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Toward a History of Access: The Case of Mary Church Terrell

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In February of 1924, Mary Church Terrell wrote to author Agnes Repplier. “Your essay on the Happiness of Writing an Autobiography is most interesting, instructive, and entertaining,” Terrell said. “I have enjoyed

every syllable of it and have read it twice.” Terrell's motive in writing Repplier was twofold: in addition to praising her work, she also wished to elicit her assistance. “[M]y friends have been urging me for a long time to write an autobiography,” she told Repplier. “I am wondering whether you will have the time or the inclination to advise me how to write [it].” Taken on its own, Terrell's request is straightforward: she wished to glean from another, experienced writer tips toward composing her own memoir. However, Terrell was also signaling the complexity of her literary positioning. “I have been...

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