reputation as the "poor girls' Radcliffe." As a tuition-free college, Hunter did not pose the economic hurdle that Barnard did, but the same academic requirements blocked her there. She faced an additional year and a half to two years of study before she could hope to qualify. The Hunter officials suggested that she complete the necessary work at a high school in the city. With a degree from a New York public school, she would win automatic acceptance. But to be eligible to enroll in a city high school one had to be a resident.²

Aunt Pauline appealed to Cousin Maude, who talked the matter over with Cousin James. They offered to let Pauli live with them and attend Richmond Hill High School. They even took out adoption papers for her so that she could meet the residency requirement. Aunt Pauline agreed to pay a small sum for her room and board. Overcoming her initial reservations, Pauli set her sights on Hunter and resolved to complete all the work required for admission in one year.³

New York City high schools were far more rigorous than anything Pauli had ever encountered. She struggled, both mentally and emotionally. The only “colored person” in a school of 4,000 students, she watched in horror as her grades dropped to a “mortifying” 65 in Latin, 77 in French, and only fair numbers in other subjects. Even achieving these grades meant devoting every waking hour to study. Under the stress of the unaccustomed academic pressure, she stopped menstruating, but her efforts paid off. By taking the maximum number of credits allowed and auditing the additional classes needed to pass the mandatory Regents exams, Pauli fulfilled all the requirements for admission to Hunter by the end of the year. According to her yearbook entry, she began using the name Agnes (rather than Anna) Pauline Murray for official purposes, in tribute to her two mothers, but she continued to use the nickname “Paul.”⁴

Ready to enroll at Hunter, Pauli learned to her distress that Aunt Pauline could no longer afford to help her financially. When Grandmother Cornelia died in 1924, Grandfather’s pension ended. The farm Cornelia had inherited passed to her children, but with southern agriculture already sunk in a depression that would spread to the rest of the country in a few years, there was no market for what was mostly unimproved land. Better to let a tenant work the property in the hope of generating at least enough income to pay the taxes and to wait for values to rise. That left the house Grandfather Robert had built. Pauline and her surviving siblings decided to sell it and divide the proceeds. Not able to bear the thought of the house passing into the hands of strangers, and having nowhere else to live, Pauline resolved to buy it back. Her bid of \$2,200 secured the property when it was put up for auction, but she had to assume a mortgage. Despite her forty-two years of teaching experience, she made only \$970 a year, and, as a black teacher, she could not expect a pension. Paying a mortgage and supporting Pauli in New York was more than she could manage. So Pauli returned home to Durham to work and save for college.⁵

After spending the summer of 1927 as a janitor, typist, and reporter back at *Carolina Times*, Pauli landed a job as a junior stenographer at the black-owned and -run Bankers Fire Insurance Company. As the youngest person on a staff of ten, all working in one room, Pauli had to submit to close supervision. But the skills she learned that year were valuable for the rest of her life. When all else failed, she could almost always find work as a typist.⁶



Figure 2.1 Pauli “Lenie” Murray, 1927, inscribed to Aunt and Uncle, probably her cousins Maude and James Womack, at the time of her graduation from Richmond Hill High School in Queens, New York. Photographer: Herring. Estate of Pauli Murray, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

That year Aunt Pauline received word that the Right Reverend Henry B. Delany, the family’s long-time pastor and priest, had fallen gravely ill. The first black bishop of the racially segregated Episcopal Church, Reverend Delany had confirmed Pauli when she was nine. Worried that he was near death, Aunt Pauline took Pauli to see him in Raleigh. Pauli would always remember his final words to her, that she was a “child of destiny.” Whatever obstacles she encountered, the fact that a bishop on his deathbed had blessed her reinforced her religious faith and her determination to persevere.⁷