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### Curatorial Statement

Our exhibition room represents the modernist playwright Mary P. Burrill and her two one-act plays, “They That Sit in Darkness” and “Aftermath” both published in 1919. Burrill was a queer, Black playwright of the Harlem Renaissance period that wrote about the Black experience. Her plays were written as political protests on the issues of race and gender. During her time as an English and Drama teacher at Dunbar High School from 1905-1944, she influenced multiple students to later become playwrights including “Willis Richardson (The Deacon's Awakening), May Miller (Graven Images), and James Butcher (The Seer)” (Mary Burrill Born). She shared a house known as “The Halfway House” with Lucy D. Stowe, the first dean of women at Howard university, where she held literary gatherings for many prominent authors of The Harlem Renaissance. This house was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2020 for its significance to African American history (Neff).

Burrill used her publications as progressive stances on race and gender. “They That Sit in Darkness” was published in Margaret Sanger’s *Birth Control Review*. The edition it was published in was entitled “The Negro's Need for Birth Control as Seen by Themselves” (Mary Burrill Born) highlighting the purpose of her play as an argument for the knowledge of contraceptive health for women of color. “Aftermath” was published in *The Liberator*, a left-winged, white magazine edited by socialist Max Eastman. (Hamalian 135). This play contributes to the conversation of racism in the military and the treatment of men of color. The publication of this play went against the background of W. E. B. Du Bois’s statements on the racism of the

military and how the community should act at the time (Hamalian). Du Bois told the community to fight against white people, yet she publishes the play in a white magazine. Burrill fought for the recognition of rights for the African American community.

In order to honor her political activism, we've decided to create a digital room that brings Burrill's plays into current conversations about feminism, social justice, and the fight against racism in the United States. Our room gives an understudied playwright a place in the digital world to call attention to and advocate against the politicization of Black bodies. We use examples of political propaganda of her time, the history of birth control in the United States, conversations about racism and white fragility, digital humanities projects on lost African American voices, and elements from both plays to advocate for social justice. Our project will aid in bringing diversity to the world of Digital Humanities. Showcasing Mary P. Burrill and her plays in this way provides accessibility to an incredibly influential piece of literature and history. With social justice movements, such as Black Lives Matter, happening today, it is beneficial to provide access to modernist literature in relation to these conversations. Reviewing the past will help the progression of the future for social justice.

Works Cited

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