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Seeking Social Justice in the City of Los Angeles: Mary Julia Workman

By Jose Luis Castro Padilla

Abstract: Mary Julia Workman (1871–1964) was a Catholic social activist in the early twentieth century. She was the founder of the Brownson Settlement House in Los Angeles established in 1902. By the twentieth century, during the Progressive Era (1896–1916), Workman led a group of volunteer women to help immigrants, the majority being Mexicans, who were segregated and discriminated against in the growing city of Los Angeles, California. Although Catholic activism was influenced by the Protestant Progressive ideology, Workman provided social justice to the marginalized communities with education, health, and job training. In a time when Americanization efforts imposed by conservative and nationalist religious groups on immigrants brought antagonism, racism, and discrimination to the diverse communities of Los Angeles, Mary Julia Workman and her Americanization methodology focused on learning from a foreign culture and adapting it to American society rather than removing cultural identity and heritage. After years of service, Workman left her position as the president of the Brownson House due to the religious bureaucracy at the Archdiocese of Los Angeles but never stopped fighting for social justice. Mary Julia spent her whole life devoted to learning, understanding, and fighting for marginalized and discriminated individuals. Her contributions may have been forgotten, but her devotion will live on.

Introduction

The suffering of the world is better understood together with those who suffer.

- Pope Francis (2021)¹

Through encyclicals and messages, Pope Francis (b. 1935) has proclaimed to look for social justice in the world to counteract materialism and individualism propagated by consumerism and globalization. To contribute to that search, the life and social activism of Mary Julia Workman (1871–1964) must be recognized by society and used as an example of providing social justice to people in need. One hundred and twenty years ago, a Catholic woman who was influenced by the Progressive Era (1896-1916) of the early twentieth century brought social justice to the poor in the city of Los Angeles. During her time at the Brownson Settlement House, Workman was a forerunner of social justice within the Catholic Church providing education, employment, and public health to hundreds of immigrants, who lived segregated and marginalized in the city of Los Angeles. Although her story has since been forgotten in the library archives, during her time, Mary Julia Workman was recognized for her altruistic work and political activism by various local civil authorities, politicians, and important figures of society.

In 1964, Mary Julia Workman passed away at the age of ninety-three. Although her life was filled with love for the poor and oppressed; the place where she now rests, Calvary Cemetery in East Los Angeles looks dusty, old, lonely, and forgotten by both the church and civil society of Los Angeles. Despite her accomplishments and accolades, Californians have no knowledge regarding her public life, civic service, and social work during the early twentieth century. Her death made headlines as her social

¹ Pope Francis, “A Poderosos de la Tierra,” *Vatican News*, Dicasterium pro Communicatione, October 16, 2021, <https://www.vaticannews.va/es/papa/news/2021-10/papa-poderosos-tierra-nombre-dios-cambien-sistema-muerte.html>.

activism was remembered. Today, however, the official history books of the Catholic Church in California have underrepresented her social work and contributions to the city of Los Angeles; therefore, the civil and ecclesiastical recognition she once received for her dedication to the pursuit of social justice among the poor has been forgotten.

A Brief History of Mary Julia Workman

Workman was an upper-class woman, born from a wealthy family and educated from an early age by her mother, Maria Elizabeth Boyle (1847–1933), under the strict Catholic faith. Mary Julia Workman’s father, William Henry Workman (1839–1918), was the youngest son of David Workman (1797–1855). When David was fifteen years old, his father passed away soon after their migration to California. To financially support his mother, William began working in different clerk positions throughout Los Angeles; additionally, he worked as a messenger that traveled from Los Angeles to San Bernardino, California on horseback.² David would go on to open a saddlery shop with his brother Elijah, and they became successful businessmen on Main Street.

Mary J. Workman’s mother, Maria Elizabeth, lived with her father, Andrew Boyle. The Boyles were one of the most influential families within the city of Los Angeles during the late nineteenth century, as they were able to achieve the “American Dream” during the Gold Rush (1848-1855).³ As an Irish Catholic

² William Henry Workman, Series 1: Mary Julia Workman, box 1 and folder 2, Workman Family Papers, CSLA-9, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University, 1.

³ Maria Elizabeth Workman, Series 1: Mary Julia Workman, box 1 and folder 2, Workman Family Papers, CSLA-9, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University, 1. Her grandfather was Andrew A. Boyle (1818–1871), a pioneer and Irish immigrant, who came to Los Angeles during the United States’ expansion into the West during the Gold Rush (1848–1855). California was a fertile land available to immigrants from Europe and Asia and migrants from the American Midwest,

woman, she attended school at Sister of Charity Church in Los Angeles. At that time, Maria Elizabeth recalled that “there were no bridges, in those days across the Los Angeles River which was a lovely pastoral stream bordered by willow trees.”⁴ Maria learned Spanish as it was spoken by almost all the inhabitants of the town. She was a devoted Catholic who made her First Communion and was confirmed in this historic old church of Los Angeles. According to her writings, she went to San Francisco in 1864 to study at the Clark’s Institute from which she graduated a year and a half later and returned to Los Angeles.⁵ Three years later, on October 17, 1867, she married William H. Workman, and together they raised seven children on the east side of the Los Angeles River.

Maria Elizabeth gave birth to her second child and first daughter on January 4, 1871, in the old Boyle brick house in Los Angeles. Mary Julia’s siblings were Andrew (n.d.), Elizabeth (n.d.), William H. Jr (n.d.), Charlotte (n.d.), Gertrude (n.d.), and Thomas (n.d.). Her mother was a housewife, and her father was a businessman who became mayor of Los Angeles from 1887 to 1888. Although her father was Protestant, her mother raised her under the Roman Catholic faith. Her First Communion took place at the old plaza church of Our Lady of Los Angeles, and her elementary education occurred at the Sister of Charity Church grammar school at the corner of Macy and Alameda Street.⁶ Every morning she crossed the east side of the Los Angeles River, the same river her mom crossed, from El Paredon Blanco to go to school. Workman remembered, “The horse was so reliable that Charlie Parker, the driver, would tie the reins, and sit with us

and Andrew Boyle did not miss the opportunity to seek his fortune in Southern California.

⁴ Maria Elizabeth Workman, Series 1, 1.

⁵ Maria Elizabeth Workman, Series 1, 2.

⁶ “Miss Mary, 91: ‘Mother’ to L.A.’S Children,” Series 1: Mary Julia Workman, box 2 and folder 11, Workman Family Papers, CSLA-9, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University, 1.

children, reciting poetry and telling stories, for the long homeward pull up Alison Street.”⁷

Mary Julia’s mother decided to send her away for higher education, as Los Angeles did not have a high school dedicated to girls, she decided to send her daughters, Mary Julia and Elizabeth, to Oakland to attend Convent of Our Lady of Sacred Heart of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary.⁸ The high school of choice for wealthy families to send their daughters since it had a good curriculum consisting of music, writing, and school training such as spirituality and bible studies.⁹ Workman graduated in 1890 and returned to Los Angeles where she was responsible for helping her mother at home and caring for her younger siblings. She helped her mother with the weekly cleaning and dusting of the house and was referred to as “Little Mother” by her young siblings because she demonstrated the same love and care that her mother did.¹⁰

Her dad did not permit her desire to serve God and her vocation. When she asked her father for permission to join a religious order and become a Catholic nun her father replied, “I can’t give my permission to let my little girl leave our home to do that. But you may use your mind and your heart to do anything you wish in this city, but I can’t agree to let you join an order.”¹¹ Besides being a protective patriarchal father, Mr. Workman did not grow up within the Catholic faith but rather in the Protestant faith and did not support the idea of having a nun in the family. She had

⁷ Miss Mary, 1. El Paredon Blanco is today the neighborhood of Boyle Heights.

⁸ Michael E. Engh. “Mary Julia Workman, the Catholic Conscience of Los Angeles.” *California History* 72, no. 1, (1993), 5.

⁹ Michael E. Eng. “Responding to Urban Poverty: Mary Julia Workman and Brownson Settlement House of Los Angeles, 1900-1920” Series 1: box 2 and folder 12, Workman Research Materials CSLA-35, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University, 4.

¹⁰ Thomas Edgar Workman, *Memoirs*, Series 1: box 1 and folder 1, Workman Research Materials CSLA-9, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University, 4.

¹¹ Oral Interview to Beatrice (Ward) Challis done by Fr. Michael Engh S.J. May, 21, 1993. Series 2, box 4, folder 4, Workman Research Material.

the desire to be a nun due to the education she had received, her experiences in the convent, and her friendship with the sisters who lived there because they changed her life and left lasting impressions. In the letters written to her friend and composition teacher, Sister Mary Leopold, Mary Julia writes, “I am more desirous of my holy vocation and more grateful to God for calling me to Himself.”¹² However, her father did not want to let Mary Julia go beyond the boundaries of Los Angeles and pursue a religious vocation.

The love she had for children led to her aspiration to become a kindergarten teacher. In 1899, she enrolled in the State Normal School, which today is called the University of California, Los Angeles. Under strict responsibility and school duties, she took several classes from English to psychology, of which she learned Froebel’s Kindergarten Theory.¹³ In a beautiful building of the State Normal School on 5th Street and Grand Avenue in Los Angeles, she was trained to be a future educator. She recalled, “I thought I knew something of Kindergarten Work, but I knew nothing. It is marvelous work and requires so much of a Teacher that I feel I can never accomplish such great results.”¹⁴ She understood how difficult the profession was and the physical, mental, and spiritual exhaustion that teaching caused. As part of her education, she was taught the theory of early education created by Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), a lesson that Mary Julia would use as part of the foundation for her social work.¹⁵ Workman stated

¹² Mary’s Letter LVI, *Golden Friendship*, 159. Series 2, box 3 and folder 1, Workman Research Materials, CSLA-35, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University. The Holy Names Graduates and teacher’s letters were collected and edited by Sister Mary Leopold.

¹³ Mary’s Letter LXI, *Golden Friendship*, 167.

¹⁴ Mary’s Letter LXII, *Golden Friendship*, 169.

¹⁵ “Froebel considered the whole child’s health, physical development, the environment, emotional well-being, mental ability, social relationships and spiritual aspects of development as important. Drawing on his mathematical and scientific knowledge Froebel developed a set of gifts (wooden blocks 1-6) and introduced occupations, (including sticks, clay, sand, slates, chalk, wax, shells,

that, “Froebel leads you so to God as the source of all, he makes you reach out for the child’s soul which is so sacred in his eyes.”¹⁶ Froebe’s methodology consisted of respect for the child’s freedom. He argued that with games, children develop forms of creative activity; he taught that children should have the opportunity to express themselves. With this method, the child developed activities with her mother and in a group to project the inner states of the child to the outside world. Under Froebel’s principles, the kindergarten developed language activities, games, crafts, and art that provided mental development for the child at an early age.¹⁷ Workman learned Froebel’s methodology and how the mental, physical, and spiritual state was important for everyone within the community and oneness with God.¹⁸ Workman believed in the freedom of will, individual responsibility, the necessity of sacrifice, the beauty of unselfishness, and the value of love in everything people do and speak. She believed that learning and teaching all of those virtues were necessary.

She began to combine her faith with her vocation, writing, “I feel that childhood is a sacred time, the seed time of a life and it is the seed of life.”¹⁹ She believed that children need to learn at a young age how human integrity could contribute to their development for their own benefit and society. For Workman, the teachings at the State Normal School resembled the philosophy of charity that she had previously learned at the convent. Through her lessons, she wanted to teach infants the true meaning of “give.”

stones, scissors, paper folding).” Friedrich Froebel, *Early Education*, The British Association for Early Childhood Education, accessed November 01, 2021.

<https://www.early-education.org.uk/about-froebel>

¹⁶ Mary’s Letter LXIII, *Golden Friendship*, 173.

¹⁷ Wilson Stuart. “The ‘Gifts’ of Friedrich Froebel.” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 26, no. 4 (1967): 238–41.

¹⁸ Patricia L. de Cos, *History and Development of Kindergarten in California*, California Research Bureau, California State Library, 08. accessed: November 01, 2021,

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.193.5931&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

¹⁹ “Mary’s Letter LXIII”, *Golden Friendship*, 172.

Seeking Social Justice

During her school days at Normal School, Mary Julia decided to associate with the Catholic Aid Society and volunteer in the Catholic charity house, El Hogar Feliz.²⁰ During her college years, a group of students at the State Normal School began recruiting volunteers for the new College Settlement House Association, and she did not hesitate to become one of their members.



Figure 1: Mary Julia Workman, sitting second from the left, at the Academy of Our Lady of Sacred Heart. Circa 1890 Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

²⁰ Society of El Hogar Feliz translates to Happy Home, an organization founded to care for abandoned and neglected children in Los Angeles.



Figure 2. Mary Julia Workman Diploma. Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University

The Settlement House Movement

The Settlement House Movement, which began in the 1880s and peaked during the 1920s, was promoted by college women in the most influential and industrialized cities of the United States. Cities began to suffer an increase in industrialization, thus creating the need to employ more laborers. Men, women, and children worked tirelessly in factories that economically flourished in urban communities. Immigration increased after the American Civil War (1861–1865), which served as fuel for large factories that requested cheap labor due to the United States' economic growth. Sadly, many lower-class industrial workers could not reach greater social and economic statuses due to the complexity of industrial capitalism. In Chicago, social worker Jane Addams (1860–1935) noticed the increase in immigrants, and she observed how they suffered from labor abuse and economic deprivation. Based on her

observations, Adams decided to start a movement within Social Progressivism, the settlement house movement, which provided services such as English classes, and health care to communities who otherwise would not be able to afford it. The help which was given primarily to immigrants gradually spread to the ranks of professional social workers, and settlement houses were established in several industrial cities across the United States such as Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles.

Protestant settlement houses worked across the country helping immigrants, along with performing religious proselytization. Charity was transformed into Christian evangelization and nationalist doctrine for all those with sufficient characteristics to be accepted by Anglo-American society. Historian John Hingham writes that, “until the end of the nineteenth-century social work had been largely synonymous with charity, and for the most part its practitioners had loudly bewailed the immigrant grant flood that was swapping their resources.”²¹ In the industrial cities of the United States, settlement houses became notorious because young college women decided to lead this progressive idea. Historian William Deverell stated, “remarkable middle- and upper-class women working at settlement houses for immigrants taught and witnessed Americanization.”²²

Addams extolled the virtues of ongoing cultural differences among immigrant groups, but she encouraged the assimilation of immigrants to Anglo-American culture. She became a leader in the settlement house movement and traveled around the nation giving speeches about her activism. In 1894, a group of college women graduates listened to Addams in Los Angeles. Addams influenced the group of college-educated women to follow in her steps in the creation of the first settlement houses in Los Angeles. The settlement house movement came to Los Angeles as a functional

²¹ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2002), Kindle.

²² William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 71.

duty for college women to serve the community providing food, healthcare, religious proselytism, and assimilation to American culture. Ran by college-educated women near La Plaza, the College Settlement House in Los Angeles was founded in 1894. Working from Castellar Street, the College Settlement Association began to recruit student volunteers from the State Normal School. Workman became one of the volunteers in this settlement house during her school years and argued that “college-trained women used their intelligence and their educational opportunity to aid in the solution of community problems.”²³ It was during the Progressive Era that a generation of educated women started campaigns to help their community without getting involved in politics, from which they were excluded. They were able to get involved in women’s clubs and other activities such as education, which was deemed appropriate for women. As a volunteer at the College Settlement House, Workman was able to observe the poverty of the people living in Sonoratown and other impoverished communities near La Plaza where volunteers conducted their social work. Besides the College Settlement House, Protestant women’s groups began to open settlement houses around the central plaza. The women and houses they represented were able to embrace Russian, French, Armenian, Italian, and other European immigrants, but failed to expand their social work in the Mexican community due to their strong religious beliefs and conflicting cultural traditions.

Although Workman’s influence was Progressive Activism, she began to distance herself from groups, such as the women’s clubs who began spreading hate against immigrants and boasted their superiority against others. Women’s clubs, like Friday Women’s Club and other Progressive activists, celebrated the United States’ conquest of the Southwest. Historian Gayle Gullett stated, “The women declared themselves patriots of white

²³ Michael E. Engh, “A Better Realization of Social Justice: Mary Julia Workman, Los Angeles Progressive,” Serie 1, Box 2, Folder 9, Workman Research Materials, CSLA-35, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

America. The United States was correct in appropriating Mexican land because this meant the victory of ‘civilization’ over ‘barbarism,’ of an advanced ‘white’ race over those backward races, Indian and Mexican, who stood in the way of Manifest Destiny.”²⁴ The idealism of the Progressive Movement set aside immigrant minorities and based its rhetoric on Anglo-Saxon religious and ethnic fundamentalism. In Los Angeles, citizens of the lower classes such as Mexicans were excluded from this Progressive Movement, although their rhetoric was portrayed as welfare for all. The College Settlement House was an instrument not to help immigrants, but to help the Anglo-American community in its efforts to reform those deemed as criminals or inferior.

Having been born and raised in Los Angeles, Workman noticed the changes that the city underwent through the years. “From a quiet pastoral pueblo, it had developed into a great city, stretching out in all directions,” wrote Mary Julia Workman when describing her hometown. She also observed, “An industrial district and a turmoil in traffic replaced the vineyards and the beautiful pioneer estates by the river.”²⁵ The city had grown, and new inhabitants arrived, not only those seeking better lives, but corporations seeking riches. Workman noted “the streets full of ragged children of foreign aspect.”²⁶ In describing the streets of Los Angeles, she elaborated that “dark, skinned, barefoot boys and girls who speak the sweet language of Spain...women with rebozos over their heads and babies in their arms, swarthy Mexican labors returning from work, all will pass one on the way.”²⁷ The

²⁴ Gayle Gullett, *Becoming Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women’s Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 124. Progressive activists in the 1900s wanted to end political corruption, improve people’s lives, and increase government intervention to protect citizens.

²⁵ Mary Julia Workman, “Brownson House Settlement Work,” *The Tidings*, Series 2, Box 3, Folder 8, Workman Research Materials, CSLA-35, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University, 1.

²⁶ Mary Julia Workman, “Brownson House Settlement Work,” 1.

²⁷ Mary Julia Workman, “Brownson House Settlement Work,” 1.

Mexican immigrants that she described lived hidden in poverty and segregated, or as a city official described it, “out of sight in the brush.”²⁸ The need to create a Catholic Settlement House to reach the impoverished Catholics began in 1901.



Figure 3. Mary Julia Workman. Circa 1885. Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University

²⁸ Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*, 110.



Figure 4. Mary Julia (Center) at College Settlement House. Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University

Social Justice In the Brownson House

Mary Julia Workman was in a meeting with the Ladies' Aid Society at Saint Vibiana's Cathedral, when priest, John J. Clifford (n.d.), suggested they establish a Catholic social workforce in the community, which began to work on the foundation of a Catholic settlement house in Los Angeles. Influenced by the Progressive Movement and inspired by the encyclical written by the Pope Leon XIII (1878–1903) entitled *Rerum Novarum*, the Brownson Settlement House was founded in 1901.²⁹

Brownson Settlement House started with a Sunday School program, led by volunteers and professionals and then introduced programs to improve living conditions at homes in the community. By September 1901, volunteers started making home visits with an

²⁹ In this apostolic letter, *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII called his parishioners to take a social attitude in the world. Besides the right to private property, and labor rights, the encyclical calls for civil associations for mutual aid.

average of 200 home visits in the neighborhoods each month.³⁰ Young immigrant women were taught housekeeping, washing, ironing, sewing, and cooking while young men were taught carpentry, for furniture making, and equipment was provided for them to use in their homes. Volunteers educated groups at the Brown Settlement House with various handy-work skills to be able to work in the factories. Workman stated that “the Settlement, based upon the principle of the unity of society, the brotherhood of many as an effort to overcome the segregation which takes place in modern centers of population where privileged and unprivileged classes become more and more widely separated by conditions of life.”³¹

On January 8, 1905, a new Brownson Settlement House building was inaugurated by Bishop Thomas Conaty (1847-1915) located at 711 Jackson Street in Los Angeles. The settlement house welcomed people from all nationalities and religions. Part of that inclusivity was neighborhood bathhouses where mothers could bring their families for weekly baths; mothers could bring their children to be examined by doctors, and they learned how to take care of not only themselves during pregnancy but their little ones.³² There were no religious obligations or requirements on who could benefit from Brownson services, religious rights were respected with no forced religious activities and the doors were open to any religious group. In this respect, the organization’s aim was to do constructive social work providing services such as health care and education. Their attendance was up to 1,000 visitors per week on average. This was due to the settlement house providing educational opportunities for children, a playground for children to

³⁰ “Know Your CYO,” Series 2, Box 3, Folder 9, Workman Research Materials, CSLA-35, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University, 2.

³¹ Maria Julia Workman, “The Brownson House,” 2.

³² “Seeking Aid for Babies,” Los Angeles Times, May 17, 1915, Series 2, Box 3, Folder 5, Workman Research Materials, CSLA-35, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

run around in, and milk distributions on behalf of the Municipal Child Welfare.

Volunteers provided job training for immigrants in addition to education and public health services. Workman stated, “Brownson House sees the need of developing workshops for industrial training along with practical work where unskilled adults who are handicapped or by the lack of skill or by ignorance of the language, etc., could secure suitable employment due developing a measure of efficiency.”³³ Unemployed immigrants, often Mexicans, gathered in a small park North of the plaza, meeting in great numbers, in hopes that a potential employer would hire them from the crowd.³⁴ Workman walked these streets and saw firsthand how Mexican workers were waiting to be hired. In most cases, they did not possess the necessary skills to work in factories and were hired in underpaid jobs. Their wages were small, but they were satisfied with steady employment.³⁵ Common among the immigrants was illiteracy, which meant they could not read, or speak English. Workman appealed to both the private and public sectors by writing in the Catholic magazine, *The Tidings*, in which she implored the readers to consider a solution to the problem of immigrant unemployment. Workman wrote, “This matter of Mexican unemployment has hardly been approached in Los Angeles and should be a matter of immediate and most serious consideration. It will have to be worked out by some public agency on a large scale with the cooperation of the public and private

³³ Mary Julia Workman, “Brownson House: A Centre of Social Service,” *The Tidings*, 59, Series 2, Box 3, Folder 8, Workman Research Material, CSLA-35, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

³⁴ Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza*, 116.

³⁵ John Emmanuel Kynlee, *Housing Conditions Among the Mexican Population of Los Angeles*, A Thesis Presented to the Department of Sociology, University of Southern California, April 27, 1912. Workman Research Materials, Series 2, Box 5, Folder 1, CSLA-35, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

forces of the community.”³⁶ She encouraged lay people’s work, as she stated that “there is a distinct need for Catholic men and women who will give personal service in constructive social work among the poor and foreign population.”³⁷

When the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) began, the population of Mexicans in the United States increased to 70,000 in 1915. Mexican immigrants arrived in the city looking for a place to live and work and they had a lack of health services, education, and work. Workman wrote, “The fact remains that foreign-born poor of our faith need special adequate work under Catholic auspices. We, Catholic lay workers, should be the first to recognize their need and the first to come to their assistance.”³⁸ For Workman the problem was not immigration, but rather how those immigrants adapted to a society that closed its doors to them. Workman’s suggestion for this problem was teaching how to survive in an Anglo-American society that kept marginalized communities cornered in a miserable way of life.

In the view of Workman, the Catholic Church forgot its mission to protect the poor. Workman wrote to her friend, Sister M. Leopold (n.d.), about her belief:

When a man or a woman is hungry, overworked or exploited, you cannot teach Catechism to him, you must first remedy his condition. When children live with eight or nine people in one room, you cannot expect the grace of First Communion to perform a miracle in every individual case and keep them decently moral.³⁹

³⁶ Mary Julia Workman, “Brownson House: A Centre of Social Service,” *The Tidings*, 59.

³⁷ Mary’s Letter XCIX, *Golden Friendship*, 232.

³⁸ Mary Julia Workman, “Brownson House; a Social Service Center,” *The Tidings*, 1916, 31.

³⁹ Mary’s Letter LXXXI, *Golden Friendship*, 210.

The relationship Workman had with the immigrant community led her to criticize the social situation in Mexico, as she wrote:

Catholic people and press, in their talk about Mexico, express no sympathy or interest in the political reform needed in Mexico, or in the achievement of liberty by the enslaved people of that unhappy land. Their only idea is the enforced subjection of the people in order that Church property and institutions may enjoy temporary security. It would be a false security, and a temporary one as history proves.⁴⁰

She saw people coming to Los Angeles, who were poor and sick who would later become her neighbors, students, and friends. She noticed and acknowledged the long struggle of the Mexican people toward the attainment of freedom and justice in Mexico. The Church saw only its interests which included safeguarding its power, and assets after the 1910s Mexican Revolution. From Workman's perspective, the Church in Mexico lacked social justice; she criticized the Church by writing, "Men cannot be economically enslaved and religiously free."⁴¹ She proclaimed, "The Church is eminently right in maintaining her freedom from governmental control, but she will be robbed of her influence if she is not associated in this instance with constructive plans for human betterment. At least, her influence should be clearly toward advancement in the realization of social justice and true liberty."⁴² To her, the Church began meddling in political conflicts leaving aside its true mission of social work, which is to promote the common good. Additionally, the Church ignored the needs of the people, even those who began following the anarchists and

⁴⁰ Mary's Letter CIV, Golden Friendship, 255.

⁴¹ Mary Julia Workman Letter to Bishop Cantwell, January 17, 1927, Series 1: Mary Julia Workman, Folder 1, box 1, Workman Family Papers, CSLA-9, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

⁴² Mary Julia Workman Letter to Bishop Cantwell, January 17, 1927.

socialists who promised a just society with bloody revolutions for those who have been oppressed by the government and wealthy institutions.



Figure 6. Brownson House Volunteers, Nurses and Doctors, Circa 1916. Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University

Socialism, Anarchism, and Americanization

Socialist and anarchist ideologies began to spread in Los Angeles in the late 1890s by Italian and Russian exiles, who took refuge in the city. As historian George Sanchez writes, “They brought with them leftist ideologies of anarchism, socialism, communism, or communitarianism, that would flourish in Boyle Heights in various labor unions and political organizations.”⁴³ This ideology against American capitalism and religion began to arrive in Los Angeles due to the teachings of ideologists such as the Mexican Anarchist,

⁴³ George J. Sánchez, *Boyle Heights: How a Los Angeles Neighborhood Became the Future of American Democracy*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2021), 46.

Ricardo Flores Magon (1873-1922) who criticized the economic system of the United States and tried to arm a guerilla in Southern California with the ultimate goal of invading Mexicali and other Mexican border cities. Magon criticized the mistreatment of workers by US employers and stressed the importance of having a society free of political institutions and economically autonomous. The Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM) incited the uprising against the bourgeoisie.⁴⁴ These acts alarmed the American government which decided to detain Ricardo Flores Magon in 1917.

Workman believed that this radical form of socialism and anarchism [that Ricardo Flores Magon incited] did not help the immigrants living in poverty. The poverty-stricken communities lacked social justice essentials such as education, healthcare, work, and fair housing. She argued that socialism came to destroy the essential values of society, such as the family. Workman wrote that “ideas are weapons and knowledge is power. During the past century, the weapon of false ideas has taken the arsenal of the human mind and turned against the children of God.”⁴⁵ She firmly stated that socialism and anarchism were the enemies of Christianity, though ironically, she sought to create awareness of social work and provide those in need with public services.

Mary Julia wanted all members of the Church to come together to give charity to those deemed the most in need: men and women in industries and urban settings. She sought to bring social leaders and priests together by organizing social activities with Catholic women who would be leading constructive missions in communities.⁴⁶ Influenced by the *Rerum Novarum* encyclical written by Pope Leon XIII, Workman wanted to reach every corner

⁴⁴ Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (TX: University of Texas Press, 1983), 94.

⁴⁵ Mary Julia Workman Letter. Serie 1: Mary Julia Workman, Box 2, Folder 20, Workman Family Papers. CSLA-9, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

⁴⁶ Mary J. Workman, “Brownson House Settlement Work,” *The Tidings*, Series 1: Mary Julia Workman, Box 4, Folder 1, Workman Family Papers, CSLA-9, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

of the city and bring social justice to the poor. As it is written in the Pope's letter, "God himself seems to incline to those who suffer misfortune; for Jesus Christ calls the poor blessed."⁴⁷

The social justice work carried out by Workman was based on her Christian belief that charity was to go primarily to those who were the neediest. She stated that the social reform done by the layman Catholic cannot be perfect, but they "can always strive to raise the social standard of living and give equal opportunities."⁴⁸ As she witnessed the many impoverished immigrants walking on the dusty streets of Los Angeles, she saw socialist ideologies growing in the city. As she noted, "In theory one would think that the weapon of atheism, and therefore materialism, could not be used successfully to destroy the traditional concept of man, all the more so since in scriptural language the man is a fool who says there is not God."⁴⁹ The Russian and Mexican revolutions had socialist overtones that were at their peak in 1917 when the First World War(1914-1918) in Europe began in 1914. Along with propaganda, such as revolutionary radical socialist books and pamphlets, the revolutions began to concern the US government and the mainstream capitalistic society because it was spreading in the industrial cities. This resulted in the increase of Americanization programs throughout the country, aimed at assimilating immigrants in the United States by removing any socialist or anarchist ideologies.

Americanization and social work went hand in hand at the Settlement House. Contrary to the historical narrative of Progressives leaders being educated, Anglo-Protestant, middle-

⁴⁷ Pope Leo XIII. Vatican, *Rerum Novarum: Encyclical Di Leone XIII Sulla Questione Operaia*. Lugano: Edizione a cura dell' Organizzazione cristano-sociale del canton Ticino per la celebrazione del LXX, 1961, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html (accessed July 4, 2021).

⁴⁸ Mary's Letter LXXXI, *Golden Friendship*, 210.

⁴⁹Mary Julia Workman Letter. Serie 1: Mary Julia Workman, Box 2, Folder 20, Workman Family Papers. CSLA-9, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

class people, Workman was a Catholic woman who led groups of women focused on helping immigrants seek social justice through humanitarian work which encompassed health, education, and labor freedoms. With her methods of cultural integration and social understanding, Workman was able to develop an Americanization program to implement among the Mexican immigrant community contrary to the mentality of conservative nativists that ignored and suppressed them in lower socioeconomic conditions. Workman suggested that people living in the United States needed to Americanize themselves to determine what kind of a person they should be. Workman wrote:

Brownson House is valuable to the community because it lives and labor close contact with its neighbors in the foreign sections of Los Angeles and gets their point of view because it develops a sympathetic co-operative effort which is the best mean for social advance because it is a neighborhood center for social, educational and preventive work.⁵⁰

Workman and the Brownson House volunteers used cultural integration methods during the teaching of the program, as they spoke Spanish, they provided history and civic classes to immigrants in their native languages to help them better understand the material. Workman always sought to empower the education of children at the Brownson House; she did this by encouraging them to read, and play learning games which helped their educational development. The Brownson library received up to 400 books for children's education, a portion of those books were in Spanish, used by Mexican children, which were donated by fellow Catholics. Workman was able to demonstrate that the

⁵⁰ Mary Julia Workman, "A Social Service Center," *The Tidings*, 1916, Box 14ov, Folder 08, Workman Family Papers, CSLA-9, Series 2, Box 4, Folder 14, Workman Research Materials, CSLA-35, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

national narratives surrounding a lack of intelligence, interests, and abilities that existed for immigrant Mexican children were wrong and due to the racial bias, that was originated by the ruling Anglo-American class. Public schools in Los Angeles segregated Mexican students from the rest of the children and demonstrated their bias on racial inferiority by modifying the students' curriculum, which emphasized gendered manual and domestic training for low-paying jobs rather than higher education for economic freedoms. Segregated classrooms were filled with underqualified teachers and the schools were in substandard facilities, which were poorly equipped with none of the necessary educational tools. The physical and intellectual space of schools became as segregated as the students. Mexican and Mexican-American students could not climb in society, based on a foundation of inequality due to systematic racism that was reinforced in the classroom. The language, hygiene, and special needs of Mexican students were the main reasons why segregation was practiced. Education such as after-school tutoring and book clubs were supplemented within Brownson House as Workman had the vision to not underestimate minorities and championed giving them the space and opportunity to learn and work for the common good in society.

Workman knew that education could open the doors for marginalized and oppressed young people in a systematically racist society that abandoned them and as a result, she pushed for Brownson House to be an educational space for families. Brownson House was open for teenagers and children seeking educational opportunities. Workman noted this when writing:

Brownson House is able to furnish dreams and air castles for children who live in mere shacks and have so little of material luxury is rather significant. It is the dream that helps one to live down the unhappy present condition; it is the dream that helps one to rise and find that air castle in some form or other later on. It is therefore significant that our

Mexicans are given an opportunity to dream and live-in castles in the sky, and one day from those dreams they will rise up above the shacks into the realms of the America's highest ideals.⁵¹

Workman further explained that the “Brownson House remembers this great basic fact in all its efforts for Americanization and seeks to preserve and strengthen the religious faith and practice of immigrants as the basis of good citizenship.”⁵² William J. Denney (n.d), from The Charity Organization Society, wrote that:

[He] was very impressed with the progressive spirit of these Catholic social workers. As for Brownson House, no social worker can visit it and talk with Miss Workman without coming away with the feeling that here is a social institution worthwhile, and that is designed to meet a real need and that is trying to give the best possible measure of genuine service.⁵³

In the end, boys and girls who grew up in the House's playgrounds wrote letters remembering the days of joys with volunteers and other children. Workman claimed that the “Brownson House has succeeded in listening to the beating hearts of a foreign people during the past years and with close attention has tried to provide correct channels for their repressed emotions can best be understood.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Mary Workman, Brownson House, November 22, 1919.

⁵² “Brownson House: A Centre of Americanization,” 48.

⁵³ William J. Denney, “The Charity Organization Society,” to Rev. Joseph S. Glass, Feb. 12, 1917. Series 1: Mary Julia Workman, Box 1, Folder 1, Workman Family Papers, CSLA-9, Series 2, Box 4, Folder 14, Workman Research Materials, CSLA-35, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

⁵⁴ Mary Workman, *Brownson House*, November 22, 1919.



Figure 7. Children at the Brownson Settlement House Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University



Figure 8. Classroom in the Brownson Settlement House. Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University

The Brownson House promoted unity and respect of Mexican immigrant culture and traditions because Workman looked beyond the societal narratives and included the value and contribution of immigrants to American society. She did not tolerate the prejudicial attitudes of racial superiority that were growing throughout the city and state. Growing up and working with minorities on the Eastside of Los Angeles allowed Workman to learn their language, culture, and traditions from them. She not only embraced Mexican Catholics, but she also worked hard to help other minorities living in Los Angeles.

During the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic in Los Angeles, monetary support was low because of World War I and anti-immigrant rhetoric in the city. The lack of monetary support included a lack of donations, especially for the Brownson House because many Americans did not want to help Mexican settlements due to a growing fear of their socialist ideology spreading from Mexico during the Mexican Revolution and causing the “Brown Scare,” stigmatizing all Mexicans who did not want to assimilate to American society as anti-Americans. This ongoing lack of monetary support to the Brownson House incited the new Bishop Joseph Cantwell (1874-1947) to centralize all the Catholic charities that he oversaw, which meant removing the presidency of the Brownson House from Mary Julia Workman. According to historian Francis Weber, “Cantwell did not believe in placing an ethnic label on charitable work. Bishop Cantwell believed that the ‘Brown Scare’ and the anti-Mexican feeling might discourage contributions.”⁵⁵ However, Brownson House demonstrated how the Mexican refugees in Los Angeles wanted to be good citizens and respected the values of American society, while still embracing their own native heritage.

⁵⁵ Romo, *East Los Angeles*, 100. The “Brown Scare” increased with the propaganda and speeches of the Hermano Flores Magon and his followers. The newspapers oversaw spreading the speeches and replicating the Regeneration articles. American society, in Los Angeles and the United States, were reading about the Anarchist ideology that they propagated and the revolutionary plots in the Southwest.

Centralization of the Brownson House

Bishop Cantwell believed that all Catholic charity was the responsibility of the diocese. In 1919, he established the Associated Catholic Charities to centralize power in a single institution governing all aid associations.⁵⁶ This shift mirrored a centralization of powers that was typical in political and social organizations during the Progressive Era. Similar to other leaders at the time, Bishop Cantwell believed that all facilities must be brought under the jurisdiction of a central office.⁵⁷ In a letter complaining about the Bishop's plans to centralize the charities, Workman wrote:

Diocesan Bureau of Charities' is written the need for unification is stressed and rightly so, but the dangers are pointed out as follows, viz., pioneer organizations should not be compelled to lose their individuality, and the Bureau must bring the charities together and not remain a financial agency only. Too much supervision, too much efficiency, may kill the spirit of Christian charity and harness the administration of charity to the paraphernalia of the steel industry or of a department store.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, Bishop Cantwell wanted to coordinate the work of all Catholic charities and institutions, which included seven orphanages, two clinics, the Brownson House, and other charitable organizations in the diocese. The Associated Catholic Charities was designed to modernize and increase charitable efficiency within their facilities, encouraging benefactions and establishing a

⁵⁶ Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 159.

⁵⁷ Francis J. Weber, *Century of Fulfillment: The Roman Catholic Church in Southern California, 1840-1947* (n.p., 1990) 424.

⁵⁸ Mary's Letter CIX, *Golden Friendship*, 263.

liaison with other public and private agencies.⁵⁹ The Association would spend money on the development of new programs and new facilities over the next two years, which included Americanization programs in the Brownson Settlement House.

Workman knew that the Brownson House was going to fall under the purview of the newly formed centralization of Catholic Charities, so she expressed her discontent by writing, “I believe in true scientific administration, but I value most the spirit of love, without which the most elaborate mechanism becomes a monster.”⁶⁰ Beyond a centralized government, Workman believed in social justice that exceeded efficient work which did not contribute to the social growth of the population. As she published in *The Tidings* magazine, “Under normal conditions Christian justice and charity would sacrifice for the healing of society. Under the abnormal conditions of desertion of Christian principles and a corrupt social system, it does not and cannot suffice to meet the claims upon it.”⁶¹ Some of the changes by Bishop John Cantwell (1874-1947) included the hiring of specialized personnel for the charities instead of utilizing the volunteers who had given years of service due to the love they had for their neighborhood. Furthermore, Bishop Cantwell suggested the Brownson House stop social work altogether and focus on religious work, stating “the dioceses will support immigrants with intense Americanization programs, and the function of the Brownson House should be purely religious such as religious instruction, and practices.”⁶²

After the centralization of charities, Mary Julia was relieved of her duties as President of Brownson House, which was then placed under the Association of Catholic Charities’ newly appointed director Rev. William E. Corr (1882–?). Father Corr

⁵⁹ Weber, *Century of Fulfillment*, 425. The Catholic Charities was named Associated Catholic Charities in 1919.

⁶⁰ Mary’s Letter CIX, *Golden Friendship*, 263.

⁶¹ Sociology, *The Tidings*, February 23, 1917, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

⁶² Mary’s Letter CVII, *Golden Friendship*, 260.

had served as director of charities in the diocese of Fall River prior to his migration to California.⁶³

The new objective of the organizations within the diocese was to increase charitable donations, expand its facilities, and improve those that were already established. Father Corr wanted to establish another larger center by the neighborhood adjacent to the Brownson House district by the Hogar Feliz house.⁶⁴ The diocese was able to increase the donation, due to the Bishop's relationship with conservative Catholics, and invested the money in the dioceses' religious work and the Americanization program.

The relationship between the Dioceses of Los Angeles and Brownson House Association began to fracture, in a memorandum dated November 30, 1919, it was stated that "Brownson House Settlement Association will continue to function in all the affairs of Brownson House in the future as in the past, subject to general direction and supervision of the Bureau of Catholic Charities."⁶⁵ Catholic Charities began to give priority to the Americanization programs and took over the expenses used at the Brownson House. Father Corr mandated Workman to leave the financial administration of Brownson House to the Dioceses stating, "Rt. Rev. Bishop agrees to have the Los Angeles Division of the National Catholic War Council take over all expenses of the Brownson House during the year beginning December 1st."⁶⁶

⁶³ Michael E. Engh, S.J. "A Better Realization of Social Justice: Mary Julia Workman, Los Angeles Progressive," 15 Serie 1, Box 2, Folder 9, Workman Research Materials, CSLA-35, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

⁶⁴ Our Diocesan Charities, *The Tidings*, Serie 1, Box 2, Folder 1, Workman Research Materials, CSLA-35, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

⁶⁵ Memorandum, November 30, 1919. Serie 1: Mary Julia Workman, Folder 1, box 1, Workman Family Papers, CSLA-9, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

⁶⁶ Rev. Corr to Mary Julia Workman, December 4, 1919. Serie 1: Mary Julia Workman, Folder 1, box 1, Workman Family Papers, CSLA-9, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

Workman commented that “On January 31, our Treasure (Miss Bernard) was told that no more expenses of Brownson House will be paid by Father Corr’s office until a more satisfactory agreement has been reached by him.” In this way, Workman complained to the bishop about the negative actions taken against the Brownson House. She elaborated that “we understand that it was your wish as owner of the property we occupy at present, therefore, we are paying our own expenses. We have a brief sense of freedom once more.” After this point, Workman no longer respectfully took the decisions of her superiors, due to the humiliations and rudeness to which she was subjected to by Father Corr. It was in a letter to Bishop Cantwell where she wrote her feelings and desire to resign, “I shall give up everything, even my last desire that the name of Brownson House pass with us, if you will let me go. What we have done has been done holy for lord’s glory and I shall offer him the sacrifice of all our dear dead hopes.”⁶⁷

Describing what was happening in Los Angeles, Workman wrote to her friend Sister Mary Leopold in Oakland that “Brownson House is doomed.”⁶⁸ After Workman let her feelings be known, Bishop Cantwell offered her a paid secretary position which she rejected based on her beliefs that labor was voluntary and reflected the love she had for the people and children who were oppressed in this country. Workman wrote that “Father Corr believes that he has offered us much and that it has been refused. My refusal of the position as paid Secretary at the Bureau, for one thing, will forever stand against us; also, my rejection of a stereotyped building offered, on Pleasant Avenue. But even if we accepted all this, Brownson House would have lost its individuality, and so would have died in its finer values.”⁶⁹

The centralization plan served to acquire more funds, regardless of social service. In the Brownson Settlement House, the funds gathered aimed to support an Americanization program aligned with what the United States government was doing to

⁶⁷ Mary Julia Workman to Bishop Cantwell, February 8, 1920.

⁶⁸ Mary’s Letter CXII, *Golden Friendship*, 269

⁶⁹ Mary’s Letter CXII, *Golden Friendship*, 269

emphasize nationalism during World War I. The program, and others like it, sought to create a cultural and societal mentality to fight against radical Socialism that was spreading across the streets of industrial cities in the 1910s. Bishop Cantwell guaranteed Americanization work for immigrants, which Workman criticized in a report, “Until 1917, and the world war, moreover, the word Americanization was not in the popular vocabulary; the conditions of the immigrants was known to an interested few, only joined to all this difficulty of being unknown was the added obstacle of prejudice against the Mexican even among his American co-religionists.”⁷⁰ The Brownson House survived struggles against many odds. Volunteers taught themselves about foreigners, and their culture so they in turn could educate those who supported their work about the immigrants and refugees they served. They had to not only learn about but understand refugees and immigrants who partook in their services and gain their confidence. Brownson House was financially poor, but still provided an adequate settlement house and services to many underserved communities.

The spirit of the Brownson House, wrote Mary Julia Workman, “was a spirit of cooperation and service; a spirit of welcome of neighborhood, of generous willingness to work with its neighborhood and with every beneficial social force in the community.”⁷¹ The process in which the Americanization program was introduced, and the modified bureaucracy were her triggers for leaving Brownson House. Workman lamented that “the pioneer has a certain satisfaction when others find the trail which he has blazed, so we can rejoice today that the need of the immigrant is being recognized. Our hope for success shall attend the newly elected Directors of Brownson House Settlement Association and the whole plan for the diocese.”⁷²

It was in that summer of 1920, when the Brownson House ceased to be what it had once been, a voluntary based settlement

⁷⁰ Mary Julia Workman, Handwritten President Report, On June 6, 1920.

⁷¹ Mary Julia Workman, Handwritten President Report, On June 6, 1920.

⁷² Mary Julia Workman, Handwritten President Report, On June 6, 1920.

house to part of the larger Catholic Charities association as Workman recalled, “There has been an unbroken inner harmony at Brownson House, due to the unselfish devotion of each worker which has been the strength of the organization.”⁷³ After the centralization, the volunteers decided to move away from the house, leaving behind an institution that failed to reach the immigrants and poverty-stricken refugees in the city. After the Brownson Settlement House, Bishop Cantwell asked Workman to become a diocesan representative for the National Council of Catholic Women and be part of the conference of the Catholic Workers of the diocese to which she did not respond. By 1921, the Catholic Charities association was restructured as the Bureau of Catholic Charities, and Father Corr was removed from his charge as Director of the Charities and a new Director was appointed, Father Robert Lucey (1801-1977), who later became Bishop of San Antonio, Texas in 1934. Reverend Lucey asked Workman to return to Brownson House however she refused the position, and The Sister of the Holy Family who oversaw the new Brownson House took over the settlement house and their services.

Mary Julia Workman: Beyond the Brownson House

After the Brownson House, Workman was involved in a long list of both Catholic and civic charitable organizations. In 1922, she was a part of the Native American Concerns. By 1925, she became a Civil Service Commission member. In 1926, she organized and presided over the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, and she became a member of the Municipal League and League of Women Voters. On November 19, 1926, Workman received the “Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice,” from Pope Pius XI (1857-1939). The Supreme Pontiff conferred the honor of bestowing that decoration on Mary Julia Workman and Queen María Cristina of Spain. The recognition came directly from the Vatican and extolled the charitable missionary work of Workman on behalf of the Church.

⁷³ Mary Julia Workman, Handwritten President Report, On June 6, 1920.

Pope Pius XI publicly acknowledged her charitable and social work done in Los Angeles.⁷⁴ Her acquaintances, who lived and saw her hard work at Brownson House sent letters congratulating her. One of the letters written by Attorney Joseph Scott (n.d) noted, “Your life has been spent in self-sacrifice and service to duty to such a degree that it would do credit to a person who has consecrated her life by religious vows”⁷⁵ Reverend Siedenburg (n.d) from Chicago wrote, “I know no woman in America who deserves this honor more than you do and it was great satisfaction to know that your work has been appreciated by the whole Catholic Church.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, in 1935, she was the second Vice President of the Municipal Light and Power Defense League.

From a progressive platform, Workman did not put her faith aside, she used it as a tool for understanding as it was Progressive Catholicism that led her to give her life to the advocacy for disadvantaged communities and aided in her search for social justice. Mary Julia Workman was a tireless woman that worked in defense of marginalized and persecuted people within her community and city. She was a member of the Democratic Party and fought actively in political campaigns in the 1930s and 1940s. When World War II (1939-1945) began, she became the chapter officer of the League of Nations Association. By 1939, she became part of the American Committee for Peace through Democracy. In 1943, she became actively working to defend the Japanese Americans against concentration camps. In 1944, she

⁷⁴ Pope Honors Holy Names Graduate for Welfare Work, *The Tidings*, November 23, 1926, Series 1: Mary Julia Workman Box 1, Folder 3, Workman Family Papers, CSLA-9, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

⁷⁵ Joseph Scott to Mary Julia Workman, Nov 18, 1926, Series 1: Mary Julia Workman Box 1, Folder 3, Workman Family Papers, CSLA-9, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

⁷⁶ Reverend Frederick Siedenburg to Mary Julia Workman, December 20, 1919, Series 1: Mary Julia Workman Box 1, Folder 3, Workman Family Papers, CSLA-9, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

Seeking Social Justice

became a member of the Catholic Inter-Racial Council and fought for the defense of African Americans. She was a member of the National Conference of Christians and Jews and in 1946, she worked with Father George Dunne (n.d) who was a prominent activist and writer, to help fight against racial segregation and discrimination in America.⁷⁷ Workman also became involved in the Hollywood Strike in 1946 with Reverend Dunne, advocating for fair labor laws in the film industry. Mary J. Workman's unwavering dedication, relationships, and work with not only the immigrant communities during the Progressive Era but with marginalized communities within the city must be recognized for its historical value within the Catholic Church, the City of Los Angeles, and women's studies.



Figure 9. Mary Julia Workman Circa 1918 Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University

⁷⁷ Eric Pace, "George Dunne, 92, Priest and Ecumenist, Dies," *The New York Times*, July 14, 1998, accessed March 2, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/07/14/us/george-dunne-92-priest-and-ecumenist-dies.html>

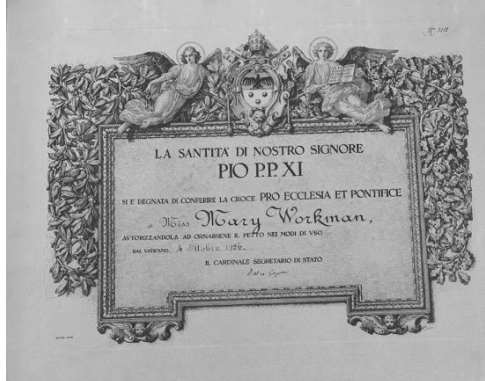


Figure 10. Pro Ecclesia Et Pontifice, Vatican Certificate Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University



Figure 11. Los Angeles Times Article. Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University



Figure 12: Brownson House Volunteers with Children. Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

On January 12, 1964, Workman at the age of ninety-one died in Los Angeles, California. Workman challenged social and clerical barriers in favor of those in need, through her work, she was able to bring brief social justice to Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles. The Brownson House sought true progress for foreign-born individuals by providing education, public health, jobs, and social services. Unlike other settlement houses, Brownson Settlement House treated immigrants respectfully, learning about their culture and language to help them. Americanization was with mutual respect and was not a conditioned assimilation. Immigrants were welcome regardless of their religion and race. While in some settlement houses, religious conversion and the loss of each individual's cultural identity was the norm.

Workman went against repressive and racist manifestations of the time. She is an example of American Catholics who sought the common good among the impoverished. She was able to work with both Catholics and outside religions who shared similar progressive ideas. For nineteen years, the Brownson Settlement House was staffed by young women such as Mary Julia Workman,

who responded to poverty in the city. Workman walked through the city's slums where she saw people in need, she spoke, lived, and prayed with them, understanding their language and culture.

Workman worked to break the barriers of systematic invisibility that people with disabilities had, who were marginalized from society and discriminated against because of their physical condition. Contrary to the eugenics ideology, Mary J. Workman advocated for respecting the individual's life and giving value to people. She considered that the social context was a factor that determined how a person with weaknesses could be rehabilitated and help social progress. The Brownson House clinics served to provide health and rehabilitation support to disabled people. Going against the eugenics movement that started during the Progressive Era, she had respect for life and for those with disabilities. She defied the eugenic ideologists who supported that only physically perfect immigrants were able to fit into American society.

She challenged the nativist and nationalist rhetoric of Americanization used to harass immigrants and indigenous people to force them to leave behind their culture, traditions, and language and assimilate into Anglo-American culture. At Brownson House, English was important to survive on the city streets, but the native languages of immigrants were important to learn and aided in bilingual education. The culture and traditions of immigrants were recognized and respected. Therefore, it was important that the Catholic Church recognize Mexican traditions and the religious syncretism from which people exercised in their country and contributed to their devotion to the Church.

The official history of the Los Angeles Dioceses has ignored and underestimated Workman's legacy in the Catholic Church of California. In all books published by the Dioceses, archivist and historian, Monsignor Francis Weber, Mary J. Workman has been ignored and any recognition for what she had done has also been ignored. In some cases, when Weber mentioned Brownson House in books, he downplayed how successful it was during the almost two decades of its existence in Los Angeles. In

the book written by Weber, *Catholic Heroes of Southern California* (2007), he writes about several prominent Catholics but blatantly ignores Workman. In the Diocese archives there are no letters from Cantwell to Workman, no Brownson House records or mentions of Mary Julia, therefore, it is difficult to find archives, documents, or official records related to her, or her work within the Diocese Archives; however, Workman had the forethought to keep documents that were later transferred to relatives.

In 1929, Sister Leopold published a book of letters written by Mary Julia's friends at Holy Names Convent in Oakland, California. This compilation of personal letters from Workman reflects her intimate feelings about the situation she experienced during her conflict with the clergy of the Diocese. When the book was published, Father Corr's name was censored due to his position as a practicing priest at St. Elizabeth Catholic Church in Altadena, California, as a result, he was named as "Father X." The book was banned within the Diocese of Los Angeles in 1926 due to the negative criticism of the Catholic Church and Father X. The few surviving copies of the book are a primary source on the life of Workman, and from these letters, we can gain an intimate insight into her life during this period.

Workman's life and accomplishments have been kept in boxes down in archives as the Catholic Church has not recognized her work in society. The Church has forgotten Workman's vision for social justice, and the liberation of the oppressed through education, work, and health. She observed the needs of the poor and the marginalized, understood their ways of life, and learned from them. She did not agree with the centralization of charitable institutions because she knew that it was a bureaucracy that sought only to increase financial resources rather than benefit society. She was decisive in breaking the barrier of respect for the clergy by resigning and rejecting the proposal to become Father Corr's secretary and being unable to lead and make her own decisions at Brownson Settlement House. The gender dynamics that were prevalent throughout society and the church imposed a conflict between the priest who had belittled the volunteers who, for almost

twenty years, had administered and served the most destitute in Los Angeles. At this point of her life, Workman put aside the values of submission and obedience taught in her adolescence to raise her voice and consolidate her leadership with the other volunteers.

Although the dogma of the Church is inviolable, the Church must give women an equal place within the institution and recognize their leadership both in the Church and in society. Women have managed to sustain the foundations of the Church, which is charity and love for the most unprotected and poverty-stricken, such as Teresa de Avila (1515-1582) in Europe, Elizabeth Seaton (1774-1821) in the United States, and Mary Julia Workman in California.

The Catholic Church in Los Angeles is the largest diocese in the United States and the most ethnically diverse and has understood that its social work in the poor sectors of the city encompasses all communities and with 'Together in Mission' it has embraced ethnic and cultural diversity creating a multicultural church trying to reach the impoverished. In 2020, Pope Francis called for social justice for the unprotected and helpless, and the need to understand their suffering, which is something Workman called for and *did* in the city of Los Angeles' over a hundred years ago through the Brownson Settlement House and her many other social justice efforts.

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