



The Rollin Sisters: Queens of the South

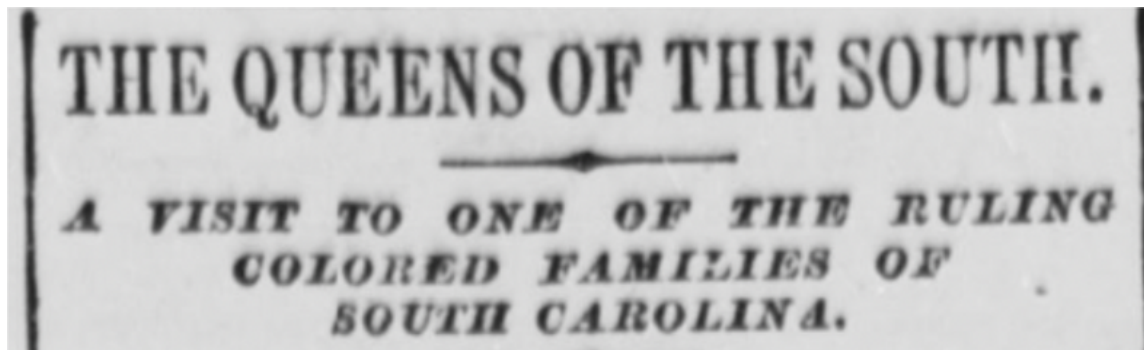
Warm Up Sheet

WARM UP DIRECTIONS

Complete the following questions based on the primary sources in the document, The Rollin Sisters: Queens of the South.



Document A

Headline from Source 3: "The Queens of the South, March 29 1871"**ONE**

What does the headline suggest about the power of this family?

TWO

Why might this story be interesting to a New York audience?

THREE

What do you want to know about the Rollin sisters?



Document B

Biography: Rollin Sisters

The political and social influence and activism of Frances, Lottie, and Louisa within the Reconstruction state government made them the three most notable Rollin sisters.

The five Rollin sisters were born in Charleston; they included Frances Anne (November 19, 1845–October 17, 1901), Charlotte “Lottie” (1849–?), Kate (1851–March 4, 1876), Louisa (1858–?), and Florence (1861–?). Descendants of émigrés who fled the St. Domingue Revolution in the late eighteenth century, the Rollins were free people of color living prosperously in South Carolina during the era of slavery. The political and social influence and activism of Frances, Lottie, and Louisa within the Reconstruction state government made them the three most notable Rollin sisters. Before the Civil War the sisters lived in an elegant mansion in Charleston on America Street with their parents, William and Margaretta Rollin. Their father was a devout Catholic who operated a prosperous lumber business. The girls attended private Catholic schools in Charleston, and the three eldest were sent to the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia for secondary education.

The Civil War damaged the family’s wealth, and the sisters living in the North were temporarily stranded with family friends. Shortly after the end of the war, they returned to South Carolina. Known for their grace, intelligence, and charm, the Rollin sisters were active participants in the highest social circles, and their Columbia home became an important, if informal, venue for Republican Party leaders in South Carolina. During Reconstruction, Frances, Lottie, and Kate were active in South Carolina politics.

In 1867 Kate and Lottie briefly attempted to start their own school for black children in Charleston. Located on Line street their “Day School for Colored Boys and Girls,” never obtained sufficient funding and the sisters moved to Columbia where they established their base for political activity. In Columbia Lottie and Kate taught in Freedmen’s Bureau schools and again attempted to raise money to establish a Rollin family school. Later they each bought property in Columbia. Lottie Rollin became well known in South Carolina Reconstruction government for her efforts in the women’s suffrage movement. In 1869 she addressed the South Carolina state legislature on the subject, the first black woman ever to do so. At the time she was a clerk in the office of Congressman Robert Brown Elliott. In 1870 she was elected secretary of the South Carolina Woman’s Rights Association. In 1871 Lottie led a rally at the State House to promote woman suffrage. She then went on to spearhead the creation of a South Carolina chapter of the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), corresponding personally with the organization’s president Lucy Stone. Republican men and women both black and white joined this fledgling suffrage organization in Columbia and Kate Rollin served as the organization’s secretary. In 1872 Lottie was the sole representative of South Carolina at the national AWSA conference in St Louis. Louisa Rollin and the sisters’ mother, Margaretta, shared Lottie’s home in Columbia during Reconstruction. Kate Rollin died from a short illness in March of 1876. Following the death of their father in 1880, Lottie and Louisa Rollin moved their mother to Brooklyn, New York. Little else is known of their activities.



Document B

Biography: Rollin Sisters (Continued)

Frances Rollin, the most prominent of the sisters, became a writer, educator, law clerk, and civil rights activist. She gained national notoriety in 1867 when she won one of the earliest Civil Rights lawsuits following the Civil War while working in an American Missionary Association school for freed children in Beaufort. After being denied access to the first-class cabin of a steamship travelling between Beaufort and Charleston, Frances brought the captain of the steamship to court. He was found guilty of discriminating against her because of her race and fined \$250.

In 1868 Frances wrote a biography of the black abolitionists, emigrationist, and Union soldier Martin R. Delany, who had assisted her in her trial the previous year. Her book *The Life and Times of Martin R. Delany*, which she published under the name Frank A. Rollin, sold well. The only one of the sisters to marry, Frances wed William J. Whipper, an influential black legislator and later a judge who she clerked for, on September 17, 1868. Whipper became the Rollin sister's biggest ally in the pursuit of women's suffrage and frequently aided in their efforts. After their marriage Frances remained involved in her husband's political career, writing for a publication produced for his constituents. Their marriage produced five children but was fraught due to the pressure of Whipper's public life. In 1880 William, Frances and their surviving children moved to Washington, D.C. Frances took a job with the federal government and by the 1890s was helping her youngest daughter, Ionia Rollin Whipper, to finance her studies at the Howard University School of Medicine, where she earned a degree. William returned to South Carolina and became a judge for several years. Frances eventually returned to Beaufort, South Carolina, with failing health and died there in 1901.

Gatewood, Willard B. "The Remarkable Misses Rollin: Black Women in Reconstruction South Carolina." *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 92 (July 1991): 172–88.

Ione, Carole. *Pride of Family: Four Generations of American Women of Color*. New York: Summit, 1991.

Terborg-Penn, Rosalyn. "Nineteenth-Century Black Women and Woman Suffrage." *Potomac Review* 7 (spring–summer 1977): 13–23

Yarbrough, Cappy. "The Mark they Had in Sight: Black Women, Suffrage, and Politics in Reconstruction South Carolina." Master's thesis, College of Charleston.

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URL: <https://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/rollin-sisters/>



Document B

Biography: Rollin Sisters (Continued)

ONE

What did you find interesting and/or unique about the Rollin sisters?

TWO

How do their lives confirm or challenge what you know about African American women living in the South during Reconstruction?

THREE

What would you still like to know about them?
