Williams, Fannie Barrier,  
née BARRIER (b. Feb. 12, 1855, Brockport, N.Y., U.S.--d. March 4, 1944, Brockport, N.Y.), American 
social reformer, lecturer, clubwoman, and cofounder of the National League of Colored Women. 

Williams graduated from the local State Normal School (now the State University of New York College 
at Brockport) in 1870. Thereafter she taught in freedmen's schools at various places in the South and in 
Washington, D.C. She also studied for periods at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston and 
at the School of Fine Arts in Washington, D.C. While helping her lawyer husband establish his practice in 
Chicago in the late 1880s (at one time he was a partner of Ferdinand Lee Barnett, husband of Ida B. 
Wells-Barnett), she became active in civic affairs. 

Williams helped organize Provident Hospital and its Training School for Nurses, both interracial 
institutions, in 1891. In May 1893 she gave an address on "The Intellectual Progress of the Colored 
Women of the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation" to the World's Congress of 
Representative Women (held in conjunction with the World's Columbian Exposition). In September she 
addressed the World's Parliament of Religions. These two public appearances brought her national 
recognition, and for a decade or more afterward she was in great demand as a lecturer. Also in 1893 she 
helped found the National League of Colored Women, and she remained a leader in its successor 
organization, the National Association of Colored Women. 

In 1894 Williams was proposed for membership in the prestigious Chicago Woman's Club. Debate within 
the club raged for more than a year; one of Williams' stoutest supporters was Dr. Sarah Stevenson. In 
1895 Williams became the club's first black member. She wrote regularly for the Chicago Record-Herald 
and the New York Age and worked quietly in many ways to open new opportunities to black women. 
From 1900 she became an outspoken supporter of Booker T. Washington's program of accommodation 
and self-improvement. In 1924 the widowed Williams became the first woman and the first African-
American to be named to the Chicago Library Board. In 1926 she returned to her native Brockport.