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"To End This Day of Strife": Churchwomen and the Campaign for Integration, 1920-1970

Janine Marie Denomme
University of Pennsylvania

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"To End This Day of Strife": Churchwomen and the Campaign for Integration, 1920-1970

Abstract

"'To End This Day of Strife': Churchwomen and the Campaign for Integration, 1920-1970," explores the development and significance of a race relations agenda within a national interdenominational and interracial organization of women, known today as Church Women United (CWU). This project examines the role the organization played in the expansion of a moral language of race that reached across region, race and denomination. The keys to this expansion were twofold: First, the participation of African American churchwomen in the organization from its beginnings stimulated dialogue and action; and second, the missionary legacy of white churchwomen, which, despite its initial imperialist assumptions, introduced churchwomen to a religious idiom and intellectual experience that embraced cultural diversity. Black churchwomen pursued membership in CWU as a potential avenue to a more fully integrated American society. As they did, they challenged white churchwomen to take moral responsibility for race relations and supplanted the prominent black stereotypes held by white America.

Using primarily the organization's national papers housed at the General Commission on Archives and History at Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, this project contributes to recent scholarship on the civil rights movement. It explores the more intimate aspects of its unknown players and expands the periodization of the struggle as well as the limited literature on women's role in the movement. "To End this Day of Strife" examines the multiple interpretations of racial integration for various groups of citizens. In particular, it considers the moments when white and African American churchwomen's pursuit of racial integration conflicted and coalesced with each other. The participation by CWU in the antecedents of as well as what is considered the actual civil rights movement provides a valuable context to understand better the place of religion in twentieth century American history.

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**“TO END THIS DAY OF STRIFE”:
CHURCHWOMEN AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR INTEGRATION, 1920-1970**

Janine Marie Denomme

A DISSERTATION
in
American Civilization
Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
2001



Supervisor of Dissertation



Supervisor of Dissertation



Graduate Group Chairperson

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2001**

Acknowledgments

Many academics, including myself, have described the years of writing one's dissertation, at least in part, in terms that include isolation. The realization that there is no blueprint to follow, no exact formula and no direct path to the conclusion of one's research, can be experienced with profound angst. Those days when the pages seem to write themselves have been interspersed with just as many days (if not more) of peering at an empty screen and begging for inspiration from a scholarly muse. Those glorious moments when a light bulb goes on, the planets align and another chapter comes to an end often seem distant and too few.

On the other hand, although this section of the dissertation is "optional" according to Penn's Dissertation Manual, it is in no way optional for me. Many individuals and institutions have consistently reminded me that I do not work in isolation. Time and again, if I simply reached for the phone or sent a quick plea over the electronic airwaves, calling on someone for help, I was met with kindness, support, encouragement and, on those really good days, a hot meal. It is far too easy to focus on the difficulties involved in such a project as this one but entirely necessary to thank the many people who had a hand in the completion of this work.

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benefited profoundly because of your input. Kathy, I thank you for your personal support as well. I have often thought of you as a midwife as you coached me through this “birthing process.” I will always be grateful to you. Thanks also go to Drew Gilpin Faust for her willingness to work with me despite the many demands upon her. I must also add that I have had the wonderful honor to have taught for Tom, Kathy and Drew. All three have gifted me with superb models of teaching - both in and outside the classroom. I aspire to impact my students as much as they do. Last but not least, I would like to thank Barbara Savage who has also accompanied me on this journey.

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ABSTRACT

“TO END THIS DAY OF STRIFE”: CHURCHWOMEN AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR INTEGRATION, 1920-1970

by
Janine Marie Denomme
Supervised by Kathleen M. Brown and Thomas Sugrue

“‘To End This Day of Strife’: Churchwomen and the Campaign for Integration, 1920-1970,” explores the development and significance of a race relations agenda within a national interdenominational and interracial organization of women, known today as Church Women United (CWU). This project examines the role the organization played in the expansion of a moral language of race that reached across region, race and denomination. The keys to this expansion were twofold: First, the participation of African American churchwomen in the organization from its beginnings stimulated dialogue and action; and second, the missionary legacy of white churchwomen, which, despite its initial imperialist assumptions, introduced churchwomen to a religious idiom and intellectual experience that embraced cultural diversity. Black churchwomen pursued membership in CWU as a potential avenue to a more fully integrated American society. As they did, they challenged white churchwomen to take moral responsibility for race relations and supplanted the prominent black stereotypes held by white America.

Using primarily the organization’s national papers housed at the General Commission on Archives and History at Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, this project contributes to recent scholarship on the civil rights movement. It explores the more intimate aspects of its unknown players and expands the periodization of the struggle as well as the limited literature on women’s role in the movement. “To End this Day of Strife” examines the multiple interpretations of racial integration for various groups of

citizens. In particular, it considers the moments when white and African American churchwomen's pursuit of racial integration conflicted and coalesced with each other. The participation by CWU in the antecedents of as well as what is considered the actual civil rights movement provides a valuable context to understand better the place of religion in twentieth century American history.

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Introduction

This began as a history of an organization known today as Church Women United. More specifically, it began as a history of the group's pursuit of better race relations within their own organization as well as beyond. Having emerged in 1941 as an interdenominational and interracial organization, Church Women United (CWU) offered me an excellent window through which to examine the postwar civil rights movement and the intersection of historical issues I consider among the most important: African Americans' pursuit of justice, women's social movements and the historical impact of religious faith on people's lives. As I began to examine the CWU papers, however, my interest and focus shifted so as to include the twenty plus years preceding the churchwomen's constituting convention. I became concerned with trying to answer why a women's national interracial organization had developed in 1941 with a mission for racial justice. What had led these churchwomen, mostly white, to begin including race relations in their array of missionary pursuits? For reasons related to their faith, class and gender, these white women began to recognize the incongruence between their articulation of their Christian faith, which proclaimed all human beings children of God, and the state of inequality and injustice among African Americans. In addition, it became more and more difficult for white women to ignore African American women who continued to call on them for assistance in resolving the myriad problems that plagued black communities north and south. These problems included lynching, housing, jobs, poverty, education and access to the ballot. Although white churchwomen in no way responded to all of these problems immediately, especially to voting rights, over time

Church Women United grew to include all of these issues in their agenda.

Because most of the churchwomen who preceded, founded and became members of CWU were products of the white Christian church, I feel it necessary to make a few remarks about the historical literature on white Christianity and race relations. The historical acquiescence by the white church to political, social and legal measures, which have systematically disallowed African Americans from partaking fully in all realms of life in the United States, must be understood at the very least as a historical subject if not also a spiritual atrocity. Accordingly, historians have most often examined Christianity and its relationship to racial injustice when the church, its teachings or its institutions have somehow been used to develop and uphold racist ideology and practices. The very real nature of the white church's historical propensity either to actively encourage or ignore racial discriminations, however, has inhibited historians from exploring any other role white Christians' religious faith may have played. Unfortunately, this has made for a paucity of understanding regarding the religious motivation for many white racial progressives. Although scholars have examined the relationship of the Black Church to the civil rights movement, the role of Christianity among white progressives and interracial groups remains understudied. Finally, the widely held position by Americanists that religion took a decreasing role in individuals' lives as the twentieth century progressed, has further inhibited scholars from pursuing arguments that contradict this stance. For all these reasons, historians have failed to account for the central role of morality in the twentieth century race relations discussion and for the

powerful force it often played for those who fought for racial justice.¹

To End This Day of Strife augments the literature that illuminates how and why some white church people began to apply morality to racial injustices in the period following World War I. More specifically, it examines the development of a moral impetus for pursuing racial justice among a distinct group of churchwomen. Church Women United originated in 1941 as the United Council of Church Women (UCCW) after a lengthy negotiation between nationally and locally organized missionary women. During the twenty some years preceding UCCW's constituting convention, much of the groundwork was laid for the churchwomen's organization to embrace race relations as one of its

¹This said, however, there is an impressive and growing body of literature on the impact of Christianity and church affiliation on women's attempts to impact the nature of U.S. race relations from which I have greatly benefited. This literature includes the work of John McDowell, *The Social Gospel in the South: The Woman's Home Missionary Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1886-1939* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Campaign Against Lynching*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974); Alice G. Knotts, *Fellowship of Love: Methodist Women Changing American Racial Attitudes, 1920-1968*, (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1996); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Nancy Robertson, "'Deeper Even Than Race'?: White Women and the Politics of Christian Sisterhood in the Young Women's Christian Association," New York University dissertation, 1997; Susan Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times: Racial Justice, Peace, and Feminism, 1945 to the 1960s* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Susan Hartmann, *The Other Feminists: Activists in the Liberal Establishment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*; Mary E. Frederickson, "'Each One Is Dependent on the Other': Southern Churchwomen, Racial Reform, and the Process of Transformation, 1880-1940," *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

primary concerns within its first few years of existence.

This dissertation argues that four central components converged in the years after World War I and among some white churchwomen, leading them to designate good interracial relations as a Christian goal. Three of those components, churchwomen's history of missionary work, the impetus to organize interdenominationally at both the local and national levels, and the influence of the Federal Council of Churches and its social gospel ideals, each serve as the focus of one of the first three chapters. The fourth component, the challenge by African American churchwomen to white churchwomen to take responsibility for better race relations, served as the consistent backdrop behind the other three components. African American women's influence is therefore woven throughout the first three chapters beginning with Chapter One, which opens with a story that has already been told in a few places but bears repeating. In 1920, in Memphis, four African American women stood before a group of one hundred white women and questioned them regarding their lack of outreach to blacks. The white women, mostly members of the Methodist Women's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South listened to the black women's stories of discrimination, injustice and hope. The African American women called on the white women to respond to the poverty, illiteracy and violence plaguing the black communities. In the moment, the white women responded and the Southern Methodist women established a committee to address race relations. Their commitment to racial justice, not surprisingly, often fell short of the African American women's expectations, but the event was significant for the door it opened for white women to begin accepting African American women as their equals and

to begin acknowledging the race problem as a white problem. Furthermore, the black women did not disappear. They continued to challenge white women, north and south. The movement to organize nationally across denominations became a potential site for African American churchwomen to pursue racial justice while pressing white churchwomen to join them and accept the cause as their own.

Chapter One proceeds from a premise already well argued: white churchwomen's long history of missionary work, both at home and in foreign fields, introduced them to a language and appreciation of pluralism. The chapter extends this argument, stating that missionary women began to apply their language and appreciation of pluralism to black-white relations during the 1920s. As local missionary women expanded their programs to include community services and foreign missionary women embraced a World Friendship philosophy, the women transformed their missiology and began to perceive former "clients" as equals. The World Day of Prayer, a day when Christian women world-wide gathered to pray for home and foreign missions, further broke down the divisions between peoples and opened avenues for missionary women to accept U.S. race relations as a missionary cause.

After World War I, missionary women in local societies began to campaign for a national interdenominational organization. Chapter Two argues that this organizational development among churchwomen served to further redefine missions to include race relations by bringing local and national groups of churchwomen together to share their visions and intent for missionary work. Furthermore, by establishing a national, interdenominational organization, churchwomen provided the necessary networks to

promote interracial fellowship across denominational, regional and racial lines. Although two such organizations were already in place, the Council of Women for Home Missions (CWHM) and the Federation of Women's Boards for Foreign Missions (FWBFM), the two had little input from local women who actually carried out the programs designed by the national churchwomen. When the CWHM and the FWBFM dragged their heels over launching a new organization that would include local constituents, the local women spearheaded their own group and the national women were forced to either join them or lose their support. In addition, as denominations subsumed their women's missionary boards under their general missionary programs during the 1920s, churchwomen grew increasingly vocal about their restricted role in the church. Their frustration surfaced as they attempted to organize against the wishes of churchmen, many of whom preferred that the women remain within the prescribed boundaries of local churches or church councils, both controlled by male clergy. These early attempts to assert their agenda, either as churchwomen or as advocates for programs more suitable for local conditions, reflected the strength and will power necessary during the inter-war period to initiate any program that supported racial justice or better race relations.

Churchwomen were not the only ones organizing interdenominationally after World War I. In fact, the Federal Council of Churches (FCC), a national union of the mainline Protestant denominations, had originated in 1908. Furthermore, the churchwomen were not the first white Protestants to begin applying moral and Christian principles to racial injustices. The FCC, which was predominantly white, also began to do so following World War I. The Federal Council's story, which includes the intellectual context of the

social gospel and cooperative Christianity, provides further context for why some white churchwomen began speaking about race as a moral issue in the 1920s. Significantly, the national CWHM and the FWBFM worked closely with the FCC and so drew on its intellectual resources. Prominent churchwomen often served both the FCC and one of the national missionary organizations and so there was a lot of intellectual “traffic” between the groups. Finally, the Women’s Committee of the FCC’s Commission on the Church and Race Relations was perhaps the first national interracial women’s group that specifically organized to address race relations. The Women’s Committee developed in 1926 as interracial and interdenominational and its story and influence is the focus of Chapter Three. When UCCW emerged in 1941, the Women’s Committee’s Executive Secretary, Katherine Gardner, was instrumental in establishing a race relations agenda within the new organization. Because the history of the Federal Council of Churches is crucial to this narrative, its work on race will be further explored later in this Introduction. Although their numbers were few early on, once UCCW emerged in 1941, African American churchwomen’s influence grew within the organization. Their role in creating a political consciousness regarding race within UCCW is the subject of Chapter Four. As church leaders, wives and mothers, African American churchwomen took the suffering they themselves endured, as well as the abuses wrought against their children and communities, and politicized it for themselves and for white churchwomen. With their written and spoken words, their leadership roles within UCCW and their initiation of actions, African American members introduced white women to the horrors, disrespect and injustices suffered by blacks. Because of who they were, educated,

middle-class and respectable women, African American churchwomen were able to gain the sympathy and indignation of white UCCW members. Their presence and leadership within the organization shaped the discussion as well as the programs created by UCCW.

Chapter Five examines the work and political tactics by which UCCW women approached race relations. By exploring their programs and activities, the legislation they supported, the organizations with which they were affiliated and the literature they produced, the chapter places them in the historical context of the civil rights movement while comparing them to other organizations. Although these women embraced more traditional forms of political strategies, including lobbying their legislators, facilitating interracial workshops and home visits, and relying on moral persuasion, they participated in both the antecedents to and the subsequent civil rights movement. For example, UCCW women joined with the National Council of Negro Women, as well as Jewish and Catholic women, to travel to Mississippi during the summers of 1964 and '65 in response to Mississippi African American women who feared the potential for violence. With hundreds of college students and organizers converging on the state to register voters and establish Freedom Schools, the local blacks understood only too well how resistant to change many of the Mississippi whites were. These same organizations also cooperated to implement Women in Community Service (WICS), an initiative of President Johnson's War on Poverty and the Job Corps of the Office of Economic Opportunity. For the most part, however, these were not women who took to the streets in protest of racial injustices, although many took part in local open housing marches as well as the March on Washington in 1963. Their activities were many, but perhaps the most important

difference UCCW made is, in the end, immeasurable. In biblical terms, which they would appreciate, one might understand these churchwomen, who were mostly white, as John the Baptist, that is, the one who went before the Christ to prepare the way. They created the climate for other whites to examine their personal attitudes about race and for the country to remedy at least some of its unjust laws. Although the civil rights movement did in no way resolve the country's racial problems, and can therefore be understood as limited, the changes from 1940 to 1970 were in fact immense. At least a small part of those changes are due to the courage of white and African American churchwomen who dared to question the environments into which they were born and raised.

In trying to assess where to place these women on the political spectrum from radical to conservative, it has been necessary to examine other organizations and their proclivities for acting on behalf of racial justice. The determination of an organization's progressive nature is, in part, the timing of its decision to respond to African Americans' demands for civil rights. In making that determination, however, it must first be acknowledged that none of the white or interracial organizations with white leadership were "ahead of their time." In fact, acts on behalf of racial justice have come all too late in this country. Despite the fact that UCCW churchwomen may have responded to racial inequalities prior to most white Americans, African Americans had waited (and continue to wait) far too long for the U.S. to allow blacks to assume the rights that were already theirs.

* * * * *

The Federal Council of Churches and a moral language of race

White churchwomen's association with and exposure to the Federal Council of Churches must be taken into account in any analysis of the churchwomen's shift in racial attitudes and programs promoting good race relations. Their alliance with the FCC served as a major impetus to revise their understanding regarding their responsibility for racial injustices. The churchwomen's relationship with the Council and its message of social obligation functioned as a foundation upon which the women expanded their missiology and explored their potential for a national organization that would reach across denominational, regional and racial lines. The churchwomen witnessed as the FCC, soon after its formation, became known as the progressive voice of Protestantism, prompting a number of churches to remove themselves from its membership when they concluded the Council was too radical in its application of the social gospel. Following World War I, the women observed as the FCC initiated a specific commission on race relations and began to seriously explore the moral relationship between Christianity and the color line. As the churchwomen followed suit, they developed a missiology incorporating these new initiatives, they expanded their moral language regarding race, and they instituted the beginnings of a national organization uniting churchwomen across denominational, regional and racial boundaries.

Early attempts by the FCC to respond to the country's racial problems culminated in a 1925 conference, the first of its kind according to the Council:

For the first time in America an Interracial Conference of White and colored people from many states and localities, representing many organizations, has met to consider the problems arising out of relations of white and Negro people in

America and their experiences in trying to apply the principles, policies and methods of understanding and goodwill to them. The Conference was called jointly by the Commission on the Church and Race Relations of the Federal Council of Churches and the Commission on Interracial Cooperation.²

The conference grew out of the same context that, in part, engendered some white missionary women to begin acknowledging race as a moral issue and to initiate race related programs in the years following World War I. Two movements, the social gospel and cooperative Christianity, especially shaped this context and elicited attempts by churchwomen and men to improve race relations. The social gospel and cooperative Christianity each emerged within evangelical Protestantism at the end of the nineteenth century. Although both expressed the traditional hope for the Christianization of the nation, argues at least one scholar, they also represented a departure from former models of church organization, teaching and activity.³ Advances in scientific thinking in numerous fields prompted religious intellectuals to develop new insights regarding faith and its application and thereby encouraged the development of a race relations agenda. The Federal Council of Churches (FCC), the major representation of the interdenominational campaign, advocated that Protestant churches both wrestle with the application of the social gospel to questions of race and join forces with each other in a cooperative effort to advance the Christian conquest. Although white churchmen initially led both movements

²George Edmund Haynes, "A National Interracial Conference," News release from the Federal Council of Churches, 1925, 1. RG 18, Box 80, file 11, National Council of Churches Collection, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA (hereafter NCC archives).

³Robert T. Handy, *A Christian American: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities*. 2nd ed., rev. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 134.

in cooperative Christianity and the social gospel, many African American churchmen and white and African American churchwomen also participated in their development and expansion. As churchwomen advocated a more significant place for themselves in the interdenominational movement, they also adapted it for their own purposes when they found the male-led campaigns inadequate and when their individual churches did not respond to these new initiatives.

Many historians have characterized the social gospel as a response to urban-industrial problems at the end of the nineteenth century, and thus a new phenomenon in evangelical Protestantism at the time. Depicting the social gospel movement as the churches' Progressive Era reaction to increased urbanization, industrialization and immigration, they have also concluded that the movement ignored racial problems and focused on economic issues. Others, however, have argued for the social gospel's origins in antebellum voluntary societies. By linking the social gospel prophets at the turn of the century to abolitionists and antebellum home missionaries, these historians have instead been able to draw out a tradition of social Christianity and its response to race relations which predates the Progressive era. Ralph Luker, one such historian, posits three traditions of racial reform during the nineteenth century and argues that it is the diversity of these responses to racial injustices by social Christians which have confused historians. The movement's lack of cohesiveness, both in its understanding of the problem and in its formulation of a solution, served to erase the movement's significance to race relations for many scholars, argues Luker. The reality however, suggests that social Christianity, although its emphasis remained primarily on economic issues, especially capitalism's

effects on workers, did develop a critique of racial injustices in response to the racial crises at the turn of the century, including disfranchisement, lynching, peonage and race riots.⁴ In addition, social Christianity helped create a context for white church members to recognize their moral obligation to respond to such injustices. Although such responses may have been conservative earlier in the twentieth century, such a context eventually instigated more radical action.⁵

Just as the social gospel began to respond to the racial crises in the United States, cooperative Christianity grew in force. While local church federations emerged across the country and women's missionary boards united their study of mission texts, the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) culminated in 1908 the national effort to unite Protestant voices. Reflecting the hope to Christianize the nation, the FCC also "gave

⁴Ralph Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Ronald C. White, Jr., *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel, 1877-1925* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990). On historians who have negated the social gospel's relevance for race relations, see Handy, 151-158; David Reimers, *White Protestantism and the Negro* (New York, 1965), 53; George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York, 1971), 302; Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York, 1965), 197; Preston M. Williams, "The Social Gospel and Race Relations: A Case Study of a Social Movement," in *Toward a Discipline of Social Ethics: Essays in Honor of Walter George Muelder*, ed. Paul Deats, Jr. (Boston, 1972), 237; Robert Moats Miller, *American Protestantism and Social Issues, 1919-1939* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1958), 9.

⁵James F. Findlay, Jr., *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 6. Findlay's study of the National Council of Churches, of which UCCW was a part of from 1950-1966, first introduced me to the interdenominational church women's movement; 49, 130, 207, 220-221.

official ecclesiastical form to the Social Gospel,” according to an early historian.⁶

Although the FCC did not explicitly address race relations early on, it did adopt the “Social Creed of the Churches,” institutionalizing social Christianity as its theological foundation. Originally composed by the Methodist church, the Social Creed emphasized justice for all people although it focused primarily on workers.⁷ As a cooperative effort, the Federal Council combined the missionary impulse and the social gospel and quickly made its presence felt among the denominations. In 1910, after wrestling with problems facing the church, a Presbyterian report noted:

All these new questions can not be solved by one Church alone, nor one denomination alone. There must be a combination of the Churches - a united, persistent effort to lift society, in both Church and State, or the Republic is doomed. Realizing this, the Church bodies formed the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, popularly called the Inter-Church Federation. The work of the Inter-Church Federation is the rousing in all our churches and citizens to the solving of the great religious and social problems of our day.⁸

The Presbyterian report reflected the Protestant hope and determination to infuse the nation with the Christian beliefs and values necessary to stabilize what was becoming an increasingly complex society. After World War I, the FCC articulated an even greater need for a stabilizing force in the nation. In a statement identified as “The Church and Social Reconstruction,” the Council announced an “enlarged purpose of the Christian

⁶John A. Hutchinson, *We Are Not Divided: A Critical and Historical Study of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America* (New York, 1941), 25.

⁷Handy, 149; White, 246; Samuel McCrea Cavert, *Church Cooperation and Unity in America: A Historical Review, 1900-1970* (New York: Association Press, 1970), 150.

⁸*Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, 1919, 285; cited in Handy, 150.

church.”⁹

It is the peculiar challenge of the present hour to the Christian Church that, in a day when the ground ha[s] been cleared by perhaps the greatest social convulsion in human history of so much of its previous structure, the opportunity is ours to build Christian civilization anew....We hail with rejoicing the consciousness of Christian brotherhood which has been greatly deepened during the war....Believing that Christian unity is even more a matter of growth and developing experience than of design and program, we invite all Christian churches to unite in the practical cooperative movements of the present day.¹⁰

The FCC articulated the Protestant conviction that only a united effort would truly Christianize a world torn apart.

After World War I, the Federal Councils of Churches began to deepen their recognition and implementation of the churches' responsibility for race relations as a part of the "enlarged purpose of the Christian church." In response to the riots following the war, church leaders grew increasingly conscious about racial injustices.¹¹ In 1920, the FCC elected Reverend Rodney W. Roundy, a white minister from the Congregational Church, as secretary of the Committee on Negro Churches. Roundy, originally from Vermont and a graduate of Amherst College and Yale School of religion, already held a position with the Home Missions Council, an interdenominational body which provided leadership and unity among the churches for the cause of home missions. In his job with the Home Missions Council, Roundy helped develop programs to provide services for African Americans new to the northern urban areas. In reporting on Rev. Roundy's

⁹*Federal Council Bulletin*, September, 1919, 153.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, June 1919, 92.

¹¹White, Jr., 248.

appointment to the FCC, the *Federal Council Bulletin* wrote:

In this day of deepening Americanization the Negro question is one of the largest, if not the largest home mission task facing the denominations. The Negro is no longer a southern but a national asset - or problem, according to one's point of view. At the present time crowded conditions in northern centers have presented not alone pressing housing problems but also those of deep moral and religious import so far as the Negro is concerned....More churches are needed and better church programs should be planned and carried out....¹²

The Council's characterization of African Americans as a home mission "task" and as a potential "problem" early in 1920 reflects its limitations. Such language also reflects the similar ways the FCC constructed their perceptions of both African Americans and women. On the other hand, the fact that the FCC recognized blacks as both physical and spiritual selves and therefore needed both physical and spiritual homes speaks to their beginnings of applying the social gospel to racial issues. Indicative of the Council's growing consciousness regarding the churches' responsibility for race relations, the *Federal Council Bulletin* began to communicate a new attitude:

The Church must lead in the development of that attitude of brotherhood which breaks down all racial and class prejudices and which binds together all the diverse elements of our population in a unified national life.¹³

The combination of the social gospel and cooperative Christianity originally culminated in the FCC.

The Council included both black and white Protestant churches and therefore provided opportunity for African Americans to influence FCC teaching and policy. In addition,

¹²"New Associate Secretary of Home Missions Council will Supervise Work for Negroes." *Federal Council Bulletin* (February 1920), 31.

¹³Ibid., June 1919, 92.

many of the most prominent African American churchmen active on the Council, including Bishop Alexander Walters, Henry H. Proctor, Richard R. Wright, Jr., and George E. Haynes, all identified with the social gospel. The impact of these men and, later in the decade, African American women on the Council's race-related programs and pronouncements is clearly reflected in the Council's bulletin. When in December of 1920, the FCC's fourth quadrennial meeting included interracial problems on its agenda, the bulletin reported several African American churchmen speaking out, asking for the white church's help and challenging its members to a more authentic Christianity. Dr. George E. Haynes, said the bulletin, contended that "the acid test of our national Christianity and our professed sympathy with darker races, was in our treatment of the Negro at home." Bishop Thirkield, chair at the time of the Committee on Negro Churches, apparently drew prolonged applause when he said, "The root of the difficulty in our greatest American racial problem is our failure to recognize the Negro as a man. We talk democracy. Let us act democracy."¹⁴

The FCC eventually responded to such challenges by establishing the Commission on Negro Churches and Race Relations with John J. Eagan as the chair. Although white, Eagan was also chair at the time of the Commission of Interracial Cooperation (CIC), which represented, as far as the Council was concerned, "the most outstanding effort yet made to secure larger co-operation between the two races." The FCC was especially

¹⁴"Negro Leaders Contribute to Program and Discussions," *Federal Council Bulletin* (January 1921), 26.

impressed by the CIC's commitment "not to do things *for* the negroes, but *with* them."¹⁵ In reality, it had taken the CIC, organized in Atlanta in 1920, over a year to open the "interracial" organization to African Americans and even longer before they admitted women as members of the Committee on Woman's Work. Initially, the CIC grew out of southern white middle class fears of racial uprising. They looked to the newly recognized black bourgeoisie to help eradicate that possibility. CIC members did not challenge segregation; the possibility was not in their frame of reference. Instead, they asked prominent blacks for a list of requests to aid the black community and then met and decided which to grant. In addition, the CIC was well funded and so by the mid-twenties had grown into the premier interracial organization in the South.¹⁶ Its influence on the FCC's Commission on Negro Churches and Race Relations would be clear throughout the 1920s both in programming and personnel.¹⁷

The FCC's Commission on Negro Churches and Race Relations reflected the FCC's Social Creed, a core aspect of liberal Protestantism early in the twentieth century. The Social Creed espoused the churches' responsibility for promoting equality and justice for all peoples, although it did not necessarily specify how the churches or its members ought to do so.¹⁸ At its first meeting on July 12, 1921, the Commission adopted a statement of

¹⁵"New Interest in Inter-racial Problems," *Federal Council Bulletin* (April-May 1921), 60.

¹⁶Hall, 60-65.

¹⁷White, Jr., 250.

¹⁸Charles Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism*,

purpose, the preamble of which states faith in Christianity as the “one adequate solution of the problem of the relations of races to each other.” All of humanity served as God’s family and thus were “bound together in an organic unity.”¹⁹ The Commission announced as its mission:

To assert the sufficiency of Christian principles in the solution of race relations; to provide a clearing house and meeting place for Christian forces in this matter; to promote mutual confidence and cooperation; to distribute accurate knowledge of conditions; to develop a public conscience in inter-racial matters which will secure justice and the correction of unfair conditions in education, housing, etc., and to provide an agency through which the churches and auxiliary organizations may work together to these ends.²⁰

As harbingers of liberal Protestantism, the Commission trusted in Christianity as the solution to the racial dilemma, although it also preached the necessity of church members’ participation in the elimination of ignorance and the promotion of justice. Not only did the FCC espouse Christianity’s power to advance race relations, but it also warned church members that if white Americans did not progress toward racial justice, the credibility of Christianity would be damaged. In May of 1927, the editor of the *Federal Council Bulletin* wrote:

It is hardly possible to overstate how indispensable to the further advance of the Christian movement both at home and abroad is a new appreciation of other races. Unless we can get over our false notions of any inherent Anglo-Saxon superiority, unless we can rise above the racial snobbery toward darker peoples

1865-1915 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 316-317; Yohn, 248.

¹⁹“Coming to Grips with the Racial Problem,” *Federal Council Bulletin* (August-September 1921), 100; Hall, 94.

²⁰“Churches Undertake Constructive Policy on Race Relations,” *Federal Council Bulletin* (February-March 1922), 2.

which has been so characteristic of Northern Europeans and Americans, we shall be unconsciously testifying to the impotence of Christianity to create the world unity of which we preach.²¹

For the FCC, the reputation of Christianity was at stake when it came to the churches' responsibility for race relations.

The Commission's appointed leadership reflected the FCC's commitment to racial equality,²² at least in appearances. In January, 1922, the Council named two secretaries for the Commission (by this time they had dropped "Negro" and it was simply "the Commission on the Church and Race Relations"). Dr. George E. Haynes, an African American and former professor of economics and sociology at Fisk University, became responsible full time for the daily operations of the Commission while Dr. Will W. Alexander, the white full time director of the CIC in Atlanta, "cooperated closely with Dr. Haynes at every point."²³ In addition to symbolizing a cooperative attitude in race relations, the appointment of Haynes and Alexander may have also signaled the FCC's unpreparedness to name an African American as the sole person responsible for one of their Commissions. The appointment of Alexander lent the legitimacy they may have feared would not be present with Haynes alone despite Haynes's reputation in academic and church circles including among home missionary women. He had recently written a textbook for the Missionary Education Movement and the Council of Women for Home

²¹"Appreciating Other Races," *Federal Council Bulletin*, May 1927, 2.

²²White, Jr., 250.

²³*Ibid.*, 1.

Missions entitled, *The Trend of the Races* and so shared in the responsibility for shifting home missionary women's missiology.²⁴ Haynes was also well known in African American circles. A member of the Congregational church, Haynes was a founder and first director of the Urban League. In addition, Haynes' wife, Elizabeth, also played a prominent role herself as an academic and in race relations. A published author, Elizabeth Haynes was instrumental in the southern women's interracial movement and would eventually join her husband on the FCC Commission.²⁵

Both white and black church leaders endorsed the announcement of Haynes and Alexander as the Commission's leaders. The *Bulletin* reported "an officer of one of the largest Protestant denominations said: 'I have been wishing for a call of this kind from some large source, and I am glad that you are calling representative men together for this purpose.'"²⁶ In addition, the bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church all endorsed the Commission. Apparently, Black Baptists had already pledged their

²⁴Ibid.; George E. Haynes, *The Trend of the Races* (Missionary Education Movement and Council of Women for Home Missions, 1921).

²⁵White, Jr., 172, 250, 253; Hall, 91-92; Elizabeth Ross Haynes, "Negroes in Domestic Service in the United States," *Journal of Negro History*, 8 (October 1923), 384-442; Elizabeth Haynes was present as a representative of the FCC's Commission on the Church and Race Relations at a June, 1926 meeting, *Notes on an Informal Meeting of Representatives Interested in Plans for a National Interracial Conference in 1927 - Held in Federal Council Conference Room, Tuesday afternoon, June 15, 1926, three o'clock*, RG 18. Box 60. file 11. 1, NCC archives.

²⁶"Churches Undertake Constructive Policy on Race Relations," *Federal Council Bulletin*, February - March 1922, 2.

support.²⁷

Led by Haynes and Alexander, the Commission advocated moderate strategies to address racial justice. Although by September of 1922, the Commission began to advocate that churches across the nation take a stand against lynching, most of what they suggested to churches corresponded to their recommendation that churches use the Sunday prior to Lincoln's birthday to address race relations. This particular Sunday, proposed the Commission, ought to be committed to an examination of the churches' responsibility to promote cooperation between the races. A number of Home Mission Boards had already begun utilizing this Sunday in February to draw attention to their work among black Americans but the FCC looked to expand the meaning of the observance by making it more mutual. They advised that Black and white churches exchange delegations to visit each other's services and create contacts among each other. They also suggested that ministers shape their sermons around the theme so as to build appreciation and understanding.²⁸

The Commission also pursued a mission of educating people by sending Haynes and Alexander to various conventions of home mission societies, social service conferences for numerous denominations, teachers' meetings, and ministers' conferences to promote cooperation between the races. Haynes delivered the commencement address at Virginia Union University in Richmond and led a study of his book, *The Trend of the Races*, at the

²⁷Ibid., 3.

²⁸*Federal Council Bulletin*, October-November 1922, 30.

Missionary Education Movement's Conference. Together, Haynes and Alexander articulated and publicized the FCC's application of the social gospel to race relations.²⁹

Early efforts by the FCC Commission on the Church and Race Relations culminated in 1925 when they sponsored the nation's first Interracial Conference which included 216 delegates, 114 of them African American.³⁰ The delegates represented local and regional interracial committees as well as organizations such as the CIC, YMCA, YWCA, Urban League and numerous missionary agencies of the churches. Sessions were held on social welfare, housing, education, health, judicial processes and the church while speakers expressed the need to eliminate racist practices within the United States, including lynching and segregated housing. George Haynes, the Commission's secretary, spoke as well, looking back and identifying the beginnings of various prejudices but also looking ahead at the potential for interracial cooperation. Haynes believed that the fact that whites and blacks had come together to talk was reason enough to celebrate. Critics in the days and years ahead would look back at these early years of the Commission and contend that Haynes and his colleagues did not do enough. However, the FCC Commission established a national structure to deal with race relations just as the CIC had done in the south. This model for advocating cooperative race relations not only kept the issue of race before the churches but also lent itself to other individuals and

²⁹Ibid., August-September 1922, 20.

³⁰George Edmund Haynes, "A National Interracial Conference," *News Release from the Federal Council of Churches*, nd, @ 1925, RG 18, Box 80, file 11, NCC archives.

organizations who looked to do similar work.³¹ Such was the case for the interdenominational women's movement.

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Two final notes before the reader begins: The organization that I have based this project upon is known today as Church Women United (CWU). This is also the name by which all the archival collections are designated. However, during the time I have studied this churchwomen's group, the organization went by two names. In 1941, it began as the United Council of Church Women (UCCW) and in 1950, when it joined with the National Council of Churches, it became known as United Church Women (UCW). It was not until the late 1960s that the churchwomen changed their name. For historical accuracy, I have used UCCW and UCW, based on the time period I am discussing. I hope this is not confusing. Finally, the name of my project, "To End This Day of Strife," is borrowed from the title of a proposal to address race relations written by the Chicago Federation of Churches in the 1950s.

³¹White, 259-260.

Chapter One - "Breaking Down Barriers" **Missionary Women Turn to Domestic Race Relations**

The air heavy with tension, nearly one hundred white women glanced at each other with some apprehension. Anxious thoughts must have raced through their minds. "Doesn't Mrs. Bennett know such mixing is dangerous?" "What if the newspapers catch wind?" And "What if my husband or father hears of it?" they may have wondered. When they heard stirring in the back of the room, they strained their necks trying to catch a glimpse of the four guests none of them had anticipated. Organizers of the meeting had invited four African American women to speak to the white women, most of whom had responded to a vague invitation to come and consider "important problems." It being 1920 in Memphis, both whites and blacks experienced anxiety over what had become an explicitly integrated meeting. Although a small back room at the local YMCA had been chosen as the meeting place in hopes of keeping unwanted attention away, the women feared potential repercussions. As the African American women entered the room, the white women stood and without introduction, Belle Harris Bennet, one of the organizers, began to sing "Blest Be the Tie That Binds," a popular song among missionary women. Moved by the enormity of the occasion and perhaps by the power of their faith, the room full of women joined Bennett in song. White and black women together, many of them crying, transformed their fear into enthusiasm and possibility.³²

The leadership of the Methodist Women's Missionary Council of the Methodist

³²--"Woman's Division, Commission on Interracial Cooperation" (Typescript in Jessie Daniel Ames Collection, Manuscript Department, Duke University, Durham, N.C.), 20-69, cited in McDowell, 90; Hall, 90; Knotts, 53.

Episcopal Church, South, which Bennett represented, organized the Memphis meeting. Two of Bennett's colleagues, Carrie Parks Johnson and Sara Estelle Haskin, had recently attended a conference of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) where they had experienced a change of conscience upon hearing African American women speak. Johnson and Haskin surmised that if more middle-class white women like themselves could be introduced to African American women such as those they had met at the NACW conference, racial attitudes could be changed. With this goal in mind, the women had approached Will Alexander of the Atlanta-based Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), asking him for permission to form a women's committee. Alexander had responded positively and so the above meeting was called to inaugurate the committee.

The Memphis meeting exemplified how a shared faith experience between white and African American women, as well as a history of involvement for both in missionary work, could create common ground upon which to cultivate a moral language of race. When the meeting began, Johnson and Haskin first spoke to the white churchwomen about their attendance at the NACW annual meeting at Tuskegee four months earlier in June. The two Methodist women then informed the gathering that four of the black women present at Tuskegee would begin to address the gathering later that afternoon, allowing time for anyone who wished to do so to leave. When Belle Bennett began singing "Blest Be the Tie That Binds," as the four African American women entered the room that afternoon, she unleashed a power which either released or actually drew on the room's tension, at least temporarily. Margaret Washington, Elizabeth Ross Haynes,

Jennie Moton and Charlotte Hawkins Brown joined the white women in song, and a peace settled into the room.³³ The four then began to speak over a two-day period, imploring the white women as fellow Christians to respond to the needs of black Americans.

Charlotte Hawkins Brown rose to the podium as the final speaker but also the most moving and challenging. President of the North Carolina Association of Colored Women's Clubs and founder of Palmer Memorial Institute, Brown had for many years orchestrated the participation of both southern and northern whites in the betterment of African American lives.³⁴ She began her address to the white churchwomen by describing her trip to Memphis, a demeaning experience which had angered her deeply. A group of white men had physically removed Brown from a Pullman car and deposited her into a Jim Crow day coach. "I came to Memphis crushed and humiliated," Brown told her audience. But she then transformed her shame into a stirring speech, using her experience to challenge the white women, reminding them that many of those present at the meeting had been on the same train and yet had not intervened. After imploring the white women to do all they could to end the violence wrought against black men, women and children, she concluded with a stunning assertion, "I know that if you are Christian women, that in the final analysis you are going to have to reach out for the same hand that I am reaching out for but I know that the dear Lord will not receive it if you are crushing

³³McDowell, 90.

³⁴Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, esp. 177-186.

me beneath your feet.”³⁵

Brown’s address illustrates African American women’s campaign to involve white women in the resolution of racial injustices. Her remarks signify the nature by which black women attempted to engage their white sisters in some semblance of responsibility for the racial violence, segregation, and appalling living conditions so many black Americans were forced to endure. When Brown narrated her humiliating experience of being physically dragged to a Jim Crow coach, she did so as a respectable, educated, middle-class and Christian woman. By defining herself as such, she drew the white churchwomen in, appealing to their moral and emotional sensibilities. She first initiated an emotional bond with them and then made her demand. Furthermore, Brown claimed God as her authority and thereby established the moral upper hand. With God on her side, she could not be refused - or at least not politely or with any righteousness. The manner by which Brown chose to appeal to her audience demonstrates the critical role African American women played in establishing an interracial movement at least as early as 1920.

As is evident in this 1920 event, a moral language regarding race developed among churchwomen well before the United Council of Church Women emerged in 1941. In 1920, African American women and some white churchwomen, especially those of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, already spoke a moral language regarding race, although the language for white women was immature and did not fully capture the

³⁵Hall, 92-94, McDowell, 90.

magnitude of the racial situation in the United States. The white women present at the Memphis meeting initially responded enthusiastically to Brown's and her African American colleagues' challenge. They heard the common language of their religious tradition and they recognized the convictions among this group of black women as similar to their own.³⁶ Such were the beginnings of a southern interracial movement among churchwomen.³⁷

African American women, such as the National Association of Colored Women representatives to the 1920 Memphis meeting, did not limit their interracial endeavors to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Prior to 1920, African American leaders such as Brown, Haynes, Washington and Moton sought support for interracial work within the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Founded to care for young working women, the YWCA seemed a likely place to find assistance for work among young black women. By the late 1910s, however, the YWCA had not yet begun to critique racial segregation either in society or within its own organization. During World War I, the YWCA provided a staff for its first black field secretary, Eva Bowles, to aid African American soldiers as well as black women drawn into war time industries. Once the war concluded however, the YWCA immediately eliminated the "Colored Department." African American women found themselves disappointed and frustrated by the YWCA's lack of support and unwillingness to extend equality to black women within their

³⁶Hall, 94.

³⁷Hall; McDowell; Knotts; Gilmore; Higginbotham; and Frederickson.

organization. Therefore, by early 1920, African American women were looking to move beyond any preexisting organizations and gather together women of both races who were willing to work on race relations.³⁸ After 1920, just as before, black women pursued relationships with white women wherever such a prospect had the potential of serving their purposes. The interdenominational churchwomen's movement, as it accelerated in the 1920s, offered African American women a potential site for advancing the cause of racial justice.

Many factors helped prepare these white churchwomen to receive Charlotte Hawkins Brown's message to the degree they were able to. Among the most important were their missionary experience and theory, which underwent a tremendous shift in the post World War I period. The missionary enterprise epitomized the hopes of evangelical Protestantism between 1880 and 1920 and inspired some white churchwomen to engage in interracial work. According to Protestant hopes and assumptions at that time, Christianity would continue to advance throughout the nation and the world until all civilization had been conquered. Rising church memberships and increasing numbers of missionaries to foreign lands and domestic frontiers supported such expectations. Seen through this lens, much of the world's progress visible at the end of the nineteenth century appeared to be due to the influence of Christianity. Churches concluded that there was no reason why this divine influence should not continue to advance and as it

³⁸Hall, 82-86; Nancy Robertson, "'Deeper Even Than Race'"; Judith Weisenfeld, *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York's Black YWCA, 1905-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

did, resolve national and international dilemmas. With this as their intellectual foundation, missionaries traveled to new frontiers to spread Christian civilization. Attentive to the deliberations regarding social Christianity's role in race relations and active participants in the ecumenical movement, a small number of white women began to hear the pleas of African Americans calling them to take a moral responsibility for the realities of racial injustice. Slowly, especially after the 1920 Memphis meeting, some white churchwomen began speaking in a moral language of race.³⁹

The Legacy of Missionary Work

In addition to producing a venue for churchwomen to organize, the world of mission work prepared white churchwomen for the possibility of cooperative relations between the races. Churchwomen's history, experience, and theory of missionary work provided the primary intellectual and political ingredients for a new moral language of race. With nearly a century of missionary experience introducing them to the possibility of relationships with diverse peoples, white churchwomen involved in mission work were predisposed to interracial work by the 1920s. Their shift in missiology following World War I only focused and intensified the ideal of equal relationships between themselves and others. A diverse home front with new immigrants introducing unfamiliar languages, customs and religions, helped shape white missionary women's faith perspective, further advancing a missiology that served their experience with people unlike themselves at home and abroad. By the 1920s, race relations began to take its place in some white

³⁹Handy, esp. Ch. 5 and 6.

missionary women's agenda as a moral and religious issue.

History of Missions

Nearly one hundred years of an expanding role in missionary work precipitated white women's move to include cooperative race relations in their agenda. Early in the nineteenth century, Protestant churches did not allow women to be missionaries. Wives could only accompany their missionary husbands while women back home raised money for their churches' missionary boards. However, as women organized and fundraised successfully, they began to make headway into the world of missions. By the late nineteenth century, many churchwomen were financing their own mission projects and choosing, training and sending single women into the mission field, both at home and abroad. These Protestant women transformed missionary work into an acceptable avenue of participation in the church and society during an era when women's roles were narrowly defined. However, Protestant women also defined missionary work as "woman's work for woman," and therefore did not necessarily challenge their own traditional roles. By focusing their work on women and children, both in foreign fields and in mission schools on the U.S. frontier, which at the end of the nineteenth century included the southwest and west coast among Mexicans, Native Americans and Asians, urban immigrant neighborhoods among southern and eastern Europeans, and the south among African Americans, churchwomen reinforced the prevailing ideal that women's interest ought to be the home and family. Through their missionary work, churchwomen

both reaffirmed their social role and enlarged its boundaries.⁴⁰

Although some missionary women attempted to organize across denominations prior to the turn of the century, it was not until the winter of 1911 and the spring of 1912 that this organizing really flourished. At that time, national boards of missionary women sponsored a Jubilee celebration across the nation honoring fifty years of women's missionary work. The magnitude of the celebrations stimulated interdenominational gatherings unprecedented before the Jubilee, especially at the local level.⁴¹ After the Jubilee, these women continued to meet with the primary purposes of studying mission text books and observing a Day of Prayer for Missions, soon to be the World Day of Prayer.⁴² In 1915 the Federation of Women's Boards of Foreign Missions emerged to administer the money that had been raised during the Jubilee year. Soon after, the Federation and the other national interdenominational women's missionary organization, the Council of Women for Home Missions (formed in 1908), began discussing how they

⁴⁰Margaret Lambert Bendroth, "Women and Missions: Conflict and Changing Roles in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1870-1935," *American Presbyterians* 65 (Spring 1987): 49-59, 50.

⁴¹Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 256; R.Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission: A History of the First Feminist Movement in North America* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968; Revised, Eerdmans, 1980), 152-3. Gladys Gilkey Calkins, *Follow Those Women: Church Women in the Ecumenical Movement* (NYC: National Council of Churches, 1961), 12 -13. Calkins was an active member of UCW for many years.

⁴²*Historical Background of Information of the National Committee of Church Women*, prepared November 3, 1938, Box 56, file 1, Church Women United archives, General Commission on Archives and History, the United Methodist Church, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey (hereafter CWU @ GCAH).

might together draw upon these local women to further the missionary cause. In 1918 the two groups formed a joint committee, known as the Women's Church and Missionary Federations, to discuss how to gather local women under the national leadership of the Federation and Council.⁴³ The process of organizing across denominations eventually led to interregional and interracial alliances.

Missiology

In addition to providing an organizational network which served to cross, at least temporally, national, cultural, and racial borders, missionary work initially presented thousands of Protestant churchwomen with opportunities to evangelize non-Christian and non-Protestant peoples. Prior to the turn of the twentieth century, even though their primary tasks focused on alleviating physical needs and educating those less fortunate, such activities were often understood as the means to an end; in other words, a hot meal, a new school, or an opportunity for employment provided a road to conversion. Missionary women's actions were guided by the belief that "Christian conversion could promote social betterment as well as spiritual salvation."⁴⁴ Churchwomen therefore busied themselves with not only evangelism at home and abroad, but also with improving the conditions in which people lived, especially women and children.

⁴³Beaver, 158; Mabel Head, *Forward Together: An Historical Sketch of Interdenominational Women's Work and The United Council of Church Women*, (NYC: United Council of Church Women, 1945), 4; Katherine Bennett, Miss Florence G. Tyler, Mrs. E.H. Goedeke, "All That Is Past Is Prologue": *The Emergence of Interdenominational Organizations Among Protestant Women*, (NYC: United Council of Church Women, 1944), 17.

⁴⁴Robert, 304; McDowell, 20-25.

After World War I, however, the basic philosophy of missionary work, which regarded all people as sons and daughters of God, began to take a greater hold in significant ways. This underlying foundation grew in influence when missionary women, in response to the war's horrors, reevaluated their relationships with their missionary prospects at home and over seas and found the relationships to be especially lacking in mutuality. This reevaluation, coupled with regular resistance on the part of the prospects, inspired a new attitude to develop among missionary women that regarded all people, despite their country of origin or skin color, as members of one race. As it did so, the organizational and theoretical divisions churchwomen had established to separate foreign and home missions began to dissipate, allowing for missionary work to engender a race relations initiative at home. Years later, when the United Council of Church Women organized in 1941, white women who had been active in the missions agreed on interracialism as a priority. This suggested that a common missiology influenced white members' racial attitudes. For those that understood and agreed upon the imperative to unite across racial lines, it did not matter whether they had been involved in foreign or home missions or both. What did matter was that a shift in thinking transpired among missionary women after World War I, paving the way for race relations to develop as a missionary activity.

Foreign Missions

The foreign missionary enterprise represented one aspect of the United States' unique brand of cultural imperialism in places such as China, Africa and India. The absence of an American political or governmental body in these places, however, did not signify an

absence of imperial power. Indeed, the Christian assumption of the right to conquer the world or remake it in Western Christian terms was a significant element in this imperial formula. Such a formula included defining not only what Christianity expected but also what civilization entailed. Women missionaries participated in this imperialist endeavor, especially as architects of “civilizing” institutions such as schools, hospitals and social welfare agencies. Such institutions represented to evangelical Protestants the hope for future conversions as well as successful attempts to fundamentally change foreign cultures. In fact, when national missionary leaders spoke to the success of missions, they often highlighted the proliferation of colleges and universities, schools and medical facilities rather than the numbers of churches and converts. Women’s work in the mission fields thus often represented a “cultural assault.” The institutions women erected or assisted male missionaries in building, a male missionary leader wrote, “abolished cannibalism and human sacrifice and cruelty, organized famine relief, improved husbandry and agriculture, introduced Western medicines and medical science, founded leper asylums and colonies, promoted cleanliness and sanitation, and checked war.”⁴⁵ It would take world war, consistent resistance on the part of their intended converts, a

⁴⁵Robert E. Speer, *Missionary Principles and Practice* (New York, 1902), 419-420, cited in William R. Hutchinson, “A Moral Equivalent for Imperialism: Americans and the Promotion of ‘Christian Civilization’, 1880-1910,” 172, in eds. Torben Christensen and Hutchinson, *Missionary Ideologies in the Imperialist Era, 1880-1920* (Denmark: Christensens Bogtrykkeri, Bogtryknergardena-s, Struer, 1982). Although neither Speer nor Hutchinson were specifically writing about female missionaries, the social institutions they do address were often the handiwork of women. Denied positions reserved for clergy which involved pure evangelism, female missionaries concentrated their energies on the “civilizing” aspect of the missionary enterprise. Hutchinson’s entire article was formative in this section.

growing internationalism and the influx of modern anthropological and scientific thinking before women missionaries began to move away from an imperialist stance.

What the woman's foreign missionary movement did offer, however, was the initiation of hundreds of thousands of American women into ideas regarding cultural diversity. Initially, the relevance of missionary overseas experience to American race relations may not be immediately visible to today's historian. The Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic cultures that comprised much of the missionary women's experiences as well as the study materials for the women back home, did not address, at least on the surface, the unique realities of racial strife in the United States. However, foreign missions possessed what one historian has called a "reflex influence." In her discussion of how the movement affected home life, Patricia Hill argues that churchwomen at home gained a broadened perspective on other cultures.⁴⁶ Through its introduction of a systemic mission study at the local level, as well as its institution of mission schools, the woman's foreign missionary movement instigated discussions examining such topics as cultural differences and similarities, mores, customs and food. Churchwomen at home in the U.S. learned about gender roles, caste systems and non-Christian faiths without ever taking a step outside their neighborhoods. Although the information was often laced with imperialistic and ethnocentric sentiments, it nonetheless enlarged the lens through which they viewed their world.

⁴⁶Patricia R. Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1985), 108.

In addition to preparing churchwomen at home for the possibility of working cooperatively with people of other cultures through its study guides and schools, the movement's basic missiology, which professed that all people were children of God, also laid the foundation for missionary women to eventually initiate race relations programs. Churchwomen at home familiar with foreign mission theory saw it shift significantly following World War I. progressing from a "Woman's Work for Woman" missiology to one based on "World Friendship." This shift can be traced across denominations by examining the annual mission study textbooks published by the Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions beginning in 1901. Although by the turn of the century most denominations already published missionary periodicals for groups to use in local churches, the Central Committee's efforts were the first to cross denominations.⁴⁷ The basic assumption reflected in the annual textbooks prior to the war was that women all over the world were sisters but that the non-Christian sisters needed saving. Hinduism and Islam, according to the "Woman's Work for Woman" theory, oppressed and enslaved women. The task of missionary women was to liberate their sisters by bringing them the light of Christ. An example of this is Caroline Atwater Mason's 1902 text *Lux Christi* which reads. "Of the average Hindu woman it can truly be said: her birth is unwelcome, her physical life is outraged, her mental life is stunted, her spiritual life is denied existence."⁴⁸ In Mason's assessment, the only hope for India and Hindu women was the

⁴⁷Robert, 257-268.

⁴⁸Caroline Atwater Mason, *Lux Christi*, (Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions, 1902), 97 as quoted in Robert, 264.

light of Christ:

The supreme hope and the supreme inspiration for India are in the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ....It is the surpassing glory and beauty of Christianity that its prime motive is the willing sacrifice of the individual, hoping nothing for himself, in order to bring healing and rescue to his fellow-men. The Cross of Christ is the light of India, the light of the world.⁴⁹

Although Mason's text is not unlike many of the foreign mission theory books published before the war, the most important text of the period is Helen Barrett Montgomery's *Western Women in Eastern Lands*, written in 1910 in honor of the Jubilee. Montgomery summarized the mission theory expressed by the women's missionary movement: "non-Christian religions supported wrongs against women, whereas Christianity emancipated them."⁵⁰ Montgomery acknowledged that women also suffered in western cultures but she argued that Christianity opposed the wrongdoings and did not cause women harm as did other religions. *Western Women in Eastern Lands* articulated the goal of the movement: unity among all peoples under one Christian God. Once unity was attained, the kingdom of God would certainly have been established.⁵¹

World War I destroyed the "Woman's Work for Woman" mission theory, and "World Friendship" emerged as the new banner for the missionary women's movement. With the western Christian nations at war, killing one another in the name of the same God, missionary women reinterpreted their missiology as hypocritical and developed new

⁴⁹Ibid., 257-258 as quoted in Robert, 264.

⁵⁰Helen Barrett Montgomery, *Western Women in Eastern Lands* (Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions, 1910), 68 as quoted in Robert, 268.

⁵¹Robert, 264-265.

theories for the changing world situation. According to missions historian Dana Robert, “World Friendship” transformed the attitudes missionary women held for the various peoples they worked among. With this change, missionary women

assumed that western culture no longer had a monopoly on virtue, and that women around the world stood poised to lead their own people not to western Christian civilization, but to their own forms of Christian life. What was needed of missions was not paternalism, but partnership and friendship: united work for peace and justice.⁵²

Furthermore, there is also evidence that missionary women revised older theories in response to resistance by foreign men and women to Christian evangelism. Such resistance prompted missionary women to subsume their quest for converts to an expanded mission that included education and medical relief.⁵³

During the decade following World War I, this shift in missiology engendered a new sense of internationalism among missionary women and with it a desire to create cooperative relationships with indigenous women. Schools and hospitals founded by American missionary women were slowly turned over to the control of these women, whom female missionaries now recognized as partners. Indigenous women, educated by the schools opened and funded by American women, also gained leadership status in these institutions. In doing so, they challenged missionary women to shift their thinking.

In 1934, Michi Kawai and Ochimi Kubushiro, Japanese women who had chosen to convert to Christianity, authored the first mission study book to be written by non-

⁵²Ibid., 272-273.

⁵³Hill, 130-134.

western Christians: *Japanese Women Speak: A Message from the Christian Women of Japan to the Christian Women of America*. Kawai and Kubushiro emphatically informed American women that they were no longer needed as “bosses” in Japan. They were needed as friends and co-workers. They wrote,

Today, more than ever before, missionaries and Christian workers are needed who can come to Japan to live with us, work with us, and set us a loving Christ-like example. More than ever before, a spirit of co-operation is needed where missionaries can work shoulder to shoulder with us in our search for a national Christian living and Christian thought.⁵⁴

With this shift in thinking among both missionary and foreign women, churchwomen began to think of their indigenous counterparts as being more like themselves than they had in the past. Although American women had considered foreign women as sisters prior to this change, Americans perceived themselves as the older, caretaker sister. With World War I, even this attitude began to dissipate.

Distinctions between foreign and home missions dissipate

As part of their pursuit of interdenominational and national unity, missionary women after World War I also sought to diminish the divisions between home and foreign mission theory. In addition to encouraging unity, however, this effort also prompted white missionary women to regard all women, foreign and American-born, black and white, as equal partners in the Christian enterprise. As their interests expanded to include activities outside the traditional parameters of mission work, not only did local

⁵⁴Michi Kawai and Ochimi Kubushiro, *Japanese Women Speak* (Boston: Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions, 1934), 58-59. Cited in Robert, 289-90.

missionary women call for a new national organization but they also forced a modification of missiology so as to allow for their new endeavors. In her annual report in 1927, Katherine Silverthorn, president of the Federation of Woman's Boards of Foreign Missions, responded to local women's activities:

May not one of the functions of the Federation be this very thing, that together we may come to view with clear eyes the "wholeness" [and] the inclusiveness of the missionary enterprise, and that the outcome may be an enlarged conception of the scope and purpose of missions, and of the application of Christian principles to all of life?"

Elsewhere in her report, Silverthorn articulated more precisely what she meant by "an enlarged conception of the scope and purpose of missions:"

We are finding it increasingly difficult in this age of complex relationships to narrow our missionary activities and interests to what we used to designate as "Missions per se." If "Mission" implies sharing the Gospel Message, Good News, the abundant life Christ came to give to all, then our message touches all of life, and its relationships. Godward and Manward. This latter implies a very widespread interest; such relations as racial, international, economic, industrial and social come under its purview.⁵⁵

By the late 1920s missionary women had shifted their missiology to such an extent that foreign missionary women began to allow for activities traditionally designated as home mission endeavors.

Years later, after the United Council of Church Women organized, at least one leader recognized in retrospect the convergence of foreign and home mission theory. In 1955

⁵⁵*Annual Report - Federation of Woman's Boards of Foreign Missions*, January 1927, 16ff. Cited in Helga Hiller and Eileen King, "An Interactive Presentation on the History of World Day of Prayer," *World Day of Prayer International Committee 1999 Quadrennial Meeting - Cape Town Report* (New York: World Day of Prayer International Committee), 36-37.

Mossie Wyker, then national president of UCCW and an ordained Disciples of Christ minister, looked back at churchwomen's organizational development and spoke to the relationship between women's foreign and home missionary work. As a spokesperson and international representative of UCCW, Wyker's words reflected the organization's understanding of its formative influences.

Then came the next step in the evolving story. Some of the women began to have misgivings. They saw a discrepancy in their behavior. They were sending missionaries, asking them to live out the Gospel of love in other countries, treating all people as children of God regardless of race, color, or sex, but they themselves were not always following this practice in their own communities. The women knew that in our large country, made up of so many different nationalities...they must be...what they expected others to be. The next struggle began: The study of race, Christian family life...and social and community issues of all kinds were discussed. The women went into action.⁵⁶

For Wyker and other UCCW women, foreign and home missions were not unrelated but deeply connected. Although separated by oceans and continents, work in foreign lands influenced the home front, and vice versa, in very real ways. Wyker's statement reflected the movement, begun after World War I, to break down the borders between home and foreign missions and the theory which accompanied these activities. Such a movement brought many white missionary women to consider race relations as relevant to their missionary endeavors.

Missionary women, in addition to recognizing the discrepancies between how they were asking foreigners to live the gospel message and how their nation was behaving,

⁵⁶Mossie Wyker, "The Development of Church Women's Organizations in the United States of America," Address given at Herrenalb, Germany (c) 1955, Box 56, file 22. CWU @ GCAH.

also described what they perceived as a negative relationship between foreign missions and their work at home. When a national interdenominational and interracial committee of churchwomen formed within the Federal Council of Churches in the late 1920s, they contended that deficiencies in U.S. democracy discouraged foreigners from accepting Western Christian civilization. This conclusion led missionary women to promote cooperative race relations as a partial remedy for failures on the foreign field. In an article entitled, "Missionary Women and Race Relations," Katherine Gardner, chair of the FCC women's interracial committee, wrote,

The relation of this work [race relations] to our missionary program and the responsibility of missionary women for its endorsement are very clear....The whole world is looking at America to see how a Christian nation solves this problem. One after another, our missionaries in foreign lands testify that the greatest hindrance to their work is race prejudice at home. We would be false to the spirit of the missionary enterprise; we would be false to those self-sacrificing women who have given their money and their service to take education to dark places;...we would be false to the ideals of democracy, and, above all, we would be false to the teachings of Jesus Christ if we failed to do our utmost to bring good will between the races. And let us not be too long in doing it.⁵⁷

In an interesting twist of African Americans' use of democratic ideology during World War I to expose the hypocrisy of their nation fighting for freedom overseas while withholding it at home, Gardner argued that unless racial prejudices were eliminated at home, foreigners would cease to be attracted to the American ideal of civilization. Conflating the missionary enterprise with both democracy and Christianity, Gardner defined cooperative race relations as an embodiment of all three ideals. In doing so, she

⁵⁷Katherine Gardner, "Missionary Women and Race Relations," *Women and Missions*, April 1931, 16.

furthered the integration of foreign and home missions.⁵⁸

What had largely been separate enterprises, foreign and home missions, came to be understood as parts of the same body. One vivid example of this was the emergence of the World Day of Prayer, begun as two separate days annually observed for home and foreign missions, but which grew into one day in 1919, combining prayers for all missions. By the late 1920s, American missionary women responsible for the organization of the Day recognized its relationship to cultural and racial unity both at home and abroad. In their 1928 report they wrote:

It is with deep gratitude that we recognize the growing power inherent in our World Day of Prayer. A very decided expansion of this prayer fellowship has come during the past year. The circle of prayer has expanded literally around the world. We have learned the great lesson of praying with, rather than for, our sisters of other races and nations, thus enriching our experience and releasing the power which must be ours if we are to accomplish tasks entrusted to us.⁵⁹

The World Day of Prayer encouraged white missionary women to take steps toward working cooperatively with women of other races and cultures through its facilitation of shared worship. This became evident when women around the country provided the organizing committee with feedback regarding the Day's significance:

Testimonies from hundreds of communities in the United States...are full of expressions of gratitude of what the day is meaning to Christian women...in breaking down denominational and interracial barriers and bringing the women together into a beautiful and helpful fellowship. A letter from one of the southern

⁵⁸Philip A. Klinker with Rogers M. Smith, *Unsteady March: the Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁵⁹*World Day of Prayer Committee Report - Annual Meeting of the Federation of the Woman's Boards of Foreign Missions*, January 1928, 17ff. Cited in Hiller and King, 37.

states expresses what others have said, namely: "Such programs as 'Breaking Down Barriers' are helping us a great deal to a better interracial understanding and to break down the barriers which hinder our fellowship in Christ." To women who have limited knowledge of other races and nations, the day has awakened consciousness of a great world of need beyond their own borders and of themselves as a part of a great world sisterhood.⁶⁰

When UCCW emerged in 1941, they took on the sponsorship of this day, emphasizing the unity of women and men all over the world. An early history of the interdenominational women's movement and its relationship to the World Day of Prayer reads:

All these groups are praying that Christians may be one in service for Jesus Christ, that barriers of race and class may be eliminated and that all may truly learn to follow Him whose way is the Way of Life for all men - and that men may find the way by which individuals and nations may live together in peace and understanding.⁶¹

Slowly, white churchwomen began to apply their understanding of cultural pluralism, gleaned from their missionary experience, to the issue of race in their own country. This perspective combined with their faith in one God of all humanity to open the door for a moral language of race to develop and expand among them.

Home Missions

Like their counterparts in foreign missions, many domestic reformers saw the world through imperialistic lenses. Home missions among American Indians, immigrants, frontier towns and African Americans were often driven by racist sentiments. Lucinda Helm, a southern Methodist deeply involved in home missions and who feared the

⁶⁰Ibid., January 1929. Cited in Hiller and King, 37.

⁶¹Bennett et al. "*All That Is Past Is Prologue*," 15.

presence of non-Christians, felt called like many other religious women “to Christianize these Barbarous and ungodly elements in the midst of a Christian civilization.” By doing so Helm believed her society would be strengthened and her missionary subjects better off. Lucinda’s sister, Mary Helm, editor of *Our Homes*, the Methodist women’s home missionary journal, authored a text in 1909 which echoed early nineteenth century pro-slavery claims. Helm argued, in part, that slavery transformed African savages into Christian American citizens. Such a statement paradoxically reflected southern white churchwomen’s underlying racism and their belief that African Americans were capable of progress. This conviction stemmed in part from their contact with what they considered “exceptional negroes.” In these African Americans, “and in their constantly, if slowly, increasing numbers, we find a visible warrant for our faith in the future of their race, as well as for our faith in the providence which has bound up their future with that of the whole country.”⁶²

White churchwomen’s most patronizing statements also usually conveyed their belief in their Christian duty to assist African American women on the road of progress. Instituting home missions among African Americans in the early twentieth century prior to World War I, southern churchwomen combined paternalistic and racist missionary impulses with a sincere desire to improve the awful conditions in which so many blacks

⁶²*Seventh Annual Report of the Woman’s Parsonage and Home Mission Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville, 1893), 24-25 as quoted in McDowell, 11; Mary Helm, *From Darkness to Light: The Story of Negro Progress* (2nd ed.; New York, 1909), 13. in McDowell, 103; Lily Hammond, “A Southern View of the Negro,” *Outlook*, LXXIII (March 14, 1903), 621, in McDowell 104; McDowell, 101-105.

lived. They genuinely believed that only Christianity could solve racial problems and, in fact, that the gospel demanded they work to bring about better relations between the races. For this reason, they grew greatly disturbed with southern churches and ministers who ignored the reality of racial hatred and hostility.⁶³

Early on in their work with African Americans, southern white church women expressed confidence in their own racial superiority and ability to assist blacks. White Methodist women took it upon themselves to galvanize their forces, asserting that African Americans were “backward” and needed their help to develop into a race equal to whites. They promoted the institution of missionary societies among black women, believing that African Americans could in many ways better serve their own communities, but they sincerely believed black women could not do so without them. It was each white woman’s “duty to act as a counselor and advisor to the colored women.” By doing so, they would assist African Americans in moving forward and upward. “The finest and strongest Negroes, I believe without a single exception,” wrote Lily Hammond, “have come to their high development largely through contact with broad-minded, large-hearted white men and women.”⁶⁴ It would take African American women such as Elizabeth Haynes and Charlotte Hawkins Brown decades of activism to dislodge white women from this attitude of racial superiority. Many white women’s attitudes, however, would go unchanged. African American women instigated changes in missionary theory among

⁶³McDowell, 100.

⁶⁴*Fifth Annual Report of the Woman’s Missionary Council*, 144; Hammond, *In Black and White*, 203-204, McDowell, 102.

some white churchwomen by asking them to become part of the solution and to work with them and not for them. By doing so they encouraged the development of more mutual relationships between themselves and whites.

Home missions also encouraged discussions regarding cultural pluralism among their supporters although neither home or foreign missions necessarily advocated or supported the idea of cultural pluralism, especially early on. In fact, a major motivation underlying mission work was a desire to westernize, Christianize or assimilate into white America those who were not. The very nature of the enterprise however, brought differing cultures, faiths and races together - most times resulting in confrontation - and therefore the missionary endeavor stimulated discussions based on these experiences. Furthermore, the resistance which home missionary women met in the peoples they attempted to assimilate, similar to the foreign missionary case, prompted a shift in missiology so that conversion faded in significance while social welfare projects became the focus.⁶⁵

When the FCC women's interracial organization, the Church Women's Committee, formed in the late 1920s, it expressed a distinct understanding of missionary influence on its own philosophy. Similar to foreign missionary women's post-war "World Friendship" missiology and the Commission of Interracial Cooperation's expressed commitment, the Church Women's Committee articulated a desire to engender mutual relationships between blacks and whites. Such a desire had not always existed and Gardner recognized the change:

⁶⁵Susan M. Yohn, *A Contest of Faiths: Missionary Women and Pluralism in the American Southwest* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), esp. Ch 4.

Church women of America have long been interested in the many forms of missionary endeavor which include Negroes as the beneficiaries....Recent years, however, have shown that mission work is only the first step in the development of a Christian attitude on race relations; that while it is very fine to do things for another race, the time has come when the word must change from **for** to **with** - when Christians must face the world as “workers together with God,” irrespective of race and color.⁶⁶

By the late 1920s when Gardner wrote about this shift in missiology, churchwomen had begun to feel the impact of the resistance on the part of foreign and home missionary prospects as well as the influence of African American churchwomen who began to demand more and more that white churchwomen participate in a cooperative fashion in the attainment of racial justice. The resistance and demands coming from all sides moved some white churchwomen to a different place in their understanding of mission work.

Race Relations as a Local Missionary Effort

By the late 1920s, many local women’s missionary societies had expanded their programs to include race relations. Sometimes working in tandem with the local council of churches, the churchwomen endeavored “to reach everyone with the message of the Gospel, and to promote the application of the law of Christ in every relation of life.”⁶⁷ Churchwomen in Chicago established their first Race Relations Committee in 1927, which by 1932 was interracial in its makeup. Elsie Lineweaver, the Committee’s chairperson during much of the 1930s, expressed her sentiments about the group in the

⁶⁶Ibid..

⁶⁷*Woman’s Department, Chicago Church Federation, Bulletin No. 1, nd, circa 1927, 3, Box 18, file 12, Church Women United Collection, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois (hereafter CWU @ CHS).*

following way:

It is a rare privilege indeed to sit down with representatives of other races than our own and exchange our developing ideas of a Christian philosophy. The only way to describe that experience is that in a way it visualizes more concretely than anything else [the] idea of the Kingdom of God where we will find all the partitions that divide us, racially[,] socially and economically falling away till [sic] we are indeed a family of the Father.

In her 1932 report on the Committee, Lineweaver communicated to her readers that many requests had come to her to provide talks “on what the attitude of the white person should be in his Christian thinking.” She had accepted eight invitations during the year to address various audiences.⁶⁸ Lineweaver announced in her 1934 report that the churchwomen had joined forces with the Chicago Church Federation’s Race Relations Commission. Together the two groups conducted an all day Interracial Conference for church members. During the Conference, participants were introduced to the current economic conditions for African Americans including their degree of inclusion in New Deal programs. Conference leaders also spoke to the various factors preventing blacks from attaining justice despite their American citizenship. Participants discussed what techniques they might use to both encourage racial equality and “re-educate” whites. The final objective of the Conference, wrote Lineweaver, consisted of a challenge to the churches to act in response to racial injustices. She too, issued a challenge to her readers:

...will you be the one to originate an Interracial Committee in your church...? You may not be as popular in your church as the lady who presents the moving picture problem but you will have the satisfaction that you are promoting one of the greatest problems in American life today, while at the same time exploring a large

⁶⁸Elsie M. Lineweaver, *Report of the Interracial Committee*, January 1, 1932 - January 1, 1933. Box 2, file 6, CWU @ CHS.

region of new friendships; sincere in their appreciation of your interest and exceedingly rich in rewards.⁶⁹

As progressive as Lineweaver's leadership was, however, she too sometimes reflected the attitudes of racial superiority common among whites at that time as well as the limitations in their proscribed techniques for racial justice. When she discussed her committee's accomplishments for 1936, Lineweaver highlighted the churchwomen's study of African Americans, including their relationships to whites. Regarding the passage from slavery to freedom, Lineweaver wrote, "This speediest development ever recorded of a backward group had the advantage of operating side by side with a highly developed people, and the disadvantage of being hampered in their development by prejudice." Furthermore, after she reported on the recent statement of an African American leader in Chicago who had addressed the continuing racial discrimination experienced by blacks in housing, jobs and education, she noted that her committee's emphasis was on the "interchange of pulpits." Referring to Race Relations Sunday, a day each February when white and black churches were encouraged to send their pastors and choirs to each others congregations in the hope that interracial contact would engender better relations, Lineweaver reported that her committee was working to promote and encourage the exchange.⁷⁰ Clearly this emphasis would not provide any immediate relief for African Americans who could not secure adequate housing, jobs or education.

⁶⁹Lineweaver, *Annual Report - Interracial Committee*, January 25, 1935, 1-2, Box 2, file 6, CWU @ CHS.

⁷⁰Lineweaver, *Report of the Interracial Committee - Woman's Department, Chicago Church Federation*, nd, circa January 1937, Box 2, file 6, CWU @ CHS.

The shift in missiology among white churchwomen, which transpired after World War I, is also reflected in the changes made in churchwomen's committee names in such places as Rochester, New York. Beginning in 1922, when the Woman's Council of the Federation of Churches first formed, the interdenominational churchwomen's group appointed an Americanization Committee. For almost ten years this committee concerned itself with immigrant families, including teaching mothers English, counseling foreign students, and advocating for changes in naturalization laws. The Americanization Committee also produced and presented pageants for immigrants as a means to teach the newcomers such diverse lessons as "personal friendliness" and Rochester history, government and geography. In 1930, the committee participated in conducting a race relations survey for the area, which may have instigated a name change to the committee in 1932. The Americanization Committee was replaced by the Race Relations Department, which gave up such activities as providing English lessons and began to include in their committee membership persons of different cultures and races. They began to support the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), sponsored an exhibit of African American Art and another exhibit called "Homelands." During the 1930s, the churchwomen's emphasis included, in addition to some of the earlier concerns with immigrants, African American welfare. Beginning in 1941, when the churchwomen again renamed the Race Relations "Department" to Race Relations "Committee," their focus became primarily the living situations of and better relationships with African Americans. Interest in immigrant issues almost completely disappeared. Cooperative work with the NAACP continued as well as joint programs

with the Rochester Federation of Churches.⁷¹

Women's Denominational Missionary reports also revealed the growing inclusion of race relations as a commitment among both national and local groups of churchwomen during the 1920s and 1930s. Although it was the southern white Methodist women who invited the African American women to the 1920 Memphis meeting, the northern Methodist women also began to develop a race relations initiative. Northern women took notice of the southern attempts and found inspiration in women such as Carrie Parks Johnson, one of the Memphis meeting organizers, chairperson of the Commission on Race Relations for the Women's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1921-1926, and the director of Woman's Work for the Commission on Interracial Cooperation for that same period.⁷² At the request of Johnson, the northern Methodist women appointed a representative to the Women's Committee of the CIC, which oversaw the establishment of over 800 interracial commissions across the south by 1923.⁷³ The northern Methodist women participated in the Federal Council of Churches Committee on the Church and Race Relations as well as national interracial conferences for

⁷¹Lillian Teller Snodgrass, *Weaving the Tapestry of Council Service and Fellowship: 25th Anniversary History*, May 1947, 3; *Summary: Outstanding Features in Development and Program, Council of Church Women, Rochester and Vicinity - January 1922-April 1947*, Files of CWU in Rochester, NY, Rochester NY CWU office (hereafter CWU @ RO-NY).

⁷²Mrs. May Leonard Woodruff, *Report of the Corresponding Secretary, Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church Annual Report, 1922-23*, 80; *Ibid.*, 1923-24, 85. CWU @ GCAH.

⁷³Mary Haven Thirkield, *Annual Message of the President, The Woman's Home Missionary Society of the MEC Annual Report, 1922-23*, 67.

churchwomen, the first being in 1926.⁷⁴ By 1930, the northern Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church had declared, "No question before this nation is of more paramount importance than that of the relations between the various races...." In addition to the above statement, the Society's Corresponding Secretary, Mrs. May Leonard Woodruff, also noted a shift in attitude among the women regarding their work on behalf of African Americans and other minority people:

In the earlier days we worked *for* the Indian, Negro, and Mormon. Today we serve *with* these and other groups for their religious, mental, and physical betterment....No longer are we building *for* but we are building *with* those for whom and with whom we are honored in serving.⁷⁵

An important change had begun in white churchwomen's attitudes allowing for an acceptance of a degree of equality between themselves and women of other races. This change lessened the paternal/maternal motives that supported many of their programs. By 1930, the Society had also instituted their own Interracial Commission.⁷⁶ Finally, by 1939, northern Methodist women, as represented by their Home Missionary Society, reported that 222 of their local auxiliaries gave "attention" to race relations.⁷⁷

The northern Methodist women's home missionary journal, *Woman's Home Missions*, also indicated a growing concern for race relations and the attempt to disseminate both

⁷⁴Woodruff, *Report of the Corresponding Secretary*, The Woman's Home Missionary Society of the MEC Annual Report 1925-26, 81.

⁷⁵Ibid., 1929-30, 88, *italics mine*.

⁷⁶Ibid..

⁷⁷Ada Townsend, *Christian Citizenship Committee Report*, The Woman's Home Missionary Society of the MEC Annual Report 1938-39, 143.

information and a challenge to local churchwomen to respond to the situation in their area. In January 1932, the journal included articles by Katherine Gardner, the Executive Secretary for the Woman's Committee of the Federal Council of Churches Commission on the Church and Race Relations, and Jesse Daniel Ames, Carrie Johnson's replacement at the Commission for Interracial Cooperation and the leader of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching. In "A Challenge and an Opportunity," Gardner invited white churchwomen to meet the economic and social crises experienced by African Americans during the Depression by utilizing their roles as employers.

Gardner wrote:

Women are large employers in many forms of household service. We urge that in filling vacancies in these positions special consideration be given to Negroes and members of other minority racial groups and that when possible openings be secured for these groups in other occupations.⁷⁸

Gardner may have realized that African Americans were "the last hired and first fired" during the Depression. As many white households lost the financial capability of hiring household help, African American women working as domestics lost their jobs. While white women increased their share of the female labor force during the 1930s, African American women's share declined. White women replaced black women by moving down the "occupational ladder of desirability." Once white women stepped down, African American women, who were already at the bottom, had nowhere to go and so lost their source of income. This phenomenon happened as well between white and

⁷⁸Katherine Gardner, "A Challenge and an Opportunity," *Woman's Home Missions*, January 1932, 9.

African American men in some service industries and factory work.⁷⁹ Gardner recognized the dire circumstances so many African Americans were in even prior to the Depression and so challenged white churchwomen to provide some relief.

Jessie Daniel Ames also offered a challenge to her readers. She juxtaposed churchwomen giving money and prayers for missions in other lands while people in their own locale suffered from the weight of poor living conditions, violence and poverty. Ames advocated that white churchwomen come to know African American women so as to understand their circumstances and their desires. She admitted that interracial contact could be awkward, especially at first, and relayed what one white woman had told her recently: "It is odd that we can sit down in a room with a colored person from any foreign land without self-consciousness, but when we meet with Americans of color, we are ill at ease and embarrassed."⁸⁰ Ames insisted, however, that churchwomen persist in their familiarization of themselves with African American women so that they might come to see "the real heart of the Negro woman." Ames promised that if white women persevered, they would "find buried deep within" African American women's hearts

intense longing and a grim struggle for a chance in life for her children, for decent

⁷⁹Lois Rita Hembold, "Beyond the Family Economy: Black and White Working-Class Women During the Great Depression," *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 3 (Fall 1987); Joe Trotter, "Race, Class and Industrial Change: Black Migration to South West Virginia, 1915-1932." in Trotter, ed., *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991; Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 242.

⁸⁰Jessie Daniel Ames, "The Church Woman Answers," *Woman's Home Missions*, January 1932, 9.

and clean living conditions, for the sure protection of the law in her family life, for a chance to earn money sufficient to support her family. These she wants, even as all women do....She must be known and understood as a woman striving upward out of a history black with tragedy and heartache, seeking a friendly world in which she may live free from the fear of humiliation for herself and violence for her children.⁸¹

⁸¹Ibid..

Chapter Two - "The women were nearly bursting": Churchwomen Organize Across Denominations

The task of transmitting race antipathy into brotherly love is one to try our souls and test our faith. Yet the women of the churches are addressing themselves to it courageously and with gratifying results.... The conflict may be a long one; but race hatred can have no place in the hearts of Christians, if the Church is to take this land for Christ! The present efforts of the women to promote better race relations constitute as necessary a contribution to the Church and the welfare of our land as was the educational program of the 1860's.⁸²

When Hallie Winnsborough spoke these words at the Home Missions Conference in January 1927, she had the vantage point of a woman with many years of experience in interdenominational organizing among churchwomen. A leader within both the Presbyterian missionary women's auxiliary and the interdenominational Council of Women for Home Missions, Winnsborough had witnessed the rapid growth of local societies of churchwomen as well as a national impetus to draw together their moral and spiritual forces. During that same period, she had also observed a slow but consistent development among some of these very same churchwomen: a desire to address race relations and racial inequities as components of their missionary programs.⁸³ It is in this

⁸²Hallie Winnsborough, "Woman's Part in Home Missions," an address given at the Home Missions Conference in Philadelphia, January 4, 1927, published in *The Missionary Review of the World*, February, 1927, 98. Winnsborough was the superintendent of the Woman's Auxiliary, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.

⁸³Winnsborough appears as early as 1920 as her church's representative on the Council of Women for Home Missions (CWHM) - a national interdenominational body charged with serving as a clearing house for resources and information for women's denominational home missionary boards. *Thirteenth Annual Meeting of the Home Missions Council, January 13, 14 and 15, 1920*, 30, World Day of Prayer International Committee, NYC; Florence E. Quinlan, "Let's Do It Together: An Account of the Cooperative Programs of Thirty-one Women's Organizations," *International Journal of Religious Education*, February, 1930, s 13-14, 16. Quinlan wrote that in 1919, 110 local

period of organizational and philosophical transition that the United Council of Church Women (UCCW) had its roots. Following World War I, churchwomen established a national interdenominational organization, eventually providing a structure for the growth and dissemination of a moral language concerning race. Although many of the women and groups active in the organization's development also participated in the evolution of this moral language, the two were not causally connected. The national organization arose from the needs of women's local and national missionary societies to coordinate activities around important religious and moral issues. Controlled predominantly by white women, only over time did the organization adopt race relations as a moral issue. Gradually, the interdenominational churchwomen's movement became an avenue for the expansion of a race relations agenda. When a lasting national organization emerged in 1941, known as the United Council of Church Women (UCCW), it continued to filter such an agenda throughout the various channels churchwomen had established over the years.⁸⁴ UCCW's first national assembly in 1942 and its decision to institute racially integrated local councils, which predated a similar decision by the national YWCA by nearly four years, culminated nearly three decades of change in churchwomen's organizational structure and mission.⁸⁵

groups existed while by 1930, over 1,600 had registered their existence with the CWHM of which Quinlan worked as the Executive Secretary.

⁸⁴Bennett et al.. *"All That Is Past Is Prologue"*, 21-22.

⁸⁵"Meeting of the Board of Directors," December 10, 1942, 4, Box 46, file 1, CWU @ GCAH; Robertson, ix.

A mass movement of women in missions did not begin until after the Civil War. Before then, women served in home missions on the western frontier and among the poor in their own locales but their numbers were limited. Furthermore, most Protestant churches did not allow women to serve by themselves in foreign fields but only as the wives of male missionaries. A number of factors changed this, including the recognition by churchmen that women were perhaps best equipped to reach “heathen” women and so ought to be more fully utilized in the mission fields. In addition, the amount of leisure time available to middle and upper-class white women following the Civil War increased substantially for various reasons. Fertility rates declined while at the same time middle-class whites grew more affluent and increasingly relied on the availability of domestic servants, many of whom were immigrants. In addition, the numbers of educated white women entering the labor force only increased slightly. All in all, middle and upper-class women had more time and energy on their hands to devote to mission work.

In addition, the experience of the Civil War changed many white women’s lives and generated desires to be more publicly active. The war had required that these women perform duties ordinarily fulfilled by their husbands, brothers, fathers and sons. They learned to manage their families and their property, and they formed voluntary associations, such as the Sanitary Commission to serve the needs of the soldiers.⁸⁶ The

⁸⁶Drew Gilpin Faust, “Trying to do a Man’s Business: Gender, Violence, and Slave Management in Civil War Texas,” chap. in *Southern Stories: Slaveholders in Peace and War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 174-245; Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

vast rise in the number of women missionaries, as well as in the number of women who assisted the missionary endeavor through their participation in local auxiliaries after the Civil War can be understood as one response to the void left by the return to peace and relegation to the home. By 1915, over three million women filled the membership rosters of forty denominational female missionary societies. By the 1920s, among Presbyterian women alone, 6000 local missionary societies raised three million dollars annually.⁸⁷ Until the turn of the century, however, most missionary activities were organized at the denominational level only.

At least two important factors encouraged missionary women to transcend denominational lines prior to World War I. In 1901, churchwomen instituted the Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions. Two years later, they followed it with a similar committee for home missions. Up until then, each denomination's woman's board of missions published a separate study guide for its local auxiliaries. The newly established committees discontinued this practice and instituted the publication of one study guide each year which was utilized by all the denominations' local auxiliaries. In addition to uniting the study of missions via textbooks, churchwomen also formed institutions and held summer schools where women could study the "science of mission."

In 1917, for example, nearly twelve thousand women and girls attended twenty-five

⁸⁷Hill discusses the changes in women's lives after the Civil War, including the effects of the war, on s 37-39; numbers of women in missions, 3; Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women in America: Two Centuries of a Quest for Status*. Presbyterian Historical Society, Contributions to the Study of Religion, No.9 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 59; Calkins, 5-6; McDowell, 10.

summer schools around the country. In addition, by 1915, twenty-five denominational and ten interdenominational missionary training schools existed in the United States and Canada.⁸⁸ Locally, however, women continued to meet and work predominantly at the denominational level. This changed when certain festivities brought local churchwomen together across denominational lines. The 1910-1911 Woman's Missionary Jubilee, a series of ecumenical celebrations staged across the nation to honor fifty years of the woman's missionary enterprise, brought churchwomen together for speeches, pageants, teas and luncheons. According to missionary women historian R. Pierce Beaver, many local interdenominational missionary societies emerged from the planning committees for these events and remained together once the Jubilee was complete. By 1924, claims Beaver, 1,200 local interdenominational societies existed.⁸⁹

Following World War I, a new set of forces further encouraged the impetus by missionary women to organize interdenominationally. Among these was the late influence of the Progressive Era on the theology of missions, or missiology. Since women missionaries were not ordained and therefore not responsible specifically for the actual evangelism or conversion of their missionary targets, social service had always been a part of both home and foreign missions. Initially, however, such services as

⁸⁸McDowell, 10-11; Robert, 260-269; Patricia Hill argues that the movement to unite mission study across denominations was only one aspect of an overall professionalization of the woman's missionary movement during the Progressive Era. In addition, says Hill, the movement to one missionary study guide was used to train local leaders how to teach and lead study groups; 121-122, 144-149; on numbers of schools, see Hill, 127.

⁸⁹Robert, 255-257, 269-272; Beaver, 152, 153, 157-158.

teaching and medical work were considered avenues that would lead to conversion. But when the progressive impetus swept across the nation, professionalizing and secularizing social service, the woman's missionary enterprise was not left untouched. By the turn of the century, reform efforts, social work, teaching and nursing were all recast as legitimate aspects of the missionary endeavor, and became an integral part of a successful mission.⁹⁰

As the missionaries' work evolved, so too did the responsibilities of the women back home who supported them through prayer, study and fundraising. Influenced by the writings of women in the missionary fields who began to emphasize social welfare instead of conversion, as well as by the growing culture of reform, churchwomen at home turned their attention to local social service projects. As they assumed roles in social welfare, industrial, international and race relations, law observance and Christian citizenship, they moved beyond the goals of missionary programs designed by the national boards of missionary women. This sparked demands for national missionary boards to promote programs better suited to their communities.⁹¹ In the absence of such initiatives, churchwomen turned to other local churchwomen to further their local missionary work. By 1920, many local churchwomen had forged interdenominational alliances with each other to better provide services to increasingly needy urban areas.

⁹⁰Hill, esp. Ch. 5; Yohn, esp. Ch. 6.

⁹¹Bennett et al. 11-14; *Forward Together: An Historical Sketch of Interdenominational Women's Work and the United Council of Church Women*, (NYC: United Council of Church Women, 1945), 3-4; *Findings: Conference on Organized Women's Work in Federations and Councils of Churches*, December 11-12, 1924, 1-2, Box 1, file 5. CWU @ GCAH; Ruth Mougey Worrell, "The United Council of Church Women," June 2, 1943, 1, CWU @ GCAH.

As a consequence of their experience, both as churchwomen and as activists, local churchwomen began to call for a national organization that would unite churchwomen interdenominationally under a missionary program agreeable to all. The Progressive Era's late influence on the missionary enterprise, local churchwomen's demands upon national women for new programs, and their expanded community roles helped redefine missiology to sanction endeavors churchwomen had already begun at the local level. The resulting redefinition of missiology broadened the mission field to include the needs of the poor, orphans, juvenile delinquents and other underprivileged classes in churchwomen's immediate areas.

Even as local churchwomen sought a more effective national organization, nationally based missionary women also began to consider the benefits of greater cooperation among local churchwomen, a process which ultimately led to revisions in missionary goals. Why exactly national women began this process of interdenominational organizing is not entirely clear although the evidence suggests several reasons. In 1918, the Council of Women for Home Missions (CWHM) began discussing with the Federation of Woman's Boards of Foreign Missions (FWBFM) how to unite local women's interdenominational missionary societies. In addition, a number of denominations had forcibly subsumed their woman's missionary boards into their male-headed general mission boards. By the end of the 1920s, almost all women's missionary boards had been eliminated.⁹² In doing so, the denominations in effect stripped

⁹²On the CWHM and the FWBFM initiating a conversation, see Head, 4; Bennett et al. 17; Beaver, 158. On the forced merging of woman's missionary boards, see Beaver,

missionary women of the institutional voice they had created in their churches.

Established in 1908 and 1915 respectively, the CWHM and FWBFM served women's denominational home and foreign missionary societies as clearing houses for literature, resources and money. Perhaps concerned about the future of women's ability to administer their own mission work within their denominations, the CWHM and FWBFM may have discussed interdenominationalism as a strategy. On the other hand, the support of missions had severely declined by the end of the war and so the CWHM and FWBFM may have been simply trying to consolidate their remaining resources. Whatever the actual motives, the CWHM and FWBFM stated their reason for interdenominational organizing as an attempt to better coordinate local efforts.⁹³

ch. 7; Robert, 302-307; Virginia Lieson Brereton and Christa Ressemeyer Klein, "American Women in Ministry: A History of Protestant Beginning Points," 180-182, in *Women in American Religion*, ed. Janet Wilson James (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), 171-190; Bendroth, 49-59.

⁹³Hill, 172-176. Hill argues that the professionalization and secularization of the foreign missionary movement transformed it into something akin to a social club and led it into decline. The rhetoric of professionalization articulated by the leaders, says Hill, ceased to promote a unique role in missions for local churchwomen. Whereas these women had once been asked to invest themselves spiritually and emotionally into the mission cause, they were, by 1920, only being asked for their intellect and some cash. Their role, according to missionary leaders, was the same as men's. Local churchwomen therefore loss interest in the movement and so it declined; Robert, 302-316. Robert attributes the decline in foreign missions to three causes: 1) the forced merges of woman's boards into denominational structures; 2) the fundamentalist-modernist controversy after the war which polarized liberals and conservatives and destroyed "the balance between personal and social that was a key to the success of the woman's movement." (307); and 3) a shift in missiology which elevated "World Friendship" as a model for partnership between eastern and western women and reduced the need for American women in foreign lands.

Why the CWHM and the FWBFM chose to unite local interdenominational

Gender Relations in the Church

At least two actions by the CWHM and the FWBFM resulted in a redefinition of missionary work and the legitimation of race relations as a missionary initiative. The national missionary women's organizations first decided in 1921 to petition the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) for assistance in exploring the possibility for a new national organization. Organized in 1908, the FCC stood as the united Protestant voice in the United States. Although it set no policy for any individual churches, its leaders suggested appropriate responses to contemporary issues in light of the gospel message.

Predominantly male and white, the Federal Council of Churches relegated churchwomen to an insignificant role on the Council. Furthermore, the African American presence on the Council had resulted more from the Black Churches' desire for representation in this national Protestant voice rather than the Council's active recruitment and desire for black members. Therefore, the Council remained mainly white and male throughout much of its early history. Despite their marginality, white and African American churchwomen and African American churchmen strategized how best to use the Council for the promotion of the issues they cared most about. In addition, churchwomen were often able to determine the conditions of their relationship to the FCC.⁹⁴ By so engaging the

organizations has been expressed by at least three chroniclers of the women's missionary movement: Head, 4; Bennett et al, 17; Beaver, 158.

⁹⁴Nothing has been written recently on women's relationship to or role in the Federal Council of Churches; See Samuel McCrea Cavert, *Church Cooperation and Unity in America: A Historical Review, 1900-1970* (New York: Association Press, 1970), esp. chapter 13, 236-256. David W. Wills has addressed the relationship of the Black Church to the FCC in, "An Enduring Distance: Black Americans and the Establishment,"

predominantly male FCC, churchwomen exposed churchmen's discomfort with women's role in the church as well as their attempts to seize control over churchwomen's activities. This, coupled with the ongoing discussions between the CWHM, the FWBFM and local missionary women, who had begun to demand new missionary programs, encouraged not only the formation of a national, female, interdenominational organization, but an expansion of their mission and mission field.

Although churchmen initially appeared amenable to churchwomen's request for help in local interdenominational organizing, the women soon discovered apprehension beneath the surface of the FCC's accommodations. In response to churchwomen's appeal, the FCC sent out questionnaires to salaried executives of local councils of churches, requesting information regarding organized churchwomen's work in their area. Florence Quinlan, Executive Secretary of the CWHM, reported in April, 1922 that the FCC had sent the surveys and that the Annual Conference of the Association of Church Federation Secretaries, to be held later that spring, would include "The Place of Women

in William R. Hutchinson, ed., *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), 168-192. Hutchinson, in "Protestantism as Establishment," in his ed. *Between the Times*, 3-18, briefly addresses the participation of women and African Americans in the FCC. In general, by reading the FCC monthly publication, *The Federal Council Bulletin*, one can readily perceive the dominance of white men in the FCC; See also "The Women Again Step to the Front," *Federal Council Bulletin*, May-June, 1924, 23. On the FCC and the social gospel, see White, Jr., esp. Ch 15; Luker, 314; "Editorial Comment on 'The Church and Social Reconstruction'," *Federal Council Bulletin*, September, 1919, 152-3; "The 'Social Gospel' or the 'Gospel for the Individual'?", *Federal Council Bulletin*, June-July, 1922, inside cover; See also Findlay, Jr., 6. On the FCC as the united Protestant voice, see Robert A. Schneider, "Voice of Many Waters: Church Federation in the Twentieth Century," in Hutchinson, ed., *Between the Times*, 95-121.

in Cooperative Christian Work” on its agenda.⁹⁵ Prior to beginning her work with the CWHM in 1919, Quinlan had been active with the Presbyterian Woman’s Board of Home Missions for many years.⁹⁶ The surveys and proposed conference session revealed that churchmen associated with local interdenominational councils of churches around the country were increasingly aware of women’s efforts to organize themselves across denominational lines. According to Quinlan, these local councils of churches began to express concern regarding how women’s work ought to be orchestrated.⁹⁷ In December, 1924, the Federal Council urged the CWHM and the FWBFM to “refrain from promoting organized women’s work under any form until such time as this whole *problem* shall have been studied and a uniform policy agreed upon.”⁹⁸ The FCC wanted time to conduct a study which would address women’s role in the church and how their organized work ought to be related to the churches’ many agencies. Although the Council promised to include women’s voices on any committee that would oversee such a study, the

⁹⁵Bennett et al, “*All That Is Past Is Prologue*,” 18; Katharine Silverthorn, “Historical Background of the Formation of the National Committee of Church Women,” November 3, 1938, 1. Box 56, file 1, CWU @ GCAH; Calkins, 21-23; Ruth Mougey Worrell, “The United Council of Church Women,” June 2, 1943, 1, Box 2, file 1, CWU @ GCAH; Calkins, “United Church Women,” 1961, 3, Box 56, file 26, CWU @ GCAH.

⁹⁶*Thirteenth Annual Meeting of the Home Missions Council, January 13-15, 1920*, 33. World Day of Prayer International Committee files, NYC.

⁹⁷Florence E. Quinlan, *Minutes: Committee on Women’s Church and Missionary Federations*, April 25, 1922, 2, Box 1, file 4, CWU @ GCAH.

⁹⁸Federal Council of Churches, “Excerpts in Regard to Place and Scope of Women’s Organized Work in the Church,” Quadrennial Meeting, Federal Council - December 7, 1924, 1, Box 1, file 5, CWU @ GCAH; *italics* are mine.

churchmen attempted to stall churchwomen's organizing momentum so that they could devise a system by which to control women's local activities. The Council's male members expressed anxiety regarding churchwomen's degree of independence from their institutional churches. By identifying the situation as a problem here and in other places, the men revealed their assessment of the situation as potentially threatening to their authority and control over local church-based programs. Their call for a "uniform policy" in this matter suggests a desire to gain or regain some control over women's organizational work.

According to historian Margaret Bendroth, this tension between churchmen and women during the 1920s was related to a changing perception of women's role in the church. Although churchmen had learned to embrace women's leadership in the missionary movement during the late nineteenth century, writes Bendroth, such support was largely based on an accepted ideal of Christian womanhood that included "woman's work for woman," as missions had come to be defined. By the 1920s, however, when many Americans began to rethink traditional relationships between men and women, many Protestant denominations began to critique the separate female institutions churchwomen had constructed to conduct their missionary programs. Criticizing "'feminized' religion, which granted special influence to women on the basis of their superior religious sensibilities," churchmen, at that time, began to express more readily their anxieties over their lack of control over both churchwomen's activities and, perhaps more importantly, the money the women raised. When leaders of the FCC and local councils of churches defined women's interdenominational organizing as a "problem"

and attempted to orchestrate the process according to their own desires, they reflected not only a power struggle between men and women, but also a movement within Protestantism to reassert a masculine Christianity by encouraging laymen to accept greater responsibilities for the church.⁹⁹

In response to churchmen's concerns regarding women's freedom to organize, the FCC and local church councils sponsored conferences and undertook studies that ironically increased women's opportunities to organize interdenominationally. Women from both local and national missionary societies involved themselves in the FCC study of women and the church and gathered at annual and biannual conferences to present accounts of their work, their future plans and their perceptions of their relationship to the church. The Federal Council appointed a well-known YWCA woman, Clarissa H. Spencer, to direct the study in cooperation with the FCC's Research Department. General Secretary of the World YWCA for ten years prior, Spencer served as Secretary of the Division of Education and Research of the National YWCA when she took on the FCC study.¹⁰⁰ When Spencer died unexpectedly prior to the study's completion, her "life-long friend" and fellow YWCA leader, Elizabeth Wilson, continued the study on her

⁹⁹Bendroth, 53. Bendroth's article is primarily about the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and the manner in which this particular denomination dealt with the changing ideals regarding women's religious roles.

¹⁰⁰Clarissa H. Spencer, "Women and the Church," *Federal Council Bulletin*, March-April 1926, 29; Thanks to Nancy Robertson for additional information on Spencer.

behalf.¹⁰¹

A series of conferences begun in December 1924 regarding churchwomen's work revealed important tensions between churchmen and women. In discussions regarding their missionary activities in urban areas, churchwomen made clear that such activities reflected their attempts to forge a place for themselves within the church. Given their limited role within the institution, women moved beyond the church walls and adopted roles for themselves to which they brought a sense of moral purpose. This movement by churchwomen beyond the official reach of lay and clergymen, discomfited churchmen, who responded with attempts to regain control.

The first Conference on Organized Women's Work, held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in December 1924 proved to be a contentious affair. The meeting's minutes describe a fairly mundane gathering with four male clergy giving the primary lectures followed by four churchwomen leading discussions.¹⁰² The official minutes, however, did not record women's reactions to the speakers as did a letter from Florence Quinlan to her friend and colleague at the Council of Women for Home Missions, Carrie Kerschner. Having seen and heard things missing from the minutes, Quinlan offered a different perspective. She described a meeting full of discord between men and women as well as between local and national missionary women. She expressed annoyance with the meeting's design, especially its privileging of the clergymen's perspective. She wrote, "Had there been

¹⁰¹"Death of Miss Spencer," *Federal Council Bulletin*, April 1927, 8.

¹⁰²*Minutes: Conference on Organized Women's Work*, Fort Pitt Hotel, Pittsburgh, PA., December 11-12, 1924, Box 1, file 5, CWU @ GCAH.

women on the committee which planned the conference, it would undoubtedly have attacked the problem from a somewhat different angle.”¹⁰³ In addition, Quinlan conveyed her frustration with what the men had to say: “Real ignorance of the women’s denominational programs was displayed by some of the men, and the men did not hesitate at all to indicate the lines of procedure that they thought the women should take.”¹⁰⁴ Clearly, Quinlan did not support the idea of men determining how churchwomen ought to work or organize.

According to Quinlan, she was not alone in her frustration. By the end of the first session by Reverend B.F. Lamb, Quinlan says “the women were nearly bursting,” implying they yearned for the opportunity to respond to Lamb so as to clarify the issues as they understood them.¹⁰⁵ During the following session the organizer of the conference, Dr. Charles R. Zahniser, claimed that churchwomen’s groups currently organized around two issues: raising money and educational work and that “the latter was purely in the theoretical realm, and not in the actual doing.” Quinlan told Kerschner, “This was one of the places where the women in the room rustled considerably,” expressing their disagreement with Zahniser. Quinlan also noted that they “rustled” more than once during the meeting.¹⁰⁶ In the fourth session Dr. Orlo Price spoke to the group regarding

¹⁰³*Florence Quinlan, New York, to Carrie M. Kerschner, Philadelphia, PA, December 20, 1924 (dictated December 18), 2, Box 1, file 5, CWU @ GCAH.*

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.: Minutes of the Conference on Organized Women’s Work.*

¹⁰⁶*Quinlan to Kerschner, 3.*

churchwomen's response to community issues. Price headed up the Federation of Churches in Rochester and Monroe Counties, New York.¹⁰⁷ Quinlan wrote:

Dr. Price informed us that the women practically did nothing along international or interracial lines; that all moral and political issues were dealt with by non-church organizations and civic affairs by groups outside the church -- the groups in the church seeming to be oblivious of these issues; that they practically ignored the human problems. *The room nearly exploded at this point.*¹⁰⁸

Quinlan's account of Dr. Price's insult to the churchwomen and her subsequent remarks hint that race relations may already have begun to assume some importance as a missionary objective (although the women could also have been insulted by Price's comment regarding international relations).

When it came time for her to lead the discussion after the fourth session, Quinlan suggested to the conference participants that both Price and Zahniser were mistaken.¹⁰⁹ Apparently she did so with some finesse since she reported that a Mrs. Darby came to her during the conference, took her aside and said, "You are the best politician in the room." As further evidence of the churchwomen's "hidden transcript," Quinlan wrote that Darby, "had been watching some of the moves and could read through them what others in the room did not see."¹¹⁰ Despite not being included on the planning committee for the conference, the women communicated more to each other than what had been allowed for

¹⁰⁷*Minutes of the Conference on Organized Women's Work*, 1.

¹⁰⁸*Quinlan to Kerschner*, 3; italics are mine.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*

on the written agenda. The Findings Committee for the conference, which included Quinlan, appointed a number of women from each represented organization to a planning committee for the next conference.¹¹¹ By doing so, they ensured that the second conference on organized women's interdenominational work would include their voices in a more substantial way.

Churchwomen at this time did not hesitate to articulate their frustration with the church's exclusion of women in its leadership and programs. In December, 1925, at the annual meeting of the Federal Council's Executive Committee, both Katharine Silverthorn, President of the FWBFM and Frances MacMillan Ferguson, President of the CWHM, addressed the gathering and challenged the clergy and laymen present to "take into account the ability and contribution of women." Silverthorn used humor in her attempt to provoke the churchmen into responding:

There was a story going around during the war about a Y.W.C.A. secretary who was allowed to return from overseas on a battleship. Great difficulty was found in placing her. She was neither a commissioned officer nor a common seaman. Finally they classified her as "One casual miscellaneous female"! I wonder whether there is not almost as much difficulty in the minds of our brethren in the Church as to what should be the classification today of well-trained educated women.

Ferguson, on the other hand, warned the Council that churchwomen were finding other avenues through which to make a mark on the world:

Many women are seeking other avenues of expression and work than the Church because they do not feel that they are finding there an opportunity for real leadership. The majority no doubt accept the leadership of the men without question, but a growing group is aware of a new place for women in the life of the

¹¹¹ *Minutes of the Conference on Organized Women's Work*, 3.

world. Other organizations - civic, political, educational and commercial - are bidding for their leadership. If in the Church they must come constantly to meetings which are presided over entirely by men, and whose committees are made up almost exclusively of men, if they must accept programs made wholly by men, will this lead to the greatest development for the Church?¹¹²

Ferguson's message reflects women's struggle to maintain some positions of power in the church at a time when churchmen were subsuming woman's missionary boards into the churches' general mission boards. In addition, her warning marks the missionary enterprise's loss of many churchwomen to the new avenues for public participation which had opened up to women since the turn of the century. Finally, Ferguson's statement reveals her concern for the health and vitality of the church. Her admonition to church officials regarding the potential exodus of churchwomen to fields outside the church, invoked both principles of equal rights language and the church's own welfare. Her ability to intertwine women's rights interests with a regard for the church and its leadership may have been the most effective way to argue her point as well as her attempt at diplomacy. Ferguson's warning to the churchmen reflected churchwomen's multiple identities. Her message signified how she and her cohorts understood themselves as both church members and women. Although they may have emphasized one over the other at times, the women believed their two identities were inseparable.¹¹³

Despite churchmen's attempts to curtail them, churchwomen took control of their

¹¹²"Heard on the Floor at Detroit," *Federal Council Bulletin*, January-February 1926, 29.

¹¹³Hill, 173. Hill argues that female missionary leaders, throughout the Progressive period, emphasized their roles as women less and less while emphasizing their equality with churchmen.

organizational development. At the opening of the second Conference on Organized Women's Work in June, 1926, Dr. Samuel McCrea Cavert, General Secretary of the Federal Council of Churches addressed the gathering. During his presentation, women interrogated him about the FCC's decisions regarding women's role in the church, their relationship to the Council and the creation of a Woman's Department within the Council. It had been a year and a half since the FCC had asked missionary women to refrain from organizing while they made a study of the *problem*. However, the Council was not yet prepared to issue a definitive statement. Said Cavert, "We would ask like Alice in Wonderland, 'Where do we go from here?'" But we give you every assurance that a committee is at work, we are interested, we want to help you solve the *problem*, but we prefer to deliver the address on the subject a year hence."¹¹⁴

Other reports at this June conference however, suggested that the women had no intention of waiting for the FCC's decision. Mary Clarkson of Milwaukee reported to the conference participants that churchwomen there had organized independently of the Milwaukee Council of Churches, which had decided against forming a Woman's Department. The women did so said Clarkson,

To take an active part in community service; To cooperate in church activities; To conserve and promote interests of church women; To compel law enforcement; To aid in building up the morale of the county.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴*Minutes: Conference on Organized Women's Interdenominational Work*, Hotel Winton, Cleveland, Ohio, June 2, 1926, 1, Box 1, file 8, CWU @ GCAH. Italics are mine.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 3-4.

The Conference's Findings Committee, which included Quinlan, Mrs. Robert McCall, president of Chicago's churchwomen's society, and Mrs. E. Tallmadge Root from Massachusetts, remarked at the end of the day, "such a conference as that held today is a distinct step toward coordinating the varied types of women's work."¹¹⁶ The Committee also recommended,

That organized interdenominational groups of local church women not already affiliated with the city Federated Churches, the Council of Women for Home Missions, [or] the Federation of Woman's Boards of Foreign Missions, study the programs and activities of these three organizations with the thought of joint affiliation.¹¹⁷

With activities and services already in place, and far too many obligations to let languish while the men conducted their studies, the women moved ahead with their organizational development.

A Broadening of Missions

The discussions that transpired between national and local missionary women at these conferences on women's work helped to produce a revised missiology. At the second conference in June 1926, the tenor of the conference had completely changed from the one reported on by Florence Quinlan with women conducting almost every session. Mrs. E. Tallmadge Root from Massachusetts led the devotions to open the conference and her husband, Reverend Root of the FCC closed it with a benediction.¹¹⁸ Frances Ferguson,

¹¹⁶Ibid., 7.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 8.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 1 and 6.

from the Council of Women for Home Missions, presided over the entire conference.¹¹⁹ Throughout the meeting, national missionary leaders, including Quinlan and Katharine Silverthorn, presented the goals of their organizations while numerous women from local groups introduced the activities in which their societies had been involved.¹²⁰ Clearly local women had moved beyond the missionary programs designed for them by the national women. Mrs. Robert McCall of Chicago reported that her group, the Woman's Department of the Chicago Church Federation, had in reality grown into the "Service Department" of the Church Federation. She attested that as many as twenty people were referred to her office each day for mental, moral and economic assistance. Churchwomen in Chicago served in the Juvenile, Morals, Domestic Relations and Night Courts, said McCall. In addition, their group had both a black and a white woman assigned to the County Jail, apparently acting as religious instructors and spiritual counselors.¹²¹ Together, local and national missionary women discussed how they could best cooperate in their interest of Christian unity. In doing so, they defined a new united theory of missions. By the end of the meeting they asserted, "We have been home missionary women or foreign missionary women, now the inclusive term - church women."¹²² Furthermore, among the many projects listed as acceptable community services for

¹¹⁹Ibid.. 1.

¹²⁰Ibid.. 1-3.

¹²¹Ibid.. 2-3.

¹²²Ibid.. 6.

churchwomen were interracial activities.¹²³

At these forums, local women voiced their needs and interests to national female missionary leaders as if for the first time. They compelled those responsible for developing local missionary programs to shift their focus away from the traditional understanding of the mission field to include the reform and social welfare activities engaged in by churchwomen in their immediate locales. In addition to redefining their mission, churchwomen also determined for themselves how they wanted to be organized. In June, 1927, at a conference on women's organized missionary work, the Findings Committee for that conference reported:

Since the times demand a broader interpretation of the term "Missions" it seems advisable that programs be expanded to include all the activities of church women and we therefore would call attention to the following action brought in by special committee: "The coming together in conference for three successive years of women representing organized local interdenominational groups reveals the fact that church women throughout America are recognizing the need for some central interdenominational organization through which the work of local interdenominational groups of church women may be correlated, systematized and promoted....Such a plan would provide a bond of unity and a medium of cooperation for all activities for which church women should be responsible."¹²⁴

Precise meaning for this ideal of unity would continue to evolve up until and even after the emergence of UCCW in 1941.

Local versus National

When conflict transpired between local and national missionary women in the 1920s

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴"Findings Committee Report," *Conference Women's Organized Interdenominational Work*, St. Louis, Missouri, May 31-June 1, 1927, 1, Box 1, file 7, CWU @ GCAH.

over interdenominational organizing, it was not the first time the two groups had experienced discord. As historian Patricia Hill has noted, the professionalization of the women's foreign missionary movement affected its leaders as well as the missionaries on the field, creating a division between these two groups and local members. By the end of the nineteenth century, missionary leaders had established auxiliary societies in local churches as a means of support and education for women's denominational missionary efforts. Initially, local women's support included direct correspondence with female missionaries and regular prayer, both private and public. According to Hill, conflict emerged between the movement's leaders and the auxiliary members very early on. Local auxiliaries discovered that they were able to raise money with great ease if they had a specific missionary or orphan as a focus of fundraising efforts. If members had a name of a child and perhaps even their picture, it made their efforts much more tangible. If they could exchange letters over time with just one missionary, they could create a relationship with that woman and feel that much more emotionally invested. However, both the movement's leaders and the missionaries themselves tried to end these practices. Leaders did not want local members to have that much control over the distribution of their money and missionaries in the field grew weary trying to keep up regular correspondence and finding orphans for every local society that wanted one. As early as the mid 1880s, missionary leaders were chastising auxiliaries for relying too heavily on correspondence for information. They were told that the missionaries were far too busy to respond to everyone and that they ought to rely instead on published missionary magazines. According to Hill, these early conflicts led to the eventual decline in interest

among local churchwomen to support missions and thus led to the overall decline in the movement.¹²⁵

This history of contention between missionary movement leaders at the national level and local auxiliary members makes conflict regarding the process of organizing interdenominationally in the 1920s that much more understandable. Having already experienced disapproval from their national leaders, local churchwomen felt less committed to their authority, and more aware of the power of their resources and their ability to withhold them. Furthermore, as the interdenominational organizing among women began, churchwomen at the local and national levels did not always agree with each other regarding their development needs. In February of 1927, the national leaders of the two interdenominational women's missionary groups, the Federation of Woman's Boards of Foreign Missions (FWBFM) and the Council of Women for Home Missions (CWHM), sent a letter to their board members, alerting them to local churchwomen's efforts to establish a national organization separate from the FWBFM and the CWHM. In this joint letter, the leaders issued a warning:

There is gradually emerging a desire on the part of some of these local church women's groups for a national organization of church women quite apart from our two national missionary organizations. We feel this would be a calamity and we need wise counsel and planning to avoid such duplication.¹²⁶

The national missionary women called a special meeting with the purpose of determining

¹²⁵Hill. 62-65, 94-107.

¹²⁶Frances MacMillan Ferguson, Constance Emerson Geil and Katharine V. Silverthorn, *Letter to FWBFM and CWHM Board Members*, February 23, 1927, 1, Box 1, file 7, CWU @ GCAH.

what their policy ought to be “in relation to these emerging organizations of church women.”¹²⁷ At that meeting a month later, the national churchwomen admitted that they did not have “a complete understanding of local interests,” which was causing local women to look elsewhere for national affiliation. In their ensuing discussion, the FWBFM and CWHM members examined their functions and programs to determine what they might do to circumvent the emergence of a new national churchwomen’s organization. Mindful of the decline of local support for national efforts, these national women did not want to lose any more support or the prestige made possible by local women’s affiliation. In the end they voted to appoint a joint committee of the two organizations to communicate to local churchwomen the programs currently sponsored by the national groups and “to win into cooperation in the missionary enterprise those groups of Christian women among our constituency who are laying emphasis upon types of work not hitherto adequately emphasized by missionary organizations.”¹²⁸ Local women had ventured into new territory and national women did not want to miss out.

Despite the national missionary women’s apparent commitment in early 1927 to both improve communication with local women and expand missionary efforts to include parochial interests, local churchwomen, dissatisfied with national women’s efforts, took matters into their own hands. After the third Conference on Women’s Organized Interdenominational Work in June, 1927, at which the Findings Committee reported that,

¹²⁷Ibid., 3.

¹²⁸Edith E. Lowry, *Minutes to Meeting of Representatives of Boards Constituent to Federation or Council*, March 29, 1927, 4, Box 1, file 7, CWU @ GCAH.

“church women throughout America are recognizing the need for some central interdenominational organization,”¹²⁹ local women took steps to form such an organization. Again, national missionary women tried to avert the creation of an independent organization by forming, in December, 1927, a “Guiding Group” to oversee the evolution of a new organization and preserve the missionary interests of the FWBFM and CWHM. They did so, however, with great apprehension, negating the permanency of the Group and calling it advisory. Upon seeing the wisdom of a more permanent body, the national women renamed the “Guiding Group” the National Commission of Protestant Women six months later at a conference in June 1928. At the very same meeting, however, local churchwomen, apparently chafing at the restraints of the slow moving national committee, organized themselves as the National Council of Federated Church Women. “By a humorous bit of irony, which did not make things any clearer,” noted one of the churchwomen’s chronicles, “the chairman of the commission and the chairman of the local groups were both named Ferguson!”¹³⁰ Such a comment suggests the importance these women placed on the formal use of their husbands’ names. Within a short time, once it became clear that local churchwomen would affiliate with the locally organized Federated Church Women, the nationally-based Commission dissolved itself.¹³¹

¹²⁹“Findings Committee Report,” *Conference on Women’s Organized Interdenominational Work*, 1.

¹³⁰Calkins, 28-36, 35. Frances MacMillan Ferguson served as chair of the National Commission of Protestant Women while Carrie Ferguson served as chair of the National Council of Federated Church Women.

¹³¹Head, 7.

It was not until the late 1930s that local and national churchwomen's organizations began to discuss merging.¹³²

Churchwomen, Interdenominationalism and Race Relations

Almost simultaneous to the emergence of a national interdenominational organization of women, many of these same women began developing and using a moral language of race to address social inequities and the failure of the U.S. to behave in a Christian manner in regards to all of its citizens. Although African American women long considered discrimination, segregation, racial violence, cultural diversity and race relations to be moral issues, white women of the 1920s were just beginning to understand the issues in this way. Three major factors coalesced and provoked a moral language and race relations agenda to take hold among some of the same white churchwomen who were organizing interdenominationally. The shift in white women's missiology and their broadening of missions, the efforts within the Federal Council of Churches to address race and the challenge by African American women to white churchwomen to take responsibility for racial injustices all united to make this happen. White missionary women's experiences with diverse people, both overseas and domestically among immigrant and migrant populations, laid the initial groundwork for this language to emerge. Even for those churchwomen who never ventured far beyond their home, their

¹³²Ibid., 8-9; Silverthorn, "Historical Background of the Formation of the National Committee of Church Women," November 3, 1938, 2-4, Box 56, file 1, CWU @ GCAH; "United Church Women," ("Historical Summary 1961" handwritten at top of 1), 4-5, Box 56, file 26, CWU @ GCAH; Silverthorn, "Church Women Cooperate," January 1938, 1 and "National Committee of Church Women - What is it?" *The Church Woman*, September 1938, 20-21.

correspondence with missionary women and their study of missionary publications stretched their minds and introduced them to a racially diverse world. As the Federal Council of Churches attempted to respond to racial injustices, they did so, in part, because of the presence of Black Churches among its members and African American church people within its leadership. Furthermore, white churchwomen who held leadership positions within the CWHM and the FWBFM also actively participated in the FCC's leadership. As national interdenominational bodies, the FCC, CWHM and FWBFM worked closely in their coordination and development of programs and so the FCC's initiatives on race were closely watched by the women. Finally, as with the Black Churches and African Americans who influenced the FCC, so did African American women challenge white churchwomen to respond to racial injustices. Within time, many white churchwomen came to understand that cultural diversity, including black-white relations, had moral implications that cried out for religious leadership. When their churches moved slowly on matters of racial justice, although the Federal Council of Churches advocated that they do, many churchwomen took it upon themselves to respond.

As early as 1926, the interdenominational movement among churchwomen created a network through which this moral language of race could spread across regional, denominational and racial lines. The presence of women in the movement who were speaking this moral language, helped make this happen. In September of that year, the Interracial Conference of Church Women gathered together white and African American women from both the north and the south at Eagles Mere Park, Pennsylvania. Many of

the fifty women who gathered for the Conference had long histories of missionary work as well as experience building alliances across the color line. In addition, these same women represented groups and individuals who were playing key roles in the development of a national interdenominational women's organization that preached interracialism. They represented at least nine different Protestant denominations and came from either their local churches and missionary societies or national denominational and interdenominational unions. The conference brought together women experienced in church affairs and aware of social issues. Most were well connected through volunteer and professional activities although they might not have previously known each other.

Some of the women in attendance in 1926, like Charlotte Hawkins Brown and Elizabeth Ross Haynes, had first come to the attention of southern white Methodist women in 1920 at the Memphis meeting. Haynes had an A.B. from Fisk University and an M.A. in sociology from Columbia University. A long time advocate for African American urban female workers, Haynes wrote her thesis on black domestic workers, the most comprehensive study of its kind until the 1970s. She also worked with the YWCA, serving from 1924 to 1934 as the first African American national board member. Her history of willingness to work within segregated institutions, always attempting to provide better services for African Americans, made her a likely candidate to engage white missionary women, challenging them to integrate race relations into their programs.¹³³ Charlotte Hawkins Brown, an educator and founder of the Alice Freeman

¹³³Francille Rusan Wilson, "Elizabeth Ross Haynes (1883-1953)," in *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, eds., Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley

Palmer Memorial Institute in Sedalia, North Carolina, was also a prominent club woman and national board member of the YWCA. Although her career as the president of Palmer Memorial Institute claimed most of her time, she played a primary role in the beginnings of a southern interracial women's movement in the 1920s. Always a vocal advocate for civil rights, Brown consistently challenged Jim Crow laws and customs, at times forcing her physical removal from "whites only" designated spaces. She, like Haynes, challenged white women to examine their Christian principles in regards to race relations.¹³⁴

Other women present at the 1926 Interracial Conference reflect the interdenominational and missionary arenas where race had become an issue of importance. In addition to Haynes and Brown coming via the 1920 Memphis meeting, so too did a number of white women. The Methodist Women's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, organized the 1920 meeting, hoping that if more middle-class white women could be introduced to African American women such as Brown and Haynes, racial attitudes could be changed. Sara Estelle Haskin, a white woman and one of the main organizers of the 1920 meeting, attended the 1926

Brown and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 548-549.

¹³⁴Recent scholarship on Charlotte Hawkins Brown includes Kathleen Thompson, "Charlotte Hawkins Brown (1883-1961)," in *Ibid.*, 172-174; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, esp. Ch. 7; Charles Weldon Wadlington, *Charlotte Hawkins Brown and Palmer Memorial Institute: What One Young African American Woman Could Do* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

conference.¹³⁵ Christine Smith, vice president of the Woman's Parent Mite Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church traveled from Detroit while Jessie Daniel Ames, of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), attended from Texas. Florence Quinlan, Executive Secretary of the Council of Women for Home Missions (CWHM), made the trip from New York City. All these women played prominent roles in the Interracial Conference of Church Women either by presiding at a session, making a presentation, or chairing a committee.¹³⁶

All of these women would play a role in the continued development of an interdenominational and interracial organization of women. Elizabeth Haynes, represented the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs and was a member of the Federal Council of Churches. She served on the FCC's Commission on the Churches and Race Relations, whose female members would later help shape UCCW's race relations agenda. Christine Smith became a founding member of UCCW who challenged churchwomen to reject segregated local UCCW units. Southern white women, a group represented by both Haskin and Ames, would provide important national leadership to UCCW and their mission to improve race relations. For example, Louise Young, the first

¹³⁵“Woman's Division, Commission on Interracial Cooperation” (Typescript in Jessie Daniel Ames Collection, Manuscript Department, Duke University, Durham, N.C.), 20-69 in McDowell, 90. Also see Hall, 86-95; and Knotts, 51-53.

¹³⁶On Christine Smith, see Octavia W. Dandridge, *A History of the Women's Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1874-1987*, (Women's Missionary Society, 1987), 39-40; On Jessie Daniel Ames, see Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry*; For attendance and roles at the 1926 meeting see *Interracial Conference of Church Women*, September 21-22, 1926, record group RG 18, Box 56, file 13, NCC archives.

chair of UCCW's Committee on Social, Industrial and Race Relations, was born and raised near Memphis, Tennessee. Dorothy MacLeod, the General Director of UCCW from 1948 to 1965, was a native of South Carolina and lived in the south most of her life. Mossie Wyker, UCCW President from 1950-1955, grew up in Kentucky where she also attended college. And Louise Wallace, president during the very turbulent years, 1961-1964, was raised in Texas. Dorothy Tilly, Jesse Daniel Ames' successor at CIC, would also attend UCCW's 1941 convention. And Quinlan's CWHM would merge with two other organizations to actually form UCCW. Together, these women and organizations laid the groundwork for UCCW's mission to advance interracialism as an ideal for the country and as an obligation for Christians.¹³⁷

The 1926 Interracial Conference of Church women reflected the coming together of a

¹³⁷On Haynes, Wilson, "Elizabeth Ross Haynes (1883-1953)," in *Black Women in America*, 548-549; on the attendance of Christine Smith, Dorothy Tilly and other southern women at the 1941 UCCW constituting convention, *Constituting Convention, Hotel Dennis, Atlantic City, NJ, December 11-13, 1941, Attendance*, Box 56, file 5, CWU @ GCAH; on Smith's role at the 1942 Assembly, *First Assembly of the United Council of Church Women*, Monday, December 7, 1942, 4, Box 46, file 1, CWU @ GCAH; on the influence of southern women in the shaping of UCCW's race relations agenda, see *Louise Young, interview by Robert Hall and Jaquelyn Hall*, February 14, 1972, transcript, Southern Oral History Project #4007, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, *Louise Young, interview by Hilda Dail*, 1972, Box 78, file 32, s 4-8, CWU @ GCAH; "For Immediate Release: Dorothy Shaw MacLeod, Former General Director of CWU, Remembered," news release from Church Women United, August 3, 1992, Box 75, Folder 32, CWU @ GCAH; *Dorothy MacLeod, interview by Hilda Dail*, no date, ca early 1970s, Box 78, file 10, CWU @ GCAH; "Mrs. W. Murdoch MacLeod," *UCW Assembly Bios*, 8, no date, Box 46, file 9; Margaret Frakes, "She Heads United Church Women," (article on Mossie Wyker), in *The Christian Century*, May 14, 1952, reprint in Box 75, file 26, CWU @ GCAH; "Mossie Allman Wyker, 1901-1988," Eulogy, Box 75, file 26, CWU @ GCAH; "1961 Assembly Participant Bios," Box 46, file 9, CWU @ GCAH; on the CWHM taking part in the emergence of UCCW in 1941 see, Calkins, esp. Ch. 4.

significant ensemble of women to address race relations in a way that had not been done before. Women from the Commission on the Churches and Race Relations of the Federal Council of Churches, the Council of Women for Home Missions and the National Board of the Young Women's Christian Association sponsored the event. The National Urban League, the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACWC), the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), and the National League of Women Voters also sent delegates. Fifty women in all, thirty-two of them white, traveled from fifteen different states to discuss churchwomen's responsibility for the advancement of race relations.

When the *Federal Council Bulletin* reported on the conference it noted,

At the opening session some of the leading northern and southern white and colored women expressed an emotional and moral attitude toward the whole problem which created a spirit of goodwill that ran throughout the conference. It removed the tension between northern and southern women and made certain that the spirit and impulse of the women at the conference was based on a liberal, democratic and Christian sentiment. A number of the women have since written letters giving this as one of their outstanding impressions.¹³⁸

The women present discussed current racial attitudes and methods of interracial organization, shared their experiences with previous attempts to work interracially, and brainstormed about ways to proceed in the future. Throughout the two days, the addresses and open forums were interspersed with sacred music and prayers. When the conference was over, an African American participant who appeared satisfied with the gathering remarked.

No attempts were made to minimize or gloss over discriminatory practices as

¹³⁸ "Church Women Explore Interracial Paths," *Federal Council Bulletin*, September-October 1926, 7-8.

perpetrated against the Negro in many sections of our country, but there was evident on the part of all a sincere and honest desire to face the situations as they actually exist in employment, in housing, in courts of justice, in schools and public places.¹³⁹

Out of this conference, a Church Women's Committee on Race Relations was formed as a department of the Federal Council's Commission on the Church and Race Relations.¹⁴⁰

Elizabeth Haynes and this Committee would be instrumental in setting the race relations agenda for UCCW after 1941. The networks of women and organizations present at the 1926 Conference would continue to overlap until December of 1941 when many of the individuals and groups would unite as the United Council of Church Women.

¹³⁹*Interracial Conference of Church Women, September 21-22, 1926.*

¹⁴⁰“New Leadership in Race Relations,” *Federal Council Bulletin*, September 1928. 20.

Chapter Three – Churchwomen Organizing for Interracial Peace

Churchwomen, the FCC and a moral language of race

Throughout the 1920s, as churchwomen redefined their missiology and continued organizing interdenominationally, they also expanded their relationship with the Federal Council of Churches, which served to foster among the women new ideas and initiatives regarding race. Although the southern interracial movement among churchwomen had emerged prior to the FCC's initiatives, the Council's national structure allowed churchwomen to expand their efforts across region and denomination.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, women were a part of the FCC's Commission on the Church and Race Relations from early on, including its first meeting on July 12, 1921 in Washington D.C.¹⁴² Among the Commission's guests was Carrie Parks Johnson, chairperson of the Commission on Race Relations for the Woman's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, future director of the CIC's Committee on Woman's Work, and one of the organizers of the 1920 Memphis meeting where Charlotte Hawkins Brown and her cohorts had addressed white churchwomen. Johnson, at that time, informed the FCC

¹⁴¹ The southern women's interracial movement has been well documented during this period. See Hall; McDowell; Knotts; Higginbotham, esp. Ch 4; Gilmore; and Frederickson.

¹⁴² "The Council, therefore, acting on the urgent recommendation of many leaders in the churches, both white and Negro, has created a new agency known as the Commission on the Church and Race Relations, in which Christian men and women of the two races are now working together to promote racial justice and good-will." *Federal Council Bulletin*, April-May 1922, 28.

what southern churchwomen had been doing regarding race relations.¹⁴³ Women within the FCC became much more visible however, after the 1926 Interracial Conference of Church Women. Following the conference, the Church Women's Committee of the FCC's Commission on the Church and Race Relations emerged.¹⁴⁴ According to Katherine Gardner, whom the FCC hired as the full time secretary of the Committee in the fall of 1928,¹⁴⁵ the Women's Committee was a direct result of the 1926 Conference. The purpose of the Committee, said Gardner was "to extend a program of inter-racial thought and action among organized Church women's groups."¹⁴⁶ The Women's Committee operated throughout the 1930s and into the early 1940s when it became subsumed into the FCC's general Commission on the Church and Race Relations. Participation on the Women's Committee or in the programs it sponsored included women involved in the Council of Women for Home Missions, the Federation of Women's Boards for Foreign Missions, the National Council of Federated Church Women, and the YWCA as well as locally involved churchwomen.¹⁴⁷ The networks in

¹⁴³"Coming to Grips with the Racial Problem," *Federal Council Bulletin* (August-September 1921), 100; Hall, 59; Knotts, 53; McDowell, 88.

¹⁴⁴The *Federal Council Bulletin* first mentions the Church Women's Committee in the spring of 1927. *Federal Council Bulletin*, May 1927, 12.

¹⁴⁵"New Leadership in Race Relations," in *Ibid.*, September, 1928, 20-21.

¹⁴⁶Katherine Gardner, "Church Women at Work on the Race Problem," *Church School Herald*, 7-9, nd. ca 1929, 7, RG 18, Box 58, file 4, NCC archives.

¹⁴⁷"Church Women Confer on Interracial Problems," *Federal Council Bulletin*, May 1927, 12; "Church Women in Interracial Conference," *Ibid.*, October 1928, 13-14; "Church Women Concerned About Race Relations," *Ibid.*, December 1929, 15; Mrs.

place among churchwomen at this time thereby afforded opportunities for the exchange of new ideas and initiatives regarding race relations.

An experienced organizer and promoter of missionary work among African Americans, Katherine Gardner was a good choice for the Women's Committee inaugural leader. Prior to her position with the FCC, Gardner, a white woman, was active on the Board of National Missions of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. There she worked to promote her denomination's Division of Schools and Hospitals as well as its Division of Work Among Colored People along the Atlantic seaboard. Traveling throughout New England and as far south as West Virginia, Gardner worked with nearly 2,500 women's missionary societies, organizing conferences, arranging for missionaries to visit the local women, and developing activities for women and young people interested in missionary work. A graduate of the New York School of Social Work in 1910, she first worked for the New York Charity Organization Society before becoming the Executive Secretary of the Civic Association of Englewood, New Jersey where she resided. The Association operated a day care, clubs, classes and various health programs. At that time, Gardner was known for developing the Association's work among the growing African American

Wm. F. Rothenburger, "Department of Race Relations Report," in Board Minutes of the National Council of Federated Church Women, May 20, 1935, 10-11, Box 1, file 22, CWU @GCAH; *Conference on the Relation of Women's Interdenominational Work to the General Interdenominational Work of the Churches*, April 16, 1936, RG 25, Box 19, file 24, NCC archives; *Eighth Annual Conference of the National Council of Federated Church Women*, May 12-15, 1936, Box 1, file 23, CWU @ GCAH; "Council of Federated Church Women," *Federal Council Bulletin*, March 1930, 19; Sarah Esther Trowbridge, "Asbury Park Inter-racial Conference," *The Church Woman*, February 1938, 17-19; Katherine Gardner, "Church Women Meet to Plan the Next chapter in Racial Understanding," *Ibid.*, February 1938, 9-11.

population in Englewood.¹⁴⁸

To engender mutual relationships between blacks and whites, Katherine Gardner directed a program with two major endeavors: the promotion of interracial conferences at all levels, and the education of church members regarding racial attitudes. Regarding interracial conferences, wrote Gardner, the Church Women's Committee

believes that there is no more effective method of solving racial problems than by bringing together the leaders of the groups in close fellowship for periods of heart-to-heart discussion and planning. And oftentimes the informal contacts at these conferences have the most far-reaching results.¹⁴⁹

The Committee believed that if black and white women were brought together at the local, state and national level, and if they were to represent the many groups potentially interested in race relations such as social welfare organizations, women's clubs, educational bodies and labor groups, then interracialism could be properly spread throughout the country. As an example of the potential benefits, Gardner reported that at a 1928 interracial conference, a conversation between an African American delegate and a white board secretary of the same denomination resulted in the black woman being elected to a high position in the church. When telling the story of the woman's election, the white secretary said, "It wasn't because we hadn't wanted Negro officers, we just hadn't thought of it before." Gardner attributed this change in mentality to the opportunity offered by the interracial conference for these two women to spend time together in casual conversation. Without such a forum, the women would have remained

¹⁴⁸"New Leadership in Race Relations."

¹⁴⁹Gardner, "Church Women at Work on the Race Problem."

strangers with their prejudicial attitudes about one another intact. According to this attitude, racial prejudice could be dissolved one person at a time.¹⁵⁰

In addition to providing opportunities for interracial contact, such conferences also presented occasions to educate. At the opening of the conferences, national and local experts presented the facts regarding the living conditions of African Americans. A discussion would then ensue examining the reasons for these conditions, including prejudice, and just what white and black church women could do together to alleviate the problems and bring about better understanding between the races.¹⁵¹ According to Gardner, white women's major interest at these conferences concerned the economic conditions African Americans were forced to live in. The fact that black men and women rarely were able to find jobs in the trade they went to school for, or that black women could not find work as nurses, or that state normal schools highly discouraged African Americans from attending, surprised white women. The Church Woman's Committee claimed that the interracial conferences introduced white women not only to these realities but also to something which perhaps startled them even more: black Americans had aspirations to move beyond the limitations they experienced on an every day basis. Gardner and her committee interpreted white women's surprise and ignorance as ample evidence of the need for their organization.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰Ibid.

¹⁵¹Gardner. "Missionary Women and Race Relations," *Women and Missions*, April 1931, 15.

¹⁵²Ibid., 15-16.

White churchwomen partially attributed poor race relations to a lack of information and so pursued the second of their program's endeavors: the promotion of education in realms outside of conferences. Gardner wrote, "Our thinking is no better than our information; what we're not up on, we're almost always down on."¹⁵³ To educate their congregations, churchwomen produced literature, assembled a list of speakers who could be called upon to address any group regarding race relations, and created a curriculum promoting good race relations for Sunday School lessons, adult study groups and young people's organizations.¹⁵⁴ Gardner wrote about the committee's special focus on children in a woman's missionary publication:

Realizing that the greatest hope for the solution of race problems is to build right attitudes in the coming generation, a subcommittee on curriculum has made a study of the methods and materials being used to teach Christian race relations to children and young people....[D]irectors of religious education in one section of the country are helping to secure stories from the children in their groups giving their personal experiences in dealing with members of the other race, telling how these experiences have been hard, or easy, or delightful, or disappointing.

The stories, said Gardner, would be used to write new curricula for children's religious education.¹⁵⁵ Finally, although the FCC's Church Woman's Committee of the Commission on Race Relations was national in focus, it also occasionally conducted local programs such as a "friendly trip to Harlem" for seventy white church women of New

¹⁵³Ibid., 15.

¹⁵⁴Gardner, "Church Women at Work on the Race Problem," 7-8; "Church Women Concerned About Race Relations," *Federal Council Bulletin*, December 1929, 15.

¹⁵⁵Gardner, "Missionary Women and Race Relations," 15.

York. According to Gardner, the participants carried “away a new interest and respect for the Negro race.”¹⁵⁶ “Through simple projects of friendly working together and large plans for influencing future generations,” wrote Gardner, “the members of the committee are seeking all possible ways of fulfilling their purpose.”¹⁵⁷

Although structurally it belonged to the Federal Council of Churches, the Church Woman’s Committee did not always see eye-to-eye with the Council’s leadership. In her capacity as the Committee’s executive secretary, Katherine Gardner also served as the secretary of an ad hoc committee on hotel arrangements. Consisting of representatives of national church-based organizations such as the FCC, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Board of National Missions, and the Society of Friends, the committee began meeting in 1930 to discuss accommodations for interracial gatherings.¹⁵⁸ Since each group at the time followed its own internal policy, there was no guarantee that African Americans would be housed or allowed into meetings sponsored by church organizations. Depending on what city the organizations chose to meet in and what hotel they contracted with for housing, blacks may or may not have been able to participate fully in the proceedings. By 1930, the FCC recognized this as a problem and so a committee was called together to study the issue.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶Gardner, “Church Women at Work on the Race Problem,” 8.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 9.

¹⁵⁸“Working Against Racial Discrimination,” *Federal Council Bulletin*, December 1930. 13.

¹⁵⁹*Minutes of a Meeting on Hotel Arrangements for Interracial Gatherings Held in*

Certain incidents involving the Hotel Committee however, reflected conflict between Gardner and the FCC. In May of 1931 at a Hotel Committee meeting, Gardner expressed reservations about taking a recommendation, which the Committee had voted on, to the Federal Council's leadership for approval. The meeting's minutes read, "Based on a recent experience with a resolution from the Commission on Race Relations, she [Gardner] feels that it is very doubtful if the Administrative Committee would adopt a resolution such as this committee will prepare." Gardner instead proposed that the Hotel Committee send its statement directly to its constituent groups, of which the FCC was one.¹⁶⁰ Gardner's hesitation to entrust the FCC with approving the Committee's recommendation prior to circulating it among the member groups suggests that the Council would not act decisively on behalf of African American members.

This also appears to be true in another incident a year later. In May, 1932, the Methodist Episcopal Church adopted a resolution requiring their General Assemblies to meet in places where there would be no segregated accommodations. According to Gardner, she had advised the Methodist leadership as they made this decision and offered them the procedures the Hotel Committee had drawn up. The procedures delineated by the Committee involved a process whereby the constituent organizations could hold meetings on a nondiscriminatory basis. Steps included the selection of towns where open

the Trustees Room, 105 E. 22nd St., Wednesday afternoon, October 29, 1930 at 2:30 o'clock, 1, RG 18, Box 58, file 4, NCC archives.

¹⁶⁰*Minutes of a Meeting of the Committee on Hotel Arrangements held in the Federal Council Conference Room, Thursday afternoon, May 27, 1931 at 2:00 o'clock, 1, RG 18, Box 58, file 4, NCC archives.*

accommodations could be found, the development of committees in the chosen towns to provide leadership in ensuring an open meeting, educational work within the constituent organizations regarding the Christian principles supporting interracial relations, and educational work with chambers of commerce and hotel associations regarding their support of open accommodations.¹⁶¹ Soon after the Methodist decision, Gardner wrote an editorial for the Federal Council's Bulletin expressing the Council's support of the action. Prior to the editorial being published however, a series of memos passed back and forth between her, George Haynes, the executive secretary of the Commission on Race Relations and Dr. Samuel Cavert, the general secretary of the FCC. The memos revealed a difference in preferred strategies between the three but especially between Gardner, a white woman, and Haynes, an African American man. When the two could not come to an agreement about the editorial's tone and content, they turned to Cavert for counsel.¹⁶² Haynes's main objections to Gardner's editorial revolved around its apparent implication of the Federal Council and its Commission on Race Relations for the action taken by the Methodist Church. A number of denominations had also issued statements against racial discrimination during the previous year and Haynes believed that these actions spoke louder than an editorial from the FCC. Two days after a memo passed from Gardner to Cavert and back again, Haynes wrote to Cavert:

Action in a matter like this without too much talk carries better against opposition

¹⁶¹Ibid.

¹⁶²Gardner, *Memorandum to Dr. Cavert, May 14, 1932*, RG 18, Box 58, file 4, NCC archives.

than a considerable amount of expression of opinion. Our best strategy, therefore, would be not to draw attention to Federal Council opinion but to play up the action that has now already been taken by four bodies.

Haynes' preferred response to the Methodist action was to publish an article written by someone present at the proceedings who could state the arguments in favor of the action as they were articulated at the Methodist gathering.¹⁶³

Gardner did finally agree to appease both Haynes and Cavert but not without some resistance. Two days after Haynes' memo to Cavert, Gardner again wrote to Cavert, this time granting him her permission to use her editorial as a news article, but at the same time offering several potential reasons why she believed it was an unnecessary action.

It will be quite all right for you to use my editorial as a news article if you think it is suitable. It seems to me more like an editorial than a complete news article, and as I told Dr. Haynes in our discussion it seemed to me that since the Methodist action has been given such wide publicity and is being so generally discussed, it really seems as though no harm could be done for us to give editorial comment to the Methodist action. You may remember that I wrote an editorial for the BULLETIN on the Hotel Committee's work some time ago which said that the special committee had been set up under our Commission.¹⁶⁴

Cavert had obviously abided by Haynes's wishes regarding the news article but had kept Gardner as the writer. This may have been his means of compromising between the two while keeping the peace. Clearly, Gardner disagreed with this strategy and did not hesitate to let either Haynes or Cavert know, although she did begin her last memo to Cavert by agreeing to the compromise.

¹⁶³George Haynes, *Memo to Dr. Cavert, May 16, 1932*, RG 18, Box 58, file 4, NCC archives.

¹⁶⁴Gardner, *Memo to Dr. Cavert, May 18, 1932*, RG 18, Box 58, file 4, NCC archives.

The editorial that the FCC published in the June, 1932 issue of the *Bulletin*, was in fact a diluted version of Gardner's original piece. The published version contained little support of the Methodist action except to say it was "in line" with similar actions taken by other national religiously-based organizations. Originally Gardner had written, "This [the action] puts the Methodist Episcopal Church in the front line of those groups which have determined that Christian brotherhood shall not consist of pious platitudes and high-sounding resolutions but shall be an actual part of life itself."¹⁶⁵ Clearly, Gardner wanted to use the Methodist action to reprimand those groups and denominations which had not yet adopted such a resolution. Perhaps the Council leadership, including Cavert, decided that such a lecture was too heavy-handed, especially coming from a woman. But not only the reprimand was cut. Even Gardner's original final line, "We congratulate and honor the courageous leadership which brought this action to pass..." disappeared in the published rendition.¹⁶⁶ Although the Hotel Committee, pulled together in 1930 by the FCC to draw up recommendations related to interracial accommodations, had influenced the Methodist action, the Council chose at this time to minimize its role. Gardner was disappointed in the decision.

This incident also exposes racial and gender tensions on the Council. As an African American who occupied the center of the political spectrum, George Haynes had

¹⁶⁵Gardner, "Courageous Action on the Color Line," nd, ca May 1932, RG 18, Box 58. file 4, 1; "Courageous Action on the Color Line," *Federal Council Bulletin*, June, 1932.

¹⁶⁶"Courageous Action," 2 of original editorial; "Courageous Action," *Federal Council Bulletin*.

developed his own set of strategies regarding how to best attain his agenda. Described as a gentle man, Haynes preferred to listen to everyone's point of view. He believed in conciliation and persuasion as well as agitation as effective tools in the attainment of equality.¹⁶⁷ Having perhaps less to lose, Gardner was unfamiliar with Haynes' perspective. What she may have interpreted as too much caution and too much compromising on the issue, Haynes may have regarded as a means of survival. In addition, as an educated man who had attained the respect of many fellow blacks and whites and who had achieved a comfortable economic position, Haynes may also have developed a sense of caution to protect himself and his position. What is clear though is the tension which occasionally surfaced between the Church Woman's Committee, as led by Gardner, and the larger Federal Council.

As this incident demonstrates, Katherine Gardner possessed a certain amount of determination and strength to take a stand against two men, both of whom were in positions above her in the FCC. Strong-willed and committed to the issue of race relations, Gardner also held beliefs similar to those of Haynes. Race Relations Sunday, the annual event born of Haynes's efforts, reflected a foundational commitment for both. Haynes once wrote that "racial attitudes have their basis in painful or pleasurable experiences arising through the contact of individuals" and groups. The purpose of Race Relations Sunday, like so many other of their efforts to bring the races together, was to

¹⁶⁷White. Jr., 258.

provide “pleasurable contacts” for both whites and African Americans.¹⁶⁸ In one of the many articles she wrote during her years as secretary of the Church Woman’s Committee, Gardner wrote an editorial entitled, “Into the ‘Upper Case’.” In it Gardner addressed the news that the New York Times had decided to change the lower case “n” in negro to a capital “N,” and elaborated on why this change might have occurred. Using the NYT action as a symbol of advancement for African Americans, Gardner argued that the main reason for this progress was due to the cultural contributions made by blacks. The music, art and drama engendered by black Americans, posited Gardner, had opened the eyes of whites to blacks’ potential for creativity and genius.¹⁶⁹ Both Gardner and Haynes argued that such activities or “pleasurable contacts,” allowed whites to see African Americans as human and more like themselves.

Gardner and the Church Woman’s Committee continued to bring white and African American churchwomen together throughout the 1930s despite the decrease in available funds during the Depression. In 1937, the Committee, with cooperation of the Council of Women for Home Missions and the National Council of Federated Church Women, the culmination of local missionary women’s efforts to organize a national association in 1928, sponsored two interracial conferences. Held in Asbury Park, New Jersey and Evanston, Illinois, the conferences together attracted delegates from sixteen

¹⁶⁸Haynes and Staff, *The Work of the Commission on Race Relations*, II-1, Federal Council of Churches, 1932 (Type Script) cited in Samuel Kelton Roberts, “Crucible for a Vision: The Work of George Edmund Haynes and the Commission on Race Relations, 1922-1947” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1974), 54 cited in White, Jr., 257.

¹⁶⁹Gardner. “Into the ‘Upper Case’,” *Federal Council Bulletin*, April 1930.

denominations, twenty-five states and eighty-five cities. At the conferences, African American churchwomen expressed both their satisfaction in white churchwomen's efforts to help alleviate substandard conditions for blacks and their distrust in the sincerity of white church members. Dorothy Height, future president of the National Council of Negro Women, spoke to the delegates, her focus on the interconnection between race relations in the United States and the lack of democracy abroad.¹⁷⁰ The conference provided the opportunity for white and African American women to interact. In fact, at the opening luncheon in Asbury Park, women were assigned to small integrated dining tables, as small as two people, to engender interracial relationships. One white woman who had participated in the conference upon returning home, began to think about how she might continue to develop the friendships she had begun at the conference with African American women. *The Church Woman* published her thoughts on the subject:

As I thought of inviting one or two of the colored women to lunch with me I realized how carefully I should have to choose among my white friends in order that the company might be congenial....[and] I should run the risk of remonstrances from the superintendent of the apartment house where I live. If I asked them to meet me at a restaurant or a hotel I should be very limited....This brought home to me the appalling need of education along these lines among Christian white women and of the stand we must take in demanding the same...opportunities for people of the same social standing of whatever race.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰Katherine Gardner, "Church Women Meet to Plan the Next Chapter in Racial Understanding," *The Church Woman*, February 1938, 9-11; On Dorothy Height and the National Council of Negro Women see Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 249.

¹⁷¹Sarah Esther Trowbridge, "Asbury Park Interracial Conference," *The Church Woman*, February 1938, 18-19.

Clearly the interaction between white and African American churchwomen benefited the white women in that their levels of racial consciousness were raised. Despite her class limitations, this woman came to a deeper understanding regarding the depth of racial prejudice among white Americans and the need for change. Most likely, this would probably not have happened without her contact with black women of similar class status. The importance of class in its role in these interracial relationships will be further discussed in chapter four.

***A new organization, a moral language of race
and a redefined missiology***

As Katherine Gardner and her committee continued to develop programs and strategies to address race relations, the interdenominational movement of women continued to evolve. With the economic difficulties brought on during the 1930s, the National Council of Federated Church Women (NCFCW) moved its headquarters to Kansas City, Missouri in 1932 where the Council's President, Carrie Ferguson lived. Although the Depression limited both travel and resources, the mid-western office became more accessible to women from across the country versus the earlier New York office.¹⁷² The NCFCW was also able to produce a quarterly bulletin beginning in November, 1934 that served to build and support networks of churchwomen.¹⁷³ *The Church Woman* succeeded the quarterly bulletin in 1936, became a monthly publication

¹⁷²Calkins, 39.

¹⁷³Ibid., 41.

in 1937,¹⁷⁴ and in 1938 became “the official organ for the Council of Women for Home Missions, the Committee on Women’s Work of the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, and the National Council of Federated Church Women.”¹⁷⁵ By that time, the Federation of Women’s Boards for Foreign Missions (FWBFM) had been collapsed into the Foreign Missions Conference, much like most denominational women’s missionary boards. The Committee on Women’s Work from the Conference consisted of the same women as had the FWBFM and it was these women who continued to represent nationally organized churchwomen with foreign missionary interests in the ongoing development of the women’s interdenominational movement.

By the mid 1930s, the NCFCW recognized that the organization was failing to achieve the purposes for which it had been founded in 1929, that is, “to unify efforts of churchwomen in the task of establishing a Christian social order....” In 1930, churchwomen had formed a Relationships Committee to consist of representatives from the NCFCW, the CWHM and the Committee on Women’s Work of the Foreign Mission Conference, in order to coordinate programs and activities.¹⁷⁶ When this committee met in March, 1935, the women admitted that communication between the organizations had

¹⁷⁴The *Report of the Executive Vice-President* in December 1935 continued to list the *News Bulletin* as the publication of the NCFCW. The first issue of *The Church Woman* did not appear until 1936. Carrie Ferguson, *Report of the Executive Vice-President*, December 1935, Box 1, file 22, CWU National; *The Church Woman*, November, 1936, Box 1, file 23, CWU @ GCAH; Gilkey, 42, 49.

¹⁷⁵ *The Church Woman*, January 1938, inside front cover.

¹⁷⁶ *Review and Evaluation of the National Council of Federated Church Women*, Annual Meeting, 1937, 1, 2, Box 1, file 24, CWU @ GCAH.

faltered, leading to confusion, inefficiency and the overlapping of programs. They had therefore failed, in their minds, to unify churchwomen's efforts. At that time, the Relationships Committee began taking preliminary steps to rectify the confusion.¹⁷⁷ In May 1936, however, finding that problems continued to amass, the NCFCW voted "to secure a person or persons to review and evaluate the organization, administration, program and procedure" of the NCFCW.¹⁷⁸ Even as that review progressed, though, interest in a united interdenominational women's organization mounted. In March 1937, the Re-evaluation Commission reported that its members believed "that women can not hope to give direction and leadership to the total interdenominational program until they themselves can present a united front."¹⁷⁹ The Commission reported that local churchwomen were consistently confusing the three national churchwomen's organizations, not knowing fully the groups' individual identities or missions. They believed something had to be done.

One of the most challenging criticisms, however, came from the NCFCW's Finance Department's chairwoman in May, 1937 at the Board of Directors Meeting. Beginning her report by stating, "Candor is a virtue that cannot be ignored at this crucial hour," Mrs. F. I. Johnson conveyed a number of complaints to the organization, believing all of the

¹⁷⁷*Minutes of the Relationship Committee*, March 20, 1935, 1-2, Box 1, file 22, CWU @ GCAH.

¹⁷⁸*Review and Evaluation of the National Council of Federated Church Woman*, Intro.

¹⁷⁹Lulu McEachern, *Report on Preparation for Closer Unity in the Work of Church Women*. nd, ca July, 1939, Box 1, file 25, CWU @ GCAH.

critiques had contributed to the NCFCW's failure to raise sufficient funds. Johnson was most disparaging regarding the churchwomen's refusal, just months earlier, to readopt the Social Creed, the churches' application of the social gospel to society's most serious concerns. "In our procedure, we have curtailed, if not strangled, our influence by not taking a definite stand on vital current problems that are shaking the very foundations of our Protestant churches and of the nation," said Johnson. She continued,

Our vision was limited, our judgment confused, and our courage at low ebb. At that dinner, when we succumbed to the suggestion that it is best for organizations to straddle economic and moral issues - that is, to make no pronouncement on them - we lost our chance to meet the silent cry for help on the part of the masses of Protestant women who would have seized upon the 'Social Creed' as an answer to their prayer for light and guidance. That was a crucial hour; we failed the Almighty and must pay the penalty.

Johnson rejected the notion that the Depression limited the money they might raise:

The financing of an accomplishing organization is not difficult. During the last year, I have raised \$56,000 for one such organization....Why? Because it [the organization] is a concrete project that accomplishes results....These days, only demonstrated achievement has in it an appeal that will open checkbooks. Personally, I cannot ask people to give to a cause for which I, myself, would not repeatedly sacrifice in terms of money.¹⁸⁰

According to Johnson, if the NCFCW had taken more risks by publicly embracing a more progressive approach to social issues, the organization would have been able to raise the necessary funds needed to operate a full host of programs. As it was, they had to cut back on their expenses, including relying more heavily on volunteer support, in order to keep

¹⁸⁰Mrs. F. I. Johnson, *Finance Department Report in Minutes of the Special Called Meeting of the Board of Directors of the NCFCW*, May 27-28, 1937, 4-6, Box 1, file 24, CWU @ GCAH.

their doors open.¹⁸¹ That same year, a Cooperative Committee of the three churchwomen's national organizations began to meet to more formally discuss their unification.¹⁸²

Despite Finance Chairwoman Johnson's criticisms regarding the churchwomen's weak stance on social issues, the National Council of Federated Church Women did in fact aspire to address race relations. At the same meeting during which the NCFCW was established, the women also inaugurated a Christian Race Relations department. Throughout the 1930s, the NCFCW advocated that local churchwomen organize race relations committees but their difficulty in attracting the support of these women in general led to a poor response to this request as well. The Race Relations Department also sent requests to local churchwomen advocating that they telegram President Roosevelt and ask him to work for the passage of the Costigan Wagner Anti-lynching Bill. The Department was in regular contact with Katherine Gardner and her Committee as well as the Federal Council of Churches' larger Department of Race Relations. In fact, as discussions ensued regarding uniting the women's national organizations, the NCFCW's president, Daisy June Trout, suggested that instead of having their own Department, the NCFCW ought to simply supply Gardner with representatives from the organization. Furthermore, the NCFCW was aware of other agencies dealing with race

¹⁸¹*Board Minutes, NCFCW, July 13-17, 1937, 11-12, Box 1, file 24, CWU @ GCAH.*

¹⁸²*Special Called Meeting of the Board of Directors, May 27-28, 1937, 14; Minutes of the Cooperative Committee, September 14, 1937, Box 1, file 25, CWU @ GCAH.*

and took steps to have these organizations' literature available to their constituents. By 1936, however, when the NCFCW was examining its entire organization, the women decided that the most important thing to do regarding race relations was to do some "fact-finding." With their concerns of duplicating services and programs multiplying, the churchwomen pledged to find out "just what groups, denominational or interdenominational, make Race Relations a part of their program" and in this way provide guidance to local councils of churchwomen.¹⁸³

The lengthy time it took for the three organizations to merge reflected not only the time it took to travel, communicate and meet regularly in the late 1930s, but also the painful process of individual women letting go of the organizations they had worked so long to develop. The discussions that they began in 1937 to orchestrate the consolidation, culminated in a December, 1941 constitutional convention where the United Council of Church Women emerged. Throughout that time period, the women continued to assert that one organization was in God's design, but this faith did not eliminate the difficulties involved in dissolving the three churchwomen's groups for the good of the one. When they were finally ready, they called together one hundred delegates, each representing one of the three organizations, to meet in Atlantic City. Myrta Ross, a member of both Katherine Gardner's Race Relations Committee and the Committee on Women's Work of the Foreign Mission Conference, chaired the nominating committee for the convention. A missionary in the Congo with her husband for many years, Ross would also serve as a

¹⁸³ *Review and Evaluation of the National Council of Federated Church Women*, 2-3; *Minutes of the Cooperative Committee*, 3.

long time staff member of UCCW. Ross recalled that Japan bombed Pearl Harbor just days prior to the Atlantic City gathering, prompting the churchwomen to address their first official communication to President Roosevelt pledging their “loyalty to the highest ideals of our nation in this hour of grave crisis.” As the convention ended, Ross was entrusted with securing UCCW’s first president.¹⁸⁴ Her committee contacted Amy Ogden Welcher who was at home in Hartford, Connecticut and who remembered the call vividly in her later years:

The most exciting experience for me was being called to the phone at night and asked to serve as Pres[ident] of the United Council of C[hurch] W[omen] which had been born that day. “Amy, did you know that women of interdenominational Councils and Home and Foreign Mission Boards of U.S.A. have been here in Atlantic City this week to consider uniting?” “No, I didn’t know.” “Well they have. And they did. They formed the United Council of Church Women. And they want you to be Pres[ident]! They adjourn tomorrow. They want you to come for the last session.” Thinking what an expensive phone call I said, “Thank you. I’ll think about it.” Nearer midnight, the phone rang again. “Amy...we’ve checked the trains. If you take the 7 o’clock train tomorrow morning, you can get to Atlantic City at one - in time for the 2 o’clock closing session...” I replied, “I’ll think about it. Good night.” Well I did. Wouldn’t you?¹⁸⁵

Welcher later surmised that because her volunteer experience had encompassed both home and foreign missions, her name was propelled to the top of the presidential candidate list. Furthermore, she had spent the bulk of her energies on local organizational work, the source of the original impetus to unite women nationally and the reason why the churchwomen found a need to unite the three national organizations. Finally, she had

¹⁸⁴Myrta Ross, interviewed by Hilda Lee Dail, nd, @ early 1970s, 1-2, Box 78, file 13, CWU @ GCAH.

¹⁸⁵Amy Ogden Welcher, *National Continuing Fellowship Questionnaire*, April 1980, Box 75, file 25, CWU @ GCAH.

not been an unknown to the national leadership of churchwomen's missionary boards. All of these traits made her an ideal and acceptable candidate by all the constituents for the first president of UCCW.¹⁸⁶ It was in this manner that UCCW originated.¹⁸⁷

When it came time for Katherine Gardner to resign in 1942 in response to physical ailments, she guided the Church Woman's Committee into a relationship with the newly founded United Council of Church Women (UCCW). While advocating that members of her Committee be integrated into the Federal Council's larger Commission on Race Relations, Gardner also recommended that UCCW "should serve as the channel through which race relations in local women's interdenominational groups can be promoted."¹⁸⁸ As someone deeply involved in the national interdenominational women's movement, and who was present at the December, 1941 constituting convention for UCCW, Gardner would have been keenly aware of its organizational development over the years.¹⁸⁹ She looked to this new Council of women as the inheritors of her and her Committee's mission. In fact, Gardner was successfully recruited by UCCW in 1943 to join its own committee on race relations.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶Amy Ogden Welcher, interviewed by Margaret Shannon and Hilda Dail, January 20, 1972, 2, Box 78, file 23, CWU @ GCAH.

¹⁸⁷Calkins. 58-59.

¹⁸⁸*Minutes, Steering Committee, Church Women's Committee of the Department of Race Relations*. January, 1942, RG 18, Box 58, file 4, NCC archives.

¹⁸⁹"Attendance," *Constituting Convention, Hotel Dennis, Atlantic City, New Jersey*, December 11-13, 1941, Box 56, file 5, CWU @ GCAH.

¹⁹⁰Louise Young, *Letter to Dr. Samuel McCrea Cavert*, November 11, 1943, 1,

For its part, UCCW also sought to create a cooperative relationship with the Federal Council of Churches. Once Gardner resigned and the FCC merged the Church Woman's Committee into its larger Department of Race Relations, UCCW looked to pick up where the Woman's Committee had left off. In the minds of UCCW leaders who chose to further institutionalize churchwomen's roles, there was still a place for gender-specific work to be accomplished and this included the field of race relations. In November of 1943, Louise Young, the chair of UCCW's newly formed Committee on Social, Industrial and Race Relations, wrote to Dr. Samuel McCrea Cavert, General Secretary of the FCC, conveying UCCW's position: "The understanding is that our committee will carry forward the program formerly developed by the Woman's Committee of the Department of Race Relations of the Federal Council."¹⁹¹ Young asked for information on the Council's programs, literature and the personnel who might assist her and her committee's agenda. In his response to Young, Cavert offered assistance through the FCC personnel but also stated clearly that he did not perceive UCCW's new committee as a replacement for Gardner's former committee.

To guard against a possible misunderstanding in connection with your reference to the "program formerly developed by the Woman's Committee of the Department of Race Relations..." I ought to explain that we do not think of ourselves as having in any sense abandoned this program. We think of it rather as permanently incorporated into the work of our Department of Race Relations even though we do not have a woman secretary giving exclusive attention to this aspect of our total program. We are, of course, glad to have you invite Miss Gardner...to serve on your Committee but I hardly think that [her] presence on your

RG 18, Box 56, file 12, NCC archives.

¹⁹¹Ibid.

Committee should be considered as a direct liaison with our Department of Race Relations.¹⁹²

Cavert attempted to reassert the Council's position and authority regarding their leadership in race relations. On the other hand, Young insinuated that the FCC had lost an important component of that leadership when they folded the Church Woman's Committee into the larger Race Relations Department. Although the FCC may have included women in its Department, UCCW maintained that a specific role for women existed in the church, in society and certainly in the mission to create cooperative race relations.

A Moral Language and Ideals of Womanhood

The white women active in the formation of a women's interdenominational organization and in the development of a moral language of race in the post World War I period combined distinct ideals of womanhood to create a model that served their specific purposes. On the one hand they fought for greater roles in their individual churches and in the ecumenical movement. They did so, however, without completely dismissing either their roles as wives, mothers and homemakers, or their belief in woman's distinctive nature, especially their moral superiority. They positioned themselves to share the responsibilities in the interdenominational campaign but also organized themselves separately from churchmen to ensure a degree of independence from the men's desire to control them. This desire culminated in the United Council of Church Women in 1941. However, this position was malleable since UCCW joined seven other

¹⁹²*Samuel McCrea Cavert, New York City to Louise Young, New York City, November 18, 1943, RG 18, Box 56, file 12, NCC archives.*

interdenominational organizations, including the FCC, to form the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC) in 1950. The voices of churchwomen active in the formation of UCCW and the NCCC reflected a flexible and utilitarian ideal of womanhood which neither strayed too far from the accepted norms for their time nor remained rigidly within its boundaries.

Prior to the formation of UCCW or the NCCC, when the National Council of Federated Church Women gathered in Dayton, Ohio for their eighth annual conference in May, 1936, their president, Lulu McEachern addressed them at some length. During her lecture, she looked back at the past year since the Council had voted her into office. She spoke of the meetings she had attended as their representative, including the Mobilization for Human Need, called by President Roosevelt, the New York Herald Tribune's Forum on Current Problems, its subject "America Faces a Changing World," and finally, a meeting called by the Federal Council of Churches to discuss women's work.¹⁹³ In her Presidential address, McEachern told her audience how inspiring it was to meet so many local churchwomen, the site and inspiration of the Council's origins in 1928. Mostly, however, McEachern talked about the state of humanity and the role and responsibility churchwomen must play in society. She painted a world where men and women grappled with social problems, searching for adequate solutions. Demonstrating her evangelical Protestantism, McEachern cast the establishment of a "Christian social order" as the

¹⁹³Lulu McEachern, "President's Message," *Eighth Annual Conference of the National Council of Federated Church Women*, May 12-15, 1936, 29, Box 1, file 23, CWU @ GCAH.

answer to all the world's dilemmas. Furthermore, she cast churchwomen as major players in that establishment. As McEachern did so, she drew, in part, on an older ideology of womanhood which sanctioned women's religious superiority:

Often in the history of His Kingdom women have taken the lead in difficult times. When Christ was on earth, He found women among His most understanding and sympathetic hearers. A woman...broke through tradition into a stag dinner to express her love for her Lord; ...a woman sat at His feet and learned about the greater things in life; and it was a woman whose love kept her at the empty tomb long enough to be the first messenger of a risen, glorified Christ. Women, because of their capacity to love, are still willing to lead dangerously for their Lord.¹⁹⁴

Having established a historical and scriptural foundation for women's distinct propensity to receive God's word and act accordingly, McEachern continued by positing churchwomen's purpose in the present:

It is for this peculiar mission that we believe this movement of church women "has come to the Kingdom for such a time as this." We declare our faith in the church as the greatest of all institutions and we further declare that we *expect* to pray and work through her channels in doing our bit to help in the task of building a Christian social order.¹⁹⁵

In laying out the Council's mission, McEachern departed from her strict use of women's supposed religious superiority. The Council's president declared her commitment to the Church but then also made a demand. She spoke not just of women's *desire* to work in the church but instead, she told those gathered that the Council *expected* to work alongside churchmen, using the institution as an access point into the world, all for the

¹⁹⁴Ibid., 28.

¹⁹⁵Ibid.

purpose of promoting a social order where love and harmony prevailed.¹⁹⁶

In addition to merging an argument about women's distinctive nature with a plea for their rightful place in the church, Lulu McEachern also reified women's role as domestic care givers and thus revealed the limitations of these particular churchwomen's agenda. In regards to the Social Creed that the National Council of Federated Church Women had adopted, similar in its social gospel content to the Federal Council's Creed, McEachern said,

As we search out the unclaimed areas of life in which this creed should be practiced, we will do well to begin with ourselves right in our own homes. Homemaking is the largest, as well as the most important, business in the world....Before we try to do something about a living wage and working conditions in shops and factories, suppose we try out our theories in our homes...Let us make sure that those who live nearest to us believe in our sincerity before we advocate the practice of this Social Creed by others.¹⁹⁷

McEachern claimed homemaking as her and other churchwomen's most important role, perhaps to insure they would not be labeled feminists. In reality however, her reference to working on race relations and workers' rights in the home reveals that she and many of those she spoke to must have employed domestic workers and so did more management than actual housework.

McEachern's assertion of churchwomen as housewives echoes many of her colleague's sentiments. In a regular unsigned column called "The Man Around the House" in *The Church Woman*, the official organ for the National Committee of Church

¹⁹⁶Ibid., 28; *Italics mine.*

¹⁹⁷Ibid., 31-32.

Women and eventually for UCCW, the interdenominational churchwomen's national leadership reminded their readers on a monthly basis what their most important role was. That they presented it in the voice of a man, as if to lend authority, further exhibits their limitations. In May, 1938, a particular poignant message appeared in the column:

Women are conservators of civilization. "Johnny, use your handkerchief," "Mary, play nicely." "John, why don't you shave and put on a clean shirt?" Seems like a dumb way for a woman to spend her life. Watching buttons, necks and noses;...bearing children....No wonder you get a bit fed up and want to accept civic responsibilities. But still I wonder. Crime is increasing, insanity is increasing, divorce is increasing.... Unquestionably a civilization is built upon civilized homes and a woman is the bedrock upon which a home is built. In the increasing disquiet...the function of the conservator of civilization is of growing importance. Of course...it doesn't seem nearly as important as being a brand new Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee of the Federated Cooperatives for the Promotion of Ecumenicality. This isn't to oppose careers or ballots....It is just remarking that there is such a thing as coveting the chance to blow a tin whistle when you might be beating the big bass drum that sets the march of civilization.

"The Man Around the House" perhaps served to temper churchwomen's aspirations.

Whether they heard the above message at home, from the pulpit or from inside their own heads, there was a part of them that still believed and feared that if they weren't careful, they would lose the "big bass drum."

Katharine Silverthorn, president of the Federation of Woman's Boards of Foreign Missions in the 1920s and chair of the National Committee of Church Women, the organizing committee for UCCW in the late 1930s, also embraced these perspectives. In *The Church Woman* Silverthorn wrote,

We are also realizing more clearly the relationship of women to the total program of the Church, that women are a vital and necessary part of that Church and should begin to think of their contribution, not so much as a thing apart, the interests merely of women, but how these special interests can be enlarged and made to contribute to the strengthening and development of the total Church

program....May we, as we think and plan, pray and work together in the days ahead, pool our activities and bring our special gifts and aptitudes, as women, in rededication to our God, our Church and our fellows, and serve together to the end that we may help the Church we love, to be the Christ-like force she should be in the troubled world today.¹⁹⁸

Recalling a Victorian ideology that assumed the importance of woman's moral influence, Silverthorn and McEachern did not stop there. Similar to suffragists who contended that the state needed women's vote because of their special nature, churchwomen posited "that women are a vital and necessary part of that Church" and therefore the Church must grant them a proper place. Churchwomen thus pursued the development of programs through which they could work in tandem with churchmen. The fact that Silverthorn, McEachern and their organizations defended the necessity of a female church organization while at the same time demanded a place for themselves within the church perhaps best demonstrates the precarious nature of their position. Willing to pursue whatever avenues were available toward a fuller membership within their churches, women lived with this seeming contradiction between separatism and cooperation.

Lulu McEachern, Katharine Silverthorn and UCCW's predecessor organizations reflect the difficulty in defining one particular ideology of womanhood to describe those women active in the formation of a women's interdenominational organization and in the development of a moral language of race in the post World War I period. These women constructed a complicated gender ideology for themselves, combining moral suasion and increased professionalization with their pursuit of positions within the ecumenical church.

¹⁹⁸Katharine Silverthorn, "Church Women Cooperate," *The Church Woman*, January 1938. 3.

Denied ordination and oftentimes full membership in their individual churches, many churchwomen utilized the interdenominational movement to gain access to a fuller role in the church and society. Although they did not necessarily use equal rights language, churchwomen called for a more permanent “place” for themselves within the church. Although they would not have called themselves feminists, they championed the causes of children, the imprisoned, immigrants and sharecroppers, and therefore reflected much of the white feminist agenda of their time.¹⁹⁹

Not ideological purists, the array of gender ideologies that informed white women involved in the development of the United Council of Church Women offered them the most pragmatic means of forging an entrance into voluntary or paid positions as church workers. Even though many of these women may have also held memberships or even jobs in other voluntary organizations such as the YWCA, which shared Christian evangelism as a common foundation, they differentiated themselves from such organizations by idealizing the church as the most likely institution through which to make social changes. To them, the church offered the purest avenue through which to proclaim a Christian vision of the world. The fact that they were women appeared to be less important consciously than the fact that they were Christians. Furthermore, their

¹⁹⁹On the professionalization of missionary women, see Hill, *The World Their Household*. On missionary women and feminism, see Joan Jacobs Brumberg, “Zenanas and the Girlless Villages: The Ethnology of American Evangelical Women, 1870-1910,” *Journal of American History* Vol. 69 No. 2 (September, 1982); Shirley S. Garrett, “Sisters All: Feminism and the American Women’s Missionary Movement,” *Missionary Ideologies in the Imperialist Era: 1880-1920*, ed. Christensen and Hutchinson; Virginia L. Brereton, “United and Slighted: Women as Subordinated Insiders.” Both Brumberg and Brereton were especially helpful in constructing these pages.

interpretation of the Christian social order, in part, as unanimity between the sexes, circumscribed their understanding of themselves as women and thus curtailed a consistent feminist agenda. The task of defining just what it meant to be a Christian in an increasingly complicated world dictated white churchwomen's deliberations. This is not to say that gender, race and class did not influence the outcomes of those deliberations. In fact, the outcomes of those deliberations reflect such categories. And nor did the deliberations remain static. As white churchwomen became more conscious of the significance of those categories, their estimation of a Christian's responsibility in the world changed. Furthermore, their deliberations involved interpreting not only what it meant to be a Christian woman, but perhaps more importantly for them, what it meant to be a *churchwoman*. Women with concrete ties to their denominations and/or to the Federal Council of Churches, and who involved themselves in cooperative Christianity and the missionary movement, defined themselves not only as Christians, but also in relationship to the church or interdenominational organization. As early as 1926, when their missiology experienced an expansion, missionary women began to refer to themselves as church women.²⁰⁰ Meant as a strategy to unite women involved in home and foreign missions, it also served to emphasize their relationship to the ecclesiastical institution.

As a woman's interdenominational organization continued to develop, churchwomen persisted in defining themselves in relationship to the institutional church. In doing so,

²⁰⁰ *Minutes: Conference on Organized Women's Interdenominational Work*, June 2, 1926, 6, Box 1, file 8, CWU @ GCAH.

however, they often revealed the tension women organizers experienced when choosing whether or not to collaborate strictly along gender lines. In the mid 1930s, Dr. Mary Woolley, president of Mount Holyoke, accepted the chair of the Women's Cooperating Commission of the FCC. Charged with communicating the Council's activities to local churchwomen's councils throughout the country, the Commission enlisted Woolley to lend her name to the Commission's efforts to recruit a select group of women to become members. In response to the Commission's invitation to join, Amy Ogden Welcher wrote Woolley with her concerns:

I must confess that I had some question about the advisability of a separate group of women within that organization [the FCC]. My theory is that they [women] have been too separate within our church life. Too often the local churches are not missionary-minded because of the strength of the Women's Missionary Society. A greater conscientiousness [sic] of her position as a Church Member, first of all, would increase her contribution, it seems to me.²⁰¹

Despite her misgivings, Welcher, a Congregationalist in Hartford, Connecticut and an active member of their Women's Board of Missions,²⁰² accepted Woolley's invitation. Her resistance to the nature of the Women's Commission however, did not dissolve. A year after she wrote the above letter to Woolley, she penned another to the Commission's secretary, Anna Caldwell, again expressing her distress over the separate women's commission:

I believe that women's greatest contribution to the Federal Council should be as

²⁰¹ *Amy Ogden Welcher, Hartford, Connecticut, to Mary E. Woolley, New York City, April 9, 1936, RG 18, Box 70, file 2, NCC archives.*

²⁰² *Amy Ogden Welcher, interviewed by Helen Baker, Hilda Dail, and Margaret Shannon, January 20, 1972, transcript, Box 78, file 23, CWU @ GCAH.*

regular members of its Board of Directors...and of its committees! That a women's commission should not be just a money raising auxiliary of the Federal Council, - or so thought of by the brethren!²⁰³

Welcher did not oppose women's organizing separately. She herself participated in the women's missionary movement and in 1941 she agreed to serve as the first president of UCCW.²⁰⁴ Welcher's opposition revolved around the fact that the Commission was a part of the FCC, an institution supposedly representative of the Protestant church. In her mind, every board and committee within the Council should have been integrated with men and women.

Anna Caldwell agreed with Welcher. In a 1941 report on the Women's Cooperating Commission, Caldwell wrote,

The ...Commission was formed primarily to bring lay women into the orbit of the Federal Council... It would be a sad commentary on the ...Commission if, after a period of five years, there has not been some integration of the Commission with the Federal Council; a complete integration should be the ultimate goal.... We look forward to the time when they [women on the Commission] will be fully absorbed and no Women's Cooperating Commission will be necessary in order to "bring the thinking of outstanding lay women into the councils of the Federal Council.[*]"²⁰⁵

Caldwell's Commission continued to function into the late 1940s, advocating a more

²⁰³*Amy Ogden Welcher, Hartford, Connecticut, to Anna Caldwell, New York City, October 8, 1937, RG 18, Box 70, file 2, NCC archives.*

²⁰⁴Welcher's presidency is documented in many sources, published and unpublished. Perhaps the most recent source is a news release from CWU when Welcher died in February 1992 at the age of 104. "For Immediate Release," February 27, 1992, Box 75, file 25, CWU @ GCAH.

²⁰⁵Anna E. Caldwell, "The Women's Cooperating Commission," April 14, 15, 1941, 3, RG 18, Box 68, file 1, NCC archives.

equal role for women within the Federal Council but never attaining adequate representation.²⁰⁶

Churchwomen at the local level echoed similar sentiments as Welcher's and Caldwell's. The local women's society in Chicago originally organized as the Woman's Church Federation in 1914. When the Chicago Church Federation invited the women to join them however, the society became the Woman's Department of the Chicago Church Federation.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, although they were part of the same organization, by the late 1920s, both the Woman's Department and the Church Federation administered separate Race Relations Commissions.²⁰⁸ Even though they often worked together on projects, the commissions operated independently. In her 1935 annual report for the Church Federation's Race Relations Commission, Florence Eldridge, an Executive Committee member of the Commission, wrote the following regarding the separate commissions:

Can we really be an effective instrument for furthering cooperation as we are set up, or is our lack of co-ordination and stimulation really inherent in the structure and, therefore, personnel of the Executive Committee itself? After careful consideration, I believe it is the latter. Nor is this a new idea, for in 1932 the retiring Chairman of the Race Relations Commission called attention to the need to include on the Executive Committee of the Commission more active representation from...the Women's Division..., if not the actual merging of the

²⁰⁶ Anna M. Pyott, "A Report of the Women's Cooperating Commission, 1936-1946," RG 18, Box 68, file 1, NCC archives.

²⁰⁷ *Mrs. Robert L. McCall, Chicago, to Anna Estelle May, Boston, October 4, 1926, Box 18, file 12, CWU @ CHS.*

²⁰⁸ Mrs. John W. Lear, "Woman's Department, Chicago Church Federation," Bulletin No. 1, Box 18, file 12, 2, CWU @ CHS. There is no date on this bulletin. However, Lear served as president of the Woman's Department from 1927 until 1930 and her name and title does appear at the top of the letterhead.

Race Relations Committee of the Women's Division into the larger whole, that is, the Race Relations Commission of the Federation itself. I am more than raising this question. I...urge that we face this question....

Eldridge continued her report by also requesting that the Church Federation take steps to secure better racial representation on the Race Relations Commission as well.²⁰⁹

Although she apparently did not have the same resistance to a separate women's committee within the Federal Council of Churches, Katherine Gardner also identified herself in relationship to the church. In an article regarding the 1937 interracial conferences held in Asbury, New Jersey and Evanston, Illinois, Gardner noted that the collaboration between the Woman's Committee of the FCC's Committee on Race Relations, the Council of Women for Home Missions, and the National Council of Federated Church Women was a first. The alliance between these three organizations for the sponsorship of the conferences, said Gardner, was "new in that the meetings were essentially for **church** women to consider their **church** responsibilities."²¹⁰ Gardner may have been referring to organizations such as the YWCA, the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching. Such groups often engendered interracial gatherings and included among its members countless churchwomen but their missions did not necessarily involve working within the Protestant establishment as did the three churchwomen's organizations. Nor were the

²⁰⁹Florence M. Eldridge, "The Race Relations Commission of the Chicago Church Federation Report for Year 1934 to April 1935," RG 18, Box 59, file 13, 7-8, NCC archives.

²¹⁰Gardner, "Church Women Meet to Plan the Next Chapter in Racial Understanding," *The Church Woman*, February 1938, 9.

YWCA and its counterparts advocating the racial integration of specific Protestant churches. The women involved in these 1937 conferences were not simply Christian women, they were **church** women. Gardner and her cohorts accepted with this designation certain responsibilities, certain limitations, and certain opportunities. By defining themselves, at least in part, by their relationship to an institution controlled by white men, churchwomen accepted a social, racial and economic status quo. Despite their attempts to modify the religious structure by vying for positions of authority within it and soliciting its members to respond to social injustices, their alliance with the institution diminished their efforts. Theirs was a reform movement and not a revolution.

As white churchwomen carved out a niche for themselves in the world of ecumenical Protestantism, they did so within the context of changing ideals of motherhood during that period. The “educated mother” ideal, as it came to be known, demanded that mothers acquire the proper tools, skills and insight so as to appropriately raise their children who suddenly needed more than just the instinctual affection characteristic of motherhood up until then. The ideal also expected mothers to carry their concerns regarding their children into the public arena, demanding social policy and legislation to protect children once they grew older and began to venture outside the home into schools and the workplace. Education for women grew in importance as the demands for raising, caring and protecting children demanded proper training. As one historian has written, “As the notion that a college education was actually an advantage to would-be mothers gained popularity, it made even more sense (and became still more socially acceptable) for women to enter the university.” Once in the college setting, women en masse

discovered the social sciences and translated the private message of educated motherhood into a public cry for community leadership by college-trained women.²¹¹

Churchwomen felt the impact of this change. As some of the most educated women of their time, they applied their training and ideals of public service to their changing missiology and developed areas of interest to focus their concerns. These areas reflected their interpretation of what was wrong in their society and what needed to be brought into “harmony” in order for a Christian social order to be attained. These areas of concern then became embodied in departments or committees that then attracted to their membership those women who wanted to devote themselves to their specific causes. In 1936, the National Council of Federated Church Women operated eleven such departments including, Spiritual Life, Motion Picture and Drama, Legislation, and Race Relations.²¹² With these departments, churchwomen armed themselves with the latest scientific, sociological, anthropological and moral arguments with which to attack the issues. As they embraced the educated mother as an ideal of womanhood, the emotionally based prayer meeting atmosphere traditionally experienced within local churchwomen’s groups gave way to a school-like meetings complete with textbooks, study guides, expert speakers and discussion panels.²¹³ The education of themselves and

²¹¹Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978), 107, esp. Ch. 3.

²¹²*Eighth Annual Conference of the National Council of Federated Church Women*, May 12-15, 1936, 5, Box 1, file 23, CWU @ GCAH.

²¹³Hill. 148.

of the ignorant masses, as white churchwomen viewed them, grew into a mission as important as feeding the hungry. If people knew better, knew differently, knew more, then they would cease to harm one another, or so churchwomen believed.

White churchwomen's ideals of womanhood both inspired and inhibited their race relations agenda. On one hand, racial injustices and racial prejudices detracted from a truly Christian social order and so fell within churchwomen's duties to address. On the other hand, because they continued to identify themselves with the church and with churchmen, despite their separate organizing, they did not move outside the status quo and so, perhaps without realizing, continued to support the accepted gender, racial and class norms. Without the presence of African American churchwomen who chose to participate in the ecumenical movement and who used it to further their pursuit of racial integration in American society, white churchwomen would most likely not have taken the moderate steps they did in pursuit of racial justice. In the next chapter, the leadership of black churchwomen in the development of a moral language of race within the interdenominational churchwomen's movement will be explored at length.

Chapter Four - "When I am jim-crowed...God is jim-crowed." African American Churchwomen and UCCW

I wonder if the women of the United Council of Church Women have backbone enough to return to their communities and put into action the many fine statements that have been made in all these Conferences.... We are wasting time and money if we continue to come to these meetings, listen to discussions and conclusions on the race problem, and then do nothing about it.

When Christine Smith stood up at UCCW's 1942 national assembly and extended this challenge to the white churchwomen who were at the time debating the institution of segregated local UCCW units, she did not speak for just herself. As a member of the professional black middle class, Smith felt called to speak on behalf of African American women. She continued, stating, "We Negro women are asking that you know us better, then you will not be afraid of us." Smith also recognized that since she was one of only a few African American women present at the assembly, if she did not stand up in defense of black churchwomen's concerns, undoubtedly no one else would. She therefore protested, "We Negro women are anxious to work *with* you but we do not want you working *for* us." Finally, Smith spoke for African American women long accustomed to the exclusionary tactics of white women's organizations, "Negro Church women have all of the machinery needed to enable them to work together and do not need nor want any type of separate councils set up for them, and what is more we will not have them."²¹⁴

With this proclamation, Smith put white churchwomen on notice. African American

²¹⁴*Board of Directors Meeting, December 10, 1942, IV, Box 46, file 1, CWU @ GCAH; Christine S. Smith, "A High Point in the Assembly," The Church Woman, February, 1943, 29; Deborah Gray White, Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves: 1894-1994 (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), 16, 174-5.*

churchwomen already had their own established networks and they would not participate in UCCW if the church group sanctioned Jim Crow. Despite white churchwomen's missionary legacy, their participation in social Christianity and their advancement of interdenominationalism, many of them continued to waiver on issues of racial justice. Furthermore, even with the participation of African American churchwomen such as Christine Smith, white UCCW women often failed to live up to their own highest ideals as well as demands such as Smith's. However, the participation of African American churchwomen in UCCW served to foster a greater awareness regarding racial injustices within the organization as well as a consistent attempt to identify and implement avenues for their correction.

Most African American women active in UCCW, especially those who rose to prominent places at the local, state and national levels, embodied the mid-twentieth century's black middle class woman. Known as the female members of the "talented tenth" at the turn of the century, a term coined by W.E.B. Du Bois and expanded upon by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, the talented tenth referred to the minority of African Americans educated in the humanities with whom Du Bois laid responsibility for the advancement of civil rights and the guidance of the black masses away from the worst in their own and other races. In addition to challenging Booker T. Washington's prevailing philosophy, which sanctioned industrial education as the primary answer to African Americans' woes, Du Bois' concepts had obvious class assumptions. He believed the talented tenth, through its espousal and dissemination of middle class ideals, would raise the position of blacks in the United States. The female portion of this elite group, the

female talented tenth, also came to be regarded by black educators and religious leaders at the end of the nineteenth century as essential to racial progress. Through their institution of schools, their participation in churches, and their establishment of missionary organizations, African American women provided leadership and services to their communities' struggle to rise out of oppressive conditions.²¹⁵ Their leadership did not disappear as the century progressed. Throughout the northern migrations, world wars, and economic depressions, black middle-class women continued to pursue better lives for themselves and their communities.²¹⁶

When UCCW emerged in 1941, many African American women were searching for other avenues to assert their energies and agenda for racial justice. Beginning in the 1920s, the black women's club movement had begun to suffer a decline. By 1940, the NAACP had also begun to languish. At that time, although it had recently surpassed the Urban League and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters as the leading civil rights organization, the NAACP lost 168,000 members, a forty percent drop from the year before. Furthermore, as it focused its campaign on the legal battle to desegregate educational institutions, there became less room for African American women to hold leadership positions since there were very few lawyers in their ranks. Finally, by the end of the 1940s, the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) fell into disarray when

²¹⁵Higginbotham, 20, chapter 2; W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Fawcett Publications, 1967), 42-54; Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

²¹⁶Giddings, 248.

Mary McLeod Bethune, its founder and president, retired. Following Bethune's tenure, the Council cast about looking for leadership and direction. All of these factors left African American women with few opportunities to enter into a national political movement.²¹⁷

In addition to the lack of options for African American women to organize nationally, the climate for interracial cooperation grew in the 1940s, also provoking African American women to work with white women in UCCW. Although this climate had grown among many churchwomen involved in the missionary and interdenominational movements, outside the church, the sentiments for interracial cooperation had also progressed in places. Not since the 1920s, when the Council for Interracial Cooperation, the Federal Council of Churches' Commission on the Church and Race Relations, the Woman's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the YWCA began to grapple with race relations had there been such a surge in the support for building relationships between the races. Among the factors that produced this shift in attitude were the anti-racist rhetoric created by the war, social sciences and the national economy. The abundance of research concerning African American life funded by the government and many universities at the time drew attention to the miserable conditions so many of black Americans lived in and created a semblance of sympathy among some whites. According to Ralph Ellison, however, the call for racial harmony by many of these studies was a calculated device to foster economic development, particularly in the

²¹⁷Patricia Hill Collins, "Feminism in the Twentieth Century," in *Black Women in America*, eds. Hine et al, Vol 1, 418-425; Giddings, 249-250.

South. Such entreaties served as a “blueprint for a more effective exploitation of the South’s natural, industrial and human resources,” said Ellison.²¹⁸ Even Jesse Daniel Ames admitted that the South had

managed to reduce lynchings not because we’ve grown more law-abiding or respectable but because lynchings became bad advertising. The South is going after big industry at the moment, and a lawless, lynch-mob population isn’t going to attract very much outside capital. And this is the type of attitude which can be turned to advantage much more speedily than the abstract appeal to brotherly love.²¹⁹

Whatever the reasons for the beginnings of change in the dominant racial ideology, the shift in attitudes that began to open to the possibility for cooperative race relations, eased the way for both white and African American churchwomen to work together in UCCW.

White churchwomen did not necessarily realize, when they agreed to an interracial UCCW, that African American participants would utilize the organization for, what Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson call, “cultural expressions of resistance.” By the 1940s, write Hine and Thompson, black women “knew how to organize, [and] were accustomed to working together.... The church and community work in which they had been involved for two centuries – and especially in the sixty years before the Civil Rights movement – made them ideal political activists.” In addition, say Hine and Thompson, African American women had created over time a particular form of expression “specifically created to avow and protest the oppression of black people.”

²¹⁸Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, (New York: Signet, 1953, reprint, 1966), 297-299 in Hall, 169.

²¹⁹Jesse Daniel Ames, *Louisville Courier-Journal*, November 29, 1939 in Hall, 169.

From abolitionist writings to slave narratives; from protest poetry to musical dramas; all traced the slavery, resistance and freedom of African Americans. With these expressions, black women participated in creating “a collective consciousness, a social and *political* consciousness.” Quoting Angela Davis, the authors write, “The consciousness of the social character of Black people’s suffering is a precondition for the creation of a political protest movement.” Over time, African American women had “helped to create an awareness of the political nature of black suffering in America,” thereby taking part in the construction of a protest movement. According to Patricia Hill Collins, “Black women’s attention to...the legacy of struggle against racism, sexism, and social class exploitation” has been a core theme in Black feminist thought. By participating in UCCW, black churchwomen widened their attempts to enlist white women in their campaign, believing that if whites became aware of the social and political nature of black suffering, they too would join the movement for civil rights.²²⁰

Although African American UCCW women did not necessarily reflect the predominant experience of most black women in the United States, especially economically, as members of the middle-class, they possessed a sense of social responsibility to their race.²²¹ Forty-one percent of African American women who held

²²⁰Collins, “Feminism in the Twentieth Century,” 418; Giddings, 249-250; Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 267-271.

²²¹For a discussion of middle and upper-class African Americans’ sense of social responsibility and race consciousness, see Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), es Chapters 2 and 6; and Charles T. Banner-Haley, *The*

wage earning jobs, worked as domestics in 1950 and another large percentage as agricultural workers. The average pay for black women at that time equaled thirteen dollars per week. Most black UCCW members, however, especially those who became prominent in the organization, worked in professional jobs such as teaching or social work or as administrators in their churches or the YWCAs.²²² African American UCCW leaders at the national, state and local levels had time to devote to interracial church work, usually in addition to numerous other commitments. Believing that the concerns of their community could in no way be separated from those things that impacted the women of their race, African American women engaged in an array of activities, always attempting to balance the multiple facets of their identity.²²³ Their commitments often included church and missionary work, club activities, the YWCA, the NAACP, the Urban League, social engagements, and other forms of professional or volunteer work they engaged in on behalf of the African American community's welfare.

Steeped in a long tradition of voluntarism, philanthropy and race consciousness, African American UCCW women looked to the interdenominational organization as an additional potential site for racial uplift. They not only believed that contacts with liberal whites might increase the chances for legal remedies for the racism that prevailed in

Fruits of Integration: Black Middle-Class Ideology and Culture, 1960-1990 (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 14-16.

²²²Ruth Feldstein, "Labor Movement," in *Black Women in America*, eds. Hine et al. Vol 1. 688; Giddings, 256.

²²³White, 16-18.

American society, but also that their interactions with white women could work to transform the negative images white America held regarding black women. As Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham notes, whites had long accepted, since the days of slavery, that promiscuity was an innate feature among African American women. Such assumptions had produced a perpetually threatening environment for black women; one in which prosecution of white men for rape became nearly impossible.²²⁴ The images and racial stereotypes served, writes Darlene Clark Hine, “as critical indices of social worth, political significance, and economic power.” In Hine’s estimation, African American women involved in racial uplift “well understood the power of images to determine the treatment of black girls and women by the larger society.” Therefore, African American UCCW churchwomen’s interaction with white UCCW women operated as a means of resistance in the face of white America’s images, attitudes and beliefs regarding black America.²²⁵

Throughout the life of the United Council of Church Women, African American women played pivotal roles in the organization’s advancement of a race relations agenda. By doing so, black churchwomen solicited white churchwomen to take responsibility for

²²⁴Higginbotham, 188-191; Hall, “‘The Mind That Burns in Each Body’: Women, Rape, and Racial Violence,” in *Powers of Desire: Politics of Sexuality*, eds. Ann Sintow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1983); Jacqueline Jones Royster, ed., *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900* (Boston & New York: Bedford Books, 1997), 31.

²²⁵Hine, “‘We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible’: The Philanthropic Work of Black Women,” chap. in *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1994), 126.

better race relations and better living conditions for black Americans. Through UCCW, black churchwomen advocated for the integration of public facilities, accommodations and housing. They spoke out for fair employment practices legislation and voting rights for all. The history of UCCW reveals the strategies employed by African American churchwomen as well as the varying degrees of success they attained in their pursuit of white allies. UCCW's records and publications demonstrate that for some black churchwomen, although their numbers were small at all levels of the organization, UCCW represented a potentially beneficial site for their involvement. Their positions within the organization often afforded them the opportunity to influence program design and shape the discussion regarding UCCW's race initiative. An examination of key organizational projects and literature within UCCW reveals the presence and influence of African American churchwomen.

Integration

In addition to being steeped in a long tradition of philanthropy, voluntarism and race consciousness, African American UCCW churchwomen also represented an intellectual legacy of integrationist thought. Although black women constructed a comprehensive consciousness that combined their pursuit of equality in their relations with black men with an end to racism, as members of the black middle-class, their main priority was to win full inclusion for their race into American democracy.²²⁶ As integrationists, they

²²⁶For discussions concerning African American women's political and social consciousness, see Elsa Barkley Brown, "Womanist Consciousness: Maggie Lena Walker and the Independent Order of St. Luke," in Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois, eds., *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, 2nd ed., (New York:

believed that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution included them in the promise of freedom and it was therefore their task to “prick the conscience of whites, showing the contradictions between their [whites] professed values and their actual treatment of blacks.”²²⁷ Integrationists, including African American UCCW women, were optimistic about the possibilities of change. Their faith in the Christian gospel of love and justice combined with their trust in their country’s stated political ideal of freedom for all citizens translated into a profound belief in an inevitable victory in their pursuit for civil rights. Black Christianity had taught these women that all people, as children of God, must treat one another as brothers and sisters. According to their faith, humanity’s oneness under God demanded that Christians reject segregation and integrate blacks and whites into one community - the beloved community. In time, so integrationists believed, African Americans would realize their full rights as U.S. citizens. To believe anything less would reflect poorly on their state of Christian faith.²²⁸ It was within this intellectual context that African American UCCW churchwomen cooperated with white churchwomen on a host of interests, including the proliferation of evangelicalism, home and foreign missionary endeavors, and a commitment to

Routledge, 1994; reprint, *Signs* 14, Spring, 1989), 268-283; Higginbotham, “African American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” *Signs* Vol. 17 (Winter 1992) p 251-274; for a discussion of the difficulties African American women’s organizations faced over the twentieth century in their attempts to keep a sense of balance between their multiple identities, see White, 16-18, 147, 174-175 and Chapter 6.

²²⁷James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 4.

²²⁸*Ibid.*, 6.

international peace. And it was within this context that African American churchwomen challenged white churchwomen to break down racial divides and work towards integration.

Women such as Christine Shoecraft Smith, the woman who first extended the challenge to integrate local UCCW units, brought a respected reputation to UCCW. Accustomed to leadership both in her church and in the African American women's vast club network, Smith's presence on UCCW's board signified the organization's alignment with moderately progressive politics as well as with the black establishment. Smith did not begin her personal campaign to build interracialism either in 1942 or with UCCW. Born at the end of the Civil War in Indianapolis, Indiana, Christine Shoecraft married Charles Spencer Smith in 1888. An African Methodist Episcopal minister, Charles was elected bishop in 1900 and the couple settled in Detroit after having served in various posts including South Africa. In Detroit for over forty years, Christine Smith became extremely active in the religious, social and political scenes of the city as well as the state and nation. She served as state president of the Michigan State Association of Colored Women; as a member of the executive board of the Detroit Urban League; as a mayoral appointee of Detroit's first Interracial Committee; and as an active board member for the Lucy Thurman Branch of the YWCA where she was instrumental in erecting its first new building. Smith also took an active role in her own church. Elected first vice president of the Woman's Parent Mite Missionary Society for the AME Church in 1923, Smith took over as president of the society in 1931 and held that position for ten years. She also served on the Federal Council of Church's Race Relations Committee with Katherine

Gardner. This particular position symbolized her support of an interdenominational approach to the solution of race relations. After serving as the third vice president of UCCW from 1941-1944, Smith remained on its executive board while at the same time serving as president of the National Association of Colored Women from 1945-1948. During the early 1940s, she chaired the Religion Department for the National Council of Negro Women and brought to the Council, according to its president Mary McLeod Bethune, "great spiritual influence." Recognized by the federal government during her final years, Smith was named to the national board of the Fair Employment Practice Commission in late 1947.²²⁹

Christine Smith, like most African American women active in UCCW, lived a life congruent with middle class, black, educated ideals. Committed to major black institutions such as her church and the NACW, she also found it necessary and advantageous to affiliate herself with interracial groups such as the FCC and the UCCW. In addition to her work with the FCC, her participation in the construction and management of the Lucy Thurman YWCA branch in the early 1930s reflected her desire

²²⁹Octavia W. Dandridge, *A History of The Women's Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 1874-1987* (Women's Missionary Society, 1987), 39-40; R.R. Wright, Jr., *The Encyclopedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia, PA, 1947), 255-256; on Smith's role on the National Council of Negro Women, see *Mary McLeod Bethune, Washington D.C., to Christine Smith, Louisville, Kentucky*, October 13, 1943, National Council of Negro Women, Bethune Council House, Washington D.C. (NCNW hereafter), Series 5, Box 31, file 6; on Smith's appointment to the F.E.C., see *Ruby Kendrick, Washington D.C., to Ella Phillips Stewart, Toledo, Ohio*, January 16, 1948, microfilm reel 11, file 148 "Christine S. Smith - Correspondence 1948 and No Date," NCNW.

to forge interracial cooperation in an organization extremely divided on the issue.²³⁰ As a leader in the Parent Mite Missionary Society, Smith took an active interest in both her church's missionary endeavors in West Africa and in the religious education of the church members' children. Her name on UCCW's masthead lent the organization wide recognition and validation among AME churchwomen and her presence encouraged the acceptance of racial integration as an ideal.

Abbie Clement Jackson, a founding UCCW member, also impacted the churchwomen's organization in profound ways as an involved and dedicated churchwomen in her own denomination as well as the wider interdenominational movement. The daughter of Bishop George Clinton Clement of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and Emma Clarissa Clement, Abbie Clement Jackson served on the organization's board of directors for most of the 1940s and actively participated in its programs and assemblies into her latter years.²³¹ A leader within her own denomination, Jackson committed herself to both the home and foreign missionary enterprises of the A.M.E. Zion Church, serving at different times as her denomination's executive secretary and national president of the Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Society. In addition, Jackson served on the YMCA board, the National Council of Churches, and was

²³⁰“Detroit, Michigan Lucy Thurman Branch Building,” Microfilm Reel 1900-1950, Michigan, YWCA national archives, Empire State Building, New York City.

²³¹On Jackson's parents, see C. G. Woodson, “The Record of the Clements,” *The Negro History Bulletin* Volume IX, No. 19 (June, 1946), 197-200; On Jackson's service to UCCW's board, see *Anna Harrison, New York City to Olivia Stokes*, October 10, 1979, Box 62, file 22, CWU @ GCAH.

chosen by the A.M.E. Zion Church as a delegate to the first two assemblies of the World Council of Churches. Finally, in 1961, Abbie Clement Jackson was appointed president of the North American Area of the World Federation of Methodist Women.²³² Like Christine Smith, Jackson brought visibility to UCCW. Other African American churchwomen would have recognized her name and been attracted to the organization because of Jackson's own involvement. Her name lent credibility as well as a black middle-class respectability.

The 1945 UCCW Board meeting in Washington D.C. reflected African American churchwomen's appropriation of the organization as a site of racial protest. Abbie Clement Jackson and other African American churchwomen played a pivotal role in this event, one which has figured prominently in UCCW's history. Reports of the board meeting have been passed down over the years through various written and oral channels. In October of that year, one hundred and fifty board members arrived in Washington for their meeting. One particular narrative reported that the hotel where they had made reservations denied them service.²³³ With de facto segregation still holding strong in the city, the management refused to accommodate the African American churchwomen on the board, insisting that they would have to go elsewhere. Instead of bowing to the racist policies by separating themselves, the women found housing in the private homes of

²³²"Two Who Helped it Get Started," *The Church Woman* Vol. 4 (1990), 9-10.

²³³Margaret Shannon, *Just Because: The Story of the National Movement of Church Women United in the U.S.A., 1941 - 1975* (Corte Madera, CA: Omega Books, 1977), 34.

churchwomen in the area, including the home of Mary McLeod Bethune who was president at the time of the National Council of Negro Women and who, as a UCCW board member, led the worship service during the second morning of the meeting.²³⁴ In the days that followed their initial entrance into the city, the women met in churches to conduct business and visited their congressmen to protest the city's racial policies, to support fair employment practice legislation, and to discuss with them the dangers of relying on the atomic bomb as an aspect of foreign policy. They enjoyed tea with President and Mrs. Truman one afternoon and ate together in open restaurants, ignoring the stares and surprised looks on people's faces. They stirred things up enough so that their presence in the city was recorded and commented upon by the Washington Post and by at least one politician, Senator Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi. In his 1947 book *Take Your Choice*, Bilbo described the churchwomen's behavior as "mongrelizing." He wrote, "Such stunts are not only disgraceful, unthinkable and outlandish but...a betrayal of the white race and...an affront to every decent and cultural American ideal and aspiration of the Anglo-Saxon race."²³⁵

²³⁴*The Board Meeting of October 1945, A Report*, RG 18, Box 70, file 1, 1, NCC archives.

²³⁵Theodore Bilbo, *Take Your Choice* (Poplarville, MS: Dream Publishing Co., 1947), 146. Quoted by Myrta Ross, a founder and longtime staff member of United Church Women, 1941-1961. In April of 1980, Ross wrote down some of her memories at the request of UCW staff who were at the time preparing for UCW's 40th birthday celebration. Ross was present in Washington D.C. in 1945. Myrta Ross, "Two 'Remembrances,'" April 25, 1980. Box 74, file 33, 1, CWU @ GCAH; *Washington Post*, October 24, 1945, front page.

This particular 1945 Washington D.C. story has been retold and recast by several

On the surface, the meeting in Washington D.C. violated an earlier board decision to never meet in cities where segregated accommodations existed.²³⁶ But according to Myrta Ross, a UCCW founder and longtime staff member, Jackson and other African American UCCW members insisted on orchestrating the Washington D.C. meeting.²³⁷ Ross remembered that the black churchwomen persuaded UCCW to go to Washington and stage the event so as to demonstrate their principles of interracial relationships. The local Washington chapter arranged for private housing, specifically putting white members like Ross into the homes of prominent African Americans such as Judge Armad Scott and his wife. Georgiana Sibley, the white president of UCCW, stayed in the home of Mary McLeod Bethune and white and African American women stayed together in the home of Dr. Paul Douglass, the president of American University. Whereas the white UCCW churchwomen had made what they believed to be a sound moral decision by

different UCW players. In addition to Myrta Ross's 1980 account, Margaret Shannon included the story in her history of UCW, *Just Because*. Shannon, a longtime member of UCW, served as the director from 1966 - 1975. Also, Louise Young, a sociology professor at Scarritt College and who was hired by UCW for a year in 1945 to become their first director of the Christian Social Relations Department, remembered the story when she was interviewed in 1972 by a then current UCW staff member: Box 78, file 32, CWU @ GCAH, 2-3. James F. Findlay, Jr. also mentions the event when he briefly describes UCW in *Church People in the Struggle*, 49.

²³⁶Although I can not find the exact time when such a decision was made, the decision is referred to earlier than the 1945 meeting: "Voted that the policy of standing for no racial discrimination in hotels used by the United Council be reaffirmed." *Minutes to the Executive Committee Meeting, May 19-20, 1943*, 7, Series 5, Box 34, file 4, NCNW.

²³⁷Myrta Ross. interview by Hilda Lee Dail, ca 1972, Transcript, 3, Box 78, file 13. CWU @ GCAH.

refusing to meet in cities with de jure or de facto segregation, the African American churchwomen demonstrated how such a decision could in fact be limiting. By meeting in the nation's capital, the country's symbolic and literal site of supposed democracy, UCCW brought attention to the hypocrisy involved in fighting for freedom in Europe while denying justice to black Americans at home.

The action in Washington D.C. led other churchwomen to speak out regarding the limiting nature of UCCW's national policy prohibiting meetings where the public facilities were segregated. The Louisville, Kentucky churchwomen's council requested Abbie Clement Jackson to speak on their behalf at the May, 1947 Executive Committee meeting concerning this subject. The meeting's minutes record their concerns:

The Louisville Council feels that because of this resolution, which would bar Louisville (in any case because of its legal restriction on the housing of Negroes in hotels), Southern church women are deprived of a great opportunity to break down segregation patterns in their churches and homes. They propose that the Council consider a plan of holding a Board meeting where all persons would be intertained [sic] alike in homes and by churches with no one breaking the pattern by using public facilities.

The Louisville churchwomen would have read about the 1945 Washington D.C. Board meeting in the monthly UCCW publication and recognized the potential power in such action. Furthermore, Abbie Clement Jackson lived in Louisville and may have very well discussed the 1945 Board meeting specifically and the issue generally with other churchwomen. Once Jackson spoke to them, the Executive Committee discussed the matter but decided not to vote on a change in their national policy. They did, however, promise to keep discussing the Louisville women's concerns so that UCCW could find ways to "move forward on this racial issue on a local level which will strengthen and not

weaken the national policy.”²³⁸

Despite some churchwomen maintaining that UCCW’s policy might be limiting, the 1945 experience in Washington D.C. led UCCW organizers to further ensure that future meeting accommodations would meet the organization’s interracial stance. At times, their determination to insist that they be accommodated introduced embarrassing and amusing situations. Three years later in 1948, UCCW made preparations for their national assembly in Milwaukee. Cynthia Wedel, chair of the Christian Social Relations Committee at the time, remembered that UCCW was not overly concerned about meeting in Milwaukee but they did ask the local committee to procure signed statements from the hotels and restaurants UCCW would patronize, promising to admit anyone regardless of race. When the national staff got word that one of the hotels refused to sign the statement, they sent someone from New York to challenge the hotel management regarding its apparent racist policy. Wedel later recalled the incident:

They got a call in the national office saying that one of the hotel managers refused to sign the statement. It was a large hotel and we needed to use it, and we weren’t at all sure that these local girls were doing their bit. So somebody, one of the staff members, was sent out there to straighten that one out. [She] told me that she went to this [hotel] and demanded to see the manager, and as soon as she went in she began reading him the riot act about how this was unChristian, unAmerican, indecent, immoral to discriminate against Negroes and that he ought to be ashamed of himself and he ought to sign this paper. She said he listened very patiently and very graciously to her, and when she got all through with her long tirade, he said, “I don’t discriminate against Negroes. I just don’t like Church conventions. They don’t spend enough at the bar.”

²³⁸*Executive Committee Meeting, May 7-9, 1947, 8, Box 2, file 7, CWU @ GCAH.*

As Wedel pointed out, the zealous nature of UCCW often resulted in “interesting” events like this case of misunderstanding.²³⁹

UCCW benefited from the organizing and leadership experience of Anna Arnold Hedgeman. During the mid 1940s when she served on UCCW’s board, Hedgeman worked as the executive director of the National Council for a Permanent Fair Employment Practices Committee (NCPFEP). Born and raised in Minnesota at the turn of the twentieth century, Hedgeman could not find work as a teacher in the north due to her race and so headed south to a black school in Mississippi where she recalled experiencing segregation for the first time. Lasting only two years in the south, Hedgeman returned to the midwest in 1924 and began working for the YWCA where she stayed for the next twelve years. Although the YW remained segregated at the local level, the organization did hire African American executives to run many of its black branches. Executive Director at the Brooklyn YWCA in the late 1930s, Hedgeman attempted to expand employment opportunities for African American women in the borough’s department stores and was assisted in this task by Katherine Gardner’s race relations committee at the Federal Council of Churches. Hedgeman resigned from this, her last position at the YW, when her organizing tactics, which included picket lines, became a point of dispute with the central board.²⁴⁰

²³⁹Cynthia Wedel, interview by Hilda Lee Dail, 1972, Transcript, 5, Box 78, file 22. CWU @ GCAH.

²⁴⁰Paula F. Pfeffer, “Hedgeman, Anna Arnold,” *Black Women in America* Vol 1, eds. Hine et al, 549-552.

As an individual UCCW member, Hedgeman also challenged Washington D.C.'s de facto segregation. In doing so, she challenged white UCCW women's assumptions regarding American democracy. After Hedgeman had served A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington Committee, Randolph, in 1944, asked her to provide leadership for the FEPC. It was during this time at the FEPC that Myrta Ross recalled being in Washington with Hedgeman to testify before Congress, which was debating a bill regarding a fair employment practices committee. Ross remembered that she asked Hedgeman to dine with her in the Senate lunchroom and when Hedgeman consented, the two proceeded to the cafeteria only to be told that the African American woman could not be served. After they were told to leave, Hedgeman said to Ross, "I knew this, but I wanted you to experience [it]." Ross remembered, "I was so mad I wrote an article that night and it was published over [the] AP wire service. We've come a long way, but not fast enough."²⁴¹ Ross's article was in fact a letter to President Roosevelt that she released to the Associated Press. It read in part:

If you are to save our nation from a civil war more horrible than the horrors that now engulf us, you cannot permit conditions that give rise to such an incident to exist in our nation's capital. We have built these buildings. They are ours, those of us who are Americans, no matter what the color of our skin. We have built them to serve in carrying out the justice and freedom promised to all citizens by the constitution of the United States. That freedom must not be denied within their very walls.²⁴²

Despite her own history of race work first with the FCC race relations committee and

²⁴¹Ibid.: Ross, interview by Dail, 4.

²⁴²Shannon, 30-31.

then with UCCW, Ross assumed, prior to this event, that all citizens were welcome in their nation's government dining rooms. It took Anna Arnold Hedgeman to reveal to her this additional level of discrimination in the capitol. Not only did de facto segregation persist among privately owned businesses such as hotels and restaurants, but also within government owned and operated buildings. The truth of this matter spurred Ross to new protests of racial injustices, including writing an indignant letter to the President.

As a UCCW board member for most of the 1940s, Mary McLeod Bethune's prestige as a race leader, an educator, a government official and a churchwoman contributed to UCCW's reputation as an advocate of racial justice. Born to two former slaves in 1875 near Columbia, South Carolina, Bethune was the fifteenth of seventeen children. Her family poor, Bethune still managed to attend school and, with help from a teacher and mentor, graduated from Scotia Seminary, a missionary outpost of northern Presbyterians in Concord, North Carolina. After teaching for several years and establishing a mission, Bethune opened, in 1904, the Daytona Educational and Industrial Institute, later renamed the Bethune-Cookman College. Deeply involved as well with the black women's club movement. Bethune became a national leader in 1924 when she took on the presidency of the National Association of Colored Women. Hoping to unite all African American women's organizations for the purpose of enhancing their public influence, Bethune organized the National Council of Negro Women in 1935 and remained its president until 1949. During the great Depression, Bethune also took on a more politically connected role when she organized the Federal Council on Negro Affairs, popularly known as the Black Cabinet. Charged with encouraging the Roosevelt administration to include

African Americans among the recipients of New Deal monies, Bethune enjoyed a certain degree of access to the president although in reality, it was Eleanor Roosevelt who offered greater support. Throughout her lifetime, whatever political, educational or social role Mary McLeod Bethune took on, she pursued equality of status and opportunities for African Americans.²⁴³

Bethune played an important role in the UCCW 1945 board meeting when she opened her home and lodged white UCCW members. Bethune also provided the final celebratory event for the board by inviting them to tea at the headquarters of the National Council of Negro Women, the organization that she founded and of which she was president.²⁴⁴ The “high brow” implications suggested by the tea reflected the class limitations present within the organization. Nearly all the women, white and black, had economic interests in the status quo. On the other hand, the occasion also brought many middle and upper class white women into educated, middle class African American women’s domain. Bethune’s invitation to UCCW women to a social event reflected the fact that she considered herself an equal and expected others to think so as well.

Bethune, despite her primary roles and responsibilities outside UCCW, still found time to encourage and influence the churchwomen’s organization as it related to building better race relations. When Abbie Clement Jackson’s mother, Emma Clarissa Clement,

²⁴³Elaine M. Smith, “Mary McLeod Bethune,” in *Black Women in America*, Vol 1, eds. Hine et al., 113-127; Howard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York, 1978).

²⁴⁴“Great Days in Washington,” *The Church Woman*, December, 1945, 20.

was named the American Mother of 1946 by the Golden Rule Foundation, Bethune thanked UCCW's president, Ruth Mougey Worrell, for her role in the award:

Six and one-half million brown American women would, through me, express due and deep appreciation for your courage, your democratic spirit in naming for the Committee's consideration Mrs. Clarissa Clement as "Mother" of the year. This has done more to strengthen the hopes of the Negroes of this country than any one thing I know.

But Bethune was more than gracious. She reminded her audience of the stark and vicious realities that black Americans lived with and an appeal to keep working. Her letter continued:

Facing the different philosophies of America and the race hate, discrimination and segregation that we have among us not only in the deep South but throughout America, makes this move of yours a daring, [C]hristian, courageous one....God bless you and all the fine women of the United Council of Church Women and continue to make you a great bridge over which we may all walk into freedom and sisterhood, equalities of opportunity and lasting peace. You know how much I love you and appreciate you. Go forward.²⁴⁵

Bethune also contacted UCCW leadership when she believed the organization should be responding in some way to current events. President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights, which he had commissioned in 1946, issued its report early in 1948. Truman had followed up the report by recommending to Congress legislation to secure civil rights for all. He called for a permanent Civil Rights Commission to report to the president, stronger laws protecting the right to vote, the enactment of fair employment practice legislation, and the end to segregation in interstate travel vehicles and facilities.²⁴⁶ Once

²⁴⁵*Mary McLeod Bethune, Washington D.C., to Ruth Mougey Worrell, New York, New York, July 31, 1946, Series 5, Box 34, file 4, NCNW.*

²⁴⁶Harry S. Truman, "Executive Order 9808, December 5, 1946, Establishing the

Truman had made his statement, Bethune asked that UCCW call together women from around the nation to formulate a response to the Civil Rights report:

My dear Mrs. Sibley:

I am deeply concerned about the Civil Rights report. I am wondering what steps we should all take. I think I would like to see the United Council of Church Women take the leadership in calling the national women's organizations together for a conference on what we can all do in a united way now to give emphasis to the importance of this report.²⁴⁷

Bethune recognized the window of opportunity to gain the public's attention. She also believed that white citizens' attention might be more easily gained and her message taken more seriously if white people led the campaign. In addition, Bethune maintained that one of the most important solutions to race relations in the U.S. was the establishment of interracial councils and activities.²⁴⁸ For these reasons, she called on Georgiana Sibley and her army of churchwomen. By doing so, Bethune influenced and shaped UCCW's race relations initiative.

Despite Bethune's, Christine Smith's and other African American churchwomen's call

President's Committee on Civil Rights," reprinted in Albert Blaustein and Robert L. Zangrando, eds., *Civil Rights and the Black American: A Documentary History* (New York, N. Y.: Washington Square Press, 1968; repr., 1970), 374-375; President's Committee on Civil Rights, "A Program of Action: the Committee's Recommendations," reprinted in *Ibid.*, 375-379; Harry S. Truman, "President Truman's Message to Congress, February 2, 1948," reprinted in *Ibid.*, 380-384.

²⁴⁷Mary McLeod Bethune, *Washington D.C., to Mrs. Harper [Georgina] Sibley, New York, New York, March 3, 1948, Series 5, Box 34, file 5, NCNW.*

²⁴⁸Mary McLeod Bethune, "Poll of Experts: Questions on Negro-White Relations." surveyed completed by Bethune in 1945 for Arthur Kornhauser who published his findings in *The American Magazine*, August 1945, both at NCNW, Series 5. Box 19, file 7.

for interracial councils, communities did not always immediately follow through with this challenge. This was especially true in the south where holding integrated meetings was often illegal and white racial attitudes were often more entrenched and volatile. It took the Greensboro, North Carolina UCW unit until 1952 to integrate when Rosalie Wooden and seven other African American women expressed interest in joining. Born in 1910 in Moore County, North Carolina, Wooden went to business college in Washington D.C. while she was married to her first husband. In 1938, soon after her husband died of leukemia when she was just twenty-five, Wooden opened the first public stenographer's office in Greensboro. She continued her business education in New York when her second husband, Ralph Wooden, was stationed with the Army in Rome, New York during World War II. According to Rosalie, she could not attain the necessary training in the south. Referring to her skin color with a certain amusement, Rosalie declared, "Permanent suntans could not get special courses in the south." Once President Roosevelt removed the barrier of racial discrimination in 1941 for civil service jobs, Rosalie began taking the qualifying exams in the various locales where Ralph was stationed. In this way, she, like the vast majority of African American women, contributed to the household's income. During the 1940s alone, while Ralph was teaching at A&T State University in Greensboro and earning eighty dollars per month, Rosalie stated that she brought home eighty-five dollars each month in various occupations such as a stenographer and writer for a newspaper.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ Rosalie Wooden, interview by author, Greensboro, NC, February 26, 2000, 1-3, 8-9; Helen Ashby, Eleanor Bennett, Marietta Forlaw, Eugenia Perkins, Yolanda Leacraft,

Whether with UCW, the YWCA or the American Friends Service Committee, a number of Greensboro women, white and black, took on responsibility for early attempts to overcome racial segregation. According to historian William Chafe, besides the AFSC, the YW was the only other white institution in Greensboro which “publicly identified with an effort to change racial attitudes.” In addition, says Chafe,

Each drew upon a religious impulse that questioned the principle of segregation; both were affiliated with national organizations committed to racial equality; and both drew heavily on political liberals, primarily women, who were willing to challenge tradition.²⁵⁰

Chafe also acknowledges the fact that, similar to other locales, YW and UCW women were often the same. These women’s attempts to transgress racial mores, although in retrospect might be deemed inadequate, instigated opposition and protest among angry Greensboro citizens. Helen Ashby, the white vice president of UCW during the early 1950s and a YWCA board member during the latter half of the decade, remembered the transition to becoming an integrated UCW unit extremely difficult, “because there was not much support in the community for that sort of thing.”²⁵¹ Ashby’s understatement does not do justice to the reactionary responses to the women. The White Citizen’s Council mounted a protest when the YW women began integrating their facilities and

Joanne Sharpe, Louise Smith, Elizabeth Very, Rosalie Wooden, Doris Yeates, “Greensboro Women –10,” interview by author, Greensboro, North Carolina, February 25, 2000, Tape Recording and Transcript, 3-4, 8-9. Both interviews’ transcripts and tape recordings in author’s possession.

²⁵⁰William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 30

²⁵¹“Greensboro Women –10,” 2.

programs, raising questions about whether or not the Y would continue to be funded by the Community Chest. Louise Smith, a white member of both the YW and UCW beginning in the 1950s, remembered that the YW's attempts to integrate "irritated the white community," and jeopardized their funding.²⁵² When Rosalie and Ralph Wooden moved into a predominantly white neighborhood in 1955, an open letter was placed in their front door from Eugene Hood, the leader of the local White Citizen's Council. The letter called attention to the YW's integrationist activities and advocated that Greensboro citizens pull their funding and membership out of the YW. Clearly addressing his message to the male white citizens, Hood wrote, in part:

Did you know that the membership of your wife and children in this YWCA means that you, white and colored, are members of the same social club?...Maybe we need in Greensboro an organization for the preservation of the white race....It may be later than you think. Possibly our white women and children, some of your own family, are needing your interests desperately. I would suggest that you promptly check into this and then let the community...know your feelings.²⁵³

Just as racial violence, including lynchings, had been supported and rationalized by cloaking them in language regarding the protection of white women, so too did Hood argue that integration must be prevented for the sake of white women and children.²⁵⁴ It

²⁵²Ibid., 14.

²⁵³*Open letter sent to all organizations listed in local papers and sponsors of the Greensboro Community Council, Greensboro, NC, From Eugene A. Hood, Greensboro, NC, March 4, 1955. Letter in possession of Rosalie and Ralph Wooden but also read verbatim into transcript of author's interview with Rosalie Wooden, February 26, 2000, 6-7; Chafe reports that Hood was the leader of the White Citizens Council. *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 139.*

²⁵⁴Ida B. Wells-Barnett wrote and campaigned extensively regarding lynching and the black rapist myth used to support such violence. Her collection of writings can be

is interesting to note that many of the women he purports to protect were in fact the very ones leading the work to bridge racial divides.

Rosalie Wooden was no stranger to either discrimination or instigation. The daughter of a former slave, Wooden joined the Urban League early on and became a proponent of racial harmony. When she could not receive the education she desired in order to make a professional living, she headed north. Knowing that many African Americans in Mississippi lived in poverty, Rosalie chose instead to live in Columbus with Ralph's family for a short time while he was stationed in Biloxi. There she became the city's first black court reporter. Depending on where Ralph was stationed, the couple had varying degrees of difficulty finding housing and a job for Rosalie. Stationed seventeen miles outside Champaign-Urbana, Illinois in 1941, Rosalie and Ralph could not live on the base and so lived in Champaign where Rosalie could not find work. In Rome, New York, the two were forced to live separately in male and female dorms for African Americans. Rosalie, however, did find work in Rome. She worked for a colonel for several months until she told him she wanted a transfer due to his incessant cursing. She got the transfer. When the military continued to refuse to utilize Ralph to the extent of his education, Rosalie wrote Eleanor Roosevelt, asking her to look into her husband's case. Shortly thereafter, Ralph was hauled into his superior's office and reprimanded for

found in *On Lynchings* (Arno Press and the NY Times, 1969); also see Gail Bederman, "'Civilization,' the Decline of Middle-Class Manliness, and the Ida B. Well's Antilynching Campaign (1892-94)," *Radical History Review* Vol. 52 (Winter 1992): 4-30; Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: Gender and the Making of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

the letter but they discharged him as a corporal and the Woodens returned to Greensboro.

After Rosalie helped integrate UCW, she and Ralph attempted to purchase a home in a predominantly white neighborhood. When Greensboro bankers refused to give them a loan, she wrote to the owner who lived in Atlanta and convinced him to sell his house without financing. Rosalie promised a ten percent down payment and monthly payments of seventy dollars plus interest. The Woodens lived in that home for nearly forty years.²⁵⁵

Rosalie Wooden paralleled many African American UCCW members who pursued better lives for themselves and their communities. As they did so, they gathered the forces of white churchwomen willing to fight for integration.

The Politics of Suffering

As African American churchwomen participated in UCCW, they continued creating a social and political consciousness as the means to a protest movement, but they did so with an expanded focus. Working and praying alongside white women within the organization, African American UCCW members included their white cohorts in their attempts to create an awareness of the political nature of black suffering. Some black women, such as Anna Arnold Hedgeman, did so by allowing white women to witness racial discrimination as she did with Myrta Ross. Hedgeman understood the benefits of making the intellectual personal. Other African American churchwomen created awareness by writing for UCCW's monthly journal and petitioning the mostly white readership to sympathize and support the causes of Black Americans. In a 1948 issue of

²⁵⁵ Wooden, interview by author.

The Church Woman, Rosa Page Welch told her story of being invited by the Southern Baptist Women's Union to be the guest soloist for the Union's Annual Convention in Memphis. In "The Meaning of Segregation," Welch recounted her surprise at being well received by the executive committee as well as the delegates. "Is this really true?" she asked herself, "There had been no mention of my racial background on the program but I sensed no feeling of resentment at my presence." Welch's fears were confirmed, however, just before the second session of the convention started. Several Baptist women informed her that the manager of the auditorium had complained about Welch, whose presence was technically illegal according to the city's segregation laws regarding public buildings. The women also told Welch that they had not given up hope but were meeting with the management that afternoon. Welch described her reaction to the situation in what can only be understood in terms of a culture of dissemblance. "There isn't anything anyone here can do to embarrass me....I marvel at the courage of you Christian women....I am not hurt. I admire you; we are all trying to be Christian." Welch then assured the Baptist women that she would pray for them during their meeting. Defined by Darlene Clark Hine as "behavior and attitudes of Black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors,"²⁵⁶ dissemblance served as one of many tools designed by black women "to shatter demeaning stereotypes of their humanity."²⁵⁷ Welch may very well have been

²⁵⁶Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women: Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," in *Hine Sight*, 37.

²⁵⁷Hine, "Black Women's History, White Women's History: The Juncture of Race

shielding her true feelings during the actual event. The article's opening narrative ends with the management changing their minds and Welch singing to an audience of 4500. "Never before have I had a more glorious manifestation of answered prayer....I thanked God for those Christians in the South who dare to adventure in the experience of real brotherhood."²⁵⁸

In the remainder of *The Church Woman* article, however, Rosa Page Welch spoke more openly about what it meant for black Americans to be segregated. Although she may not have divulged her true feelings to the Southern Baptist women regarding her potential expulsion from the Memphis auditorium, Welch acknowledged the suffering she endured as she narrowly escaped a humiliating experience. She also focused her attention on innocent children and their most certain anguish in the face of segregation. By doing so, Welch appealed to her UCCW readers as fellow mothers. She wrote,

Segregation comes close [to] home...when your own child asks why he can't play in the cool shady park, or swim in the municipal pool (which your taxes help maintain) or even swim in the ocean; why he has to walk to school...while white children ride past him in a bus; why his school building is dilapidated...while the white children go to a large beautiful brick building....And then one day, which you knew would come and for which you have tried to have ready a satisfactory answer, the child comes home heartbroken because he has been called by one of the nicknames used to make him feel inferior, "nigger," "darky," or "coon."

Welch denied that segregation was a satisfactory way of life for either blacks or whites.

She explained that many African Americans pretended to be satisfied or submitted

and Class." *Journal of Women's History* 4, No. 2 (Fall 1992), 125-33.

²⁵⁸Rosa Page Welch, "The Meaning of Segregation," *The Church Woman*, November, 1948, 19-21.

unwillingly to racial segregation as acts of self-preservation. “Something is wrong, it seems to me, with any intelligent Christian who...attempts to justify such a system.”

Welch testified that her faith sustained her: “As much as it hurts, as much as it imprisons my body and sometimes my mind, I am determined that it will not imprison my soul.” Claiming that her opportunities “for wholesome, Christian fellowship with many fine, truly wholesome Christian white friends,” had eased her burden and pain, Welch challenged her readers to rise to a higher form of Christianity as a solution:

When I see doors and entrances marked “colored,” “white,” I find myself asking, “Why, oh why, does this need to continue? Aren’t there enough courageous Christians to make this impossible? What about the ministers, the elders and members of the churches?”²⁵⁹

Finally, Welch, similar to Christine Smith, claimed her place as a child of God and echoed Smith’s defiance of the white America that had chosen to oppress them:

But to segregate or jim-crow worshippers [sic] in the house of God! When I am jim-crowed or segregated and sent to the balcony, God is jim-crowed, segregated and sent to the balcony, for God is in me and in every black person as He is in every person of every race, color or creed.²⁶⁰

Rosa Page Welch further shaped UCCW’s promotion of race as a moral issue by politicizing African American suffering.

Abbie Clement Jackson also wrote in *The Church Woman* to convey to her mostly white readers the experience of African American suffering and to voice her concerns and demands regarding racial justice. On an early morning in the fall of 1951, Jackson stood

²⁵⁹Ibid., 20.

²⁶⁰Ibid., 22.

on a Memphis corner waiting for an airport limousine. She was in town to address a Missionary Women's Society which she had done the night before; her talk had been entitled, "The Church Woman, Her Responsibilities and Opportunities in the Present World Crisis." Jackson served at the time as vice president of the National Council of Churches, the voice of the liberal Protestant establishment in the United States and the umbrella organization that UCCW helped form in 1950. As she stood on the corner with her friend, waiting to be transported to the airport, she thought of Louisville, her destination, and her next engagement that she was rushing home for. When the limousine arrived the driver looked at her, got out of the car and said, "We don't haul colored people." Jackson's friend, a white woman, protested, imploring the driver for his assistance and asking the other passengers if they minded riding with Jackson. The other riders did not mind sharing the limousine but the driver insisted on calling a taxi for Jackson who proceeded to the airport on her own. When she arrived at the airport, Jackson found an American Airlines representative and was partially reimbursed for the taxi fare. At that time she did not complain about the treatment she had received, or she at least did not report having done so. Once in the air, Jackson took out pen and paper and began to write down this most recent experience of racial discrimination. She eventually submitted her writing to *The Church Woman* and it appeared in the November, 1951 issue.²⁶¹

Jackson's article, entitled, "I Am An American," represents an additional attempt by

²⁶¹Abbie Clement Jackson, "I Am An American," *The Church Woman*, November, 1951.

African American churchwomen to persuade *The Church Woman's* readers to sympathize and support the causes of Black Americans. Jackson does so initially by focusing on those elements common to churchwomen of both races. Her inclusion of the title of her Memphis talk, "The Church Woman, Her Responsibilities and Opportunities in the Present World Crisis," conveyed to her readers that it did not matter to her whether she was addressing black church women or white. All women, in Jackson's mind, had similar responsibilities and opportunities given the state of the world. She also included no instances when she might have lost her temper with either the driver or the airline representative, although she had good reason. She too may have been practicing, both in the actual event and in her written narrative, the culture of dissemblance. By never revealing her anger in any reproachable manner, Jackson drew a clear line between those who showed her disrespect and herself, the epitome of respectability. Her deferential manner was intended to diffuse the prevalent negative images regarding African American women.²⁶²

Jackson, however, was not only deferential. Well aware of the potential discrimination she faced while traveling in the south, she asserted herself and the place she occupied. Later in her article she addressed the reader directly, "You ask who I am?" Jackson answered her own question, "A human being, made in the image and likeness of God, an American - as much as an American as you - a Negro." Like Welch and Smith, Jackson used the article to claim her identity as a child of God. She, along with

²⁶²Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women"; Jackson, "I Am An American."

thousands of other black churchwomen, maintained that if white people actually believed that all people were children of God, indeed were the same in God's eyes, they would be less likely to continue the patterns of segregation and forms of racial discrimination they had established. Jackson intended to move people toward that conviction. Prior to leaving Memphis, Jackson had spoken with Mossie Wyker, a white woman and UCW's General Chair at the time. Together they had discussed Jackson's plans for the trip home. Wyker had told Jackson, "I hope all will work out as you have planned." Jackson responded in the article to Wyker's good wishes, "No, it did not work out. Another door was slammed in my face - another scar. I am an American - a Christian American whose task it is to bring 'hope' to people of all races. It is not easy. Will my heart become so scarred that it will cease to beat?"²⁶³ Although Jackson may have behaved throughout the incident in a manner explained by dissemblance, or portrayed herself as having done so, she also knew that she could use the reality of her humiliation to spur white churchwomen towards action.

Jackson, however, did not end her story there. She and her readers needed a better end, a redemption of sorts. As she waited in Nashville for her connecting flight to Louisville, Jackson watched as an African American family interacted in the gate area. A young black soldier, his wife and their two young children inspired Jackson to recall her own history and the changes that had come during her lifetime.

I thought of the years when my parents had traveled across this country, knocking on doors of public transportation, in stores, restaurants, hotels, schools, and

²⁶³"I Am An American," *The Church Woman*, November, 1951, 10.

churches....They found doors closed in their faces; yet they kept on knocking and encouraged their children to knock....I, as one of their children, can travel in many sections of our country, enjoy a meal in many places, rest in numerous hotels, matriculate in most colleges, and worship in a great many churches, because of their faith! As I looked at the two small brown Americans, future leaders, I knew the answer - I too, must knock....²⁶⁴

Jackson took her experience of humiliation and transformed it into a story of fortitude and inspiration. Although both Welch and Jackson must have found that writing about their experiences was safer than responding with indignation in the moment, the act of writing also surely empowered them. Just as Charlotte Hawkins Brown had done thirty years earlier. Jackson and Welch used their suffering to draw out the sympathy of their audience, to engage them in their righteousness and to direct them to respond in an appropriate manner. Jackson finished her article by challenging her audience to act:

The church women of this generation of all races, colors, and creeds will continue to knock until every human being in our country may walk in dignity. Are you one of those who will see that the laws of your city, state, and country make it possible? I have seen you do it; ...I have seen the United Council of Church Women pioneer and make progress. ...As an American, a Christian American, with love in my scarred heart for all mankind, I still have faith to believe that with courage and vision, walking in His footsteps, and working together, we can open all doors.²⁶⁵

Jackson and Welch exhibited both the very real Christian spirituality which helped sustain them in moments such as those they described and the political savvy to employ their suffering as an opportunity to further shape the race agenda of UCW and white churchwomen.

²⁶⁴Ibid.. 10-11.

²⁶⁵Ibid.. 11.

Human Relations Workshops

African American churchwomen's activities, including those of Rosa Page Welch, included their assistance in facilitating UCCW workshops designed to promote better race relations. A member of the Disciples of Christ Church, Welch participated in her local UCCW unit in Chicago as well as in the national organization and helped advance UCCW's race relations agenda. A gifted soloist, Welch often provided the worship music for UCCW assemblies. Her most visible role in regards to racial justice however, came in the late 1950s when she toured the country as a member of a UCW human relations workshop team. In 1956, UCW received a \$10,000 grant from the Fund for the Republic for "educational work in race relations."²⁶⁶ UCW national developed the workshops as a means to train and prepare local church people for the changes instigated by both the 1954 Supreme Court decision to desegregate the schools and the congressional legislation terminating Native American reservations and relocating the inhabitants.²⁶⁷ Over the next three years, UCW either requested to visit targeted communities considered to be racial "hot spots" or accepted invitations from communities to come and conduct a workshop designed to decrease racial tensions and build better relations between the races. A team of two to four UCW women, usually

²⁶⁶Press Release from the National Council of Churches, June 8, 1956, Box 62, file 3. CWU @ GCAH.

²⁶⁷"Reflections: Golden Nuggets from Past Presidents - 50th Anniversary," (Church Women United in Michigan, 1979), 29, Bentley Library, University of Michigan. Ann Arbor, CWU in Michigan Collection (hereafter CWU-MI-Bentley), Box

interracial in its composition, traveled to the communities to facilitate the one to two day meeting. Rosa Page Welch participated as a team member.

Pearl Walker McNeil, another key black leader of the human relations workshops, began her career in the south as a sociologist. Born in Damascus, Arkansas, Pearl Walker spent part of her college years organizing Packinghouse and Tobacco Workers. In 1943, she began work as the coordinator of a three-person research team for Charles Johnson, the sociologist and future president of Fisk University. After the 1943 riots in Detroit, Michigan, Mobile, Alabama and elsewhere, President Roosevelt sought counsel from a variety of experts including monthly meetings with Johnson who in turn relied on Walker's team to keep him informed. They did this by publishing a thirty-page monthly report, *The Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations*, which in addition to preparing Johnson for his meetings with Roosevelt, also kept individuals and organizations across the nation informed on the issue. While at Fisk, Walker also completed her research for her doctorate in sociology.²⁶⁸

Pearl began her participation in UCCW at the local level before being noticed and recruited by the organization's national leadership. While in Nashville, the young sociologist had met Jesse Jai McNeil and the two married in 1945. Soon after, they made Detroit their base of religious and political activity when Jesse, a Baptist minister, was

1. file "Organizational Histories."

²⁶⁸Ibid., p 27-30; Pearl McNeil, interview by Dodie Younger, nd, transcript, CWU @ GCAH, Box 78, file 9; Clintie Winfrey Kenney, "Citizen of Superior Talent - Pearl McNeil," *The Church Woman*, January, 1965, 7-9,13.

called to Tabernacle Baptist Church in 1947. Although Pearl did not work as a salaried employee for the next seventeen years, she made a profession out of volunteer work in both religious and civic sectors. Active in Detroit's Lucy Thurman YWCA branch (too late, however, to know Christine Smith), the League of Women Voters, the PTA and the Scouts, Pearl was encouraged by her husband to enlist his congregation's women into UCCW activities. She attended her first UCCW national assembly in 1948 in Milwaukee. By the early 1950s, McNeil was chairing the Christian Social Relations Committee for UCW's Michigan chapter until she became its vice-president in 1954. That position lasted until 1958 when she became UCW Michigan's first African American president. Her participation in the interdenominational women's organization did not remain at the local and state levels, however. Soon after she participated in the workshops in the late 1950s, Pearl McNeil was elected vice-president of the national UCW in 1961.²⁶⁹

Especially active in the Michigan UCW, Pearl McNeil drew attention to a place outside the south where racial segregation also remained intact. She joined forces with women such as Louise Donaldson, a white woman from an infamously segregated suburb of Detroit. Donaldson invited African Americans to her home during a time when her town would not allow residential integration and when the police harassed her for doing so. With a bit of amusement and pride, Donaldson once related a story regarding her

²⁶⁹“Reflections”; McNeil, interview by Younger; Kenney, “Citizen of Superior Talent - Pearl McNeil.”

efforts for integration:

Once when I was on the Michigan Avenue bus...two white women near me were talking about only being able to ride the bus at that particular time of day because then it wasn't "all filled with blacks," and, continuing their conversation, one said, "If there's one person who should be kicked out of town, it's that Donaldson woman from Dearborn!"

The Michigan UCW president during McNeil's state vice-presidency, Donaldson became very interested in McNeil and in fact took partial credit for recruiting her to UCW.²⁷⁰

Together the two traveled around the state, visiting local chapters and establishing new ones. They also traveled in an attempt to educate churchwomen regarding labor relations, especially in regards to the state's large migrant population. With McNeil's background in labor organizing, this issue remained dear to her throughout her time with UCW. As she admitted, however, in regards to their travels, "Race was raised automatically because I was there. People could see that [race], because we traveled in places (Upper Peninsula, for example) where there weren't any Negroes, and, of course, I was an oddity."²⁷¹

McNeil's comments signify how rarely white people understood that the issue of race included whiteness. To ascertain whether or not an accommodation or restaurant was safe for the two of them, McNeil acknowledged that Donaldson would check it out beforehand. When they met with churchwomen throughout the state, Donaldson insisted on holding meetings in places where everyone was welcome. "That was Mrs.

²⁷⁰"Reflections: Golden Nuggets," 25; Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 76-77, 159; David L. Good, *Orvie: The Dictator of Dearborn: The Rise and Reign of Orville L. Hubbard* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1989).

²⁷¹McNeil, interview by Younger, 13.

Donaldson's rule," said McNeil. "I remember we went to one place and we had dinner at the Council president's house - for there was 'no room at the inn.' I was an oddity for about three years and then became a celebrity in the State for I was elected State President to succeed Mrs. Donaldson."²⁷² As an African American woman traveling in a predominantly white organization, Pearl McNeil forced white churchwomen and others to address the issue of racial integration prior to when they may have on their own.

Assignment: RACE

The fact that UCW was an interracial organization meant that the administration paid closer attention to political and social events that they knew would impact their African American members. This was the case when UCW churchwomen launched their initiative, *Assignment: RACE*, at their October 1961 national assembly. Prevented by their national policy that prohibited meetings in segregated places, the gathering in Miami, Florida was the first time a UCW national assembly had been held in the south. Furthermore, groups of white and African American civil rights workers, known as the Freedom Riders, spent much of the summer riding buses in the deep south, testing the Supreme Court ruling that had declared segregated seating on interstate buses and trains as unconstitutional.²⁷³ Angry white mobs met many of the buses at terminals and, left to their own devices by state police, viciously attacked the riders until the federal

²⁷²Ibid., 14.

²⁷³Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965* (NY, NY: Penguin Books, 1987), 147; President Truman, *Message to Congress, February 2, 1948 (House Doc. 516)*, reprinted in *Civil Rights and the Black American*, eds., Blaustein and Zangrando.

government was forced to send in troops to keep the peace and protect the activists. Knowing that many of their members would be traveling interracially to Miami and aware of the violence that had greeted the Freedom Riders, UCW issued directives for traveling safely to the assembly. "Tips for Travel" included both pragmatic advice and spiritual reassurance for travelers depending on their mode of transportation. Casting interracial travel as an opportunity "for prophetic action," UCW national encouraged their constituents, if refused equal access, to "explain to the persons who have refused us why we feel as we do about our lives together, why we cannot accept the situation, and how each one of us bears the burden of suffering when any one of us is denied her humanity." UCW churchwomen traveling by car were also given instructions about stopping at service stations:

The likelihood of access to rest rooms in filling stations which sometimes is denied to Negro travelers is increased by choosing large stations on main travel routes or in larger cities, requesting the key before ordering gasoline, and assuming by one's attitude that there will be no question regarding service.²⁷⁴

The "Tips" informed those traveling on buses that the Supreme Court had outlawed segregation on interstate and intrastate buses but also mentioned that Alabama and Mississippi, where the most horrific violence had met Freedom Riders, were still being tested by the civil rights workers.²⁷⁵ For those who would need overnight

²⁷⁴*Tips for Travel and Five Points to Note in Planning Assembly Travel*, nd, ca 1961, Box 1, file "Office files 1960-1961," CWU-MI-Bentley.

²⁷⁵*Ibid*: Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), esp. Chapters 11 and 12; Williams, 144-161; David Chalmers, *And the Crooked Places Made Straight: The Struggle for Social Change in the 1960s* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 22.

accommodations on the way to Miami, “Tips for Travel” suggested that the churchwomen be honest about being an integrated group when calling ahead to make reservations. They were also pointed to a travel guide, “Go,” which listed hotels that accommodated both black and white customers. Finally, UCW national reminded their members that churchwomen were “not on trial:”

Rather patterns and practices which deny our common humanity are being tried. This means we are not on the defensive, but are acting in the way natural to United Church Women when we assume we shall be treated alike – everywhere in the United States and around the world.

UCW, aware of the quest for civil rights taking place in the nation and the impact its denial might have on their members, took steps to both bring churchwomen to Miami safely and to seize the opportunity to become a “creative witness” for justice.²⁷⁶

In response to the civil rights movement, which had become increasingly visible to white America, and to churchwomen’s requests for a social action program designed to assist African Americans in their pursuit of equality, UCW created Assignment: RACE. Created to encourage churchwomen to identify areas of racial tension in their communities so as to better pursue the alleviation of such problems, Assignment: RACE emerged at the Miami assembly as a reflection of UCW’s long time concern for racial justice. The Field Foundation donated \$66,000 to UCW to fund Assignment: RACE, known initially as the “Desegregation Project” because of its focus on integrating churches, communities, including housing, and local units of churchwomen. In addition

²⁷⁶*Tips for Travel*; Chalmers, 22-23, 40; David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), es Chapter 3; Payne, esp. 107-108; Williams, 144-161.

to engaging local and state UCW chapters in the program, UCW national also drew churchwomen's denominational bodies into the desegregation project by facilitating regional trainings across the country for national coordinators of women's denominational work. Just as UCW national left it up to local UCW units to choose the specific problem to focus the program, so too did they allow each denomination to assume responsibility for designing and implementing the project. African American and white churchwomen, UCW members and those who were not, came together at the regional, state and local levels to examine the needs in their communities and to decide where to concentrate Assignment: RACE.²⁷⁷

UCW appointed an African American woman, long familiar with the churchwomen's organization, as chairperson for Assignment: RACE. Born in Tennessee, Bessie Marsh was living in Toledo, Ohio when she became secretary of the city's UCCW local unit in the early 1940s. When Marsh moved to Columbus, she met Ruth Mougey Worrell, white and president at the time of the Ohio Council of Church Women. Worrell befriended Marsh and took a special interest in her. At the 1942 UCCW assembly in Cleveland, Marsh participated in a closed-door discussion with a select group of churchwomen whose concern it was to choose the first UCCW executive secretary. They convinced Worrell to accept the position. Despite her desire to participate in the organization,

²⁷⁷*Assignment: RACE Action Guide - My Community: How to Find the Area of Greatest Racial Tension and Need*, nd, 1, Box 62, file 12; *Administrative Committee Meeting Minutes*, April 23-25, 1961, 4, Box 2, file 22; S. Garry Oniki, *An Analysis and Evaluation of Regional Training Sessions Carried on as a Part of "Assignment: RACE,"* nd, Box 62, file 6, CWU @ GCAH.

however, Marsh maintained that in the 1940s, UCCW's inclusion of her was complicated. Although she admitted that the white UCCW women were fond of her and in fact threw her a baby shower when she was pregnant with her second child, she also confessed to feeling like a token. In her later years, Marsh recalled boarding the train in 1942 with other churchwomen for the ride home from the Cleveland assembly. Although she had been quite active and had assisted in choosing the new executive secretary, she remembered that "everybody suddenly forgot that they knew me, and I rode all the way back to Columbus with no fellowship whatever, and I never forgot that." However, when she moved to Montclair, New Jersey in 1944 with her husband, a YMCA executive, Worrell recruited her for national work and Marsh consented. Furthermore, Marsh also considered UCCW in the 1940s a "distinct attempt to involve Black women," and "the seed...of the intent to do things together." Both Ohio units in which she participated included African American women other than her. When she moved to New Jersey and found no other black women involved in Montclair's women's missionary council, she set about reorganizing the group into a UCCW unit that included African American women. Marsh also began at that time serving on various national committees and in 1949 joined the national Board of Managers. Her most visible position, however, was as the chairperson for Assignment: RACE beginning in 1961.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸Carrie E. Meares, *Confidential Report on the First Year of the Three-Year Project, Assignment: RACE*, nd, 1962, Box 62, file 6; *Notes from Presentation by Bessie Marsh, CWU Common Council, June 1982*; Bessie Marsh. interviewed by HB, MS, and RW (The interviewers are only identified by initials. They are probably Helen Baker, Margaret Shannon and Ruth Weber), nd, 12, Box 78, file 8, CWU @ GCAH; "Helping to Make Our History," *The Church Woman*, 1991/two, 5-7; *Who's Who on the Ballot*:

Marsh brought with her to UCW and Assignment: RACE a history of pursuing better lives for African Americans. Her experience influenced the strength and character of the project. In addition to her work within the Presbyterian church, Marsh also served on the national YWCA board, was a member of the NAACP, the National Council of Negro Women, the League of Women Voters and the Red Cross. Furthermore, she became the first African American member of Montclair's Board of Education. Even though the mayor appointed her to that position, however, Marsh still met with resistance on the part of Montclair whites. Because of that, she understood her role on that particular board as an important one:

I'm the one who started people thinking that they must not have a school system without a black teacher in there. I'm the one who said that you don't have to have this system of neighborhood schools where white children can go to school with just white children. A lot of things that they have going now were started by this lone, black woman.²⁷⁹

Likewise, Marsh viewed her work at the YWCA as an additional avenue through which she might effect better lives for African Americans. Stating that the YW and UCW had "carried the same baggage," regarding the integration of their organizations, Marsh identified her role as a black Christian, stating, "If you're black, you get it done. You have to always be finding ways in which to dissolve this racism and be the kind of Christian you need to be." This attitude motivated her to travel across the country as a spokesperson for Assignment: RACE, teaching workshops and encouraging white and black churchwomen to speak to each other with honesty. A strong woman accustomed to challenging whites to accept her and other black Americans as their equals, Bessie Marsh

²⁷⁹"Helping to Make Our History," 7.

maintained a fortitude that sustained her throughout her lifetime. As she looked back at her position later in life as the chairperson for Assignment: RACE, she claimed, "I've never been one who shied away from something. If I felt at all that I could do it, I tried it. I'm not afraid of anything or anybody." It was this attitude that spurred UCW churchwomen into projects in support of open housing, school desegregation, the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, equal employment opportunities and integrated churches and UCW units.²⁸⁰

Among the many projects it encouraged, Assignment: RACE stimulated the integration of local and state UCW units. Prompted in part by membership inventories sent to each unit to complete, many segregated UCW councils felt persuaded to reach across racial divides and begin meeting for the first time on an interracial basis. Such was the case in Alabama in 1963 when a group of African American churchwomen from Tuskegee traveled to Montgomery for a UCW state meeting for the first time. The accounts from the meeting, one by a white participant and one by a black, reflect the personal as well as class-based nature of the event. Not knowing quite how the meeting would proceed, the white president expressed great relief when it was over. In her mind, everyone had behaved exceptionally well. She was especially pleased that the

²⁸⁰Meares, *Confidential Report on the First Year of the Three-Year Project, Assignment: RACE; Notes from Presentation by Bessie Marsh, CWU Common Council, June 1982; "Helping to Make Our History"; Who's Who on the Ballot: Young Women's Christian Association of the United States of America, National Board, April 21-27, 1955; Marsh, interviewed by HB, MS, and RW, 11-15.*

churchwomen conducted themselves as if there was nothing special about holding an interracial meeting in Alabama in 1963. It appeared to her that the women had forgotten the difference in the colors of their skin and, in her estimation, this was a good thing.

The Alabama UCW president described the first meeting of the newly integrated state UCW board in the following manner:

The women came, they mingled, they drank coffee together....We all sat down, no one overly exerted themselves for the Negro women, and yet it was as if they had no other color than ours.... We went into full discussion right away. I made a square with four long tables, so that we could all sit around these instead of in rows and they were given to understand that though there were people moderating and informed to lead, that we were all to discuss, share, add, argue anything....It was wonderful to see that every woman there was completely absorbed in this, that they wanted to share, and wanted to learn, that they were most enthusiastic, and that there was the closest, deepest fellowship that I have ever been in, I think.²⁸¹

Given the president's racial identity, her report is suspect. One of the most favorable ways she could find to describe the African American women was to say that they were without color. that is, they were nearly white. There is an "us and them" mentality prevailing in her report and seemingly, in the meeting. One is left wondering how the black women felt about the very same gathering.

The above statement by the white Alabama UCW president is further complicated however, by the existence of a letter written by one of the African American Tuskegee representatives. Near the end of her report, the Alabama president writes that after the meeting, she received a letter from one of the African American women. In the letter, the

²⁸¹Meares, *Confidential Report #II*, 14.

woman shared her own perspective on the gathering. She had returned home to Tuskegee, and according to UCW's Alabama president, had written the following:

It is not melodramatic to confess that attendance at the retreat...in Montgomery was viewed beforehand with mingled feelings of pleasure and trepidation. Would we be arrested? Would all the participants subsequently face unpleasant harassment? Would the Church building itself [where we met] be placed in possible future physical jeopardy? Would condescension and cool tolerance of our presence be considered a worthy substitute for Christian love and fellowship?...These were the dominant thoughts voiced among ourselves as we travelled [sic] back and forth from Tuskegee to Montgomery.

It is with a grateful heart that I am compelled to write to let you know that we found ourselves among Christian women. It is difficult to put into words the heartfelt response of one human being to another. I wanted so much to speak out... in order to let each person present know how very much I appreciated the warm welcome extended to each of us. To my dismay, however, there arose tears in my eyes, a lump in my throat and such a surge of deep emotion that speech was impossible.²⁸²

With both women writing such glowing comments regarding the meeting, it becomes more difficult to deny the importance of the personal nature of UCW gatherings and the relationships these women formed across racial lines. The religious nature of their organization and agenda as well as the prayer they engaged in while together, served to heighten the emotional and spiritual connections they experienced. While meeting as a UCW unit, the churchwomen, white and black, felt empowered to profess their oneness as children of God. The ugliness of racial prejudice that kept them separated in so many ways dissipated, at least for a little while.

On the other hand, these interracial alliances do raise the issue of class. It is clear that religion acted as a bridge between white and African American women who shared a certain economic background. Educated, and at least middle-class, both groups of

²⁸²Ibid., 15.

women believed that interacting with the other race was only beneficial if the persons came from the same class background. Furthermore, as integrationists, black and white, they failed to question the viability of the American economic political system to provide true equality for all. African American UCW churchwomen were among those black Americans who relied, at least in part, on the moral condemnation of segregation as the means by which they would gain full entry into American society and prosperity. They did not, in most cases, link such immorality with questions of the institutional racism inherent and seemingly irrevocable in the American system.²⁸³

This was also the case a few years later when Tuskegee women articulated a decidedly critical analysis of American society and yet continued to trust in its potential for justice. In January, 1966, Samuel Younge, Jr., a Tuskegee student, ex-serviceman and civil rights worker, was shot and killed when he attempted to use the men's room at a gas station in town. In response to the protests that erupted in Tuskegee after Younge's murder, many people across the country wrote letters, some of them of concern and sympathy and many wondering how they could help. Such requests generated a reply from the Tuskegee churchwomen who wrote, "An open letter to the Church Women of America." One of the writers, Vera Foster, a charter member of the Tuskegee UCW unit and wife of the president of Tuskegee, sent the letter to UCW's national office, which published the letter in *The Church Woman* in May 1966. Although the Tuskegee churchwomen's letter called on their white and black sisters across the nation to address inequalities in a comprehensive fashion, they did not attack or condemn the very nature of the American system. Despite the letter's attention to economic concerns and its emphasis on an

²⁸³Banner-Haley, 8, 31-32.

analysis of the power structure, the overall message signified an acceptance of the current political and economic design. Believing that racial integration would, in the end, bring about the necessary changes, the Tuskegee women wrote, "The outcome will be a new social structure with those who until recently have been disfranchised seeking to move out of their sub-society into full and equal participation in the common community life." Their faith in the overall goodness of people and in the capacity for democracy in America, prevented African American UCW women from calling for truly radical changes.²⁸⁴

On the other hand, both Tuskegee letters clearly conferred what behavior and attitudes among the white UCW churchwomen the African American women deemed unacceptable. The Tuskegee churchwomen expected to be treated with respect and "Christian love and fellowship" even though they feared that they might not receive it. The emotional tone of the first letter reminds the reader that each time African American women ventured into a "white space," they took certain risks, not only legally, as was the case in Alabama, but also emotionally. This first letter conveyed the psychic energy necessary for black women to shield themselves from the potential violence wrought by whites, even well-meaning churchwomen. The second letter also conveyed to white churchwomen distinct expectations. African American women called for a series of actions: compliance with the Civil Rights Act, economic rights, access to public facilities, access to the political process, further legislation to ensure justice in the law enforcement and judicial systems, and an end to the status quo. They knew that there were "no easy,

²⁸⁴ "An open letter to the Church Women," *The Church Woman*, May, 1966, 20-23.

instant solutions to problems of long duration that have smoldered and festered.”²⁸⁵

Unfortunately, despite the magnitude of the civil rights movement sweeping across the country, problems for African American citizens did not disappear.

“In danger of losing Negro women”

As the civil rights movement unfolded and more and more African Americans protested in ways evident to whites, UCW’s black members became increasingly vocal and confrontational within the organization. Utilizing a moral language familiar to white churchwomen, African American women wrote and spoke about race in personal terms. In their descriptions of injustice as well as in their challenges to white churchwomen, black women often introduced whites to a level of racial discrimination about which they had been previously unaware. As the years progressed, they often did so with emotion and honesty, capturing white churchwomen’s attention and drawing them into greater responsibility and a heightened state of consciousness. Such was the case in May 1963 in Tennessee. Jean Fairfax, an African American member of the national Assignment: RACE leadership team, spoke to a conference held to discuss the degree and quality of integration in Tennessee’s local UCW units. She characterized the emotional state of black Americans as determined, angry and sorrowful regarding their treatment by whites. She and other African American women present challenged the white women saying, “It looks as though you can’t ever get beyond 2nd vice president,” and “The feeling some meetings give me is that this is visiting day for Negroes.” In her closing statements, Fairfax warned the white women,

²⁸⁵Ibid., 21.

United Church Women are in danger of losing Negro women at this crucial point....If United Church Women wants Negro women leaders, it must challenge them with a dynamic program and woo them into the organization with forward-looking plans or they will not be interested. Negro women leaders have no time to be symbols today. It is important that we understand the Negro mind as United Church Women. We should ask ourselves what we can do to further this understanding.²⁸⁶

Many of the white women were hurt by Fairfax's words, believing in and priding themselves on good relations between themselves and African American women. Some felt angry enough to leave the meeting early. In the end however, the women were reported to have worked through their emotions and to have made some positive plans for UCW's future in the state.²⁸⁷ The honesty with which Fairfax and other African American churchwomen expressed themselves served to draw many of the white women into a deeper and more meaningful commitment to racial equality within UCW, their churches and their communities. In cases such as the one described here, African American women relied not so much on a culture of dissemblance as they did on a painful candor. In this way, black UCW members shifted their strategies to confront white churchwomen with the harsh experience and personal toll exacted from black Americans.

In another instance, over twenty years after Christine Smith had stood before a national UCCW assembly to issue a challenge, another African American churchwoman

²⁸⁶Jean Fairfax, "The Negro Mood: Notes on a Talk," at Tennessee UCW State Work Session, May, 1963. 2, Box 62, file 6, CWU @ GCAH.

²⁸⁷Meares. *Confidential Report #II*, 17, Box 62, file 6, CWU @ GCAH.

did the same. This time, however, the demand was not for inclusion within the church organization, which was Smith's expectation, but for increased action in the community to secure civil rights. African American churchwomen wanted justice and expected white UCW members to participate in bringing it about. In 1964 at the Tenth National Assembly in Kansas City, Abbie Clement Jackson delivered an address fashioned by the Assembly Message Committee, which she had chaired. As the assembly looked back at the work they had performed during the previous three years during Assignment: RACE, Jackson urged them to continue striving for justice, saying, "to lessen this emphasis now would be unthinkable." Despite the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Jackson and her committee knew that the battle was still to be won. Racial discrimination continued to abound and the economic conditions, especially for blacks, were only growing worse. Jackson declared,

We call all church women to encourage rapid compliance with the 1964 Civil Rights Act. We must become increasingly involved in the affairs of our local communities to secure enforcement of the gains made through law, to assist government officials, to help open up new opportunities for all minorities, and to effect reconciliation between individuals and groups of people....As long as there are groups of people, large or small, who are barred from sharing in the wealth which God has provided for the world, society is not what God intends it to be.²⁸⁸

Jackson argued that it was not enough to speak about justice; one must act accordingly. Furthermore, Jackson claimed a position of righteousness by announcing what kind of world God intended. Steeped in Christian faith, Jackson believed she knew what was right and she did not hesitate to share her knowledge with the UCW assembly, enshrouding her message as God's design. Parallel to the larger civil rights movement

²⁸⁸Abbie Clement Jackson, "Message from Tenth National Assembly," *The Church Woman*, December 1964, 15.

and its increased pressure on politicians, legislators and the American people during the 1960s, Jackson and other African American churchwomen heightened their expectations of white churchwomen.

Finally, as the 1960s progressed, African American UCW women continued to draw on their faith, but they did so with a more radical interpretation and application to black suffering. In the earlier examples, Welch and Jackson drew attention to their personal suffering by drawing on the sympathies of white women. Although they both included children in their presentations, their analysis remained personal. In the following example, Anna Arnold Hedgeman took the personal and transformed it into universal black suffering. Furthermore, her application of Christian theology goes beyond either Welch's or Jackson's. In December 1963, Hedgeman addressed a midwestern regional UCW meeting at Purdue University. Lecturing to more than three hundred women, Hedgeman took the poignant experience of black suffering and infused it with meaning and mission. As at least one participant sat in stunned silence, Hedgeman recounted the Birmingham murders of four young African American girls when their church was bombed just months earlier. Painting a graphic picture of a shattered Jesus depicted in the church's stained glass window, Hedgeman told the churchwomen that the broken Christ-figure represented African Americans. Just as Jesus's vital organs had been torn away by the explosion, so had the dignity and equality of opportunity been torn away from her race. Similar to Welch's declaration that when "I am jim-crowed,...God is jim-crowed...for God is in me and in every Black person...," Hedgeman also contended, that African American lives and their suffering were no less than the life, suffering and death of Jesus. As womanist theologian Jacquelyn Grant asserts, African American women,

beginning with slaves, “did not hesitate to identify [their] struggle and pain with those of Jesus.” Sojourner Truth made Jesus the “starting point” in all her sermons, contextualizing the suffering of her family and people with the suffering and death of Jesus. Central to Black Christians, writes Grant,

was the belief in Jesus as the divine co-sufferer, who empowers them in situations of oppression. For Christian women in the past, Jesus was their central frame of reference....As Jesus was persecuted and made to suffer undeservedly, so were they. His suffering culminated in the crucifixion. Their crucifixion included rapes, and husbands being castrated (literally and metaphorically), babies being sold, and other cruel and often murderous treatments.²⁸⁹

By identifying black suffering as the suffering Christ, African American women, including Hedgeman and Welch, not only elevated the black experience but also accused whites of persecuting and killing their own Savior, Jesus.

In addition to identifying black suffering as that of Christ’s, Hedgeman also contended that there was purpose in their suffering. She told her audience,

They [African Americans] bring a great gift to us for they make us aware of the “break-up” of misery throughout the world; they believe that God has made them (The Negro) to suffer in their own land that they might help us to see the injustices and the need for a deep faith in God in order to overcome.

Proclaiming that “the Negro who has lived in hell can help us see the Resurrection!”

Hedgeman engaged her audience in an African American practice as old as slavery: finding religious meaning in the intense suffering of a racist country. Similar to other Black Christians and their centuries-old conclusion, Hedgeman believed that black suffering only had meaning in the context of the struggle for freedom. Just as Jesus,

²⁸⁹Jacquelyn Grant, “Womanist Theology: Black Women’s Experience as a Source for Doing Theology, with Special Reference to Christology,” in *African American Religious Studies: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, Gayraud S. Wilmore, ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 217-218.

God's Suffering Servant, was called to suffer for the purpose of liberating humanity, Hedgeman believed that African Americans were also called to suffer as a way to fight for freedom.²⁹⁰

In her 1964 memoir, Hedgeman continued this vein of thought:

Perhaps then, the agony of the Negro is exacted of us by God that we may serve this nation, and by that service, help our country find her true greatness - the greatness not of bombs, missiles, power alliances or white supremacy but the greatness in the words "Liberty and justice for all." If this be the mission of the Negro, then we must forget the horror of the past, we must struggle now to help white America free herself of the idolatry of the love of whiteness, of the arrogant assumption that only whites have created in this country and in the world. Perhaps it is our mission to make clear that hate destroys and that Love can bring wholeness to mankind. The crucifixion of the figure of Jesus at Birmingham and the crucifixion of the Negro are one.²⁹¹

Although her convictions are problematic in part, Hedgeman was also not articulating new thoughts. Martin Luther King, Jr. had also expressed these same sentiments. "King posed Blacks," writes Black theologian Maulana Karenga, "as a people whose suffering and social situation have prepared them for, and in fact give them, a divine historical mission of not only liberating themselves, but also of restructuring and spiritualizing the American society."²⁹² On the other hand, to say, as did King, that suffering had prepared African Americans for a mission, a mission to restructure society, is somehow different than to say, as did Hedgeman, that African Americans were called to suffer. In fact, God

²⁹⁰"President's Message," *The Michigan Church Woman*, December, 1963, 1; Cone. *God of the Oppressed* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1975), Chapter VIII.

²⁹¹Anna Arnold Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds: A Memoir of Negro Leadership* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964). 201.

²⁹²Maulana Karenga, "Black Religion," in *African American Religious Studies*, Wilmore, ed., 288. Reprint from *Introduction to Black Studies* (Los Angeles: Kawaida Publications, 1982).

seems to have made them suffer, according to Hedgeman, in order to embark on that same mission. King was trying to infuse meaning into suffering not caused or intended by God while Hedgeman is suggesting that God caused the suffering. It is a slippery problem that vividly reflects why Black Christianity has been critiqued for its lack of radical politics. Perhaps the most important point to recall, however, is that Hedgeman was calling for a new society, a society free of the “idolatry of the love of whiteness” and the arrogant assumption that only whites have created in this country and in this world.”

Hedgeman drew on a long tradition when she spoke to the UCW gathering. In asserting that African Americans were none other than the suffering Jesus, she hoped to compel white UCW women to not refuse her her call to join the fight for freedom. In addition, with her assertions, Hedgeman argued that there was only one way this story was going to turn out. Her audience, as devout Christians, knew the end of the narrative. Jesus resurrected. Jesus triumphed. Jesus defeated death. And so would African Americans. Her interpretation of black suffering reflected her personal and spiritual need for black suffering to not be in vain. Not only did her faith fulfill black women’s need for understanding and meaning midst their often bitter lives, but her faith also acted as an agent of empowerment and authority when she challenged white audiences.

African American UCW women brought a political consciousness and spirituality to the churchwomen’s organization that shaped the discussion, projects and literature produced by UCW. Their writings, speeches, leadership and general participation in the churchwomen’s group challenged white members to initiate and expand programs that dealt with racial inequalities. They entered into relationships with white women, if not personal than at least political and social, in order to promote an agenda that included

their own and their race's advancement. They encouraged white women to engage in activities that supported the integration of countless institutions, including schools, housing, churches, public facilities, restaurants and accommodations. Their presence in the organization helped to further the churchwomen's mission of building better human relationships across all boundaries. Perhaps above all, African American women engaged in relationships with white women as a means to subvert the popular degrading images of African Americans so prevalent among whites. Finally, African American churchwomen infused spiritual and political meaning into the collective suffering of black people. By doing so, they created social consciousness in unexpected places.

Chapter Five: Radical or not? UCCW and Civil Rights

In contrast with many other women's organizations, we seem to have very little imagination or daring about the projects which we undertake....I long for the day when United Church Women will, in its activities and vision, be as big as it is in numbers.²⁹³

UCCW President Cynthia Wedel's above lament to her Board of Managers in 1957 reflected the nature of the churchwomen's dominant style of political and social activism despite some members' personal proclivities for a more radical agenda. UCCW's potential for radical initiatives in interpreting racism's causes and potential solutions reflected their deep faith in the power of both Christian and American ideals to overcome racial strife. This faith permeated their program materials and literature as is evident in a 1942 issue of *The Church Woman*:

The only kind of Christianity that is ultimately going to succeed anywhere is the kind that works here in America. What the world has been waiting for, through the centuries, is a sample Christian nation. America has the best chance of being that sample.²⁹⁴

UCCW churchwomen's language, literature, and project designs on questions of race relations represented their belief in their country and in their God to right the wrongs which crippled the nation. They grounded their programs for improving race relations in the concepts of freedom, equality, and brotherhood common to Christianity and democracy. In doing so, churchwomen followed traditional political avenues, although

²⁹³Cynthia Wedel, *Report of the President to the Board of Managers*, April 29-30, 1957. Appendix A, 1-2 of the *Minutes to the Meeting of the Board of Managers*. Box 2, file 18. CWU @ GCAH.

²⁹⁴Edward Mills, *The Church Woman*, February 1942, 24.

their agenda at times included more dynamic styles of protest or the support of those engaged in such protest. Furthermore, by defining U.S. racial realities in moral terms and uniting those terms with their firm belief in the unsurpassable power of Christian and American ideals, UCCW churchwomen unknowingly short circuited their own programs. Although they understood, supported and lobbied for legislation outlawing racial discrimination, like many liberal whites and African Americans, UCCW also believed in people's basic goodness and desire for justice. They believed that if white people had more information or had personal and mutual relationships with African Americans, they would not harbor prejudicial attitudes. These churchwomen believed that, in time, wrongs would be made right and the crooked paths made straight. And in some cases, they were correct. Overall, however, they underestimated the insidious nature of racial prejudice and oppression in the country.

Because UCCW aligned itself with middle-class individuals and organizations, the churchwomen's analysis of the racial problems that plagued the nation did not involve a serious interrogation of the country's economic system that upheld the status quo. They were not, however, dissimilar to most civil rights organizations which enlisted reform based initiatives in attempts to access quality jobs, housing, education and electoral politics. In order to do so, most civil rights organizations believed that segregation must come to an end and therefore held integration as a political ideal. On the other hand, as Manning Marable writes, "it would be a mistake to equate the battle against Jim Crow with a cultural affinity for the aesthetics and social norms of the Anglo-Saxon, Protestant majority. Almost every black person resisted segregation, because it was imposed upon

him/her by a powerful white capitalist order.” However, there was no consensus among African Americans, says Marable, regarding what type of institutions would best address the needs of working class and poor blacks.²⁹⁵ Occasionally, unions engendered productive interracial alliances on behalf of workers and African Americans displayed strong loyalties to the union when it most benefited them. But even the most progressive labor organizations had a checkered record involving their discriminated against black workers.²⁹⁶ The continuous need to negotiate with their environment, depending on the degree of racial discrimination present, necessitated that African Americans constantly adjust their strategies to best meet the situation. There was, therefore, no agreement among all African Americans regarding the institutions or tactics that would best meet their needs.

On the other hand, among middle-class blacks like African American UCCW members and the NAACP, the integration of facilities, organizations, and institutions came to symbolize their idea of progress. Integration, in their minds, translated into equality of opportunities. This ideal conflicted with most African Americans who were not so much interested in integration as they were in legal protection, political rights and

²⁹⁵Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1990* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi; 2nd edition, 1991), 55.

²⁹⁶Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), esp. Ch. 8; Marable, 50-54; Eric Arnesen. “Following the Color Line: Black Workers and the Labor Movement,” *Radical History Review* 55 (1993), 53-87; Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

access to security. As James Grossman has written about black southern migrants, most African Americans looked forward to freedom *from* whites, not the opportunity to spend more time with them.²⁹⁷ The NAACP's adoption of legal remedies as its chief strategy in pursuit of integration and the group's authoritarian leadership in Walter White, further steered the nation's most recognized civil rights organization away from a program that might have involved a stronger incorporation of economic concerns. Furthermore, in the period following World War II, as UCCW began to institutionalize its race relations agenda, both the NAACP, whose members and ideals white UCCW churchwomen were most familiar with, and A. Philip Randolph, one of the foremost black labor organizers, moved to the political right in response to the Cold War. Both Randolph and White believed that if they tied themselves to the anticommunist, liberal Democrats, their interests would be best supported. For this reason they separated themselves and their organizations from any "suspect" radicals whose presence might deter the Truman administration from instituting even modest reforms. This acquiescence on the part of some black leaders permeated not only their followers but also liberal whites who often looked to middle class African Americans as barometers of racial progress and ideology.²⁹⁸ The fact that UCCW embraced the NAACP's strategies and political ideals translated into an agenda for the churchwomen that did not often include the integration of working-class issues.

²⁹⁷James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 127.

²⁹⁸Marable, esp. Ch. 2.

The fact that UCCW did not identify itself as a feminist organization or speak out in support of women's rights until the mid 1960s further inhibited a more progressive agenda regarding race relations from developing. Although UCCW churchwomen ardently carved out a niche for themselves in interdenominational Protestantism, they identified themselves as church members first and foremost. Despite their refusal to be silent members in their churches or invisible participants in either the Federal or National Council of Churches, they had little to say about society's systemic degradation of women. They did not embrace issues concerning working women and reproductive rights until the second wave of feminism emerged. In fact, most UCCW local meetings for members were held on weekday mornings, making it impossible for working women or women without access to childcare to attend. On the other hand, when they felt that their position as the women's department of the National Council of Churches no longer served them and in fact inhibited them from speaking and acting more radically, they took steps to separate themselves from this institution beginning in 1966. Until then, however, UCCW churchwomen did not take action to dismantle the gender status quo. Their chosen roles as peacemakers and diplomats discouraged any intentional disruption of the power relationships between men and women outside of the church's setting. This reality prevented UCCW churchwomen from constructing a truly radical agenda, an agenda that would have struck at not only the racial divides but the economic and gendered ones as well.

Despite these realities, UCCW registered a message of racial harmony and integration long before it became politically and socially acceptable to do so among white

Americans. Before *Brown v. Board of Education*, before the 1955-1956 Montgomery bus boycott, and before the sit-ins and other mass demonstrations, UCCW advocated the integration of churches and their own local units. Before the U.S. Senate lunch room served African Americans, UCCW championed the integration of public accommodations. Before the FCC and YWCA officially adopted organizational policy denouncing segregation and supporting the integration of churches and local branches respectively, UCCW voted to withhold membership from segregated units and to never meet in a city where all of its members could not be accommodated in the same public place. Despite their reliance on friendly persuasion and education to change white attitudes, UCCW members entered into the political process to forever change the racial landscape of America. They were not radical. They were middle and upper class churchwomen, mostly white, who were invested in the status quo of the country. However, they had a moral conviction that American society was not how God intended it to be and that they therefore had a mission to remake the country.²⁹⁹

Race as a Moral Issue

By the time UCCW emerged in 1941, these particular churchwomen understood U.S. racial realities in moral terms. The work of Katherine Gardner's Race Relations Committee of the Federal Council of Churches, the education of local missionary women in cultural pluralism, and the consistent effort by African American women to engage white women in a program for racial justice, all led to the development of a moral

²⁹⁹*Georgiana Sibley, Rochester, New York, to Martha Edens, NY, NY, July 30, 1978, especially 5-6, Box 56, file 48, CWU @ GCAH.*

language of race prior to 1941. Steeped in a missionary tradition of World Friendship, familiar with those organizations attempting to bridge the divide between the races, and at the time influenced by African American churchwomen who expected them to respond to the injustices, white UCCW women quickly put race relations on their organization's agenda. These churchwomen continued to develop and expand the language and employed it to persuade politicians, fellow citizens and church members to take up the cause. In doing so, UCCW participated in the antecedents of the civil rights movement. Furthermore, they did not stop there. When they persisted in designing projects and platforms encouraging the adoption of civil rights legislation, equal employment opportunities, compliance with *Brown v. Board of Education*, open housing, and the integration of churches, public facilities and their own local units, UCCW acted as an advocate for racial justice throughout the civil rights era. Despite its early inability to integrate economic concerns with their agenda, UCCW still managed to articulate a politically left-of-center agenda because of the moral language they participated in developing and their use of it to shape their programs.

UCCW churchwomen defined for themselves a distinctive role in American race relations that involved the appointment of themselves as the conscience of the people. In her report to the national board in 1944, Amy Ogden Welcher, UCCW president, wrote:

[T]he UCCW may well consider among its functions...the stimulation of thought on changing developments and trends in community or nation. Through thoughtful study...this Council of Church Women may assist materially in the Christian responsibility of being a "Conscience" in community and nation. Some major tasks which are beyond our power or direct duty, we may influence others

to do.³⁰⁰

Although those changing developments included race relations, Welcher noted as an example, in her above statement, UCCW's establishment of a Committee on Religious Ministry to Women in Armed Services. This committee, said Welcher, may have influenced the War Department to appoint a Civilian Advisory Committee to the Women's Army Corps and to request her membership on it. In this instance, Welcher believed it was UCCW's duty to help make Americans conscious of their responsibility to women in the military.³⁰¹

This role as the nation's conscience grew out of UCCW's interpretation of Christian responsibility. In 1945, at UCCW's national board meeting in Washington D.C., Executive Secretary Ruth Mougey Worrell addressed the board with a declaration of Christian purpose:

There are two world problems facing the Church today. The first and most important is race. We women have it within our power to wipe out racial discrimination now. It is not a question of time or expediency. But rather a question of how Christian are we in our attitudes. This new world demands brotherhood and all that phrase implies.³⁰²

In addition to Christianity conferring certain responsibilities, UCCW churchwomen understood their womanhood as another source of their obligation for race relations.

³⁰⁰Amy Ogden Welcher, "Biennial Report of the National Board, United Council of Church Women, 1942-1944," 2, Box 2, file 2, CWU @ GCAH.

³⁰¹Ibid, 1.

³⁰²Ruth Mougey Worrell, *Annual Report of the Executive Secretary*, October 23-25, 1945, 4, Box 2, file 4, CWU @ GCAH.

While reflecting on her years as UCCW president from 1944-1950, Georgiana Sibley continued to believe that “women have a great task of Reconciliation,” both in the church and in the world.³⁰³ Worrell, Sibley, and other UCCW women based their convictions on their concept of Christian women as unique receptors and conduits of God’s spirit. They understood themselves as less burdened by societal-imposed responsibilities than men and therefore more free to respond to God’s inspiration.

The organizational, intellectual and religious developments that led to UCCW defining racial problems as a moral issue preceded what became one of the most important works ever written on race in America. In 1944, Gunnar Myrdal and a host of collaborators published *An American Dilemma*, a lengthy study of black-white relations in the United States. A Swedish economist, Myrdal was invited and paid by the Carnegie Corporation to devote several years traveling across the country, speaking with whites and African Americans in every sector of American life and to write down his observations. The result became a quick classic and, most would argue, one of the most influential books on race during the twenty-five years following its publication. Despite its lengthy fifteen hundred pages, “one simple, pervasive theme eloquently unified the gigantic tome,” one historian has written. Myrdal argued that “a resolution of the race problem was a moral imperative.” According to the Swede, white Americans could no longer bear the discrepancy between the ideals upon which their country had been founded and the racial oppression they inflicted upon African Americans. The resolution

³⁰³*Sibley to Edens*, 1.

of this dilemma, wrote Myrdal, would soon bring an end to the injustices.³⁰⁴ His optimism regarding this inevitable resolution reflected the philosophy inherent in UCCW. Furthermore, his predictions served to reinforce the convictions of UCCW churchwomen and other liberal whites as well as many African Americans. Myrdal “provided a compelling framework for civil rights advocates, policy makers, and opinion molders for nearly a quarter of a century in the battle for black rights that was already underway by World War II.” His support of social engineering as an answer to U.S. race relations ushered in a new era in racial liberalism and social policy. Until the late 1960s, the author of *An American Dilemma* was praised for his insight into the tremendous changes that race relations underwent in the post-war period. However, the events after 1965 revealed Myrdal’s miscalculations regarding the solution to systemic causes of racial oppression. Critics then and now laid blame at the foot of Myrdal for supporting what was to become a futile optimism.³⁰⁵ UCCW both foreshadowed Myrdal’s thesis and experienced reinforcement from his thesis.

Political Strategies

In their campaign for racial integration and racial justice, UCCW developed at least three political strategies: traditional political activism, education, and what the

³⁰⁴David W. Southern, *Gunnar Myrdal and Black-White Relations: The Use and Abuse of An American Dilemma, 1944-1969* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), xiii, 97-98; Gunnar Myrdal, with the assistance of Richard Sterner and Arnold Rose, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1944), xix.

³⁰⁵Southern, 294, esp. Ch. 11.

churchwomen called “social action.” UCCW did not maintain strict boundaries between these methods but moved with ease between them. At times, projects included more than one approach, perhaps beginning with education but then moving into a more action oriented style of advocacy. No matter what the issue, however, UCCW almost always included conventional avenues of protest, believing the legislative and electoral systems could and ought to be engaged in any campaign for justice.

Traditional Political Activism

Eager to assert themselves as citizens, UCCW churchwomen employed the legislative process in their attempts to improve race relations. UCCW members trusted the democratic system as a viable route to racial equality. Like many African Americans and liberal whites, these churchwomen believed that if American ideals were simply instituted to their fullest extent, racial equalities would evolve, even if gradually. They maintained that such ideals could be and must be embodied in concrete legislation. To this end, UCCW women embraced the power of the vote. They believed in making their voices heard individually as well as collectively. The organization regularly advocated that their members cast their votes in certain ways for the promotion of their convictions, including those in support of racial justice. Members of UCCW also looked to their legislators as potential allies in their pursuit of justice. They acted to hold their government representatives responsible for the creation and passage of legislation which would support their goals. As a means to that end, national UCCW created a Legislative Committee early on to track lawmakers and registered one of their members as a lobbyist in Washington D.C. In addition to voting, lobbying and tracking potential legislation,

UCCW members also sent telegrams and letters, made phone calls, and visited their government representatives to advocate for attention to their agenda.³⁰⁶

In 1950, UCCW published an overview of its political positions. *A Statement of Principles: The Voice of Christian Church Women in the Affairs of the Nation* best captured the sanctity these women accorded the democratic system as well as their own obligation to participate on behalf of justice. Calling the access Americans enjoyed to their government representatives a privilege and a responsibility, the *Statement* summoned churchwomen to exercise their right to express both their approval and disapproval to their elected officials. Invoking the Constitution and Bill of Rights, the *Statement* articulated UCCW churchwomen's faith in the nation's basic principles but also warned that such principles of freedom and justice were constantly threatened by forces both within and outside the country. UCCW advocated that intelligent and humble Christians keep constant vigilance and make a consistent effort to voice their concerns and convictions to law makers. To assist their members in doing so, UCCW promised to keep their "body of Christian women constantly informed concerning the problems that confront our people." The *Statement* reflected UCCW's convergence of democratic and Christian ideals:

We recognize the Preamble of the Constitution...and the...Bill of Rights as expressing the most advanced principles that have been voiced as a guide for the

³⁰⁶“Christian Social Relations Committee Report,” *Minutes, National Board Meeting, October 15-17, 1947, 28-29, Box 2, file 7, CWU @ GCAH; Report of the Department of Christian Social Relations, National Assembly, November 15-18, 1948, 3. Box 2. file 8, CWU @ GCAH; Executive Committee Meeting, May 7-9, 1947, 10-12, Box 2. file 7, CWU @ GCAH.*

government of men. We see in them an expression of the Judeo-Christian view of the work and dignity of man. We believe that all legislation should be weighed in terms of its correspondence to these tenets, and consider any measures in contradiction to them as antagonistic to the American way of life.

In short, UCCW declared that all legislation must meet these standards and if not, the laws ought to be stricken down.³⁰⁷

Besides education and “friendly contact,” the pursuit of legislative means served from UCCW’s beginnings as their primary strategy to end racial injustices. In addition to advocating for the passage of certain laws at the local, state or national level, churchwomen attended and instituted seminars to inform themselves regarding legislation being proposed and whether or not the laws might be sufficient for the purposes for which they were intended. One year after the 1941 constitutional convention, the Legislation Committee reported to the first assembly that they had gotten off to a slow start. The assembly urged the Committee to increase their activity, stressing the importance of its job.³⁰⁸ However, once UCCW established the Committee on Social, Industrial, and Race Relations (SIRR) at the end of 1943, the organization paid more consistent attention to legislation, especially at the federal level. As one of its first acts, just months after the committee emerged, the SIRR sent letters to local councils and denominational officers enjoining them to take action to secure the passage of the Dawson-Scanlon Bill, a law proposed to ensure fair employment practices. It helped that

³⁰⁷*Statement of Principles: The Voice of Christian Church Women in the Affairs of the Nation*, November 1950, Box 2, file 11, CWU @ GCAH.

³⁰⁸*Minutes, First Assembly, December 7, 1942*, page I, Box 46, file 1, CWU @ GCAH.

Anna Arnold Hedgeman, the executive director of A. Philip Randolph's National Council for a Permanent Fair Employment Practices Committee, served on UCCW's SIRR Committee.³⁰⁹ In addition to pursuing the passage of fair employment legislation over the next few years, UCCW also worked for anti-poll tax laws, anti-lynching legislation and other statutes that addressed a fair minimum wage, maternal and child welfare, federal aid for public education and veteran's housing. Not only did the SIRR Committee recommend which proposed legislation UCCW members ought to pursue passage of but they also urged churchwomen to subscribe to the *Washington Report*, a monthly summary "of timely legislation of concern to Church leaders."³¹⁰ By 1947, a legislative committee reemerged comprised of UCCW members who lived in Washington D.C. and the organization registered one of their own as a lobbyist in the nation's capitol.³¹¹

UCCW and later, UCW, regularly pursued the attention of federal legislators. When the national board met in Washington D.C. in 1945, they went with the intention of meeting with members of Congress as well as with the president himself. Not only did they challenge their representatives regarding the lack of open accommodations in the

³⁰⁹"Committee on Social, Industrial and Race Relations," *Appendix IV to Board Minutes, November 17, 1944*, Box 2, file 2, CWU @ GCAH.

³¹⁰"Christian Social Relations," *Report of Executive and Associate Secretaries, 1941-1946*, 5, Box 46, file 3; *Recommendations and Resolutions from the National Board, November, 1945*, 3, Box 3, file 9, both in CWU @ GCAH; *Report of the Committee on Social, Industrial and Race Relations, October, 1945*, Record Group 18, Box 70, file 1, NCC archives.

³¹¹*Executive Committee Meeting, May 7-9, 1947*, 11-12, Box 2, file 7, CWU @ GCAH.

city, but they also spoke on behalf of nuclear disarmament, the United Nations and fair employment legislation. During their Washington stay, the entire board enjoyed tea with the Trumans. In 1953, a small delegation secured a ten minute meeting with President Eisenhower during which they voiced their concerns regarding Senator Joseph McCarthy's Committee on Un-American Activities, including its accusations involving church leaders. According to the churchwomen who met with Eisenhower, he was so taken by their sincerity that the meeting instead lasted thirty minutes, causing the president to be late for his next appointment. Mossie Wyker, UCW president at the time, reported on their meeting:

The President was visibly moved that a group of private citizens had faced the issue [accusations of communism] and could see what was happening to the fiber of the country. He asked us questions about who we were, what we were doing. He spoke of pressures under which he was working and was greatly encouraged to find a group from the private sector with such understanding. Three times his secretary came to touch his arm and remind him that other appointments had been scheduled and he would say, "Just a moment."

While they were with Eisenhower, the UCW leaders also convinced him to attend their national assembly later that year as the keynote speaker.³¹² In addition, the churchwomen also had the support of Eleanor Roosevelt. She spoke regularly at UCW assemblies at all levels - local, state and national. She invited UCW representatives to conferences she sponsored. And most importantly, her name lent credibility to the stances UCW took in regards to racial, social and political policies. Whether it was increased opportunities for African American workers, the United Nations or women's rights, Eleanor Roosevelt and

³¹²Shannon, 67-68; Brereton, "United and Slighted," 152-153.

UCW stood together on most issues.³¹³

Women at the local level also engaged in conventional political strategies. They too wrote and visited their legislators regarding such matters as fair housing and civil rights. A former Chicago UCW president remembered visiting the governor in Springfield during the 1950s to urge him to act against restrictive covenants in Chicago. Although the governor told the churchwomen to return once “black people can join your church[es],” she remembered the event as a significant attempt on the women’s part to respond to racial injustices.³¹⁴ At times the churchwomen joined with other church leaders to solicit the local government’s cooperation in examining the plight of African Americans in the community and in designing correctives. In Minneapolis during the 1940s, Elizabeth Haselden was active with UCCW from its beginnings. A white woman originally from South Carolina, Haselden married a minister whose series of appointments took them to various cities where she always located and participated in the local UCCW unit. As chairperson of a committee that drew together the local chapters of UCCW, the National Council of Jewish Women and the National Council of Negro Women in Minneapolis, Haselden was responsible for coordinating a series of lectures on human relations by a professor from the University of Minnesota. Her role earned her the

³¹³Louise Wallace, Memorial for Eleanor Roosevelt, *The Church Woman*, January, 1963.

³¹⁴*Annual Report - Human Relations Committee - Chicago United Church Women*. April 3, 1964; *Church Women United, 1914-1979, Sixty-fifth Anniversary of Chicago CWU Program*, October 5, 1979, 4, Evanston, IL CWU papers currently in author’s possession.

attention of Mayor Hubert Humphrey who asked her to chair a project that brought Herman Long from Fisk University to Minneapolis to conduct a human relations survey. She organized three hundred women to conduct the study and afterwards, when the recommendations that grew out of the survey advised the city to establish the first Commission on Human Relations, Humphrey appointed her as one of two women to the Commission. When Haselden moved to Rochester, New York in 1950, she also served on that city's Conference on Human Relations as UCW's representative. Similarly, when her pastor husband was called to a church in Charleston, West Virginia, Haselden and UCW were again instrumental in establishing an Interfaith Conference on Human Relations as an advisory group to the city government.³¹⁵ Her story reveals not only her personal participation in the city's government but also the role of her cohorts.

Education

Whether for its own membership, fellow church members, or the general public, UCCW believed in education as a means to eradicate racial prejudice and further integration. Although UCW continued to attempt to influence government officials and advocate for legislation to secure civil rights, school desegregation, open housing and fair employment practices, the churchwomen became more involved in education and local action during the 1950s and 60s. Familiar with a history of liberal attempts to dispel ignorance through literature and fellowship with African Americans of similar class backgrounds, UCCW churchwomen built their programs upon a basic trust in humanity's

³¹⁵*Elizabeth Haselden, interview by Doris Anne Younger, Evanston, Illinois, June 26, 1992, 3-8, Box 78, file 5, CWU @ GCAH.*

capability and desire for good relations between the races. Long time harbingers of “world fellowship” as missionary women, UCCW members applied their experience with missionary study groups, institutes and literature to their race relations agenda. In addition to publishing their monthly journal, *The Church Woman*, which carried regular messages in support of racial equality, UCCW also produced study guides for small group discussions, recommended specific books and films, cooperated in national studies of segregation, sent members to race relations institutes and conducted human relations workshops. Together, these various vehicles comprised a firm belief in people’s capacity for change, if given the opportunity and the correct information. Such activities also reflected the prominence of the intergroup education movement in the postwar period. Utilizing social science to achieve social and political goals, the movement brought together reformers and experts to generate dialogue. Charles Johnson, one of the best-known African American sociologists of his time and a leader of the movement, described it in the following way: “The name of intercultural education,” he wrote, “is given to any conscious effort or program to develop an understanding of difference, a respect for other people’s traditions and ways of doing things, and an appreciation of the achievements of different groups and their contributions to a common civilization.”³¹⁶

UCCW early on established a relationship with Johnson, participating in his race relations

³¹⁶Charles S. Johnson, “Cultural Groups and International Problems,” in *Cultural Groups and Human Relations*, ed. Gordon Allport, Edmund DeS. Brunner, and Allison Davis (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1951), 30 in Daryl Michael Scott, *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880-1996* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 94.

institutes at Fisk University and conducting community surveys as a part of his ongoing research into race. Such activities influenced their race related programs.

UCCW's commitment to education as a means to fight racial inequalities and promote integration first became evident in 1943 when Louise Young, the chair of UCCW's newly formed Committee on Social, Industrial and Race Relations (SIRR), wrote to Dr. Samuel McCrea Cavert, General Secretary of the Federal Council of Churches. Young communicated to Cavert UCCW's certainty that their new organization was to carry on where Katherine Gardner's Women's Committee of the FCC's Department of Race Relations had left off before its dissolution.³¹⁷ Gardner's two major vehicles to promote racial peace had been interracial conferences and the education of church members regarding racial attitudes.³¹⁸ UCCW continued in the tradition established by the earlier churchwomen's groups and missiologies, including Gardner's. As proponents of interracialism, these groups and missiologies, like the intergroup education movement, had advocated education for at least twenty years and therefore UCCW's development of educational materials could be seen as conventional measures. This is not to say however, that daring and courageous women were not involved in shaping UCCW's race agenda.

Louise Young, a white sociologist, involved herself in race related issues earlier than

³¹⁷Louise Young, *Letter to Dr. Samuel McCrea Cavert*, November 11, 1943, 1, RG 18. Box 56, file 12, NCC archives. See Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

³¹⁸Katherine Gardner, *Church School Herald*, 7-9, nd, @1929, 7, RG 18, Box 58, file 4, NCC archives; Gardner, "Missionary Women and Race Relations," *Women and Missions*, April, 1931, 15-16, 15.

her participation in UCCW. Born in 1892 near Memphis, Tennessee, Young received her B.A. from Vanderbilt University, her M.A. from the University of Wisconsin and continued her graduate work at Bryn Mawr. In 1919 she dismayed her family when she chose to go back to the south to teach at Paine College, a Methodist-supported black college in Augusta, Georgia. At the time, she was told that living and teaching among African Americans was “a disgraceful thing to do.” She recalled that “one young man told me he would rather see me in the penitentiary, he’d rather see me in prisoner’s garb than to see me go down there. That’s how deeply people felt about that.”³¹⁹ As a southerner, however, Young felt it necessary to be able to adequately answer when questioned about African Americans. Her experience with blacks had been limited to the few men who worked with her father on the family farm and the woman who had taken in her family’s laundry. In addition, the Christian values her parents instilled in Young led her to believe that she had no alternative but to return to the South so that she could come to a fuller understanding regarding the common humanity between whites and blacks. Despite the values they had taught her, however, Young’s family believed she was making a “serious mistake” by going South. Her mother, especially, feared for Young’s safety and begged her to go to Yale’s law school in preparation for joining her brothers in their firm. But Young went south anyway.³²⁰

³¹⁹Louise Young, interview by Robert Hall and Jaquelyn Hall, February 14, 1972, transcript, Southern Oral History Project #4007, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 13.

³²⁰Ibid., 14-17.

After three years at Paine, an institution where she was one of three white faculty members, Young continued her academic career by remaining in the South. She spent the next three years at Hampton Institute, which was also a black college but where she was a member of an all-white faculty. She jokingly called the school “Hampton Institute Massachusetts” since the entire faculty were white northerners except for herself and a Quaker woman from North Carolina who told Young upon her arrival, “I’ve been waiting for you for twenty years.”³²¹ In 1925 Young moved to Scarritt College for Christian Workers in Nashville, Tennessee where she served as chair of the sociology and social work departments until 1957. In addition to being a sociologist, Young taught courses in black history and race relations. At Scarritt, a school for white Methodist home missionary workers, Young’s task was to shape her students’ knowledge about and their attitudes toward African Americans so as to enhance the potential of their missionary work. She took to researching at the libraries in New York City and at Fisk for resources in black history. Once she had established her history course, it became a prerequisite to her race relations class. In her estimation, her students would find it impossible to build relationships with people whom they knew nothing about. Furthermore, professed Young, students ignorant of black history would be worthless when it came time to assist other whites in building relationships with African Americans.³²²

Young’s work at Scarritt became her first extended experience in developing

³²¹Ibid., 25.

³²²Ibid., 38-39.

interracial relations. Part of her work entailed cultivating placements in Nashville for Scarritt students to perform their field work. Although such placements included a wide array of clients and work, one of the most important developments took place at Bethlehem House, a settlement originally initiated by the women of the Colored Methodist Church. During Young's tenure, Bethlehem House served as a joint venture between Scarritt and Fisk students and faculty, giving Young the opportunity to work closely with Charles Johnson, sociologist and, in time, the first African American president of Fisk. Eventually, Young, Johnson and his wife, Marie, served on Bethlehem House's board together for nineteen years. When UCCW first emerged in 1941, Marie Johnson joined Young as a member and one-time national vice-president.³²³

Louise Young's depth of experience in race relations became especially visible in UCCW when, in 1945, she took a year's leave from Scarritt to accept a UCCW staff position, funded by the Julius Rosenwald Fund, to further develop race relations work. Cynthia Wedel, who replaced Young as the chairperson for the SIRR Committee, reported that once Young came on board full time, "the organization of local committees on social education and action, and the encouragement of racially inclusive local councils," became one of the committee's major concerns. To facilitate this initiative, the committee sent questionnaires to nearly 1,200 local councils requesting information regarding their racial make-up. In July of that year, a number of UCCW members attended the Fisk Summer Institute for Race Relations under the direction of Charles

³²³Ibid., 39; Hall, 72-73; *Anna Harrison, New York, NY, to Olivia Stokes, New York, NY, October 10, 1979*, 1, Box 62, file 22, CWU @ GCAH.

Johnson. For three weeks one hundred participants, black and white, listened to experts and took part in discussions regarding the significance of labor, housing, the government, the church, and social science to race relations. Later that fall, UCCW invited white activist Will Alexander and black civil rights attorney Charles Hamilton Houston to speak to the board during their October board meeting in Washington D.C. Alexander, former director of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), spoke out against segregation, claiming it laid at the heart of racial problems in the United States. He also drew attention to the violence and discrimination experienced by African American servicemen when they returned home after having fought a war against fascism over seas. Young had known Alexander since 1922 when she wrote to him at the CIC looking for a referral for work with African Americans in the south. It was he who had found for her the position at Hampton Institute. Charles Houston, at the time a member of the President's Committee on Fair Employment Practices, was best known for his leadership at Howard University's law school and his direction of the NAACP's legal campaign to end segregation. When speaking to UCCW churchwomen, Houston warned that racial tensions would only increase unless action was taken regarding the high unemployment among black Americans. Increased mechanization and improved technologies both in agriculture and industry were eliminating jobs once filled by blacks, offered Houston.³²⁴

³²⁴Cynthia Wedel, *Report of the Committee on Christian Social Relations*, 1946, Box 46, file 3, 1, CWU @ GCAH; "The Fisk Summer Institute," *The Church Woman*, October, 1945, 25-26; Louise Young, "Tuesday in Washington," *The Church Woman*, December, 1945, 26-28; *Report of Executive and Associate Secretaries, 1941-1946*, Box 46, file 3, 1, CWU @ GCAH; Hall, 62; Young interview by Hall and Hall, 22-23; Genna Rae McNeil. "Charles Hamilton Houston: Social Engineer for Civil Rights," in *Black*

During Young's year of full time work with UCCW, she also directed their involvement in a segregation study in cooperation with Charles Johnson, Herman Long and their team of researchers at Fisk University. Of the one hundred plus participating communities, local UCCW units directed twenty-seven of the studies. Similar to the questionnaires sent out to local UCCW councils earlier in the year, the segregation study was designed to elicit the type of information which would in itself foster an appropriate response to racial injustices by all the parties involved in compiling and receiving the study. Young and UCCW believed that ignorance, more so than any refusal, inhibited white people from responding to the oppression experienced by African Americans. These churchwomen, having based this particular mission on their faith in people's basic good will, accepted the adage, "If people only knew better, they would behave differently."

The study directed councils of churchwomen and community members to report where segregation was maintained in their locale and whether or not such discrimination was enforced through custom or by law. Although the churchwomen's councils did not represent the deep south, the study found there to be "widespread segregation on a national scope" and that such practices followed custom rather than law. In addition, the study revealed that segregation was upheld most firmly by housing and churches whereas it found the post office and labor unions to be the least segregated. In the upper south states where churchwomen did conduct many studies, they found that separate

Leaders of the Twentieth Century, edited by John Hope Franklin And August Meier (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 220-240.

accommodations existed more frequently than in other areas of the country, that such practice was more than likely upheld by law, and that the south's policy of segregation often translated into a lack of facilities for African Americans. In the midwest where all the communities reported segregated housing, the report took an interpretive turn as it deliberated over the possible consequences of such conventions:

One can see where this leads. In the case of a few above the average colored people it leads to outstanding leadership in trying to right the wrongs to their race, but in the majority it injects psychic injuries which, after the rude awakenings of childhood, never recover. These wounds crusted over with bewilderment, frustration, and bitterness often lead to delinquency, violence and illegal activities and other forms of neurotic manifestation. These millions of wounds are forming a hideous cancer in the society of our day[,] which if not cured by the power of God working through us[,] will either split asunder or destroy it altogether.³²⁵

The midwest report highlighted the shift that transpired in the postwar period when racial liberals began depicting African Americans as psychologically damaged in order to justify their goals for integration. Known as damage imagery and used earlier in the century by racist conservatives to argue that blacks were inferior and therefore needed to be excluded and segregated, white and black liberals took the imagery after World War II and manipulated white pity with it. Although African American social scientists such as Charles Johnson were unwilling to use the damage imagery to their benefit during the inter-war period because of racial pride, after the war they began to argue that segregation and other forms of racial oppression caused psychological damage. In this way, many

³²⁵*Christian Social Relations Report, Summary of Activities from September, 1945, to November 1st, 1946, part of Report of Executive and Associate Secretaries, 1941-46, Appendix No. 1, Box 46, file 3, CWU @ GCAH; Louise Young, interview by Hilda Dail, 1972, Box 78, file 32, 4-8, CWU @ GCAH.*

whites responded positively to suggested racial changes out of pity and guilt. UCCW churchwomen reflected the growing expectation during the twentieth century for the state to take on greater responsibility for the protection and promotion of its citizens' psychic health, especially weak and vulnerable groups.³²⁶

In some cases, as the study revealed, communities did undertake a project to address the issue in response to their participation in the study. Activism in one midwestern city reported initiating a series of conferences at a local college based on the United Nations' World Charter and its relevance to their community. This particular community expected a permanent council on Human Relations to be established as a result of their initiative. In another locale, this time in the northeast, churchwomen came to a more honest understanding of conditions when the study evoked a clear divergence of opinions along racial lines. In this instance, a white woman reported that "People get along fine together here; we have no problem" while an African American minister contradicted her assessment, writing, "We live in two worlds from our uprising to the time of our lying down - a white world, a black world; a superior world, an inferior world." The white woman maintained that the community embraced a "respect for human rights and for fundamentals [sic] freedom for all without distinction as to race or religion." The black man however, denied that there were equal opportunities between the races.³²⁷

³²⁶Scott, *Contempt and Pity*, xii-xiii, and esp. Ch. 5.

³²⁷*Christian Social Relations Report, Summary of Activities from September, 1945, to November 1st, 1946, part of Report of Executive and Associate Secretaries, 1941-46, Appendix No. 1, Box 46, file 3, CWU @ GCAH; Segregation Study - United Council of Church Women, October 30, 1946, RG 18, Box 61, file 20, 11-12, NCC*

In addition to reflecting UCCW's mission to educate the ignorant masses and the postwar growth of intergroup education, the segregation study also revealed UCCW's and the public's understanding of the steps necessary to correct racial injustices and to attain integration. Whereas a number of communities suggested that employment opportunities for African Americans needed to be increased, including the placement of black teachers and nurses in institutions available to all races, other locales recommended that more whites and blacks join each others' churches as a step toward knowing the other race better. The fact that UCCW endorsed such a range of solutions, addressing as they did both systemic injustices and the more informal relationships between whites and blacks, reflected their combined emphasis on both the spiritual and material worlds. One church council in a western city recommended the initiation of "an educational program embodying the Christian ideals of freedom and equality and using all the fine scientific information corroborating the Biblical teachings." This suggestion embodied the ideals promoted by UCCW. These churchwomen believed in the democratic and political process because, in their minds, such ideals were informed by and more fully revealed in Christian teaching. Their use of scientific evidence in their promotion of equality only made sense because such research reinforced scripture. The material and spiritual worlds were, in their minds, inseparable. In the end, to have one without the other, to have equal opportunities without love, would not be justice.

UCW continued in the 1950s to promote integration and better relations between

archives.

whites and African Americans with educational programs. At the end of 1952, the organization's Executive Committee announced that it was launching "Next Steps in Race Relations:"

Because of the current emphasis on human rights both in the church and in the world community, we reaffirm the historic stand of United Church Women on the inclusiveness of our Christian fellowship across denominational and racial lines, and we determine to take next steps toward the fulfillment of our Christian purpose.... We recognize that 'next steps' will not be identical for every council or person; we begin where we are and we go forward from there."³²⁸

Although there was not exactly a human rights bandwagon to jump on, as the UCW committee implied, the organization interpreted the existence of the United Nations and its emphasis on world peace, the continued legal battle over both school desegregation and restrictive covenants, and the integration of the armed forces, as reason to believe that they were a part of a cause larger than themselves. UCW's Executive Committee also pledged to examine the racial practices of their state and local chapters:

We will appraise all meetings sponsored by United Church Women, local, state and national, in regard to representative attendance, program participation, planning, choice of speakers, rotation of speakers[.] We will examine personnel of boards and committees, choice of officers, delegations to conferences and choice of community projects.

Finally, UCW leadership urged individual churchwomen to commit themselves to abide by the following disciplines:

I will be guided in my everyday attitudes and actions by my belief that all persons are children of God.
I will work against all forms of discrimination.
I will act when another's rights are threatened.

³²⁸Helen Baker, "Executive Committee Advances Program," *The Church Woman*, December, 1952, 22.

I will endeavor to interpret to my own church the implications of human rights, especially as they apply to the inclusion of all Christians in its life and program. I will strive for the integration of all Christian women, irrespective of race, in all phases of the work of my local council.

Following their meeting, the Executive Committee sent the above statements to all of their state and local councils, and voted to survey the councils sometime in 1953 to evaluate their progress.³²⁹ The national assembly concurred with the Executive Committee when it met in 1953, and again called on churchwomen to work with urgency for integrated local councils of UCW. In addition, the assembly went on record as favoring school desegregation and urged churchwomen to prepare their communities for the necessary changes that would follow the Supreme Court's decision.³³⁰ However, the Department of Christian Social Relations (formerly the Committee of Social, Industrial and Race Relations) did not solicit their local councils' records of progress resulting from their implementation of "Next Steps in Race Relations" until 1954.³³¹

At least twenty-one local councils took their national office's challenge seriously, providing content for a UCW pamphlet, *This Is How We Did It*, which promoted the impact churchwomen could have on the evolution of racial attitudes. In addition to synopses of local actions, the pamphlet included words from churchwomen involved in

³²⁹ *Minutes, Executive Committee Meeting, October 7-9, 1952, 11, Box 62, file 1, CWU @ GCAH.*

³³⁰ "Recommendations and Resolutions of the Sixth National Assembly, Ibid, November, 1953.

³³¹ *Report on the Department of Christian Social Relations, Board of Managers Meeting, April 27-29, 1954, Appendix "E", Box 2, file 15, CWU @ GCAH.*

such endeavors:

Who can assess to what extent the ease with which desegregation is taking place in this state has been due to the quiet working of the council of church women which went ahead being interracial in places where no other group did any such thing....Indeed, who can say how far flung is the influence of one woman's voice raised against prejudice and discrimination toward any minority group.³³²

According to *This Is How We Did It*, places such as Kankakee, Illinois, Arlington, Virginia and Barberton, Ohio had initiated programs designed to both increase contact between whites and African Americans and address some of the issues raised by their black communities. For instance, in Barberton, churchwomen reported having established a monthly interracial meeting held in each other's homes and hosted by an interracial team of two. Within that setting, the white women discovered that the two movie theaters in town did not admit African Americans. They therefore established a committee which spent several months making phone calls, sending telegrams and mailing registered letters to the management of the theaters. Although the white women reported getting no response from their attempts to establish contact, the African American women contended that the theaters had finally begun to admit their children. The Barberton churchwomen also reported that their next project involved gaining access for African Americans to the jobs for which they had been trained.³³³

In another example, the editors of *The Church Woman* showcased the Wilmington, Delaware workshop as an example of how the national office expected local councils to

³³²*This Is How We Did It*, United Church Women pamphlet, nd, ca 1955, Box 62, file 2. CWU @ GCAH.

³³³*Ibid.*, 4-5.

respond to their call for “Next Steps.” There, the council of United Church Women, with input from local community organizations, sponsored a workshop to discuss how the citizens of Wilmington might resolve racial tensions in their area. One third of the one hundred and fifty participants were African American as were at least two of the workshop leaders. In addition to presenting a first time opportunity for many to experience sharing meals and day-long discussions with members of another race, the workshop developed a set of concrete suggestions to improve race relations. Such suggestions included attention to more systemic issues such as integration, hospital discrimination against African Americans as potential employees and patients, civil rights and Fair Employment Practice bills, and the foregoing of “special privileges” due to race. Other recommendations involved more personal relationships and advocated inviting a member of another race to one’s church, making friends with someone of another race and making “some friendly gesture immediately.”³³⁴ Clearly, this local council concurred with national UCW in its advocacy of both material and spiritual answers to racial injustices.

UCW National, however, soon made a decision to not wait for local councils to act on their own. In the spring of 1956, the chair of the Christian Social Relations Committee reflected on the insidious nature of black-white relations and the power of Christianity to heal them:

Inter-racial tension is an open wound before the world - a tragedy! Not limited to a geographic area, nor to [the] field of integration in education, but it is in every

³³⁴“Workshop on Race Relations,” *The Church Woman*, November, 1955, 32-33.

phase of our life, economic, political[,] educational, cultural, religious....A disease deep within our souls. We have not yet fully accepted and put into practice the implications of Christ's teaching of the infinite worth of every individual person in the love of one God our Father.³³⁵

When the Fund for the Republic granted UCW \$10,000 shortly thereafter for "educational work in race relations," the national office began to target specific communities for human relations workshops. In her announcement regarding the grant, UCW president Cynthia Wedel again reflected UCW's foundation of Christian and democratic ideals:

Few of us would question that the denial of the rights to whole groups of individuals in our land today is contrary to the Christian teaching about God and man. Each one of us needs to face her own inmost attitudes about the problems....The workshops will create more opportunities for frank discussion of the issues which are by no means limited to any geographical area. Without carrying banners or stirring up controversy, we hope to be able to help greatly in relieving the tensions which are abroad in our land today, and above all, to contribute to the making of a more Christian nation under God.³³⁶

A year after this statement declaring her desire to prevent UCW from making a spectacle, Wedel would issue her lament over the organization's lack of vision and imagination. Perhaps she felt more free with her Board of Managers to speak honestly, as the chapter's opening quote reflects, sensing it a more private setting than in the above News Release. On the other hand, it is possible Wedel held both sentiments side-by-side, wishing UCW

³³⁵Kathryn Mosely, *Report of the Christian Social Relations Committee*, Appendix B of the Minutes to the Board of Managers Meeting, April 24-16, 1956, Box 2, file 17, CWU @ GCAH.

³³⁶"UCW Receives \$10,000 Grant," Ibid, August-September, 1956, 19 and 33; *For Release in Papers, Saturday, June 9, [1956], A.M. 's*, news release by UCW, department of the National Council of Churches, Box 62, file 3, CWU @ GCAH.

could be both daring and disarming, imaginative and reasonable and thereby able to win allies on all sides. In either case, Wedel, onetime chair of the Christian Social Relations Department, spearheaded UCW's newest campaign to draw its members and their communities into dialogues regarding racial justice.

UCW national involved local churchwomen and community members in conducting workshops across the nation. The workshops continued to reflect the influence of the intergroup education movement on UCW. The national team, often interracial and usually comprised of a national staff member, a national UCW volunteer, and a staff member from one of the national denominational women's groups, facilitated discussions, demonstrated conflict resolution techniques, involved participants in role plays, presented pertinent films and led worship. Local churchwomen reserved speakers from their community who could convey the area's racial realities, recruited participants and made all the practical arrangements such as meeting places and meals. Oftentimes, the national staff spent a half day before the workshop conversing with community members and local churchwomen to gain a sense of the issues needing to be addressed. In addition, once introductions and a worship session were complete, the presider began each workshop by eliciting from the participants their understanding of the community's issues and what they hoped to discuss. Such concerns were written on a chalkboard and referred to throughout the workshop. Prior to the close of the meeting, the group generated strategies and techniques to address the issues they raised early on. Within a year's time, national teams conducted twenty-three workshops in every region of the country. By the end of 1959, that number had increased to forty. Included in the team's

travels were Washington, Oregon, Montana, Arkansas, South Carolina, Texas, Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York, and Virginia. Impressed by UCW's work, and after negotiating with UCW's staff over finances and the workshops, the Fund for the Republic issued an additional grant of \$20,000 to the churchwomen in late 1957 to continue the workshops and provide follow-up in the cities where UCW national had already visited.³³⁷

UCW often chose places to conduct human relations workshops because they had revealed themselves as trouble spots. In November of 1957, a workshop team that included Rosa Page Welch and Myrta Ross traveled to Texarkana, a city one hundred and forty miles southwest of Little Rock, on the border of Arkansas and Texas. Two months earlier, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus had surrounded Central High School in Little Rock with National Guard troops to prevent nine African American students from integrating the school. Faubus' unwillingness to comply with the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* forced a reluctant President Eisenhower to send federal troops to the Arkansas capitol to ensure that the "Little Rock Nine," as they became known, could safely attend Central High. Throughout this debacle, angry white mobs protested outside the school, many of them Central High School parents. The

³³⁷Helen Baker. "Twenty-three Workshops Completed," *The Church Woman*, June-July, 1957, 16-18; "Second Grant for UCW Workshops," *Ibid.*, August-September, 1957, 37; *Helen Baker, New York City to Dorothy MacLeod*, nd, ca early 1957; *Christian Responsibility for a Free Society - A Workshop in Human Relations*, May 18, 1959, Box 62, file 4, CWU @ GCAH; Kathryn Mosely, *Report of the Christian Social Relations Committee Chairman*, 1, Appendix D of the Board of Managers Meeting Minutes, April 29-May 1, 1958, Box 2, file 19, CWU @ GCAH.

reverberations from Little Rock were felt throughout the state with the majority of Arkansas' white populace supporting Faubus' segregationist tactics.³³⁸

Texarkana, although on a smaller scale, mirrored Little Rock with its racial tensions and fears. Home to a White Citizen's Council, Texarkana had also seen mob action during an attempt by two African Americans to enter the City Junior College during the prior year. The two had withdrawn before the mob lost complete control. Such was the tenor when Welch and Ross met with Aubrey Clayton, the local UCW chair, and a small interracial group of community members and churchwomen to outline a workshop strategy. In the months leading up to the workshop, Clayton, a white woman, discovered the interracial group of twelve people with whom she began to consult. Once she and the national UCW team made contact, they decided together to take safety precautions by not only preventing any newspaper publicity but also limiting the participants to UCW members' churches. Those individuals who chose to promote the workshop among their friends and churches were instructed to do so "carefully." These choices resulted in eighty workshop participants: sixty women and twenty men including twelve clergy, although some ministers reported that they "felt they would do more harm than good, if they came," and so they did not attend. Even with their careful planning however, the UCW team was unable to prevent some workshop participants from walking out after

³³⁸Williams, 92-119; Daisy Bates, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock: A Memoir* (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1962); On UCW's support of school desegregation in Little Rock, see Ernest Q. Campbell and Thomas F. Pettigrew, *Christians in Racial Crisis: A Study of Little Rock's Ministry* (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1959), 21-22.

viewing an educational movie, stating, “they would not stand the film.” The response prompted one team member to suggest afterwards that next time they not show *The Broken Mask*, “a film dealing so definitely with color right at the beginning.”³³⁹

UCW’s willingness to work within Texarkana’s restrictive parameters provided opportunities for a number of parties to circumvent the local racial constraints. In addition to curbing the amount of publicity they ordinarily pursued for such a meeting, UCW also yielded to local customs. For example, St. James Episcopal church, the only church that volunteered to host the workshop, would not allow the interracial group to meet in their sanctuary or to eat together in their building even though the workshops usually included inclusive meals. On the other hand, the white church agreed to host the workshop in their basement and to serve coffee several times over the two-day interracial meeting, a first-time occurrence for many participants. In addition, several local women took it upon themselves to hold interracial gatherings in their homes for meals or accommodations. Lenna Robinson, a white Presbyterian woman and a UCW local leader, invited the interracial UCW team and a few of her friends for lunch both days. Shirley Inghram, an African American participant, hosted dinner one evening for the UCW team, Clayton and several more black women. Finally, Aubrey Clayton housed Rosa Page Welch for the duration of the team’s stay. According to Myrta Ross, their accommodation of the African American Welch was “a first for the Clayton family.”

³³⁹Myrta Ross, *Human Relations Workshop Report*, for Texarkana, Texas and Arkansas, November 4-5, 1957, Box 62, file 3, CWU @ GCAH; *Texarkana, Next Steps Suggested After Buzz Groups*, 2, Box 62, file 3, CWU @ GCAH.

Welch described her experience with the Claytons in the following manner:

That experience in Texarkana was really something....I got into Texarkana late at night, I just knew I would be a guest in a Negro home. But, lo and behold, it was a young white couple who had two or three children. They met me and I thought maybe they were going to take me to the Negro home I was going to stay in, but they kept on going and going. We went to their house and I was a guest in this house....I [found] myself feeling fear for that white family. This was an all white neighborhood and I really was concerned about them, much more than I was about me. But they were just as relaxed as they could be. We sat up late as usual talking.

Welch echoed her concern for the Clayton's when she spoke of St. James Episcopal church as well. In her mind, the whites in Texarkana took a bigger risk than the African Americans by opening the doors of their church and homes.³⁴⁰

The Texarkana workshop, for better or worse, also revealed a degree of candor among some participants and UCW team members. The fact that some women left after viewing *The Broken Mask*, honestly expressed this particular sub-group's unwillingness to examine racial tensions. In another case, during one small group discussion, the following comment was recorded as a suggestion for "Next Steps:"

Encourage understanding between races which means, not, "I know Negroes[.]" But the root of most trouble is that you think you know Negroes but you don't. Negroes have learned to seem to accept the fact you think you know them, just to exist.³⁴¹

Although the speaker is unknown, the above remark served as an attempt to educate the

³⁴⁰Ross, *Human Relations Workshop Report*; Elizabeth Haselden and Rosa Welch. interview by Margaret Shannon, June 5, 1974, transcript, 3, Box 62, file 5, CWU @ GCAH.

³⁴¹*Texarkana, Next Steps Suggested After Buzz Groups*, 1, Box 62, file 3, CWU @ GCAH.

white participants regarding their inaccurate assumptions. These words vividly illustrate, once again, Darlene Clark Hine's theory of a culture of dissemblance, that is, "the appearance of openness and disclosure" among African Americans when in actuality they have historically shielded their lives from their oppressors.³⁴² Furthermore, as another historian has written, "so deep was the need of whites to believe in 'good race relations' that they took ritualistic deference as an authentic expression of black attitudes toward them."³⁴³ By suggesting that blacks might not be revealing their feelings in their entirety, the above speaker reprimanded whites for drawing inaccurate conclusions regarding their knowledge about African Americans, introduced the concept that blacks might not be as content as whites wanted to believe, and invited whites to pursue a more honest relationship with African Americans.

Finally, the blunt description of Shirley Inghram by one of the national team members, revealed the racial assumptions intact even among those women who endeavored to cultivate better race relations. At the very end of her written assessment of the workshop, the team member listed two names of women under "New leadership discovered." In addition to Robinson, the white woman who hosted lunch both days, "Shirley W. Inghram - Negro" is listed with her address and a brief explanation for why she had been noticed. It reads, "Retired school teacher. Her husband a doctor. Beautiful home. She is solid, sane, respected. Is very light." Together, the attributes described a woman who

³⁴²Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," 37-47.

³⁴³Chafe, 9.

would be deemed acceptable by white liberals. “Retired school teacher” indicated education, respectability and maturity. “Her husband a doctor” and “Beautiful home” represented the class from which the Inghrams stood. After enjoying dinner at the Inghrams, the UCW team would have known that the couple was capable of entertaining and perhaps even able to hire help. The use of the descriptor “sane” suggested that Shirley Inghram had said nothing that this team member found questionable or inflammatory. Inghram must have presented herself as calm, eager to befriend whites and as someone who would not be found in the streets protesting. Whether true or not, this interpretation earned Inghram a place on the list of potential new leaders. Finally, as if the above traits were not enough, Shirley Inghram was light skinned. Whatever meaning Inghram conferred upon her own skin tone, the team member translated it as an additional positive. Although skin color has always been complicated among both blacks and whites for numerous reasons, white Americans often interpreted light skin among African Americans as characteristic of cultural refinement and therefore something to be respected and sought after. Certainly this was the case for the UCW team member who included this trait in Inghram’s description.³⁴⁴

According to at least one prominent UCW leader, the Human Relations workshops served at least two purposes: First, they offered an opportunity for communities like Texarkana to begin addressing the racial tensions dividing people. Second, the workshops extended national support and publicity to communities that had already taken

³⁴⁴*Texarkana: Next Steps Suggested After Buzz Groups*, 1.

some steps in confronting the issue. Elizabeth Haselden, having moved with her husband to Charleston, West Virginia during the 1950s, recognized that Charleston might not have been as volatile as Texarkana but still considered her community in need of what UCW could offer. Acting with a consortium of white and African American women, Christian and Jewish, Haselden invited UCW national to conduct a workshop in Charleston during the late 1950s. According to Haselden, many in Charleston began examining desegregation soon after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* but they needed the assistance offered by UCW to continue their study. Haselden believed that the UCW workshops enabled those in Charleston who had begun to address the issues to continue moving forward and to do so with the backing and attention of what she considered an important group:

The prestige of the national organization of United Church Women was willing to send a team of enablers [sic] to guide with techniques and know-how and be the rallying point for two entire days. That kind of boost meant that the Charleston community came out of it with a long range program the effect of which can still be seen today. Because out of those two days they agreed...we didn't leave until they wrote a continuing program and they formed a Council on Human Relations. They went to work with a specific program and it was a direct rallying point.

In addition, both Haselden and Rosa Page Welch, one of the team members who conducted the workshop in Charleston, agreed that the community had gained both courage and new techniques to continue their pursuit of racial justice.³⁴⁵

Overall, the UCW human relations workshops provided a setting for groups and individuals living in a stratified society to come together and speak with each other.

³⁴⁵Haselden and Welch, interview by Shannon, June 5, 1974, transcript, 4.

Representatives from both the white and African American communities, from different denominations and often different faiths, as well as men and women, came together to voice their concerns and to listen to one another. In an article written from her perspective as a workshop leader, Kathryn Mosely described the benefits of the forums:

The two-day workshop serves as a platform from which members of different groups in the community may speak to each other in sincerity. In some cases this has been the first line of communication established between a minority and a majority group, the first time members of one group have seen, out of the eyes of the other, the vexing and onerous problems some individuals have to face each day of their lives.

In addition, wrote Mosely, "Sometimes the discussion has opened the eyes of all to problems in the community they did not know existed and about which they would immediately want to do something." Although school integration may have instigated a community to gather for a UCW workshop, many whites learned through the process that there existed "a multitude of other problems of extreme urgency: housing, job opportunity, economic standard of living, cultural diversity, and moral standards." And at least initially, blacks and whites experienced a new or renewed commitment to resolve the issues that plagued their community. Wrote Mosely:

Eyes that had formerly been closed to the problems of human relations around them have been opened; desire and determination to help build bridges of understanding in that community have been expressed. "I shall never be the same again." said one young woman.

Certainly Mosely's assessment of the workshops corresponded to the spirit of Charles Johnson's summary of intergroup education: "any conscious effort or program to develop an understanding of differences, a respect for other people's traditions..., and an

appreciation of the achievements of different groups....”³⁴⁶

Social Action

Although UCW engaged in mostly traditional political and educational activities, at times these churchwomen chose to participate in more dynamic styles of protest. The Washington D.C. board meeting in 1945, when the organization brought public attention to de facto segregation in the nation’s capitol by boarding in private homes in an interracial manner, represented one such attempt. Their participation in open housing campaigns and equal employment initiatives from the 1940s through the 1960s also signaled a willingness on some churchwomen’s part to ignore admonitions regarding “carrying banners or causing controversy.” In Chicago and Evanston, one of the city’s suburbs, UCW churchwomen literally wore their banner by adhering stickers to their outer clothing when they went shopping. Meant as an assertion of their support for equal job opportunities for African Americans, the stickers read, “As your customer I welcome being served by any qualified person, regardless of race, creed or color.”³⁴⁷

Most of the churchwomen’s more visible examples of protest, however, emerged in the 1960s when the civil rights movement was in full swing. Furthermore, many of the activities engendered by UCW women at that time came about as a result of Assignment: RACE, a three year project introduced at the 1961 national assembly and Reassignment: RACE, the three year extension of the original program. The initial project’s purpose, so

³⁴⁶Kathryn Mosely, “Past the Point of Double Talk,” *The Church Woman*, August-September, 1958. 21, 33-34; Scott, *Contempt and Pity*, 94.

³⁴⁷*Minutes, February 26, 1965 Board Meeting, Box 2, file 2, CWU-CHS.*

read the literature, was “to unite women across the nation to help achieve full participation for all people without distinction of race in the local church and denomination, [in] the council of church women, [and in] the community....”³⁴⁸

According to UCW, hundreds of women had “a deep sense of frustration, futility and guilt...[regarding] the tragic gap and distance between their convictions as Christians and the daily practice of their church and their community.”³⁴⁹ UCW designed Assignment: RACE to provide an opportunity for these women to channel their energies. The project grew out of UCW’s historical support of racial equality and was the next major step the organization took regarding race relations following the human relations workshops.³⁵⁰ The project also grew as a response to, as one UCW woman said, “[the] social revolution [which] was taking dramatic shape in the United States through its Negro citizens and their just demands.”³⁵¹

Over the course of its first three years, Assignment: RACE induced UCW women across the country to perform countless acts in support of racial justice, most of which

³⁴⁸United Church Women, *My Community: How to Find the Area of Greatest Tension and Need*, Action Guide for Assignment: RACE, 1, nd, ca 1963, Box 62, file 12, CWU @ GCAH.

³⁴⁹“The Churches and Race: Report of the General Department of United Church Women on Present Activities and Issues,” presentation to the General Board February 26-March 1, 1963, 1, Box 62, file 6, CWU @ GCAH.

³⁵⁰Minutes, Administrative Committee Meeting, UCW-National, April, 1960, 6; Executive Committee Meeting, UCW-National, October 4-6, 1960, 3; both in Box 2, file 21. CWU @ GCAH.

³⁵¹Bessie Marsh, *Report to the Tenth National Assembly of United Church Women on Assignment: RACE*, October, 1964, 1, Box 62, file 6, CWU @ GCAH.

never reached the newspapers or television. In a report written in 1964, Carrie Meares, National Director of Assignment: RACE, gathered stories from across the country as testament to the success of her project. In 1963 alone, numerous activities took place across the country. In Chicago, on one Sunday each in January, March, October and November, hundreds of whites and African Americans visited each others homes during ecumenically sponsored Interracial Home Visits. UCW represented and organized the Protestant women who helped sponsor the October and November visits. In Greensboro, North Carolina, UCW churchwomen held a picnic prior to the opening of the school year so that the African American children who were to integrate a particular school might, with their parents, meet informally with some of the white students and their parents. In Pueblo, Colorado, UCW formed a Christian Human Relations committee, interracial in its composition, to secure employment for African Americans in downtown stores. Churchwomen in Cleveland, Ohio walked picket lines in support of school desegregation. In California, UCW churchwomen worked to oppose pending legislation which would have amended the state constitution and given each property owner the right to decline selling, leasing or renting their property, "...to such person or persons as he in his absolute discretion chooses."³⁵² In Knoxville, Tennessee, UCW churchwomen also reported assisting with sit-ins. Another interracial group of churchwomen in an unnamed southwestern city went together to eat in area restaurants to demonstrate the need for

³⁵²Meares, *Confidential Report #II - Three-Year Project: Assignment: Race 1961-1964*. 16, Box 62, file 6, CWU @ GCAH.

open-door policy.³⁵³ Finally, in August of 1963, a substantial number of UCW women boarded buses and planes to Washington D.C. to participate in the historic March on Washington.³⁵⁴

Assignment: RACE summoned churchwomen, both those involved in the interdenominational UCW and those who were most active within their own denominations, to take individual responsibility for furthering the realization of racial equality in their communities, churches and local councils of churchwomen. Emphasizing that the project was an invitation and not an outside imposition, UCW leaders first encouraged churchwomen to sign response cards indicating their acceptance of the invitation. By doing so, churchwomen made the following promise:

As one of the countless women across the country convinced that all people are indeed 'one family under God' and committed to working more effectively to making this truth a reality in our society, I wish to accept Assignment: RACE...; and pledge myself to work with others toward the fulfillment of its goals.³⁵⁵

Once local churchwomen had signaled their acceptance of Assignment: RACE's invitation, it became largely up to them as to how to put flesh to their words. Many sought specific problems around which they shaped a local program. Others responded to incidents as they arose, perhaps more vigorously than they might have prior to

³⁵³Meares, *Confidential Report #II*, 8-10, 16; Marsh, 2; Mrs. Ralph H. Moore, *Human Relations Committee Annual Report*, April, 1963, Box 3, file 1, CWU-CHS; "Women of 3 Faiths Plan Interracial Home Visitations," *Chicago Daily News*, October 5, 1963. Religion Page.

³⁵⁴"March on Washington: Moral Leadership," *The Church Woman*, November, 1963, 26-27.

³⁵⁵"Christian Social Relations" column, *The Church Woman*, February, 1962, 31.

Assignment: RACE. Such was the case in Escanaba, Michigan in early 1962. That spring, an African American man who had been assigned to the area's State Branch Library was having difficulty renting an apartment in this small town in the Upper Peninsula. In addition, the man was also accosted on the street for no other reason than his race. Two days after this story appeared in the local newspaper, a letter appeared in *Letters to the Press* from the local UCW unit articulating the organization's distress over the gentleman's experience of discrimination. UCW's letter cited the fact that the churchwomen had adopted Assignment: RACE the previous fall and therefore had pledged "themselves to work to end racial discrimination." Three days later, the Escanaba newspaper printed another letter from UCW thanking the public for responding to the initial letter with offers of housing, furnishings and "friendly reception" for the librarian. The churchwomen ended their second letter by imploring the locals to remain alert to those in need:

Let us not drop back into our own self-contained little circles again, but continue to be alert to these needs and to respond to them in kindness and concern. The spontaneous good will evidenced by members of many churches which reached out across dividing lines in generous co-operation with others...deserves mention. We hope that it will continue and grow. To this end we are organized.³⁵⁶

For the UCW women in Escanaba, Assignment: RACE served as rationale to respond to a specific situation.

Although Assignment: RACE engendered a reaction to a similar occurrence in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, that small town's UCW unit recognized the specific

³⁵⁶Carrie Meares, "Assignment Accepted in Escanaba," *The Church Woman*, May 1962, 11-12.

incident as indicative of a larger pattern of racial discrimination and therefore responded accordingly. In May, 1962, three men were riding on the Pennsylvania turnpike when their car broke down and so had it towed to Shippensburg, a town of 6,500. Needing to stay overnight, the men found it impossible to find accommodations for the one in their party who happened to be Pakistani. The three resorted to calling a friend fifty miles away who came and picked them up. Within a week, the local paper wrote a critical editorial entitled, "It Happened Here," which made several points concerning the presence of segregation in the North, the racial discrimination experienced by the Pakistani, and the fact that such an incident could very well happen again in the town. The author of the article happened to be Dorothy Hull, a white woman and the public relations chair of Shippensburg's UCW unit.

Hull's response to her town's violation of the Pakistani traveler's civil rights reflected UCW's willingness to involve themselves in these issues as well as the churchwomen's limitations in their perception of the problem and its solution. As the editor of the local paper, Dorothy Hull had also published an article prior to the above incident regarding churchwomen's responsibility to put Assignment: RACE into action and eliminate racial discrimination in Shippensburg. When Lynn Crowding, president of UCW at Shippensburg, read Hull's editorial detailing the incident, she took it up with Eleanor Peterson, the state executive secretary for UCW Pennsylvania. Together, Peterson and Crowding called for an executive committee meeting of UCW Shippensburg to discuss how the churchwomen ought to respond. Included in that meeting was an African American woman from the local AME church who was invited to impart the facts of

discrimination to the group of white churchwomen. The white women learned that for the 155 African Americans in Shippensburg, oppression was real and vivid. From that meeting, UCW decided to do two things: call on the Shippensburg Council of Churches to join with UCW and meet with Pennsylvania's Human Relations Commission; and to call on the borough manager to put an end to "darktown brigades," the practice of whites in black-face, in any future parades. When the Church Council and UCW met with the Human Relations Commission, three Shippensburg blacks spoke to the Commission regarding the specific experiences of discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodation. The Commission agreed to work with a Shippensburg Human Relations Committee, set up by UCW and the Church Council, to work for the end of racial discrimination. What had begun as a response to a particular event, grew into a comprehensive plan fueled by Assignment: RACE. Unfortunately, however, it had taken a complete stranger to draw the attention of Shippensburg's white citizens.³⁵⁷

At times, Assignment: RACE motivated UCW churchwomen to participate in projects deemed radical by those resistant to change. This proved to be true in 1964 and 1965 in Mississippi. In 1964, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), an umbrella group joining local civil rights groups in Mississippi with SNCC, CORE, the NAACP and the SCLC, invited hundreds of college students to the state to educate and register black voters in anticipation of the presidential election that fall. Known as Freedom Summer, the project attracted national and international attention to the state ranked

³⁵⁷Virginia H. Ellison and Eleanor M. Peterson, "It Happened in Shippensburg!" *The Church Woman*, August-September 1962, 22-23, 34-37.

fiftieth at the time economically, in part because fifty-one percent of the people living in the Delta earned less than a thousand dollars a year.³⁵⁸ White violence reigned in Mississippi, inhibiting local civil rights organizers from producing some of the positive results similar to other southern states. COFO insisted that the presence of northerners would not only draw attention to the misery and injustice in Mississippi, but they would also help protect those who were working for change. Fannie Lou Hamer, when addressing a group of college students as they prepared to come south, also spoke to the necessity of northerners' presence to help convert those who doled out the violence and oppression:

We need you. Help us communicate with white people. Regardless of what they act like, there's some good there. How can we say we love God, and hate our brothers and sisters? We got to reach them; if only the people comin' down can help us reach them.³⁵⁹

Beginning in the summer of 1964 and including the summer of 1965, UCW churchwomen participated in Freedom Summer through a project, Wednesdays in Mississippi, led by the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). Calling on Protestant, Catholic and Jewish women's national organizations, NCNW gathered the moral forces of white and African American women and sent them to Mississippi.

Wednesdays in Mississippi (WIMS) emerged as a response to a group of Mississippi women who, in March, 1964, issued a request for northern women to come as a sign of

³⁵⁸Sally Belfrage, *Freedom Summer* (New York: The Viking Press, 1965; repr., Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 21.

³⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 7.

support for the student civil rights workers. The southern women feared the potential violence that might result when the student workers began to register black voters, work in community centers and teach literacy classes. These women also believed that the presence of the northern women might reduce the fears that the Mississippi community held toward the students. Finally, the women who had requested a northern presence believed that the outsiders could assist in building bridges between white and African American southern women as well as between northern and southern women. As history would tell, Mississippi women were correct to fear the potential for violence in their state. Three young workers died that summer: James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman. But by the end of the 1964 summer, eight WIMS teams, totaling fifty northern women, had traveled to Mississippi and met with three hundred southern women. The summer of 1965 witnessed another forty-eight northern women travel south as part of WIMS. In addition to northern UCW women participating in the project, numerous UCW churchwomen in Mississippi also took part by hosting their northern sisters and organizing their visits.

Specific plans for the WIMS northern participants included activities to increase their consciousness regarding the situation in Mississippi, as well as more practical undertakings. During their brief stay, which usually included three days and two nights (although some chose to extend their visit), WIMS teams observed Freedom Schools, voter registration projects and Head Start programs. In Greenwood, Mississippi, team members made home visits with a nurse from the Pax Christi Catholic Mission. In Jackson, the WIMS team canvassed the community, going house-to-house to persuade

people to integrate their schools. Each team was given the opportunity to hear local organizers, community members and academics who relayed to them information only available from those who lived the Mississippi experience. In addition, the women spent time with student workers and offered them encouragement. In 1965 especially, when the NCNW focused its efforts on bringing professional skills to the area, many WIMS participants leant their expertise as educators, librarians and social workers. Many of the team members continued their involvement in Mississippi long after their visit ended by organizing northern collections of books, clothing, literacy materials and other supplies needed desperately by the citizens and civil rights workers. They also publicized their visits and the situation in Mississippi by writing reports and giving presentations to their churches, alumnae societies, organizations and other groups to which they belonged. The focal point throughout both summers, however, remained on increasing the numbers of white and African American women in the south and north who could communicate honestly with each other regarding the racial injustices and the potential for solutions.³⁶⁰

According to the letters and reports written by the Wednesdays in Mississippi participants, both the hosting and visiting women benefitted from the experience. Claire Collins Harvey, a churchwoman in Jackson, Mississippi who in 1970 became UCW's first African American national president, recalled how the project both changed the lives of the northern visitors and provided support to those in Mississippi who wanted to alter

³⁶⁰Polly Cowan, Margery Gross and Frances Tenenbaum, *Wednesdays in Mississippi - 1964-1965, Final Report* (n.p.: The Educational Foundation of the National Council of Negro Women, Inc., 1965), 4,6-7, 15-16, 18, Box 62, file 15, CWU @ GCAH; *Wednesdays in Mississippi, Spring, 1965*, 1, Box 62, file 15, CWU @ GCAH.

the way things were:

On Wednesday you [northern women] went on a program to experience what was happening in Mississippi and experience it - and some of you just could not believe - you told us on Tuesday night that what we said and what was in the papers couldn't be true, but Wednesday night when you came back, you were a different person because you lived through it....But I must say that that kind of witness, with us that were part - with white women and black women who were there in the south and who were wanting good will to be administered, really made a difference and a change.³⁶¹

Another southern woman commented on the value of the WIMS project:

After two summers of vigorous activity it [WIMS] has established a pattern and method of operation that should not be allowed to disappear. Rather, it should be enlarged and applied on a much wider scale, all over the south, certainly, but also in other divided and simmering communities....If you looked back over the last two years and marked every forward step in Jackson community relations, you would find that a Wednesday lady had somehow been involved.³⁶²

From the perspective of a northern visitor who traveled to Jackson in June, 1965 from Chicago, Elizabeth Haselden wrote, "the major value of the visit,...really lay [sic] in the intangible realm of human relationships." Despite giving a presentation to an integrated group of women at a Black Baptist Church, Haselden found it difficult to understand what help, if any, she had given to the people she had met during her visit. Haselden told the group gathered at the church that in order to build a true community out of the "fractured society and hate" that represented present day Mississippi, every person must be able to participate and must have the opportunity for self-realization. She maintained afterward, however, that the significance of her time in Jackson "lay mostly in the

³⁶¹Cynthia Wedel, Claire Collins Harvey, interviewed by Margaret Shannon, Lexington, KY, ca 1980, Box 56, file 52, 23, CWU @ GCAH.

³⁶²Cowan, Gross and Tenenbaum, *Wednesdays in Mississippi, Final Report*, 37.

discussion of shared concerns rather than in any attempt on my part to say what could be done.” She therefore listened gladly to African American women as they spoke “about their fears, their hopes, and in some cases their sense of disillusionment and hopelessness as to their church’s stand on the race issues.”³⁶³

Despite these accolades, however, the WIMS project had its shortcomings. The brief amount of time northern women spent in Mississippi provided little opportunity for a complete assessment and realization of the many problems facing the state. Although the women heard from experts and eye witnesses regarding the horrors of white violence, as Haselden remarked, “I remembered how few people we were really meeting from the entire city of Jackson. I really did not meet the people who would express hostility and objection.”³⁶⁴ As a South Carolinian originally, Elizabeth Haselden knew the south intimately and so most likely perceived Mississippi’s situation differently than most northerners who came down as WIMS participants. In her report on her visit to Mississippi, Haselden commented at length on the presentation given the WIMS team by [first name] Tatum, a sociology professor from the University of Mississippi. Instead of focusing on the problems in Mississippi, wrote Haselden, Tatum had “tried to illustrate what he considered to be the evolving mood of compliance [among whites], a slow awakening to the inevitability for change, and the sense of relief which came with this

³⁶³To Polly Cowan, from Elizabeth Haselden, Evanston Illinois, August 30, 1965, 1. Box 62, file 15, CWU @ GCAH; Elizabeth Haselden, interview by author, Tape Recording, Evanston, Illinois, February 4, 1998.

³⁶⁴To Cowan, from Haselden, August 30, 1965, 1.

acceptance, even if demonstrated in small ways.” Haselden continued with her assessment of Tatum’s lecture:

To people who were not raised in the south and who cannot fully understand the terrible grip of custom and tradition in the virtually closed society which has been Mississippi, these gains seemed too small to be treated as sociologically important. Perhaps because of my long acquaintance with the south, I attached more importance to these small gains and felt that I understood what Mr. Tatum was trying to illustrate. I did not regard his attempt to picture the positive side of the situation as an attempt to whitewash or justify the still treacherous, violent, and explosive situation....On the other hand, I would agree that he did not sufficiently provide a balanced sociological framework for his remarks nor did he probe in depth the sociological significance of this. What I really missed was some evaluation of the atmosphere of change from the standpoint of the Negro....³⁶⁵

Based on her report, Haselden and her cohorts expected a deeper analysis of why there was such strong resistance to racial change in Mississippi. Unfortunately, they did not receive it from Professor Tatum. His report reflected the overall tenor and limitations of the project. WIMS concentrated on forming relationships versus addressing the systemic reasons for the overwhelming poverty, illiteracy, segregation and violence in the south. Despite the fact that the student civil rights workers had precipitated the women’s presence, the northerners did not actually participate in any voter registration or literacy education. They went to observe, to learn, to support, to build bridges and to carry their knowledge and experience back with them to the north. As one northern woman remarked, her experience in Mississippi changed her life. Another noted that she was now involved in the civil rights movement as she had never been before. And another

³⁶⁵Ibid., 3.

pledged to continue her involvement in her own community.³⁶⁶ The National Council of Negro Women reported in 1965, “Even some of the most hostile women in the South seemed to have been impressed by the sincerity and respectability of the team members.”³⁶⁷ The extent, however, that Mississippi was changed by the “Wednesday ladies” cannot in all reality be measured in any empirically significant manner.

On the other hand, UCW churchwomen’s activities on behalf of race relations in Mississippi did manage to provoke local anger. Conditions in Mississippi were such that even modest attempts to change the racial status quo generated hostility. Jane Schutt, president of UCW in Mississippi in the early 1960s, became the target of white violence when her activities in support of civil rights could no longer be ignored by those who felt threatened by the potential for change. Appointed to the Mississippi State Advisory Committee in 1959 by the United States Commission on Civil Rights, in 1961 Schutt organized with other churchwomen the Mississippi Prayer Fellowship, an interracial group of women who came together for weekly prayer meetings. Schutt also opened her home to white and African American college students who traveled to the state to register voters and work in Freedom Schools during the summers of 1964 and 1965.³⁶⁸ One evening just before Christmas in 1964, Schutt’s home was vandalized with a burning

³⁶⁶Cowan, Gross and Tenenbaum, *Wednesdays in Mississippi, Final Report*, 4.

³⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 3.

³⁶⁸“Woman of Courage: Jane Schutt,” *The Church Woman*, June-July 1970, 18-19; Clarie Collins Harvey, “On Trailblazers and Torchbearers,” *The Church Woman*, Vol 3, 1990, 12; Jane Schutt, “A Flaming Cross for Christmas,” *The Church Woman*, December 1965, 4-6.

cross on her front lawn. Writing about the incident a year later in *The Church Woman*.

Schutt described the scene as a frightening and lonely experience:

We looked at each other in consternation. The dancing flames cast an eerie, flickering glow into our living room, making grotesque shadows which moved like live shapes. Even before we opened the front door, I felt that I knew what would be there. The blazing cross was beautiful to see but what it conveyed was ugly and frightening. I could see pain and anger on my husband's face as he strode to put out the flames. The street was strangely quiet for this hour on Sunday night. There were no opening doors but I knew that I could not be the only one witnessing this. Had my home been ablaze, many would have rushed to our aid, but this was different.³⁶⁹

Schutt knew immediately that the warning was meant for her and not her husband.

Reflecting on the situation, Schutt wrote, "The Klan would find no reason to shame us in the eyes of the community and burn a cross because of him." Schutt knew it was her participation in UCW and its commitment to race relations that had brought on the cross burning. Insisting that she was the epitome of a traditional white middle-class housewife, except for her UCW involvement, she wrote, "As for me, I have always pictured myself as the carbon copy of many another American mother. I shop, housekeep, chauffeur my husband, the children and their friends; attend an occasional bridge, go to PTA meetings - and I'm a member of United Church Women." In the years following the incident, as other UCW members reflected on the event, Schutt's response to the cross-burning provoked almost as much pride in her relationship to UCW as her activities that had prompted the violence. Instead of removing the burnt cross from her front yard, Schutt chose instead to string it with Christmas lights and build a creche around it in celebration

³⁶⁹Schutt, 4-5.

of Jesus' birth. Her decision to do so reflected her determination to publicly denounce the scare tactics and to not be shamed into silence. In addition, her response also reflected the support she must have received from her husband who, despite his own inactivity regarding civil rights, did not stop his wife from participating and allowed the cross to remain on his front lawn. Although UCW's programs may have been limited in their understanding of systemic racism, Schutt's story indicates that UCW managed to disturb the status quo.

In 1965, UCW undertook a program, the purpose of which developed into one of the organization's primary concerns. As a precursor to UCW's deepened involvement in economic issues and their relationship to racial injustices in the late 1960s, Women in Community Service (WICS) emerged as a cooperative effort between the National Council of Catholic Women, the National Council of Jewish Women, the National Council of Negro Women and UCW. Part of President Johnson's War on Poverty, the Job Corps of the Office of Economic Opportunity called on these four organizations to recruit and screen young women for women's training centers across the country. WICS relied on the national women's associations for organization, publicity and overall administration of the program intended to train and find employment for impoverished young women. After beginning with only six offices in early 1965, WICS screening centers grew to number 290 by 1969. Although at least one paid staff person worked in each office, volunteers from the four women's organizations performed much of the recruiting and screening of potential trainees. By the end of 1966, 10,000 volunteers had passed through the doors of WICS centers; by 1969, this number has risen to 20,000. The

volunteers, in addition to finding and screening young women who wished to participate in the federally funded project, provided services based on their own expertise. Some taught classes including literacy, child care and “homemaking.” Others assisted the recruits in finding low-income housing, helped place them in jobs and offered counseling and guidance. Still others provided transportation, answered phones, and performed other administrative duties common to an office. The young recruits, 16-21 years in age, met certain federally mandated criteria such as being unemployed, lacking in education and job skills, and coming from a low income level. Since African Americans comprised a high percentage of poor young women, WICS served to deepen UCW churchwomen’s understanding regarding the interconnections between economics and race.³⁷⁰

Additional evidence of the nature of UCCW’s engagement with issues impacting African Americans’ pursuit of equality can be derived by looking at other organizations during the same period. Two groups, also female and predominantly white, when compared to UCCW, suggest that the churchwomen were acting earlier than some but were also similar to others in their political and social activities. The Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), like UCCW, worked to address race relations during this same period while the American Association of University Women (AAUW) did almost nothing. The YWCA can also be considered the closest organization to UCCW in temperament and agenda. With many UCCW members active in the YWCA and many

³⁷⁰Louise Pfuetze, “WICS - Women in Community Service,” *The Church Woman*, March, 1965, 15-16; “WICS Six Months Later,” Christian Social Relations Column, *The Church Woman*, August-September, 1965, 28-29; Shannon, *Just Because*, 139-142.

UCCW staff having received their professional training within the Y organization, the two groups clearly overlapped in vision and action. Steeped in traditions of Christian left idealism and liberal social reform, both organizations worked to apply Christian principles, including the social gospel, to the racial situation in the U.S. Both played pivotal roles in allowing a new ethic concerning race relations to develop among white liberals during and after World War II. In her discussion of the YWCA and its contribution to this ethic, Susan Lynn writes, "The Y, along with other organizations, provided an extensive associational network, replete with leadership, potential followers, and financial resources out of which a new movement for social justice could emerge." Certainly UCCW falls into Lynn's category of "other organizations," since the thousands of women across the country who regularly met in churchwomen's missionary societies provided ample networks and resources for the development and dissemination of a morally and religiously-based program for race relations. Despite the fact that the Y provided numerous programs in their communities and therefore wielded a staff the size unknown to UCCW, the Association's political proclivities draw exceptionally close to UCCW's. The Y, however, often moved more slowly than UCCW when it came to integrating their local branches. Hampered by their dependency on local funding, the YWCA often bent to proscribed racial limitations in their communities, fearing the loss of financial resources. On the other hand, once the Y chose to integrate a local branch, they had the potential to influence a wider circle of people since theirs was the older and more well known and established organization. In the end though, both UCCW and the YWCA chose similar strategies to effect better race relations: interracial relationships,

friendly persuasion, education and lobbying for legislation as legal means to end segregation and provide civil rights for African Americans.³⁷¹

The AAUW, on the other hand, despite its rather liberal agenda, did little to promote better race relations in the two decades after World War II. As Lynn points out, “it is striking that no endorsement of the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision on school integration was forthcoming from an organization whose primary interest was education.” Although some local branches studied race relations during the 1940s and 1950s, the national organization never took an official stand on the issue. When Congress debated whether or not to establish a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission in the late 1940s, the AAUW refused to support the proposed legislation.³⁷² Furthermore, the organization did not always admit potential African American members. When Elizabeth Haselden lived in Minneapolis during the 1940s, in addition to belonging to UCCW, she was also involved with the local branch of AAUW. She later remembered that an African American woman, a newspaper reporter, applied for membership in AAUW and was refused. Haselden and the local UCCW unit stood behind the woman in protest until AAUW backed down and admitted her. It also created a stir at the national convention since, as Haselden recalled, “the Minneapolis Chapter of AAUW really broke the rule...at the national convention.”³⁷³ Therefore, in relation to the American Association of

³⁷¹Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 25, especially chapters 1 and 2: On the YWCA and race prior to 1945, see Robertson, “‘Deeper Even Than Race?’”

³⁷²Lynn, 65.

³⁷³Haselden, interview by Younger, 5.

University Women, UCCW took greater risks and was more progressive in its political and social activities regarding racial injustices.

There were, however, a number of organizations that worked interracially and that responded to racial injustice with a greater degree of radicalism than did UCCW. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and its race relations program, although it had begun in similar fashion to both UCCW and the YWCA, by the late 1950s had grown into a much more progressive and activist program than the other two. Similar to UCCW and the Y in that it too drew on a long tradition of moral and religious sensibilities, the AFSC committed itself to demonstrating its Quaker mission of pacifism through social action. Initially, the AFSC's major strategy involved confronting employers and school administrators with the injustice of their discriminatory practices that excluded African Americans from working in specific jobs or attending certain schools. Similar to UCCW, AFSC believed that individual conversion was a necessity for true change to evolve, and so attempted to convince managers to hire African Americans and college administrators to accept racial integration among teachers and students at their institutions. Unlike UCCW however, the AFSC began to involve itself in community organizing in the late 1950s when they determined that moral suasion had failed to bring about needed changes. They therefore began initiating projects, says Lynn, "to generate a spirit of initiative and cooperation and political participation in a community, to get people to help themselves." Whereas UCCW often aligned itself with organizations that did community organizing or even financially supported such work, their own projects did not venture into this arena until its participation in Women in Community Service (WICS). AFSC's attempts to

empower community members to identify the issues of concern and raise the confidence of individuals in poor communities so that they might resolve their own problems facilitated the emergence of what Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci called “organic intellectuals.” Without support from the institutions that normally sponsor traditional intellectuals, organic intellectuals are individuals who “try to understand and change society at the same time” and “learn about the world by trying to change it.” This is not a practice that either UCCW or the YWCA could necessarily lay claim to and therefore made the AFSC more radical.³⁷⁴

Finally, the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), a mixed gender organization like the AFSC, demonstrated during this same period the potential for direct action by interracial groups. Established in 1942 by the Fellowship for Reconciliation, a pacifist group founded by an English Quaker earlier in the twentieth century, CORE staged the very first Freedom Ride in 1947 as an attempt to confront racial discrimination with the nonviolent techniques introduced by Mohandas Gandhi. Calling it the “Journey of Reconciliation,” the group of African American and white activists rode interstate buses through the upper South, testing the 1946 Supreme Court decision ruling that segregated seating of interstate passengers was unconstitutional. These first riders were harassed and arrested as a result. When CORE again organized Freedom Rides beginning in 1961, they rode the buses throughout the South and this time encountered massive resistance

³⁷⁴Lynn. esp. chapters 1 and 3; on the use of Gramsci’s organic intellectual, see George Lipsitz, *A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988), 9-11.

and violence. Motivated by some of the very same Christian principles that UCCW drew on, CORE instead chose to bring “the civil rights movement out into the streets and kept it there through the middle sixties.” Theirs was also a more radical program than those designed by UCCW.³⁷⁵

In the years following the amendment of their relationship with the NCCC, UCW pursued programs that reflected the widening of the southern civil rights movement to include the complexities of class and segregation - northern style. As they did so, the churchwomen, like the larger movement, moved closer to the real causes of racism. Although they did not abandon their reliance on personal relationships, education and legislation to impact racial inequalities, their projects and literature began to reflect a more complicated assessment of inequalities in housing, employment and education. Also like the larger movement, however, UCW came face to face with heightened resistance, both within and outside their constituencies. With sorrow, they realized to a much greater degree just how complicated, powerful and pernicious this national disease was. But true to their heritage, UCW churchwomen continued to believe in the unsurpassable power of God and the goodness of humanity to destroy hate for all time:

The task of achieving equal opportunity now for all is staggering, despite the many groups and forces at work. The cost in energy and even life itself will be great. Yet it is God's world which he created and loves. It is his mission: he is at work. And he will guide all who work with him; and sustain us until his work is done.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁵Williams, 125, 144-146, 147-161; Chalmers, 22.

³⁷⁶Eleanor French, “Assignment: Race: Phase 2 - In Partnership for Equal Opportunity Now for All in Church and Community,” *The Church Woman*, January, 1965. 27.

UCW churchwomen, sensing the inability of Christian ideals to resolve racial inequalities on their own, grew more adept at incorporating social analysis into their programs. Responding to the women's movement, Black Power and African American women's articulation of a feminism that merged concerns with gender with those of race and class, UCW persisted in its pursuit of World Fellowship among and between all people. The churchwomen continued to fall short of eradicating racial injustices even within their own organization but they also grew increasingly adept at recognizing that good intentions were not enough. By escalating their attempts at addressing the systems that uphold racism, UCW women moved their analysis beyond the individual relations that had circumscribed their agenda for nearly three decades.

Epilogue

The projects, agenda and publications produced by UCCW churchwomen, white and black, further complicate the history of work on behalf of African Americans' civil rights. Although African Americans had always resisted their white oppressors, fighting for voting, economic and civil rights, it can be argued that the civil rights movement did not emerge in a significant way until the federal government was willing to intervene with all three of its branches: judicial, legislative and executive. Once Reconstruction ended in 1877, the federal government did not again intercede on behalf of blacks until the 1930s. As the Great Depression besieged the country, New Deal programs instituted by Franklin D. Roosevelt produced benefits for many African Americans. Although the National Recovery Act and other reform programs such as the Agricultural Adjustment Act actually made the harsh economic realities even worse for many African Americans in the south, other New Deal undertakings helped blacks survive the decade. Relief and welfare projects, like the Public Works Administration, gave work and income to millions of struggling Americans, including blacks.³⁷⁷ Despite this positive intervention, however, Roosevelt and his administration refused to define its projects as work on behalf of African Americans. Although FDR recognized that the south was "America's worst economic problem," and that at least part of that problem was the region's dependence on agriculture and an impoverished workforce,³⁷⁸ he did not publicly define the problem as

³⁷⁷Howard Sitkoff, "The Impact of the New Deal on Black Southerners," from *The New Deal and the South*, eds. James C. Cobb and Michael V. Namorato (University Press of Mississippi, 1984).

³⁷⁸Franklin D. Roosevelt, "The President's Council Reports on Southern

one involving racial injustice. Similar to other white progressives that had come before him, Roosevelt identified the south's issues as economic. Also like his predecessors, FDR noted that the south had been prevented from reaping the economic rewards of industrialization. The region's dependence on agriculture had created an instability that the south's perimeters could not contain and therefore came under increasing attack by both northern and southern progressives.

As Roosevelt and other Democrats depicted them, New Deal policies were simply intended to break the region's dependency on agriculture and to promote economic viability.³⁷⁹ Race was not officially articulated as part of the problem or the solution. Even though some of Roosevelt's New Deal measures served to assist many African Americans, causing many of them to shift their political party allegiance to the Democrats during the 1930s, Roosevelt and his party, "rarely devoted more than passing attention to racial problems."³⁸⁰ According to historian Alan Brinkley, following World War I, liberals backed away from the attention they had given to race during the Progressive era. With the 1919 race riots, anti-immigrant sentiments and other cultural wars spawned in the 1920s, the Democrats in the 1930s recognized they could not use a racial basis for liberalism and still hope to remain in office. Writes Brinkley,

Economic Conditions," reprinted in *Major Problems in the History of the American South, Volume II: The New South*, eds. Paul D. Escott and David R. Goldfield (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1990), 389.

³⁷⁹Ibid.

³⁸⁰Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), 165.

Liberals chose to present public issues almost entirely in terms of economics and class. Most liberals detested racial prejudice, to be sure; but pursuing the politics of race, they believed, risked unleashing the kind of mass irrationality they believed they had seen in 1919 and the mid-1920s. The best hope for aiding oppressed minorities was economic reform. By attacking problems on a class basis, by defining people in economic rather than cultural terms, liberalism might hope to alleviate the material problems of African Americans without having to confront prejudice openly.³⁸¹

In addition, Roosevelt believed that any attack on segregation or discrimination would alienate both Southerners in Congress and their Democratic constituents. He therefore refused to put federal muscle behind an anti-lynching bill, which, southerners believed, would have infringed on states' rights. It was not until after World War II that white liberals moved toward a commitment to racial justice and named it as such.

The history and nature of UCCW and its antecedents, both as institutions and as individuals, supports the growing body of work on the emergence, prior to World War II, of a moral and religious discourse concerning race among some white liberals. At the very moment Brinkley argues that liberal Democrats were beginning to back away from the inclusion of race, culture and ethnicity in their platform, white missionary women were redefining their philosophy and reorganizing themselves, both of which served to foster the acceptance of these very same issues into their agenda. Perhaps because they had less to lose politically, churchwomen identified race relations as an area they might change, thereby gaining a certain expertise and moral authority, which they greatly desired. In addition, churchwomen looked at national and international affairs, including

³⁸¹Ibid., 165-166.

relationships between the U.S. and other countries, through eyes of a distinct religious faith. Their participation in missionary work, study and fundraising gave many of them an appreciation for and acceptance of people with differing cultures, faiths and ethnicities. Their pursuit of World Friendship, which celebrated the unity of all humanity as children of God, encouraged an agenda that included good race relations. The very nature of their faith inspired and motivated them to respond to their understanding of God's call: to create fellowship between all people. Despite their many shortcomings, including an inability to understand the complexities of racism, white churchwomen sought to work and pray with African American churchwomen of similar class backgrounds. Accordingly, relationships formed across racial lines, many of them true friendships. Many of these women, white and black, trusted that prayer, education and fellowship could repair most wrongs, including the insidious nature of racism. Although they often failed, their intentions were well meaning. Furthermore, the expectations they placed upon their political representatives to intervene aided in promoting the expansion of the government's role in creating racial justice.

The role of white and interracial groups of religious women in the pursuit of civil rights for African Americans has thus far been understudied. Those historians who have pursued this important line of inquiry have most often stopped short of the post World War II period when pressure continued to mount for the desegregation of the military, schools, interstate transportation and places of employment as well as for other basic civil and voting rights. Racial integration has most often been examined either as a legal contest or a specific campaign in a designated place. Although UCCW members at times

engaged in these campaigns, more often they were examining and challenging their personal circles of family, friends, churches and associations. For white women, their impetus to do so was more personal than political or economic. Long before the second wave of feminism coined the phrase, the personal became political for many UCCW women. They believed in a God who loved everyone equally without qualifications and they therefore determined that the composition of their religious and social circles must accommodate this belief. Furthermore, once many of the white churchwomen began to associate with African American UCCW members, women who did not serve as their maids or nannies but who most often qualified as their equals in class and education, the issue of racial justice took on an additional personal meaning. White members then began to understand the pernicious nature of racism as something that impacted people for whom they cared. It became more difficult to turn their eyes away from the racial oppression, ignoring the realities so entrenched in the life of the country.

Some recent histories regarding the civil rights movement have paid increasing attention to not only local campaigns but also to the role of African American women. Charles Payne, for example, in *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, not only relates the story of Greenwood, Mississippi, but also dedicates one of his chapters to the specific place of women in that community's movement.³⁸² Furthermore, important biographies and autobiographies have emerged regarding women's lives who played significant roles in the national movement or local campaigns or both. Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks,

³⁸²Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*, (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

Septima Clark, Elle Baker, and Charlotte Hawkins Brown are just a few examples.³⁸³

This trend must continue if we are to more fully comprehend the nature of the battles for civil rights, including its leadership, organizers, inspiration, and the impact on the relationships between blacks and whites as well as between women and men. By examining UCCW and the ways in which the African American members politicized black suffering as an additional attempt to motivate white members to respond, we have gained beneficial insight into the myriad ways black women fought for basic human rights for themselves, their families and their communities. Although historians have made clear that African American women occupied and integrated multiple identities in their daily lives and in their quest for freedom, their identity as Christian sisters to non-black Christians has mostly been neglected and viewed as insignificant to the civil rights campaign. The exceptions to this neglect are scholars such as Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Glenda Gilmore and Mary E. Frederickson.³⁸⁴ Historians have ignored black women's pursuit of Christian fellowship outside their own churches and communities, as if these activities only reflected attempts by middle class black women

³⁸³Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: the Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: the Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York: Dutton, ca 1993); Douglas Brinkley, *Rosa Parks* (New York: Viking, 2000); Joanne Grant, *Ella Baker: Freedom Bound*, forward by Julian Bond (New York: Wiley, 1998); Charles Weldon Wadelington, *Charlotte Hawkins Brown and Palmer Memorial Institute: What One Young African American Woman Could Do* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Septima Clark, *Septima Clark and the Civil Rights Movement: Ready from Within*, edited by Cynthia Stokes Brown (Trenton, NJ: AfricaWorld Press, Inc., 1990).

³⁸⁴Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*; and Frederickson, "'Each One is Dependent on the Other'."

to personally gain from a higher status in white America. Despite their deep ties to their racial communities, these women chose to also spend significant time and energy integrating white groups of churchwomen. They did so for reasons related to their faith as well as their politics.

Historians have also neglected the interdenominational movement, dating back to the turn of the twentieth century, as a significant line of inquiry into race relations. The Federal Council of Churches (FCC) from its inception in 1908, included black Christian churches in its membership. Because its intent was to speak as a united voice for Christianity in the United States, the FCC sought the participation of at least the mainline black churches and African Americans responded. Likewise, when churchwomen began to organize interdenominationally on a wider scale in the 1920s, they too sought to reach across racial and regional boundaries. White churchwomen's experience with missionary work and literature introduced them to the concepts of cultural pluralism and Christian unity across ethnic and racial lines. These experiences laid the groundwork for the possibility of working interracially.

Future scholarship regarding UCW must continue to examine, as Susan Hartmann has, the relationship between UCW's race programs and their growing commitment to feminist ideals in the latter half of the 1960s. In 1966, when UCW began to change its institutional relationship with the NCCC, the churchwomen embarked on a new era for their organization, which included a more developed understanding and promotion of racial justice and an embracement of many values espoused by the women's movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The changes UCW instituted drew on those very same

factors that had prompted an interracial organization to emerge in 1941: an interpretation of their missionary past that grounded their future agenda in a responsibility for just human relations; a continuation and extension of their conviction that a women's group served as a valid and necessary route by which to organize; a desire and willingness to reach across denominational boundaries as an organizational and faith-based strategy; and the continued efforts and participation by African American churchwomen to encourage white UCW members to expand their analysis of social conditions for blacks. All of these factors had coalesced during the 1920s and 1930s to usher in a national interdenominational and interracial organization of churchwomen, many of whom deemed it their Christian duty to respond to racial injustice. In addition, UCW reappraised their stance on issues such as sexuality and reproductive rights. As Susan Hartmann notes in her work on feminists in liberal institutions and organizations, such a reappraisal did not steer UCW women away from their original commitment to racial justice.³⁸⁵

From their beginnings, the UCCW churchwomen maintained their original commitment to a missionary impulse to eradicate racism. As a voice who helped generate the origins of this commitment, Katherine Gardner served as a consistent voice supporting the widening of missionary women's theory and agenda to include racial justice in her role as Executive Secretary of the Woman's Committee of the Federal Council of Churches Commission on the Church and Race Relations from 1928 until it

³⁸⁵ Susan Hartmann, *The Other Feminists: Activists in the Liberal Establishment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), esp. Ch. 4.

dissolved in 1942. As she wrote in 1931, “We would be false to the spirit of the missionary enterprise;...and, above all, we would be false to the teachings of Jesus Christ if we failed to do our utmost to bring goodwill between the races. And let us not be too long in doing it.”³⁸⁶ Gardner’s and her committee’s attention to good relations between the races, as limited as it was in analysis and strategies, provided much of the stimulus for UCCW and its own mission for good relations between the races. This faith-filled interpretation of Christian responsibility permeated the organization throughout the post World War II period, inducing many white churchwomen to assess their own and society’s racist assumptions and institutions.

Even as the 1960s unfolded and UCW both altered its relationship to the NCCC and began to incorporate feminist ideals, the churchwomen did not turn away from its commitment to racial justice. The organization’s history of interaction between white and African American churchwomen continued in this period as did their individual and collective struggles to understand and respond to racial realities. Two women, one white and one black, reflected these struggles during the latter half of the 1960s. The chair of Assignment: RACE in Illinois, Barbara Petzing, responded to racism out of a particular racial and economic experience as well as out of her religious faith. She and many other white CWU members believed their call to respond to racist measures was “a test of their faith and commitment as Christians.”³⁸⁷ Petzing expressed this notion quite well when

³⁸⁶Katherine Gardner, “Missionary Women and Race Relations,” *Women and Missions*, April 1931, 16.

³⁸⁷Marsh, *Report to the Tenth National Assembly of United Church Women on*

she wrote a letter to CWU members in the state, urging them to respond to the national problem of race. Although she admitted to feeling despair in light of the overwhelming nature of her subject, Petzing concluded that she and her fellow churchwomen must act as testament to their faith:

I have struggled with my inability to communicate to you the sorrow, the dread, the awful sense of despair that shadows me. I sit down at the typewriter and I am overwhelmed with numbness. I am sick from racial discrimination. Let those who do not know me understand me well—I am white. I have lived all my life in segregated communities, among people determined to keep those communities white.

Petzing continued her strikingly honest and confessional letter by explaining to her readers how she believed racial discrimination hurt everyone and not only African Americans.

A Negro is told there are no houses for him, save an occasional one in his ghetto, and my house stifles me. Someone says “nigger” and I have been slapped. The jokes and myths and lies are spoken or shouted or laughed into the air and suffocate me like a heavy blanket. I am afflicted but the cure is radical, and I am a coward. I am a coward because I do not want my hurt bandied about by the cruel hands of the bigot or the indifferent; I do not want to argue always and futilely for racial justice because I like calm; I do not want my children to live in the reflected image of a “fanatic” mother.

In all reality, Petzing’s pain could not be compared to the oppression experienced by black Americans. As much as she may have experienced the confusion and conflicting messages of what had become for her a moral dilemma, Petzing could not know the violence of racial prejudice. On the other hand, she named the problem in stark terms, stating that “the cause of our great national race problem is racial prejudice among white

Assignment: RACE, October, 1964, 1.

people. If you do not accept this fact, then I tell you bluntly that you are the problem.”

The CWU leader’s ability to empathize and define the racial realities of her neighborhood and nation in moral and religious terms, spurred her to act and to enlist others in her campaign. After citing numerous facts and reports regarding racial discrimination in the U.S. and calling on churchwomen to respond by becoming politically involved and informed, Petzing ended her letter by reminding her members of their Christian duty:

God has made it plain to me that he is winnowing the wheat from the chaff. He is calling us to more difficult tasks....Inform yourself; tell God you are ready for service; and pray for his strength. God will not fail us—but, oh, how we have failed him.

Petzing’s letter, not surprisingly, came on the heels of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination. The tragedy had engendered the national CWU staff to telegram their leaders and units around the nation, imploring churchwomen to respond to King’s death and memorialize his life by lobbying congress to implement economic, educational and racial justice.³⁸⁸

Dorothy Height, President of the National Council of Negro Women and Director of the Office of Racial Justice, National Board of the YWCA, wrote a challenging article in the November 1969 issue of *The Church Woman*. Opening with, “Listen white man....you can’t have it just your way any longer,” Height wrote passionately regarding how white Americans did not know how to truly listen to African Americans. Height

³⁸⁸Barbara Petzing, Elgin, Illinois, to UCW of Illinois members, April 10, 1968, Box 71, Folder 8, CWU @ GCAH.

heard, recognized and participated in the voices of black discontent, anger and revolution in the air. She also recognized that the voices often fell on the deaf ears of well-meaning white churchwomen and so she challenged them:

As women of good will it is easy to talk among ourselves and to justify token integration. But it is hard for us to hear what abrasive voices are saying, especially when the demand is for change in the power relationships between black and white people. Our faith prods us to eradicate every vestige of racism within society and within the church itself. But in Christian fellowship we often insulate ourselves from the raw realities. We join black and white hands and reassure each other of our oneness as children of God. But this is not enough.³⁸⁹

Height insisted that the days of simply working on “race relations” was over. Instead, churchwomen must address the systems that impede African Americans and whites from sharing equally in political and economic power. Instructing white churchwomen to hold their pride and tongue in check, Height advised them on how to listen to African Americans so that they might feel heard. The problem, as Height defined it, was that white people got lost in their intentions and worked “for” rather than “with” African Americans. By doing so, they did not support “self-determined social change.” Height asked why, if laws of good intent exist, such as the Fair Housing Act, “the society is no less racist.” African Americans distrusted whites, wrote Height, because whites passed judgment on the state of the black community from their place of economic, educational and residential privilege. Claiming that the “legacy of slavery continues in *de facto* segregation, discrimination, and exploitation, Height called on white Americans to listen with an openness and willingness to feel pain. Height also expressed exasperation at how

³⁸⁹Dorothy Height, “How to Listen to Black Voices,” *The Church Woman*, November 1969, 4.

so many whites claim to be listening:

When white people speak about listening, black people often laugh. Often whites claim that suddenly their ears have been opened by recent manifestations of rage and rebellion, [and] the findings of the Kerner Commission study....The joke is that the black community has been studied to death. Listening, to be effective, has to strip away the ivory tower of myths and lies and replace it with cold, shocking, enlightening realities about oneself, this country, and the people interested in sharing the burdens and privileges of existence.³⁹⁰

Only in this way, insisted Height, could white churchwomen hope to be part of the solution "in bringing about a democratic social revolution."³⁹¹

Katherine Gardner, Christine Smith, Abbie Clement Jackson, Barbara Petzing, Dorothy Height and thousands of other women, as individuals and as members of UCCW, UCW and CWU, all contributed to a legacy of African American and white churchwomen working together to battle the forces of racism. They did so within their families, churches, communities and circles of friends. Individually and collectively, white and black churchwomen participated in the creation and expansion of a moral discourse to both understand and respond to racism in American society. While doing so, white churchwomen were limited in their analysis of systemic causes of racial inequalities, especially in their beginnings. However, they provided themselves and many other white Americans the impetus to allow for the beginnings of racial justice. The African American churchwomen involved in UCCW chose to integrate the

³⁹⁰Ibid., 4.

³⁹¹Ibid., 7.

organization as an additional strategy in their campaign for equality. They did so, in part, based on their social class. Many middle-class African Americans resisted any radical avenues in their pursuit of civil rights in fear of alienating whites. They instead chose moral suasion as the best route. Although this choice may have also been limiting, they did so within the context of white America's and a federal government's unwillingness to respond in any pivotal way to racial injustices. Whatever our assessment of the many personal and social factors that shaped white and African American churchwomen's participation in UCCW, its antecedents and its successors, their contributions to the campaign for racial justice in the twentieth century must be accounted for.

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