“REPAIRERS OF THE BREACH”: BLACK AND WHITE WOMEN AND RACIAL ACTIVISM IN SOUTH CAROLINA, 1940s-1960s

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation narrates and analyzes the nature of black and white women’s activism in religious and secular organizations around such racial issues as equal educational access and voting rights in South Carolina from the 1940s to the 1960s. I focus on the three largest cities in the Palmetto state, Charleston, Columbia, and Greenville and add both breadth and depth to extant literature on women’s activism by examining them as members and leaders of such organizations as the YWCA, United Church Women, and the NAACP, during the civil rights movement in South Carolina.

This study addresses the influence of international events like World War II and such national events as Brown v. Board of Education and McCarthyism on women’s activism. It explores how different interpretations of racial activism affected relationships between national organizations and local chapters and black and white women in South Carolina. In addition to showing how women in female-led and male-led organizations dealt with racial issues and how individual women reacted to and promoted civil rights in South Carolina this study also examines the accomplishments and limitations of interracial activism.
Dedicated to my mother and father
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I wish to thank my adviser, Susan M. Hartmann, for her intellectual support, encouragement, and most of all her patience while seeing me through this project.

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INTRODUCTION

Black and white women in South Carolina contributed significantly to racial change in the state during the civil rights movement. Their efforts spanned the course of several decades as they overcame and yet at times were stumped by obstacles of race, class, and gender. Women acted consciously and as individuals through religious and secular organizations in an attempt to foster racial and interracial activism in South Carolina before, during and after World War II. This study shows how women in all female and male dominated organizations interpreted and dealt with racial issues and how individual women promoted civil rights in South Carolina. It also examines the accomplishments and limitations of interracial activism as different groups of women pursued similar yet at times conflicting agendas.

Although African Americans constituted the majority of its population, in the years after the Civil War, a “master-slave” relationship persisted due to South Carolina’s dependence upon a plantation economy in which whites owned most of the land and blacks were reduced to sharecropping under conditions not much different from slavery.¹

¹ This is not to disregard African American agency and autonomy after Emancipation. Black South Carolinians attempted and many times succeeded in
At the end of Reconstruction, the pattern of segregation had yet to be “rigidly defined” although its elements were well in the making. It was not until the last decade of the century that absolute segregation was established in practice if not exclusively in law. Restrictions on black suffrage were codified in the state constitution of 1895 and in the following year all blacks were prevented from voting in the state. With the repeal of the state civil rights law and the establishment of absolute and legalized segregation, there developed a caste system based on race and utilized as a means of racial control.  

Many white South Carolinians used violence and the law to maintain segregation and to keep blacks out of politics. Although racial conventions were thoroughly entrenched into the minds of both black and white South Carolinians, an undercurrent of activism in the years following World War I and II signaled the dawning of a new era in race relations.

In the 1940s, most South Carolinians lived in rural areas or in towns with less than 2500 people. During the war, as in many places, South Carolina experienced a shortage of labor as more than 184,000 men and women were in uniform. Textile mills in the upstate operated around the clock and in Charleston employment at the Naval Shipyard increased significantly. 

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renting or purchasing land, finding relatives, and generally reconstructing and living their lives apart from whites.


Although the war increased employment opportunities and many patriotically supported the war effort, African Americans saw little change in racial conditions in South Carolina. Many blacks in South Carolina, like African Americans throughout the South, escaped racial violence and poverty by migrating north and leaving the state with a white majority for the first time in a century. Those who remained in South Carolina however, seized the liberal rhetoric of the war years and began to push for racial equality.4

The civil rights movement in South Carolina has not been examined to the same extent that it has in other southern states such as North Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama. Indeed, when it came to civil rights for African Americans, South Carolina often put up the most resistance. In 1944 for example, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that blacks could not be kept from voting in the Texas Democratic primary, South Carolina was the first southern state to respond to this threat by creating the “South Carolina Plan.” This was based on the premise that if the state let political parties hold primaries as private organizations, they would be beyond the reach of federal courts. 5 When this plan was proposed, other southern states such as Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, rejected it and left South Carolina standing on its own.6

Not all black and white South Carolinians however, were willing to accept the status quo, and thus a series of events provide historical watersheds for racial

4 Ibid., 515, 486.
5 Ibid., 515-16. Also, South Carolina was one of only two states that did not allow absentee voting for its women and men in uniform.
and political activism throughout the state. In 1948 for example, when the white primary was thrown out in South Carolina, African Americans stood in lines for hours to exercise their newly won right to vote. In 1950, *Briggs v. Elliott*, the first legal challenge to school segregation to originate in the twentieth century South came from African Americans in South Carolina. With the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, African Americans realized that they had a legal ally in the United States Supreme Court and black leaders and their organizations intensified demands for the end of racial segregation and unjust treatment. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 gave African Americans another tool with which to fight discrimination and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 saw the arrival of federal marshals in several counties in South Carolina to oversee voter registration and to ensure black participation in the political process.

By late 1960s and early 1970s, the vestiges of legalized discrimination in South Carolina began to fall. Black and white women contributed to this with collective and individual activism. This study brings that activism from the obscurity of a mostly male-centered, and even in that case, still limited version of South Carolina civil rights history. I focus on the ways in which women interpreted and reacted to local and national events along with their particular strategies for racial change in South Carolina through religious and secular organizations. African American women had a history of activism that extended back to the late nineteenth century. Though there are few extant records, enough

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7 Ibid., 522; Ernest Lander Jr., *A History of South Carolina, 1865-1960* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 244.
8 Edgar, 545.
exist to prove that over the decades they had consistently fought for first class
citizenship for African Americans. This study also shows that all white women
did not politely acquiesce to racial inequities. They often rejected being placed
upon the pedestal of white southern womanhood by promoting racial
improvements even as they supported racial segregation. Furthermore, both
groups of women, individually and collectively, shaped the public sphere through
participation in religious and secular voluntary organizations at a time when the
state government was less than responsive.

Although racial conventions prohibited many black and white women
from working together, some formed friendships that had their foundations in
shared racial and social reform organizations. These women also came from
similar socioeconomic backgrounds and had attended college, thus exposing them
to women of different races and preparing them for a lifetime of activism.
However, most reform occurred through segregated organizations. But, that some
black and white women, in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, made small, tenuous
steps together to improve social condition and to promote racial harmony reveals
that change was possible in South Carolina.

Several histories of South Carolina have been written but they have not
thoroughly documented the civil rights movement in South Carolina and the
extent to which some blacks and whites were willing to reach to bring change to
the Palmetto State. Furthermore, these studies have barely acknowledged black
and white women’s racial activism and the risks they assumed in their attempts to repair the breach in racial and social relations. George Croft Williams’ study was the earliest to explore South Carolina’s social history after World War II. However, for scholars researching changing racial dynamics and women’s roles in the state, the work proves itself to be problematic. Even though Williams’ work serves well as a primary source document because of its date of publication, this work mentions nothing about women in South Carolina’s history.  

Slightly more attention is paid to the state’s African American population. Of course slavery is a topic and is described as a “cultural trait” as obvious as the “hoe and the ax.” However, this exploration of race relations says little about black and white South Carolinians. Like many civil rights studies, Williams marked World War I and World War II in particular as watersheds in African American racial activism. During and after World War II, African Americans increased demands for first class citizenship in South Carolina. Williams also asserted that there was interracial activism toward this end although he did not offer much more explanation than to say that such activism existed. For the decade in which it was written, this work offers much insight into South Carolina’s social dynamics and even attempts to dispel commonly held stereotypes about African Americans while politely mentioning the shortcomings of whites as well.

Howard H. Quint is much more scathing in his analysis of race relations in

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South Carolina. Unlike Williams’ study, Quint not only mentions such women’s organizations as United Church Women and the South Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs, but also briefly discusses their roles in South Carolina’s civil rights movement and concludes that although they discussed racial issues, they were otherwise ineffective. He acknowledges the activism of Modjeska Simkins and Alice Spearman in addition to the numerous integrated civil rights organizations of which black and white women and men were members. Thus, Quint’s book is the earliest published work to synthesize South Carolina’s early civil rights movement.

Another monograph, published in 1960, mentions little about women let alone their social or racial activism in South Carolina. However, it does more with African American civil rights activism since the 1940s by mentioning in particular the white primary controversy in *Elmore v. Rice* in which an African American citizen’s committee, backed by the NAACP, brought suit against in federal courts for the right to participate in the Democratic primary. It also explores the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision and the impact it had on South Carolina. While some white South Carolinians favored compliance with the Court decision and African American leaders applauded it, the vast majority of whites opposed desegregation at any level. Except for a

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section entitled the “Public School Revolution” this work does little else to
explore the impact of the civil rights movement in South Carolina.\footnote{Ernest McPherson Lander, Jr. A History of South Carolina, 1865-1960 (Chapel
Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960).}

Several studies examine African American life and activism in South
Carolina exclusively. The oldest, by Asa H. Gordon, highlights the achievements
of South Carolina blacks and includes a particularly useful chapter on black
women’s activism entitled, “The Gifts of Womanhood in Ebony,” that profiles
black women and their leadership in such organizations as the YWCA and the
South Carolina Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs.\footnote{Asa H. Gordon, Sketches of Negro Life and History in South Carolina (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1929).}
Another 1952 study places African Americans in the political, social, and institutional life of South
Carolina, from 1877-1900, although women’s contributions are noticeably
absent.\footnote{George Brown Tindall, South Carolina Negroes, 1877-1900 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952).} However, Edwin D. Hoffman’s 1959 article does a better job of this in
additional to tracing the beginnings of the modern civil rights movement in 1930s
A final monograph by I.A. Newby analyzes the lives of African
Americans in South Carolina since the turn of the century, describing their
reaction to various other national and local events including the civil rights
movement.\footnote{I.A. Newby, Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina from 1895 to 1968 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968).}
Walter Edgar’s general history of South Carolina offers by far the most updated information on the civil rights movement and women’s roles therein.

While he acknowledges the early activism of African Americans he also marks World War II as a watershed for the modern civil rights movement. In doing so he notes such African American and white women activists as Mamie Garvin Fields, Septima Poinsette Clark, Mary Modjeska Monteith Simkins, and Alice Norwood Spearman Wright whose racial activism extended into the 1960s.  

Two dissertations deal specifically with the civil rights movement in Charleston. One offers no information on women’s roles and organizations in the civil rights movement but is useful for its narrative and footnotes. The other, whose author comes from a family of civil rights activists has tidbits that reveal black women’s activism, but includes no systematic analysis.

Many of the monographs, articles, and anthologies published in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have given gender a more central role in

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17Millicent Brown, “Civil Rights Activism in Charleston, South Carolina, 1940-1970,” (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1997); Stephen O’Neill, “‘From the
their analyses, and a few even focus on women exclusively. One such study chronicles individual black women as well as the religious and secular organizations they utilized to facilitate racial activism from 1941 to 1965. Another article examines the activism of Septima Clark and her cousin Bernice Robinson both of whom had integral roles at Highlander’s Citizenship Schools developed on the South Carolina Sea Islands. An edited collection has several chapters that deal with gender in the making of southern culture in addition to the civil rights movement in South Carolina. Of particular interest is “As a Man, I Am Interested in States’ Rights’: Gender, Race, and the Family in the Dixiecrat Party, 1948-1950” and “Dynamite and ‘The Silent South’: A Story from the Second Reconstruction in South Carolina.” Another study further attests that women’s activism in the civil rights movement is often overlooked by scholars as their study documents the multifaceted roles of African American women in social reform movements.

Historians of religion and women have highlighted the role of religious organizations and their importance in creating a space for and promoting black and white women’s activism. Susan Lynn explores women’s activism through such religious based organizations as the YWCA and the American Friends

Shadow of Slavery’: The Civil Rights Years in Charleston” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1994).

Service Committee. Another post-World War II work examines the racial activism of a specific religious organization, the National Council of Churches, that had male leadership but whose members were predominantly female and with which United Church Women was affiliated until the mid-1960s.\textsuperscript{20} Susan Hill Lindley aptly compiles all the various religious organizations of which women were members from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries and discusses how they utilized these organizations to combat various racial and social causes.\textsuperscript{21}

A recent study examines women’s activism in Protestant denominations and such religious organizations as the Women’s Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and the United Church Women through its affiliation with the National Council of Churches. Some of this scholarship also calls attention to women’s activism in such regional and national female-led organizations as the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, the YWCA, and United Church Women.\textsuperscript{22}


\textsuperscript{22} Margaret Lamberts Bendroth and Virginia Lieson Brereton, eds., \textit{Women and Twentieth-Century Protestantism} (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).
All of these works clearly demonstrate that despite the racial conventions, black and white women through all-female, mainstream and nonmainstream organizations made attempts toward interracial activism and social improvement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.\textsuperscript{23}

My dissertation contributes to the historiography of women’s activism by challenging the notion that women were confined to domestic sphere both before and particularly after World War II. Despite the emphasis on domesticity after the war, recent scholarship has shown that many black and white women did everything but. The women and organizations that I discuss had activist roots that stretched back into the years before World War II. The trajectory of this activism clearly changed from “maternalist” politics in the prewar years to racial and social injustice in the postwar years.\textsuperscript{24} Some of this scholarship not only focuses on black and white southern women as organizers of the southern civil rights movement but also as leaders.\textsuperscript{25} I explore the history of black and women activists in South Carolina as leaders of female-led and male led organizations. What is particularly poignant is that while women may not have been formal leaders, by serving in supplementary positions as secretaries or office assistants


\textsuperscript{24} Susan Lynn, 4.

they were instrumental in recruiting and mobilizing members although they may have been excluded from the inner circles of decision makers.\textsuperscript{26} Such positions also allowed for closer ties to their communities allowing for a certain level of loyalty that male leaders were unable to obtain.

My study is driven by numerous questions. How did women assess the need for racial change in South Carolina? What were their goals, strategies, and tactics? How did they interpret and react to particular events of racial discrimination and activism in South Carolina? How did these judgments vary according to race and location in the state? What means did black and white women employ individually or collectively to bring change in South Carolina? What was the role of religious organizations in racial activism in the state? When did members of religious and secular organizations begin to pursue racial justice? Did these organizations have integrated memberships? If not, why did they lag behind that of other chapters/branches or the national organizations and what were their individual goals for racial activism?

Focusing on a single state allows me to explore in detail how black and white women combated racial injustice and how or if they interacted with each other in doing so. To what degree did white women seek to cooperate with black women and vice versa? On what kinds of projects did women seek interracial cooperation? Did white women activists articulate the racist assumptions of their

times through their work? How did black women respond? In asking these questions, it is important to inquire about the extent of black women’s autonomy and agency even within interracial activism. Did black women’s goals differ from those of white women? Did their religious, racial, and social ideologies differ? How did interracial cooperation affect these women’s relationships to others in their community? Black self-help efforts through institutions and clubs did not minimize the need for interracial cooperation. But, neither did this cooperation preclude the presence of racist attitudes and ideologies.  

The study also compares the different kinds of organizations and their strategies for racial activism. For example, how did black and white women use religious ideology and their memberships in religious organizations to justify and facilitate racial activism? Did organizations such as the YWCA and Church Women United evidence and maintain greater results as interracial organizations because of their members’ religious convictions? Did black and white women’s middle-class backgrounds and education help foster interracial cooperation? Did black and white women’s racial consciousness and leadership impede interracial activism? Was interracial activism limited by women’s membership in mixed gender organizations?

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27 Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Righteous Discontent, The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920 (London: Harvard University Press, 1993). Chapter 4 “Unlikely Sisterhood” analyzes this theme. It refers to the reality of the dynamics of black and white women’s interracial activism. Although she deals with an earlier period, it was useful for my study on female interracial cooperation in South Carolina.
I concentrate on three areas in South Carolina for this study, Charleston, or the lowcountry, located on the coast on the eastern border of the state, Columbia, in the Midlands and the state capital, and Greenville county, in the piedmont, a mountainous area in northwest South Carolina. Because of their location in three distinct and urban parts of the state comparing these counties offers a more thorough analysis of the shape and form of racism and civil rights activism in South Carolina.  

An analysis of South Carolina also broadens the narrative of racial and social activism among southern women by examining the multifaceted roles of black and white women in female-dominated, male-dominated, segregated, integrated, secular and religious-based organizations. Such a study reveals that while interracial activism was may have been normal among black and white women in other southern states, in South Carolina this was limited to those in leadership positions.

White women’s activism was driven by their membership in such religious based organizations as United Church Women and YWCA that supported racial and social activism. Although such organizations were integrated nationally, this was not the case in South Carolina. But, at the very least, women’s religious

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28 See Walter J. Fraser, Jr., Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989); John Hammond Moore, Columbia and Richland County: A South Carolina Community, 1740-1990 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993); Archie V. Huff, Jr., Greenville: The History of the City and County in the South Carolina Piedmont (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995).
29 See Heather Jean Erskine, “This Fellowship Without Barriers of Race”: The Desegregation of the Young Women’s Christian Associations in Greenville,
groups encouraged them to explore avenues for racial improvement thereby educating white women about racial conditions in South Carolina. As white women faced pending desegregation in South Carolina and in their organizations after the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision, their trajectory of activism changed, as did their acceptance of socially active Christianity. White secular organizations, already largely conservative, became even more so after the Supreme Court decision. Yet, some white women overcame limitations placed on them by race and gender and pushed for racial change throughout South Carolina.

Black women worked in three kinds of organizations, black female, white and black female, and black male and female to promote racial activism. They established institutions to serve African Americans through the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, pushed for integration in predominately white organizations like the YWCA and United Church Women in addition to assuming leadership positions roles in the NAACP and South Carolina’s Progressive Democratic Party. Black women often founded such organizations with men and were the best connection between African American communities and black leadership. Many of those who were leaders also worked with white women leaders and although these fragile alliances often failed, they placed both groups of women in the best position to exact racial and social change in South Carolina.

Chapter one examines the early racial activism of black and white South

Carolinians during the 1940s as they mobilized around such issues as political participation, education, and racial violence and combated racial injustice through a wide variety of professional, religious, and civic organizations. However, these years evidenced particular activism from black and white women who most often did not work together although they shared some similar ideas for racial and social reform. Many white women supported segregation but their organizations responded to the liberal rhetoric of the World War II years to enlighten whites about racial injustices in South Carolina. Black women also used this liberal rhetoric to push for equalization of teachers’ salaries and voting rights for African Americans. Chapter two focuses on the later years of the 1940s and the early years of the 1950s and specifically on the formation and activism of women’s organizations. Although the national organizations of the YWCA and United Church Women mandated integration, this most often did not occur at the local level resulting in continued segregated activism.

As the Brown v. Board of Education loomed over the South and South Carolina, black and white women worked to prepare themselves and their communities for changes that might result from the decision. Black women went one step further by supporting Elmore v. Rice, achieving voting rights for blacks and access to the state Democratic party. Chapters three and four highlight South Carolina’s reaction to changes flowing from the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision. They also explore the ways in which white and black
women’s organizations stepped up, or in some cases limited, their activism and their affiliations with national organizations in reaction to the decision and racial tensions throughout the state. Finally, chapter five analyzes the 1960s as black women continued to focus on voting rights and educating African Americans while white women redirected their attention to less controversial racial activism like the pervasive poverty in South Carolina. As they did this, however, black and white women found themselves, more so than ever before working together in integrated organizations.
CHAPTER 1

“THE LORD REQUIRED JUSTICE OF US”: EARLY RACIAL ACTIVISM IN 1940s SOUTH CAROLINA

In 1943, the white women of St. Michael’s Protestant Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, addressed the inferior conditions in black schools in the city, explaining that their concern arose from the conviction that “the Lord required justice of us.” They noted that the value of all the black schools in the city was just one-fifth that of white schools, even though both educated approximately the same number of pupils. Tax payers’ money, they insisted, should be used “above all to provide adequate grammar school education for all young people of the city . . . regardless of creed and color.” Their statement, which they presented to the men of St. Michael’s asserted, “If we as Christians see injustices that frustrate some of God’s children or hear lies that lash sensitive spirits, it is our duty under God to do our part in ending these things. Failure to do so many cause others to doubt the sincerity of our faith . . . ”

These women’s actions demonstrated the growing attention to racial injustice in South Carolina before, during and after World War II. Although always a small minority of the population, citizens of the Palmetto state, female

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and male, black and white, increasingly took positions concerning education, political representation, and racial violence. The challenge to unequal education made by the women of St. Michael’s revealed several elements of civil rights activism in South Carolina in the 1940s: the influence of religious convictions, the role and importance of women, the possibilities and limitations of racial activism, and the role of education as a key civil rights issue. Although the women of St. Michael’s were not promoting integration, but rather separate but equal facilities, many South Carolinians took small steps toward racial justice by fighting for voting rights, combating racial violence, protesting inequities in black education, and seeking equal pay for black teachers.

Although education and voting rights were central issues for African Americans in South Carolina in the 1940s, in the early years of the decade, black leaders were more committed to building institutions and establishing community resources for blacks throughout the state. In April 1940, for example, blacks met at Zion Methodist Church in Rock Hill to organize a civil league to address such issues as the lack of “leisure time facilities” or recreational facilities for African Americans and the need for creating “Negro parks.” They also discussed access to libraries for African Americans and improvements in black schools.

Such meetings often included white women activists like Mary E. Frayser, a member of the South Carolina Interracial Committee, who encouraged African Americans to request hearings before the Rock Hill Community Planning
Association, the Rock Hill Library Board, and the City School Board and to present such issues for consideration from city officials.²

Predominantly black female and male organizations such as the federated black women’s clubs, the YMCA and YWCA, Masonic lodges, Odd Fellows, the Knights of Pythias, Greek-letter sororities and fraternities, burial and benevolence societies, and various other private and professional organizations became increasingly active in African American communities throughout South Carolina. In most cases, they supported church and education related causes by combining their professional and social activities and giving direction to African American communities. Even though there were significant contributions from these organizations in rural areas like Clarendon County, most of the impetus and strength for activism came from blacks in Columbia, Charleston, Greenville, Orangeburg, and Rock Hill.³

Much of the social and community leadership came not only from a variety of African American organizations but also from educational institutions. In Charleston, for example, African Americans attending such schools as Burke Industrial School, Avery Normal School, and Immaculate Conception often worked with these organizations to gain recognition of black achievements.

² “Negroes Organize Civil League,” The Southern Frontier, vol. 1, no. 5 (May 1940).
³ I.A. Newby, Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina from 1895 to 1968 (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1973), 251-252. Some black professional organizations were the Palmetto Medical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Association, the South Carolina Colored Undertakers and Embalmers, the Graduate Nurses State Association, the Palmetto Education Association, and the state affiliates of the Negro Business League.
The black branch of the YWCA celebrated “Negro History Week,” when local schools could not and scheduled programs focusing on African American contributions to American life.\textsuperscript{4}

Black women and their organizations had been establishing and supporting such institutions all along.\textsuperscript{5} Before southern women began working together interracially, southern black women individually and collectively already had a history of organizing and developing programs to improve the quality of black communities throughout the South. Local black women’s organizations like the Sunset Club of Orangeburg, South Carolina, of which Marion Wilkinson was president; the Tuskegee Women Club of Tuskegee, Alabama led by Margaret Murray Washington; and the Neighborhood Union of Atlanta, Georgia founded by Lugenia Burns Hope created institutions that provided support and services to African American communities.

Together these women founded larger organizations such as the Southeastern Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs and the International Council of Women of the Darker Races. They emerged as leaders in the southern black women’s movement and the national black women’s movement.

\textsuperscript{4} Millicent E. Brown, “Civil Rights Activism in Charleston, South Carolina, 1940-1970” (Ph.D. diss., The Florida State University, 1997), 22.
Some of them along with their husbands often joined integrated organizations like the Commission on Interracial Cooperation where they found southern white women working to improve race relations.\(^6\)

In the Palmetto State, the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs (SCFCWC) was one of the state’s most significant service groups for African Americans. Established in 1909, in Columbia, South Carolina, the purpose of the SCFCWC was to:

Promote education of colored women and to hold an educational convention annually . . . Raise the standard at home . . . Work for social, moral, economic, and religious welfare of women and children . . . Protect the rights of women and children who work . . . Secure and enforce the civil and political rights for our groups . . . Obtain for colored women the opportunity of reaching the highest standards in all fields of human endeavors . . . Promote interracial understanding so that justice and good will may prevail among all people.\(^7\)

Under Marion Bernie Wilkinson’s leadership black women established the Fairwold Home for Girls prior to World War II to house delinquent black girls. The state had no such facility for blacks, and teenage girls were often placed in county jails or the state penitentiary for petty crimes or antisocial behavior. The Fairwold home was built on property secured for black club women by Bishop K.G. Finlay of the diocese of Upper South Carolina. Black club women raised the $12,000 necessary to build the home although they also received small contributions from the Duke Foundation. Black women’s clubs also supported a host of other causes such as suffrage, health, education, temperance, and home economics. Although women attempted to forge interracial alliances with white

women to correct racial injustice and other social ills, most of their efforts throughout the 1940s involved African American institution building and community support in addition to introducing poorer blacks to middle-class norms.  

African American leaders throughout the nation seized opportunities to increase their claims for equal treatment even before the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. Walter White, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) anticipated a significant role for the United States in the international conflict. He also recognized the importance of the war for African American civil rights and relayed this sentiment in a letter to President Franklin Roosevelt. “If the unhappy time comes, there will once again be appeals to the Negro Americans to help make the world safe for democracy, even to the extent of laying down their lives. But even in the face of this possibility, democracy is still denied to Negro Americans in the armed forces of the United States.” According to historian Harvard Sitkoff, militant editorials in the Negro press, threats by African American leaders and protest organizations, portents of black disloyalty, and support for the Allied cause in many cases were evident even before the war. Consequently, African American activists were galvanized by the rhetoric of Allied forces as they invoked democratic principles in their propaganda against Nazi Germany. In turn, they activists adopted this as a central argument in their campaign for civil rights, making it a moral crusade for

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7 Jones, 41.
8 Newby, 252.
many Americans during and after World War II. They would not repeat the mistakes of World War I where they had fought for democracy abroad and found it dangerously lacking at home. World War II found them better prepared and more sophisticated, if not a little skeptical. Patriotism, then, was also coupled with a hope for the future.

American involvement in World War II as of 1941 spotlighted the hypocritical nature of a war for democracy abroad and the failure of its practice among the nation’s own citizens. African Americans had mixed reactions to this international conflict, and as the war heightened the contradiction between white supremacy and wartime objectives, southern segregationists worked increasingly to justify racial policies. However, the increasing political significance of blacks outside of the South by 1941 forced political parties and the federal government to take an interest in the plight of its most forgotten citizens.

Nationally, African Americans and white supporters acknowledged the numerous injustices plaguing southern states such as inequities in education, unequal pay for black teachers, racial violence, and the denial of voting rights. For black South Carolinians the war years represented monumental change and for most a heightened awareness of racial injustice throughout state. Instead of

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expecting patriotism to win them respect at the war’s end, African Americans began to use the rhetoric of the World War II years to advance their cause.\textsuperscript{11}

World War II not only ended the Depression and stimulated the economy, it also provided new economic opportunities encouraging African American migration movement to areas outside the South. The federal government, even if largely inactive, realized the imperative of intervention on the behalf of black South Carolinians as African American political influence increased in northern states. Also, the New Deal years had shown that the federal government at least listened to African American demands. A. Randolph Philip demonstrated this effectively with his threat to call for a March on Washington in 1941 to gain equal employment opportunities. As national civil rights leaders emphasized equal opportunities and access to democracy in practice for African Americans, black leaders and organizations in South Carolina increasingly focused on combating inequitable salaries for black school teachers, obtaining voting rights and ending racial violence throughout the state.

In 1941, black teachers asked the state for the same pay as white teachers with the same certification, and NAACP chapters in South Carolina assumed an active role in this fight. In Sumter, for example, Oceola Mckaine, a well-known civil rights activist throughout the state, and executive secretary of the local

\textsuperscript{11} Newby, 276.
NAACP, consistently urged his branch to quickly take action and obtain information about the rules and law of the state educational system.\textsuperscript{12} The legal fight for equal salaries intensified in 1944 when Viola Louise Duval, a chemistry instructor at Burke Industrial High School in Charleston and a graduate of Howard University, filed a suit against the Charleston Board of Education because it paid lower salaries to Negro teachers than to whites with similar qualifications and responsibilities.\textsuperscript{13} At the time, under the state aid system the top salary per month for white teachers was $115 and for Negro teachers $70.\textsuperscript{14} In response, the conservative Charleston newspaper, The News and Courier suggested that all public education be discontinued in South Carolina except for “reading, ‘riting and ‘rithmetic” in order to forestall granting equal salaries to Negro teachers. This would allow whites to pay all of the taxes to build private academies for their children without the burden of supporting Negro public high schools and colleges.\textsuperscript{15} Meanwhile, state officials lost paperwork and attempted to revoke teachers’ certification.\textsuperscript{16} Nonetheless, when a similar case came to trial in Columbia, South Carolina in 1945, Judge Waties Waring of Charleston ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in 1946 ordering the Columbia School

\textsuperscript{12} Sumter NAACP Mintues, 12 April 1942, 1, 2. Sumter NAACP Records, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina (hereafter cited as SCL).
\textsuperscript{13} “Equal Pay Lawyers in Charleston,” The Lighthouse and Informer, 6 February 1944, front page; “Teachers’ Suit For Equal Salaries Filed,” The Palmetto Leader, Columbia, South Carolina, 13 November 1943, front page.
\textsuperscript{14} Southern Frontier, vol. IV, no. 5 (May 1943).
\textsuperscript{15} A Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, vol. 1, no. 6 (April 1943): 7.
Board to equalize the salaries of Negro teachers by April 1 of the same year.17
This would not be the last time that Waring would take on civil rights issues with
African Americans.

Racial violence also spurred activism among blacks in the 1940s. Mob
violence against African Americans had decreased after the 1920s, but sporadic
incidents continued. While there were fewer reported incidents of lynching and
other forms of racial violence by the end of the 1940s, racial violence continued,
in particular, against African American military personnel and those who asserted
a newly found cognizance of their civil rights.

African American soldiers’ experience in Europe gave them a newfound
sense of democracy that should exist in the United States. However, most white
southerners were not ready for such assertiveness from blacks and responded with
harassment and violence. South Carolina was no exception. In 1943 in Rock Hill,
South Carolina a black Army lieutenant was addressed as “nigger” and placed
under arrest by a bus driver after he had taken the only vacant seat on the bus. In
the same year, Ben F. Kirkley, Jr., a Florence County convict on a chain gang,
was beaten by prison guards after they suspected he had reported physical abuse
to the NAACP. Reportedly the guards said that he was the “only god damned
nigger” on the gang who “had sense enough” to write a letter of complaint to the
NAACP.18

17 Robert Lewis Terry, “J. Waties Waring, Spokesman for Racial Justice in the
New South” (Ph.D. diss., University of Utah, 1970), 16.
18 A Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, vol.1, no. 5
(December 1943): 8-9.
Although southern NAACP chapters were often the only means of resistance to segregation and discrimination in African American communities, the threat of racial violence had kept many blacks from joining such organizations. Yet, much activism was evident despite such atrocities, and numerous efforts by South Carolina’s blacks surfaced as the NAACP membership numbers increased. In 1938, according to historian Bryan Simon, fewer than twelve hundred African Americans in eight different South Carolina communities belonged to the NAACP. Between 1939 and 1948, South Carolina NAACP’s membership increased from eight hundred to fourteen thousand and individual chapters united to form a statewide organization. Meetings in the 1940s often involved such themes as “The Negro in the Present Crisis,” and “Working Toward Democracy in America.” The NAACP’s existence was clearly an act of defiance by the “disfranchised” against Jim Crow.  

And indeed, African Americans including women, used the NAACP to fight for their right to vote and for entry into the Democratic Party.  

In Cherokee County in upstate South Carolina, principal and teacher Lottie P. Gaffney, along with four other women and several ministers went to register to vote in the presidential election in August 1940. When their turn to register came, the registrar informed Gaffney and those with her that “Darkies ain’t never voted in South Carolina and especially Cherokee county. I will not

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register you.” Gaffney and her party promptly went to see the county attorney who told them that they should have had no trouble voting. The attorney informed the registrar that African Americans were eligible to vote, but Gaffney and her party were still refused their right to register. With the assistance of the NAACP, Gaffney brought suit against the Cherokee County Registration Board, but to no avail. After deliberating for thirty minutes, the Spartanburg County jury in federal court acquitted the officials of the charge of refusing to register African Americans citing insufficient evidence, and thus the case was lost. The decision had further repercussions for Gaffney however. Because she had appeared as a witness in the case, which became United States v. Ellis et al., Gaffney not only lost her position as a teacher, but also found that she could no longer obtain employment in any Cherokee county school district. This would not be the last time a black schoolteacher would lose her position due to controversial racial activism.

Although Lottie Gaffney lost her case and her job, this did not end black efforts to gain access to South Carolina’s political arena. Black religious organizations were also vocal about African Americans’ exclusion from the political process. At their annual meeting in 1942, the Negro Baptist Convention of South Carolina voiced their complaint about the Democratic Party, which had

Program Planned,” The Palmetto Leader, Columbia, South Carolina, 7 June 1941, front page.
barred South Carolina blacks from voting in the party primaries. The Convention, which was attended by more than five hundred delegates representing 1,501 churches with 332,168 members, addressed a resolution to the State Democratic Party deplored its denial of suffrage to qualified African Americans in the state. They evoked war rhetoric, citing it as “inconsistent” to fight for democracy abroad and have it denied at home. Black Baptists also asserted their intention to fight to have true democracy practiced in the United States and appealed to white citizens to use their “influence” to “demonstrate the ethics of Jesus and human relationships.”

To counteract black exclusion from the state Democratic party, such activists as Oseola McKaine and John McCray who was editor of the Lighthouse and Informer in Columbia, South Carolina, which championed “the cause of Negroes everywhere,” founded the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) after the South Carolina state legislature converted the Democratic Party into a private club to preserve its racial exclusivity. They began attending national Democratic conventions in 1944, coming out in support President Roosevelt’s reelection and thus embarrassing the state’s white power structure.

Black women like Sarah Z. Daniels and Anne Weston also helped found and supported the PDP. According to historian Vicki Crawford, the

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22 The Southern Frontier, vol. III, no. 6 (June 1942).
marginalization of black women’s roles in the civil rights movement obscures an understanding of their participation and leadership at the local level. Although male leadership dominated at the national and regional levels, black women’s participation was strongest on the local level where they were able to extend their roles within church communities and secular organizations.\(^2\) This was no less the case among black women in South Carolina.

Both Daniels and Weston had ties to organizations like the NAACP and female-led organizations like the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women’s Club. When the PDP established a woman’s auxiliary in 1945, black women jumped at the opportunity to serve not only in leadership positions within the PDP generally, but also through its women’s auxiliary. In 1945, Sarah Z. Daniels, president of the Manning NAACP, was appointed as auxiliary chairman of the PDP. She was clearly enthusiastic about accepting the position and about her efforts to get eligible blacks to register to vote: “I consider my appointment to speak when and where I can for the Progressive Democratic Party a privilege and I am glad to accept.”\(^2\)\(^5\) Using her leadership in the Manning NAACP, Daniels made voter registration “our number one objective.”\(^2\)\(^6\)

Anne Bell Weston was another black woman who worked in all-female organizations but who also held leadership positions in male dominated groups.

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\(^2\) Sarah Z. Daniels to John H. McCrory, 14 March 1945, John Henry McCrory Papers, reel 7, SCL.
A graduate of Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina, and the first woman to receive the Doctor of Humanities from the college, Weston was secretary of the Progressive Democratic Party both during and after the war.\(^2^7\) Also a member of the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, she reached out to women in particular and urged them to fight for the right to vote. Weston made connections between women’s right to vote and their roles as wives and mothers. She urged them to put the welfare of African Americans before their individual concerns.

Women must think of their people then of themselves. Think what it will mean to our families to help elect those who govern us. Think women what it means to have your G.I. Joe come back from the battle having given Democracy to others, but denied it himself. If this prevails blame yourselves. If they loose hope blame your own lack of integrity. Women, let us register! Women, let us register everyone else that we can. Then let us all vote!\(^2^8\)

\(^{2^6}\) Sarah Z. Daniels to John H. McCray, 6 October 1945, John Henry McCray Papers, reel 14, SCL.
\(^{2^8}\) Ibid. Jewish woman Gennie Seidman and her husband Jules, a Columbia merchant were both actively involved in the PDP in South Carolina and gave the organization a biracial image. Most of the funds for the PDP came from African Americans, but its first independent contribution of five dollars came from an unnamed white widow in Richland County. Furthermore, the Seidmans were the apparently the organization’s best fund-raisers. They managed to obtain donations from anonymous white backers, presumably members of the small Jewish community that existed in Columbia. From John Egerton, \textit{Speak Now Against The Day: The Generation Before The Civil Rights Movement In The South} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 228; Miles S.
Weston appealed to black women as wives and mothers, because it was imperative for them to expand their domestic responsibilities to help their spouses and their children whose futures were tied to obtaining first class citizenship for African Americans.29

African Americans had already established a history of racial activism by the 1940s, but some whites worked for racial change during these years as well. Although many southern whites resisted challenges to the racial order, those concerned with solving racial problems in South Carolina realized that blacks and whites had to work together and consequently formed organizations to do so. In 1940, in Florence, South Carolina, for example, members of the State Interracial Committee, formed in the early years of the twentieth century, met to discuss organizing a county interracial committee. It was most often at the leadership level that educated, middle-class black and white women found themselves working together. This meeting included black and white women in addition to representatives from various denominations, civic and service groups, and the white City Federation of Women’s Clubs.

Founders of these interracial committees realized the need to foster mutual understanding to address pressing social and racial problems. The Richland Interracial Committee for example, whose membership included black and white women, urged members to present issues concerning both races. South Carolina


29 Rhoda Lois Blumberg, “White Mothers as Civil Rights Activists: The Interweave of Family and Movement Roles” From Guida West and Rhoda Lois

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white women like Adele Minahan from Charleston, Mrs. Leon S. Holley of Aiken, and Kate Tess, later Davis of Orangeburg, who were also members of such religious organizations as United Church Women that worked for racial and social change had established a precedent for involvement in integrated organizations. In 1940, these women attended a working conference on education organized by State Interracial Committees, State Superintendents of Education, and the State Agent for the Division of Negro Education on race relations in Atlanta, Georgia. The conference had been designed to tackle problems such as discrimination in the distribution of taxes based on race.30

As women in South Carolina pressed for change in the Palmetto State throughout the 1940s, many issues were of particular concern to both black and white women. Although they were active most often in separate social uplift organizations, black and white women did work together through state and local branches of the Committee on Interracial Cooperation. The state organization of the Charleston Interracial Committee and the South Carolina Interracial Commission formed committees such as the Educational Committee, to study the principles of Federal Aid to Education; to find ways to extend public library services to both races; and to obtain longer school terms and more vocational training for Negroes. At this time however, the goal of these efforts was not racial equality, but the creation of equal facilities for both races.

30 “Many Regions But Common Conditions” The Southern Frontier, vol. 1. no. 2 (February 1940).
The South Carolina Interracial Commission included black women officers such as Marion Birnie Wilkinson, president of the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, and Marion Baxter Paul of Columbia, a Pennsylvania State University graduate, state supervisor of Negro Home Demonstration work and a member of the SCFCWC. These women often cooperated with white women leaders like Mary E. Frayser, chairman of the Planning Committee who formed a “Leisure Time” committee to support the development of state parks and to establish municipal playgrounds for Negroes. The interracial commission also established a committee for the creation of a State Industrial School for Negro Girls.\(^{31}\) In 1943 at the annual meeting of the South Carolina Committee of the Southern Commission on Interracial Cooperation, for which the theme was “Tensions, What We Can Do to Relieve Them,” black and white members were encouraged to urge the black and white newspapers of the state to assist in easing racial tensions.\(^{32}\)

Although many liberal whites called for conservative changes in the early 1940s, some were more forceful in their attempts secure first class citizenship for blacks. A group of prominent Columbia whites, including such women as Eunice Stackhouse and Charlotte Stevenson, also members of United Church Women and the Southern Regional Council, attempted to get black voters on the rolls by petitioning the State Democratic Convention to appoint a committee to study the

\(^{31}\) “South Carolina Has Third Conference, Definite Aims Adopted” *The Southern Frontier*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1940): 1.

\(^{32}\) “Richland Interracial Committee to Meet Tuesday, March 30th,” *The Palmetto Leader*, 27 March 1943; “Annual Meeting South Carolina Committee of Southern Commission on Interracial Cooperation” *The Palmetto Leader*, 3 April 1943.
issue and make plans to allow qualified blacks to vote in the Democratic primaries. Although their attitudes were laced with paternalism, these efforts demonstrate that some white South Carolinians recognized the hypocrisy of the war rhetoric and African Americans’ right to suffrage. They also acknowledged that many blacks shared with them similar class and educational backgrounds that had prepared them for first class citizenship.

Many of our Negro citizens are keenly desirous of exercising their rights of citizenship. We believed that they are now fitted by education and experience to assume the responsibilities that go with citizenship. We do not believe that it is either necessary or advisable that the Democratic Party be thrown open to Negroes indiscriminately. Nor do we believe that anything but good would come from establishing minor educational and character qualifications for membership for whites in the party. We believe that carefully considered qualifications of this kind, applied to whites and blacks, might result in a definite improvement in our political institutions.33

The all-white Democratic Party forbade blacks to vote unless they had cast their ballots for Wade Hampton in 1876. Moreover, in 1944 the South Carolina House of Representatives defeated a bill to abolish the poll tax as a prerequisite for voting in the states. One Representative claimed that abolition of the levy would only serve “to ram the Negro down our throats.” Integrated organizations such as the South Carolina committee of the Southern Regional Council, which replaced the State Interracial Committee in 1944, assisted Negro citizens in voter-registration under a resolution adopted by the group’s executive committee in 1945. According to Marion A. Wright, state chairman of the organization, “it is felt to be the duty of white members of our committee to lend assistance to South

33 “South Carolina White Democrats Ask Negro Participation in Primary” The Southern Frontier, vol. III, no. 6 (June 1942).
Carolina Negroes seeking to register for voting purposes where such Negroes meet all legal qualifications.” Thus, he called on liberal white members to uphold their commitment to racial justice in the state.\(^\text{34}\)

As some white South Carolinians decried the atrocities of racial injustice and discrimination during the war years, South Carolina legislators expressed their concern about increasing demands for black civil rights. A statement from *The State*, a newspaper in Columbia, outlined the three major fears of many whites. First, the outward migration of Negroes to places where their “unalienable rights” were more respected would result in labor shortages for whites who had always depended on a cheap and compliant labor force. Secondly, African Americans had become more aware of the legal channels through which they could move toward fuller participation and integration into the economic, educational, and political life of America. Such channels included the suit that resulted in the Federal Court decision to equalize black and white teachers’ salaries. And, finally as the abolition of the poll tax qualification for voting became imminent, South Carolina legislators and Congressmen feared political liquidation.\(^\text{35}\)

Southern whites generally did not support challenges the racial status quo and often looked to their churches for spiritual guidance during such anxious times. And indeed, southern white churches often created obstacles to racial activism. Rather than promoting racial change, many ministers acquiesced to

\(^{34}\) *The Southern Frontier*, vol. VI, no. 12 (December 1945).
\(^{35}\) *A Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations*, vol. 1, no. 8 (April 1944): 15.
their congregations preferring tradition to social reform.\textsuperscript{36} Southern white congregations resisted change and even resorted to biblical verses to justify segregation. But some congregations coupled the rhetoric of the war years with religious principles to bring racial change. In 1941, white Baptists South Carolina issued the \textit{Report of the Commission on Social Service}. These advocates of “Christian democracy” focused on important social problems such as alcoholism, war, church, and state and democracy. What is especially poignant in this document is the section on race relations and the position of white Baptists in South Carolina:

One of the problems of the democracies is that of minorities. One of the real tests of a democracy is how it treats its minorities. We are filled with horror at the ruthless way Germany has dealt with her minorities. We must be careful to be above reproach in handling our own minority problem. We have the Oriental, the Mexican, and the Negro. The main minority problem with us in South Carolina is the Negro. There is no use in pretending that this problem in easily solved. The former slave status, the war between the States, in which the slavery question had such a large part, the evils of Reconstruction, the economic competition between the desperately poor whites and the Negroes, the use of race prejudice by rabble rousing politicians have made this a very difficult and highly emotional problem.\textsuperscript{37}

White Baptists acknowledged progress in race relations in the state. They conceded that lynchings had decreased and that schools for blacks were improving slowly. They expressed hope that Senate Bill 1313, Federal Aid to Public Education, approved in 1942 with an appropriation of three hundred million dollars per year to be allocated to states on the basis of need would go a long way toward equalizing educational opportunities between the poor and rich

\textsuperscript{36} Newby, 253.
states of the union. The amount appropriated for South Carolina, $11, 652,500, meant that the problem of equalization of teachers salaries between the races in the state were greatly reduced and made possible substantial improvement in educational opportunities for blacks.\(^38\) Others tried to enlighten their congregations by encouraging racial understanding. In 1942, for example, white South Carolinian Claude Evans, an assistant minister at Washington Street Methodist Church in Columbia, preached a sermon entitled “This Conflict of Race,” which so angered and startled his congregation that the church’s stewards voted 87-3 to bar him from ever preaching in the church again.\(^39\)

Such reprisals did not stop some religious institutions, which persisted in their examination of racial issues and the state of African Americans in South Carolina. In 1943, for example, the South Carolina Synod of the Presbyterian Church adopted a resolution on race relations that declared that “no longer can we practice the habits of evasion and cowardice, saying ‘let sleeping dogs lie.’ The Christian religion which professes to be universal in its hope and appeal is on trial.” Some of the suggestions in the resolution included: reading books that revealed the truth about African Americans, reading Negro newspapers in order to understand their perspective, conferring with Negro college presidents, teachers, ministers, community leaders, addressing blacks as Mr., Mrs., or Miss, and

\(^{37}\) Report of the Commission on Social Service, 1941, South Carolina Council on Human Relations, box 24, folder 637, SCL.


finally, behaving “with dignity and tact on crowded buses.” 40 With this resolution the South Carolina Synod not only highlighted members’ awareness of how deeply racial injustice pervaded the state, but also proclaimed “America cannot be a white oligarchy in which the Negro is required to abide by rules which he had no hand in formulating.” 41

While some white congregations asserted their responsibility to further improve conditions, they credited southern white Christian women with most of the progress up to that point, particularly the decrease in lynching. And indeed, it was the efforts of religiously inspired women’s organizations such as the YWCA, UCW, and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching that contributed to improved conditions in the South. Many white church women were members of the South Carolina branch of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, which will be discussed later, and worked to curtail racial violence since the 1930s. However, these were very small steps toward dealing in detail with the injustices that blacks faced daily in South Carolina. 42

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42 For example, white Baptists recognized that segregated facilities were unfair and asserted that Christian minded southern whites had an obligation to move away from such practices. “S-1313 Reported Out South Could Use Money,” The Southern Frontier, vol. III, no. 7 (July 1942).
Although their story has not been fully told, white women were members of numerous religious organizations committed to racial activism throughout the South. Scholars have written about the activism of such white women as Virginia Foster Durr and Lillian Smith, but the vast majority of white women activists have been lost to obscurity in narratives of the civil rights movement. This was also the case among white women activists in South Carolina who worked to implement racial changes in the face of a conservative racial climate.

The Women’s Interdenominational Missionary Union, which would later become the United Council of Church Women, the Rock Hill, South Carolina branch of the American Association of University Women, and the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women’s clubs all expressed concern about the education and welfare of black girls around the state. Yet, although committed to the common goal of improving conditions for blacks in South Carolina, black and white women, with the exception of interracial councils, did not work together in the aforementioned organizations to achieve any of them.

For the most part, white women’s racial work reflected a commitment to maintaining segregation in South Carolina; “separate but equal” most often dictated the extent of their activism. The extension of library services for both races clearly meant separate facilities. Vocational education, was most often

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44 Church Women United in South Carolina Records, Minutes, 11 January 1944, Rock Hill, South Carolina Branch of the AAUW, Minutes, 11 November 1943, Dacus Library, Winthrop University, Rock Hill, South Carolina, (hereafter cited...
located in predominately Negro schools and the sentiment of the time was such that school administrators, who were mostly white, did not see the need for more substantial training for South Carolina blacks. It also appears that black and white women may have differed in their opinions on the use of federal aid for education. White women, like most whites in the state and indeed the South generally, favored federal aid to support an educational system that was truly “separate but equal.” However, black women and many black South Carolinians wanted not only improvements in black schools, but access to predominately white ones.

Before World War II, a pressing issue for significant numbers of southern Christian white women was the prevention of lynchings of African American men. The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynchings (ASWPL) was formed in 1930, for example, in response to the myth of the protection of southern white womanhood perpetuated by white men to justify murdering African American men. In South Carolina, church women worked hand in hand with the South Carolina Council of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (SCCASWPL) to secure 475 signatures for anti-lynching pledges in 1940. Jessie Daniel Ames one of the founders of the ASWPL, however, did not encourage black women’s participation. The ASWPL was created as a white women’s organization and excluded black women.

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as Winthrop University Archives); South Carolina Issue, The Southern Frontier, vol. 1, no. 4, (April 1940).
45 Correspondence, South Carolina Council, Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, 18 June 1940.
Ames felt that middle-class white women had “extraordinary moral authority” and that their position against southern lynchings would have more impact than that of an organization whose membership was biracial or predominately African American.\footnote{Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women’s Campaign Against Lynching (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 88, 180.}

ASWPL members challenged the connection between racial violence and sexual attitudes formed many years before.\footnote{Ibid., 159.} The SCCASWPL did its part by sponsoring educational programs to enlighten white South Carolinians about the inhumanity of racial violence. While SCCASWPL leaders denied black women membership in the SCCASWPL, white women reached out to middle-class black women leaders for assistance. Kate Davis of the SCCASWPL and the South Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs for example, worked with Marion Wilkinson of the SCFCWC in 1940 to address lynching in South Carolina.

Wilkinson was born in 1870 in Charleston to Richard Birnie and Anna Frost Birnie. Her father and his brother Charles Birnie were wealthy cotton shipping agents in Charleston.\footnote{Asa H. Gordon, Sketches of Negro Life and History in South Carolina (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1929), 1940.} Both of Wilkinson’s parents were descendants of antebellum free black families and members of Charleston’s black elite. A graduate of the predominately African American Avery Normal Institute in Charleston,\footnote{Edmund L. Drago, Initiative, Paternalism & Race Relations: Charleston’s Avery Normal Institute (Athens: University of Georgia Press), chapters one and two.} she married Robert Shaw Wilkinson, the second president of the
historically African American South Carolina State College in 1897. Wilkinson worked for social reform for African Americans in South Carolina and nationally. During World War I, she managed recreation centers for African American soldiers at Camp Jackson, now Fort Jackson Military Installation. Wilkinson also was instrumental in the founding of the first Rosenwald school in South Carolina and was invited to sit in on a conference on Child Welfare in Washington during the Hoover administration. As she was involved in many activities to promote social reform generally, Wilkinson used her position to encourage other educated, middle-class African American women to share their knowledge and material resources to help less fortunate African Americans.

According to Davis, she had had two conferences with Wilkinson and other black women activists. At one meeting Wilkinson suggested that time be allotted for black women to discuss the work they had done to educate the public about the horrors of lynching. Davis was clearly skeptical when she discovered that Wilkinson had asked the Association to support the passage of the federal

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50 Joan Marie Johnson, “This Wonderful Dream Nation!” Black and White South Carolina Women and the Creation of the New South, 1898-1930 (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1997), 118.
51 South Carolina Issue, The Southern Frontier, vol. 1, no. 4 (April 1940). According to I.A. Newby, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, private education was important to many African Americans. As such numerous northern philanthropies and religious organizations support efforts to improve education for blacks. The Julius Rosenwald Fund made it possible for African Americans throughout the South to construct numerous private and public schools. Newby, 102.
Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching bill that was before Congress. Introduced in 1934, the bill was designed to make local police accountable for prisoners’ protection.\textsuperscript{52}

Since the 1930s, Wilkinson had asked Davis as head of the state Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the state ASWPL, to call a meeting promoting the legislation. Many southern white women wanted to curb lynching and other forms of racial violence, but often did not enlist black women’s support. Like many white southerners, ASWPL and SCASWPL members also believed in states’ rights and opposed federal intervention in what they considered a state and local matter. They clearly sought only to educate the public about the dangers of racial violence.\textsuperscript{53} Although black organizations supported passage of the Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching bill, according to one historian, it eventually fell “before the brick wall of a southern filibuster.”\textsuperscript{54}

White women further revealed their own racism in the ways in which they associated undesirable social traits with African Americans. For example, Ames later mentions that a Mrs. Andrews be barred from performing mail service for the organization as she apparently sent out letters that were covered with ink. Although Wilkinson agreed, Davis went on to say to Jessie Daniel Ames that “I am more convinced than ever that she [Andrews] must some where have Negro blood in her veins and it is amounting to a psychosis.” Thus, even limited


\textsuperscript{53} “Association of Southern Women See Educating Society as Surer Way of Putting Stop to Lynching” \textit{The Peoples’ Informer}, Sumter, South Carolina, 9 February 1940.

interracial activism was tainted with traditional overtones of paternalism and outright racism.\textsuperscript{55} Although members of the Executive Committee of the ASWPL decided to retain their antilynching program at their ten-year review in 1941, they continued to restrict membership to white women and to oppose federal legislation. The ASWPL welcomed black women’s prayers for its campaign, but it never welcomed black women as members nor did it adopt their platform for federal intervention against lynching.\textsuperscript{56}

Despite these deep differences, religion most often provided a foundation for southern women to come together to discuss common concerns. As founder of the ASWPL, for example, Jessie Daniel Ames, had a history of not only working in integrated organizations like the Committee on Interracial Cooperation, but also using the best resources of black and white women’s religious organization like Methodist missionary societies, the United Council of Church Women, and the Young Women’s Christian Association, to combat lynching throughout the South.\textsuperscript{57} For example in 1942, when a black man suspected of attempting to assault a white woman was taken from a city jail in Sikeston, Missouri and dragged through the Negro district and then set afire, the

\textsuperscript{55} Kate Davis to Jessie Daniel Ames, 4 March 1940, Mary V. Barnes, Superintendent, Christian and Social Relations, Woman’s Missionary Society, South Carolina Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, to Jessie Daniel Ames, 12 May 1940, Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching Papers, reel 7.


\textsuperscript{57} Hall, 59, 66.
Methodist women of the Southeastern Jurisdiction upset by lynching and other forms of racial violence, wrote to Missouri Governor Forrest C. Donnell expressing their satisfaction after he had formed an investigative committee: “We join in your sorrow over the tragedy of the lynching.” The letter was signed by Methodist women from North Carolina, Georgia, and South Carolina.58

For many years southern church women had established educational programs dedicated to developing church and community leadership among black women but with the understanding that they would work with fellow African Americans, not with white women. Summer schools with black and white facilities and day long interracial forums in southern states were sponsored by Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian women in cooperation with black women and their churches. In 1941, the Woman’s Missionary Union an auxiliary of the Southern Baptist Convention, held an “interracial institute” at Benedict College, a historically black institution of higher learning. The “institute” was made possible through a fund raised by women of the Southern Baptist convention during the celebration of their Golden Jubilee in 1938; they raised $10,000 to aid and promote southern black women’s missionary and educational work.59

Such assistance and indeed such meetings were not uncommon among black and white women members of the Baptist church. According to historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, as far back as the nineteenth century, black and white Baptist women formed an “unlikely sisterhood” that allowed the creation of

59 “Interracial Institute,” The Palmetto Leader, 14 June 1941, front page.

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working relationships across racial lines for social and racial activism. The Commission on Interracial Cooperation, founded in the early twentieth century to address race relations in the south, aided these interracial efforts with financial assistance and even published a story about this activism entitled “Repairers of the Breach.”

To further their efforts for racial change throughout the South in 1943 eighty southern Methodist women met in Atlanta, Georgia where they declared “the denial of equality of opportunity between races in America, particularly in the South, is a denial of the Christian faith in the unity of all mankind.” This declaration from the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the Woman’s Society of Christian Service of The Methodist Church was signed by women from the southern states of Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi. In 1943, the Woman’s Society of Christian Service of the South Carolina Conference Central Jurisdiction, Methodist Church invited Thelma Stephens, executive secretary of the Department of Christian Social Relations and Local Church Activities, Woman’s Division of Christian Service, in New York City to speak at an integrated meeting at Bethel Methodist church in Greer, South Carolina.

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62 “Methodist Women of South Declare For Equal Race Opportunities” The Southern Frontier, vol. IV, no. 3 (March 1943); “White and Negro Church Women Join Hands,” The Southern Frontier, vol. IV, no. 9 (September 1943).
The theme of the meeting was “Planning for Peace” which very well might have included racial peace in addition to military peace.63

Interracial activism however, was not the norm among most white church women, although many did acknowledge the social and racial inequities around them. In Charleston for example, in 1943, the women of St. Michael’s Protestant Episcopal Church, one of its most prominent white churches, declared that “the Lord required justice of us.” They issued a statement on the condition of Negro schools in the city reporting that the value of the property was one-fifth that of white schools although both handled approximately the same number of pupils. These women, mostly Charleston blue-bloods and thus probably without any African American members in their churches, recognized their civic duty to all children in the city, because they declared that tax payers money should be used “above all to provide adequate grammar school education for all young people of the city and county of Charleston regardless of creed and color.” The statement, prepared by Mrs. W. H. Brawley, asserted that “God loves all men and desires that all men fulfill their lives. If we as Christians see injustices that frustrate some of God’s children or hear lies that lash sensitive spirits, it is our duty under God to do our part in ending these things. Failure to do so may cause others to doubt the sincerity of our faith.” 64

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63 “Greer Interracial Assemblage,” The Palmetto Leader, 6 February 1943.
Although committed to racial change and Christian doctrine as a mandate for activism, racial conventions dictated that any assistance from this group of women would maintain separate facilities for black and white children.\textsuperscript{65}

Church women’s most vital activism often occurred not in religious institutions, but in female-led organizations with religious foundations like United Church Women and the YWCA. United Church Women, composed of women from Protestant denominations, were fueled by Christian commitment to improving race relations and conditions for blacks. Founded in 1941 as the United Council of Church Women and affiliated with the National Council of Churches, its purpose was to “unite church women in their allegiance to their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through a program looking to their integration in the total life and work of the church, and to the building of world Christian community.”\textsuperscript{66}

From its founding the UCCW never questioned whether or not black women would be a part of the organization. At one point the national assembly debated whether such a stipulation should be included in the new constitution at the founding of UCCW. However, the consensus was that “interdenominational unquestionably meant interracial,” thus, rendering such wording unnecessary.

\textsuperscript{65} “Methodist Women of South Declare For Equal Race Opportunities,” The Southern Frontier, vol. IV, no. 3 (March 1943); “White and Negro Women Join Hands,” The Southern Frontier vol. IV, no. 9 (September 1943) Correspondence, 12 May 1940, from the Women’s Missionary Society, South Carolina Conference, the Methodist Episcopal Church South; Correspondence, 18 June 1940, South Carolina Records, Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, reel 7.

The national UCCW urged Christian women first to examine their own attitudes concerning race relations in the United States and to expand their knowledge of other cultures and races. Annual and regular meetings were held under conditions in which there was no discrimination. The national organization also assumed that membership in local councils included women from black churches and in the 1940s refused to recognize local chapters that were not integrated. Consequently, many local chapters of UCCW were not officially affiliated with the national council.

During World War II, the national organization’s primary focus was on the war effort at home and abroad, although an article in its magazine *The Church Woman*, in 1943 acknowledged that Christian women had a duty to recognize and confront the problem with race relations in America:

Existing attitudes and practices toward racial groups in America tend to wipe out the sacredness of individual personality; that they open the way to dangerous propaganda; that they create unsalutary reverberations around the world; that they hamper the possibility for America’s effective leadership among the nations; that they hinder democracy from being exemplary; that they are stumbling blocks for a just and durable peace; that they threaten the Christian movement around the world; and finally, that unless changed, they may become the grounds for an even greater war for the supremacy of the races.

In 1944, the UCCW proved its commitment nationally by supporting the establishment of a permanent Fair Employment Practice Committee in the federal government to protect black workers from discrimination in defense industries. In

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67 Ibid., 65.
68 “New Race Problems” *The Church Woman*, vol. 9, no. 2 (February 1943): 35. The General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey (hereafter cited as GCAHUMC).
1945, the board of the UCCW held a meeting in Washington, DC. Even though advance preparations had been made, the hotel reservations of black participants were not honored. In response, all of the participants withdrew from the hotel and arranged for accommodations with Washington, DC residents. At this same meeting, UCCW delegates met with Senators and Representatives to press for civil rights legislation, specifically the anti-poll tax bill. Both of these events were captured by the national media, a method the organization used effectively to further their cause for racial equality.69

United Church Women of Columbia, originally founded as the Woman’s Interdenominational Missionary Union first proposed an affiliation with the national organization in early January 1944. Even before the organization changed its name and became officially affiliated with the Council of Church Women in 1946, it is clear that most of their efforts in the 1940s focused on public welfare, migrant workers, and Native Americans.70 For example, for World Day of Prayer in March 1943, members elected to give Christian literature to Native American students in government schools as well as voting to lend assistance to workers in migrant camps throughout the state.

Simply affiliating with the national UCCW did not mean that the South Carolina chapter was prepared to implement its racial agenda. UCCW-Columbia did not actively welcome black women, and it addressed social issues primarily

70 Church Women United in Columbia Records, Minutes, 11 January 1944 and 21 January 1944, box 1, folder 2, Dacus Library Special Collections and Archives,
by providing funds for segregated institutions. For example, UCCW-Columbia members supported the resumption of the Annual Christian Conference of Negro Women at Benedict College (black) in 1947, voting to sponsor three women at the conference. They also supported a day nursery at the college. However black women were hesitant to make use of it, a point white women made note of in their minutes. Understandably, black women probably did not trust their intentions and turned to predominately black women’s organizations for assistance. This tension was not unusual among black and white southern women. Black women felt white women’s efforts for “Negro betterment” often amounted to nothing more than a concern for “better” servants.

UCCW-Columbia also supported the Girls Industrial School and the Negro Boys School by establishing youth programs. Both were established for wayward black youth and to fight juvenile delinquency in the state. Juvenile delinquency indeed, was a consistent issue for black and white women throughout the 1940s. Members were concerned about juvenile delinquency because many women and men were employed at Fort Jackson, the city’s army base, or were serving in the armed forces during the war. The federal government had made

Winthrop University, Rock Hill, South Carolina, (hereafter cited as Winthrop University Archives).

71 Later, in 1956 a recommendation was adopted changing the name from the Christian Conference for Negro Women to the Interdenominational Christian Conference at Benedict College. A recommendation was adopted in 1968 that the conference be discontinued because of changing times which made segregated conferences unnecessary. See Mary Joyce Quattlebaum, Women of the Church Synod of South Carolina Presbyterian Church, U.S., 1800-1973 (South Carolina: Presbyterian Church, Synod of South Carolina, 1973).
few provisions for child care assistance. Recreation activities in community facilities had been drained to meet the demands of wartime production and the armed forces, thus removing an outlet for youthful aggression. This highlighted concerns about women “deserting” domestic life and their children thus giving rise to juvenile delinquency. Church women particularly wanted to curb delinquency among young women who lived near wartime production centers. The national UCCW also addressed this issue in tandem with the federal government, waging a campaign to end “sex delinquency” in war production areas. Accordingly, UCW-Columbia members pressured their city officials for action, writing to the mayor pro tem regarding the seriousness of this issue.  

UCCW-Columbia was also committed to fighting illiteracy in South Carolina and supported “Opportunity Schools” originally developed by Wil Lou Gray, supervisor of Adult Schools in South Carolina and a member of United Church Women. Gray, often referred to as the “First Citizen of South Carolina,” was a pioneer in adult education. Born in 1883 in Laurens county, she earned an A.B. degree from Columbia College in Columbia, South Carolina in 1903. Gray later attended Winthrop College in Rock Hill, South Carolina where she studied the latest teaching methods and was inspired to create educational opportunities

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for illiterate South Carolinians.\textsuperscript{74} Like other white South Carolina women, Gray’s efforts did not aim for social equality, but rather equality of opportunity for social uplift. Education in her estimation was key to teaching illiterates how to behave more like the privileged class. Gray did not challenge the status quo, rather she worked within its confines for racial and social improvements.\textsuperscript{75}

The first Opportunity School was established in 1921 as a boarding school. Sessions were held in Tamasee, South Carolina, in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains and typically lasted a month, with students ranging from those who could not read to college graduates working on special projects. The admission fee was one dollar.\textsuperscript{76} A similar school was organized for African Americans at Seneca Junior College in Seneca, South Carolina and offered essentially the same curriculum as the white Opportunity School.\textsuperscript{77}

Members of the state council of United Church Women and the Columbia council then, did not ignore racial issues, even as they also upheld the law of Jim Crow by advocating only slow and conservative changes.

\textsuperscript{74} Marguerite Tolbert, \textit{South Carolina’s Distinguished Women of Lauren’s County} (Columbia: The R.L. Bryan Company, 1972), 113.


\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 118.

Throughout most of the 1940s both organizations limited their activism to efforts that merely informed its membership about racial injustice in South Carolina and provided limited and segregated services for blacks.

Other national religious organizations such as the YWCA recognized black and white women’s interaction as conduits for solving many of society’s ills in the 1940s. From the time of its national organization in 1906, the YWCA offered the potential for women to cooperate across racial and religious lines. Its purpose was:

. . . To unite in one body the Young Women’s Christian Associations of the United States; to establish, develop, and unify such Associations; to participate in the work of the World’s Young Women’s Christian Association; to advance the physical, social, intellectual, moral, and spiritual interests of young women. The ultimate purpose of all its efforts shall be to seek to bring young women to such a knowledge of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord as shall mean for the individual young woman fullness of life and development of character, and shall make the organization as a whole an effective agency in the bringing in of the Kingdom of God among young women.

The organization took this task seriously. Southern women who worked to improve race relations and conditions for African Americans were often able to trace their activism back to some exposure to the YWCA, an experience that often included working with black women. In April 1940, the Y’s National Student Council asked the YWCA to appoint a commission to study its interracial experience. Among the recommendations made to the National Board and local organizations was that all local associations adopt as a goal the inclusion of African American women and girls into the mainstream of association life. They

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78 Edgerton, 426.
were also not to plan separately for any group of women, be it white, African American, or other, and all salary and wage differences between white and African American workers doing the same work were to be eliminated.

In communities with rigid patterns of racial separation, the National YWCA still urged local Associations to use the Interclub Council or other intergroup activities to bridge gaps between different groups of women. The objective was eventually to bring these groups “progressively closer to inclusive functioning,” and the national Y suggested that in some communities “individuals who are ready for participation in joint clubs be given that opportunity, even though the general constituency may not be ready for such experience.”

Thus, black and white women were drawn to the YWCA for a number of reasons. The Y offered social and recreational activities often not found in other organizations, and it provided opportunities for women to exercise their leadership abilities. Unfortunately, it was often insensitive to the needs of black women because white women did not understand the depth of the problems in their communities, although black women obtained leadership positions within their segregated community Ys. Throughout most of the 20th century however, the YWCA would remain contested territory for black and white Christian women.

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This was true particularly in the southern states where the law and violence maintained the separation of the races and where black women’s autonomy was severely limited by white women’s racism and paternalism.

Student YWCAs took on the cause of interracialism even before the main branch of the organization in many southern states. Interracial activities became a subject of discussion, and by the end of the 1930s young college women encouraged the YWCA to examine the effects of discrimination on the YWCA and the possibility of integration. According to Judith Weisenfeld, finally in 1940, YWCA delegates voted at the national convention to form a commission that resulted in the 1944 book, *Interracial Practices in Community YWCAs*, by Juliet Ober Bell and Helen J. Wilkins. Bell and Wilkins conceded that YWCAs were indeed segregated and that members needed to work to make the organization and its work more inclusive. ¹²

Student YWCAs in southern states attempted to alter the racial status quo by introducing social justice Christianity to college women with the hope that its message would inspire them to work to reshape southern society. Referred to as the Social Gospel in the late nineteenth century, social Christianity encouraged believers to apply Christian teachings of brotherhood to daily relationships. Initially, urban and labor conditions comprised the Social Gospel agenda, but race relations was later included.

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The development of a religious philosophy of life within the student YWCA enabled young white women, according to Frances Taylor to, “acknowledge and overcome the racism ingrained in them since birth and to advocate radical changes in the fabric of southern life, this religious philosophy of life entailed the creation of an active, critical role of women in a society which still clung to a strong tradition of genteel southern womanhood.”

On northern college campuses, Christian Associations were acquainted with Negro students and invited them to become members although most did not participate fully in its programs. White women came quite willingly to the student YWCA and realized that the pedestal upon which all white southern womanhood was placed was more often than not constraining. However, their involvement in the student YWCA prepared many of these women for life long careers as social activists.

South Carolina was no different in this regard with its colleges and universities. The YWCA at Winthrop College for Women in Rock Hill, South Carolina, demonstrates how this activism manifested itself in an all-female collegiate environment. The Winthrop YWCA was established in 1899 to exert religious influence on its students. When the organization formed the Public Affairs and Interracial Affairs Committee, its officers initially thought that by including race relations under other national and regional economic and social problems, they would be better able to work more fully on all of them. They

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quickly came to realize that a separate committee was necessary to “seek wisdom and guide our students in action on this most pressing and burning problem.”

Thus, the student YWCA sponsored an intercollegiate meeting on interracial relations in 1941, to be held at Winthrop College. This was a radical move for the time in the South Carolina.

White women such as Mary E. Frayser, faculty advisor of the Interracial Affairs Committee, who organized the meeting, did so cautiously. Frayser, born in 1868, had been predisposed to civil and social activism by her parents who were active leaders in business, social, civic, and church work. A well informed activist, Frayser became involved in many efforts for reform such as child labor, legislation, education, recreation, feminism, world peace, and of course, race relations.

A survey expert for Clemson College and home economics teacher at Winthrop College, Frayser, like many educated white women in the south at this time, clearly felt an obligation to improving conditions in South Carolina albeit through separate organizations. She was very active in the community in Rock Hill, South Carolina where she helped to form a Negro Civic League. Yet, ever

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85 Winthrop College Student YWCA, The Report of the President, 1944-1945, Winthrop University Archives.
86 Correspondence, South Carolina Committee on Human Relations, 21 October 1941, box 10, folder 306, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina (hereafter cited as SCCHR).
87 Bianca Tinsely Madden, “In the Thick of the Fray”: The Professional Life of Mary Elizabeth Frayser (MA thesis: Winthrop University, 1995), iv.
88 “Negroes Organize Civic League,” The Southern Frontier, vol. 1, no. 5 (May 1940). This organization addressed the need for “leisure time” facilities for blacks such as libraries, parks, and supervised playgrounds. Frayser suggested that the committee ask for a hearing before the Rock Hill Community Planning Association, the Rock Hill Library Board, and the city school board to have their concerns addressed.
aware of the racial conventions of the time, white women activists realized the
controversial nature of their activism. In a letter to Frayser in 1940, Elizabeth
Stinson, resident secretary, wrote, “I believe we are agreed on the fact that only
the white race will attend the meeting in as much as we feel it wise to move not
too rapidly in the direction of race relations.”

The “interracial” conference however, was meant only for white college
students, and white women’s paternalistic and cautious tones are evident in their
correspondence. When advertising for the meeting, Thelma Hicklin, president of
the Winthrop YWCA and Mary E. Frayser, emphasized the meeting was not to be
“radical.” Rather, it would question the social and economic progress of the
South as it pertained to better educational opportunities for low-income blacks
and whites. Including low-income whites and focusing on improvements for all
impoverished South Carolinians enabled white women activists to defuse the
racial implications their agenda. The letter then, was carefully constructed so as
not to raise the suspicion or ire of Rock Hill’s white community. According to
Hicklin:

No emotional or radical presentation is proposed but the question of social
and economic progress for all in the South is intimately associated with
better educational opportunities for whites and Negroes in the lower-
income or no-income brackets.

89 Correspondence, 25 October 1940, Winthrop College Student YWCA, box 5,
folder 32. Winthrop University Archives; The Southern Frontier, vol.1, no. 4
(April 1940).
90 Although they did select the following books for reference for white students:
Brown America by Edwin R. Embree, The Negro in American Civilization by
Charles S. Johnson, Facing Facts in South Carolina by Brearley and Montgomery,
South Problems of South Carolina by G. Croft Williams, and The Negro in South
Carolina by Marguerite Talbot.
This question will receive consideration as will the matter of what constitutes adequate education for both races of the underprivileged and the inequalities of rural and urban educational opportunity for both.\textsuperscript{91}

Although the conference was not open to black students, it did bring together influential black and white leaders such as Jessie Daniel Ames, president of the ASWPL, executive secretary of the Southern Interracial Commission, and Dr. W. A. Whitaker, president of South Carolina State College, who lectured on portions of the general topic “Providing Adequate Educational Opportunities At All Levels and To Both Races.” The Findings Committee, entirely female save one, found that a number of changes and improvements were necessary in educational resources and race relations in South Carolina. Committee reports also included “accepting the responsibility of interesting others in the study of interracial relations and problems of justice and fair dealing to the underprivileged whites and Negroes.” They also opposed the dissemination of funds appropriated for Negro schools to the education of whites, encouraged the impartial enforcement of laws without regard to race, and favored fair representation of Negroes and their place in American culture in printer matter, screen and radio.\textsuperscript{92} Thus, the committee emphasized not racial equality in their findings, but improvements in conditions and facilities for African Americans.

A 1941-42 report of the President of the Winthrop Student YWCA reveals that while white students at the conference found it “very enlightening and very

\textsuperscript{91} Interracial Study at Winthrop College, 27 November 1940, Winthrop College Student YWCA, box 5, folder 32, Winthrop University Archives.
\textsuperscript{92} Reports of the Findings Committees of The First and Second South Carolina Inter-Collegiate Institute of Interracial Relations Held at Winthrop College, Rock
worthwhile,” and believed that “it was only a small beginning of a slow climb to what they hoped would some day be a large and powerful conference which would be truly interracial.” Thus, the conference only focused on educating white students about South Carolina’s racial problems. However, they recognized the hypocrisy of focusing on “interracial relations” when in fact there had been no black students in attendance.

Even these tentative efforts on the part of the Winthrop College YWCA were cut short by the very racial conventions the organization sought to eradicate. In a 1944-1945 report, the President of the Winthrop Student YWCA, Dorothy Kirkley, noticed that the interracial phase of Winthrop’s “Y” program, had not developed as she had hoped. The Findings Committee faced much opposition in efforts to get school officials to allow interracial meetings. They were told to petition the trustees of Winthrop College to repeal the ruling forbidding such attendance. The petition was denied. Also, Dr. Benjamin Mays, a black Baptist minister and President of Morehouse College had been suggested as a vesper speaker. However, this was not approved, presumably because he was African American. Mayes was a South Carolina sharecropper’s son and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. In 1944, he was elected president of the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) and influenced the organization to assume an active

Hill, South Carolina, 11 January 1941, and 1 November 1941, box 1, folder 3, Winthrop University Archives.

93 Report of the Findings Committee of the First South Carolina Inter-Collegiate Institute on Interracial Relations Held at Winthrop College, Rock Hill, SC, 11 January 1941, The Report of the President of the YWCA, 1941-1942, box 1, folder 3, Winthrop University Archives.
role in combating southern social issues. It is possible that his position in the
FCC and the fact that he was openly critical of the southern segregation may have
made it dangerous for him to come to Winthrop as a vesper speaker.\textsuperscript{95}

Although significant changes would occur in other YWCAs in the state,
this was not to be the case with the Winthrop student YWCA. The interracial
programs of the “Y” varied with the locality. In many states, interracial student
YWCA’s meant that students of both races met together to gain familiarity with
one another. In the deep South however, the only vigorous work among students
of both races was in Atlanta, Georgia.\textsuperscript{96} In South Carolina, interracial did not
mean that blacks and white college students would work together.

After World War II, the Winthrop YWCA was reorganized as the
Winthrop Christian Association to ease tensions between the college and the
community and because of a new policy from the National Board of the YWCA
that made integration mandatory. Many southern colleges found this problematic
and consequently forbade their students to participate in integrated meetings.
Others banned the YWCA and the YMCA for that matter, from their campuses
entirely because of their interracial policy.\textsuperscript{97} However, for many of the white
women who were members of the Winthrop YWCA it was a rewarding
experience. Mary Ellen Jackson, 1946-1947 president of the Winthrop YWCA
asserted,

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\textsuperscript{94} Records Relating to the Interracial Institute at Winthrop College, 1939-1942,
box 5, folder 32, Winthrop University Archives.
\textsuperscript{95} Egerton, 239.
\textsuperscript{96} Cranston Clayton, “College Interracialism in the South” \textit{Journal of Negro Life}
(September 1934): 267.
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My experience as President of the Winthrop YWCA for the past year has been one of the most wonderful, meaningful, and beneficial of my entire life. I am sure I shall never be able to measure what it has done for me or the pleasure and satisfaction I have received from my work. I know what spiritual growth it has fastened in my life through its worship, work, play, and contacts with many fine people—faculty, administration, and students. For the wonderful task that was mine, I thank God, and I pray him to bless the continued work of this organization that “His will may be done.”

As other state YWCA’s began to see the tide of change and as the national YWCA began to push its policy on race, black and white women realized that integration of community branches could not be defended indefinitely. However, where interracial contacts had been made in other parts of the nation and even in the south through the YWCA; they would not be forthcoming in South Carolina under two decades later.

South Carolina local Associations serve as useful examples of the possibilities and limits of integrated activism in South Carolina and the ways in which black and white women interpreted their obligation to uphold the dictates of the National YWCA in the 1940s. As YWCAs formed throughout the country asserting a commitment to helping local communities, so was it the case with YWCAs in South Carolina.

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97 Babcock, 375.
98 President’s Report, Winthrop YWCA, 1946-1947, 17 May 1947, box 1, folder 3, Winthrop University Archives.
The Charleston YWCA, organized in 1903, had used the name “YWCA” before the national YWCA adopted it in 1907. This would later become a bone of contention nationally and locally.\footnote{Robert P. Stockton, “Local YWCA Loses Right to Use Name,” \textit{News and Courier}, Charleston, South Carolina, 4 November 1971: 1-A.}

Although white women were able to form YWCA chapters at will, when black women approached the national YWCA to organize branches, it determined that black branches in southern cities had to be supervised by an existing “central” YWCA. “Central” clearly meant “white.” The central YWCA had to agree to start a black YWCA assuming that it would be overseen by a management committee of three white women and two black women.\footnote{Glenda Gilmore, \textit{Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 192.}

The Coming Street YWCA was formed by the Women’s Auxiliary of the YMCA in 1907 because black women in Charleston felt that while the YMCA was helping black men save black boys, it was neglecting black girls. Thus, they formed the YWCA to “look out for the future mothers of the race.” The Coming Street YWCA operated as a branch of the Charleston YWCA (white, Central) from 1920 to 1969.\footnote{Charleston YWCA Records, Coming Street Branch, Charleston, South Carolina, 1955.}

During World War II, the Charleston YWCA paid little attention to southern racial problems and instead focused on supporting the war effort. However, racial tensions existed between black and white YWCA members, particularly surrounding civil rights issues such as African Americans gaining the
right to vote. Because African Americans made up such a large portion of the population, whites in Charleston, more so than other parts of South Carolina were committed to maintaining the racial status quo. The city also had a very small black middle class and no institutions of higher learning. Thus, the effectiveness of black activism for equal treatment in Charleston was extremely limited.

When Belle Ingels of the national YWCA visited Charleston in 1944, she noted the slow progress in race relations, reporting that when the issue of blacks gaining the right to vote came up it was disregarded as “a straw in the wind.” During her visit to the Coming Street YWCA, Ingels discovered that its leaders were suspicious of white women because they kept black women in ignorance regarding YWCA affairs. When Mamie E. Davis issued an evaluation report on the Coming Street YWCA in 1946, she noted the hostility that existed between black and white women. When the branch chairman, chairman of the house, and acting secretary asked the Central YWCA about the status of their building, they were told that Central was the landlord and they were tenants. That is, white Y leaders could enter the Coming St. building at anytime, without the branch officers’ knowledge and do as they so chose.

The Columbia YWCA, unlike the Charleston YWCA, at least attempted to educate its members about racial conditions in South Carolina and had more interaction with black members than did other South Carolina YWCAs in the

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104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
1940s. Both the Columbia YWCA (white) and the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA (black) were organized in 1914, chartered by the National YWCA, and provided housing and social services to young, single, working women who came to Columbia from rural areas. In the early 1940s, Columbia YWCA members recognized black women’s agency as they acknowledged their efforts to increase branch membership. And, indeed, black women focused on improvements within their own communities by sponsoring programs like Negro Health Week.

Columbia YWCA members participated in national events, particularly as they pertained to the YWCA in the early 1940s. Members attended conferences and returned with reports highlighting the international and interracial aspects of the YWCA’s work. They were also, like other organizations, influenced by the democratic fervor of the World War II years and the duty of Christians during those years. One member, Alves Long, stressed this point after returning from a conference on World Fellowship in 1943. The conference she asserted, “defined the responsibility of Christians as citizen of country and states; duties of the citizen as concerned with one’s attitude to all public questions were defined.”

Columbia YWCA meetings in the 1940s focused explicitly on racism and interracialism more so than other South Carolina Ys. On 9 March 1944, it announced that the March 12th committee meeting would be devoted to a discussion of “Is There Race Superiority?” At subsequent meetings in 1944

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107 “Monthly Report of the General Secretary to the Board of Directors of the YWCA, February 1940, box 3, folder 74, Columbia YWCA Records, SCL.
Columbia YWCA members held discussions about interracialism even discussing the topic with younger women. Finally, Columbia YWCA members were challenged to examine themselves and their commitment to interracialism when at an October 1944 meeting, Mrs. J. Roy Jones, chairman of the interracial committee gave the devotional, using as her subject “Brotherhood the World Over.” Because Columbia had an active and educated African American community, numerous black civic and political organizations, in addition to several black institutions of higher learning, white women were more inclined to consider interracialism and racial change. The city also had a smaller, but much more vocal black middle class. Furthermore, some white women had made contacts with black women activists and resolved that it was best to work for reforms that would benefit South Carolina as a whole.

In the mid-1940s, in response to the National YWCA’s commission to study interracial policies and practices in community YWCAs, the Columbia Association wrote a letter to Mrs. Henry A. Ingraham of the National Board of the YWCA, with recommendations passed by the board “concerning interracial study.” Although there is no extant information to illustrate what these recommendations were, that the Columbia YWCA bothered to send anything to the National YWCA demonstrates that even in these tense years in South

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108 Monthly Report of the General Secretary to the Board of Directors of the YWCA, 13 May 1943, box 3, folder 74, Columbia YWCA Records, SCL.
109 Ibid., 9 March 1944, June 1944, box 3, folder 74, SCL.
110 Ibid., October 1944, box 3, folder 74, SCL.
Carolina, these women acknowledged societal inequities. Nor did their efforts did stop there. They recognized that the black branch was at a decided disadvantage in terms of finances and leadership. Consequently, in 1945, the interracial committee gathered material for a study to present to the Community Chest, a fundraising agency for Columbia’s organizations, in order to procure a trained worker at the Branch YWCA. The study, which proved a need for a “Negro” worker for women and girls in Columbia convinced YWCA members as well as Community Chest officials. The committee then contacted the National YWCA about obtaining an experienced worker. In September 1945, the Community Chest gave $1800 to the Columbia YWCA for a program director at the black branch. Although the Columbia YWCA was responsive to the needs of its black branch, it did not imagine integrated facilities or activities. In the 1940s, any racial mixing was limited to its leadership.

Black and white South Carolinians generally addressed issues of politics, education, and racial violence during World War II. They combated racial injustice through a wide variety of professional, religious, and civic organizations. But these years in particular also evidenced activism from its women and reveal patterns that would characterize the civil rights efforts for decades to come. Although black women often had different goals and separate facilities from

111 “YWCA Board Meeting, January 1945,” Columbia YWCA Records, box 3, folder 87, SCL; Sims, 83.
white women, many of the leaders shared similar socioeconomic backgrounds that permitted interracial activism around such issues as the eradication of racial violence and educational access for all South Carolinians. However, white women’s organizations did not usually include black women. And, many black women did not trust white women’s intentions and more often found support and leadership roles within their own organizations and male-led organizations like the NAACP and the PDP.

Interpretations of how racial and social improvements would benefit blacks varied greatly during these years. Clearly, most white women activists favored separate but equal improvements for blacks. Unfortunately the paucity of black women’s records prohibits an extensive analysis of their activism during these years. Yet, enough is available to prove that they differed with white women over the federal anti-lynching bill and confronted South Carolina’s power structure directly to enact such change for blacks as equal pay for teachers and the right to register to vote. These women also had limited contact with white southern women although such relationships were contentious and often revealed skepticism on the part of black women and racist attitudes from white women.

113 “YWCA Board Meeting,” June 1945, 13 September 1945, Columbia YWCA Minutes, box 3, folder 87, SCL.
CHAPTER 2

“THE NEGRO ONLY WANTED A CHANCE TO LIVE, FEED HIS FAMILY, MINISTER TO HIS SICK AND TO EDUCATE HIS CHILDREN SO THAT THEY MIGHT BE LAW ABIDING CITIZENS”: VOTING RIGHTS AND INTERRACIAL ACTIVISM IN THE 1940s AND EARLY 1950s

In 1950, Elizabeth Waring, a white woman and wife of liberal justice J. Waties Waring, gave a controversial speech at the Coming Street YWCA, lambasting white Charlestonians who resisted desegregation efforts and interracial activism. Afterwards, the Charleston Metropolitan Council of Negro Women, affiliated with the National Council of Negro Women, applauded her “unfaltering courage, strength, and integrity.” This group of black women supported increased interracial cooperation promoting “justice, amity, understanding, and cooperation among women regardless of race, creed of people or color,” because they understood that women were most able to effect change throughout South Carolina. More than this however, they also asserted a shared heritage and pride as American citizens and South Carolinians and as such “the Negro only a wanted a chance to live, feed his family, minister to his sick and to educate his children so that they might be law abiding citizens.”

While black women welcomed white women’s efforts for interracial

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1 Charleston Metropolitan Council of Negro Women to Mrs. J. Waties Waring, 30 January 1950, Johnette Edwards Papers, box 1, folder 1, Winthrop University Archives.
understanding and cooperation in the 1940s, they increasingly sought more. Their desire to be “law abiding citizens” included obtaining the right to vote. After *Smith v. Allwright* in 1944, which ruled that blacks could not be prohibited from voting in the Texas Democratic primary, black women supported similar legal changes in South Carolina with *Elmore v. Rice* and *Brown v. Baskins.* The impact of these cases throughout the South and South Carolina further ignited organizational and individual activism among black women as they increased national, regional, and local attention to voter registration in the post World War II years.

*Elmore v. Rice* had particular importance in South Carolina where white and especially black female and male-led organizations and individuals had fought continuously for access to voting. The South Carolina Democratic party controlled state, county, and city governments throughout the state and had excluded blacks from participation in the primary. Although the Republican party had some small successes in South Carolina, it had gained such a bad reputation during the Radical Reconstruction era, that it was too weak to have any major impact on local politics. In 1946, when George Elmore went to the voting precinct office and presented himself to John I. Rice, Chairman of the Richland County Democratic Executive Committee for South Carolina, he was not permitted to vote. According to Rice, Elmore was not a member of the Democratic party, and “no Negroes were permitted to vote in the Democratic

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Primary.”⁴ Elmore, a Columbia taxi driver and secretary of the Richland County Progressive Democratic Party, who was also fair enough to pass for white, had met all of the voting requirements for the city and state.⁵ The following year, a black citizens’ committee from Richland County, backed by the NAACP, sued for the right to participate in the Democratic primary claiming that the primary, whether supported by state law or by party rules, controlled the choice of office holders in South Carolina.⁶

*Elmore v. Rice* was tried before district court Judge J. Waties Waring who decided in favor of the black plaintiffs in 1947. His decision said that blacks could not be excluded from the primary and that the South Carolina Democratic party could not operate as a “private club” and restrict its membership as it pleased. He also added in passing, “It is time for South Carolina to rejoin the Union. It is time to fall in step with the other States and to adopt the American way of conducting elections.”⁷ Judge Waring’s decision was sustained by the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals and the United States Supreme Court refused to review the decision.

Women played key roles in *Elmore v. Rice* and none more so than Modjeska Simkins, a native of Columbia. Born in 1899, Simkins, a teacher, social worker, and long-time civil rights activist, gave her personal support during

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⁶ Lander, 172.
the development of this case. Already a skilled activist, she, like another of her cohorts, Septima Clark of Charleston, had sharpened her abilities as a leader and fine-tuned her racial philosophy in the 1920s, also the nadir of civil rights activism. 8 During the 1920s and 1930s, she participated in several integrated organizations dedicated to racial, social, and educational improvement such as the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, the Southern Conference Educational Fund, Commission on Interracial Cooperation, and the Southern Regional Council. On the local level, she was a member of such all-black and integrated organizations as the Civil Welfare League, the Columbia Women’s Council, the Columbia Town Hall Congress, and the Richland County Citizens Committee of which she was publicity and public relations chairman.

Simkins became secretary of the South Carolina NAACP in 1948, at its annual state conference. Thurgood Marshall, general counsel of the NAACP and a graduate of Howard University Law School, asked Simkins to pay special attention to the in-court proceedings of the Elmore v. Rice case so that she might advise him on points missed in the court proceedings. In response, she assisted him by offering a note about an argument in the Brown v. Baskin case. Marshall used a part of her suggestion and later thanked her for it.9

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Also, she contributed to the cause by giving financial assistance to George Elmore who had fallen into financial distress and faced losing his home. Simkins gave him a personal loan and arranged for him to manage one of her husbands’ businesses.\(^\text{10}\)

These actions did not stop attempts to limit black voter rights however. In May 1948, the Democratic State Convention adopted a new set of rules designed to discourage most black voters. The rules required all would-be voters to sign a discriminatory oath declaring themselves in favor of “separation of the races” and “States Rights” and opposed to the “proposed Federal so-called F.E.P.C. law.” Some white democrats repudiated the oath. For example, the Greenville County Democratic Executive Committee broke with the state organization and set aside the registration oath, allowing blacks to register, as did Richland and Marlboro counties.\(^\text{12}\) In July 1948, in a second case, *Brown v. Baskin*, Judge Waring threw out the oath, destroying the white primary in the process. The United States Supreme Court refused to review either of Judge Waring’s decisions, thus allowing them to stand.\(^\text{13}\) The following month, African Americans voted in the Democratic primary in large numbers for the first time since the post-Civil War era.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{10}\) Aba-Mecho, 207; South Carolina Urges Drive For Vote,” 14 October 1948, NAACP Records, Part 4, The Voting Rights Campaign, 1916-1950, reel 11.


\(^{12}\) “The White Primary,” *New South*, vol. 3, no. 6 and 7 (June-July 1948), 15.

\(^{13}\) Quint, 5, 6.

While African Americans were largely responsible for pushing for voting rights, *Elmore v. Rice* would not have been possible without J. Waties Waring, who issued the decision in the case. Waring, a part of Charleston’s aristocracy who could trace his English and Episcopalian ancestors back eight generations, had never questioned southern racial practices before he was sixty-five years old. His awareness of racial injustices had developed over the course of several years, influenced by events that also reshaped his political outlook. In 1945, his first wife, also a Charleston blueblood, obtained a divorce in Florida at her husband’s request. Just over a week later, Waring married Elizabeth Avery, a divorcée fifteen years his junior, and a northern “rabble-rousing” socialite. The divorce alone was controversial for Charleston whites,\(^{15}\) as the new Mrs. Waring moved into house on Meeting Street, almost immediately after the first Mrs. Waring, exited to New York City. Elizabeth Waring would later be known as the “witch of Meeting Street.”\(^{16}\)

Their social isolation was further intensified by the fact that by the late 1940s, Waring had become a “militant and uncompromising integrationist.” He had desegregated the seating and jury roster in his courtroom, demanded that lawyers address blacks with courtesy titles, and hired a black bailiff, John

\(^{15}\) Divorce was so uncommon in at this time, that South Carolina did not have any laws on the subject. From John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 407.

Fleming. In 1946, while Waring was on the bench in Columbia, the policeman who had blinded the veteran Isaac Woodard was acquitted. When white spectators cheered Mrs. Waring went to her hotel room in tears. This event further influenced her husband’s break with his racial heritage. In fact, according to historian David W. Southern, once converted, Waring became more radical on the race issue than many northern liberals. These actions revealed Waring’s increasing sense of racial justice. However, most of Charleston’s white elite perceived him as a traitor. It was not long before both Warings were estranged from Charleston society and by the late 1940s, had become the objects of severe abuse.

Unlike her southern-bred husband, Elizabeth Waring had championed civil rights from an early age. Born into privilege in Detroit, Michigan, Waring had attended all the right schools, including Westover School for Girls in Middlebury, Connecticut where she was instrumental in getting the school to admit its first African American student. Because of her activism, the hometown newspaper likened her to Harriet Beecher Stowe. Her first marriage to Wilson W. Mills of Detroit lasted eighteen years and produced three children. In 1933, she divorced Mills and married Henry Hoffman, an industrialist. During World War II, when the Hoffmans began wintering in Charleston, Elizabeth met J. Waties Waring at a

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17 Egerton, 408.
18 Ibid.
19 Southern, 210.
bridge party. In 1945, she divorced her second husband and in June of the same year, she married the judge, who was sixty-five years old and recently divorced.\textsuperscript{21} This would set off a wave of gossip among Charleston’s white elite and begin the Warings’ isolation from society.

When Elizabeth Waring addressed the black Coming Street YWCA on 16 January 1950, she chastised the psychosis of white southerners describing them as “sick, confused and decadent people…full of pride and complacency, introverted, morally weak and low,” while black southerners were “building and creating.”\textsuperscript{22} She acknowledged the risk to black women who had invited her to speak at the Negro YWCA and who came to hear the speech. Waring also recognized the price she and her husband had paid for their controversial positions. Yet, she also pointed out that fear was what drove the white supremacist machine in South Carolina invoking Cold War terminology by referring to herself and her husband as the “atom bomb:”

We to them are like the atom bomb which they are afraid we will use to destroy their selfish white supremacy way of life. And they are quite correct. That is exactly what the judge and I are doing, and they know it and see the writing on the wall. But you know and we know and they should know that there is another use of atomic energy, and that is for building and healing and restoring a civilized way of life. That is what the judge is trying to do for the good of the white people down here as well as the Negro.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{21} Southern, 215.
\textsuperscript{22} Frederickson, 268.
Waring’s speech set off a tidal wave of resentment, endless harassment and an impeachment drive against her husband. However, the couple received endless support from African Americans. Thurgood Marshall sent his regards to Waring following the speech while at the same time admonishing white South Carolinians:

Congratulations on your speech and the coverage it has received in the press up here. You did a swell job. Of course, all of us expected the reaction from (Strom) Thurmond, The Charleston News and Courier, Hamilton, and the rest of that group. The least that they could have done would have been to give credit to your courage even though they did not agree with what you said. On the other hand, I guess we should not expect even that much decency from them.24

To say that Elizabeth Waring’s speech to the YWCA was controversial is an understatement. In response, the white-controlled Central YWCA drafted a statement repudiating Waring’s speech and requesting that Septima P. Clark, chairman of the board of the Negro Coming Street YWCA, sign it. Despite pressure and threats, Clark and other members “emphatically and unequivocally” refused to sign the statement. Meanwhile, black leaders believed that whites had placed informants in the Negro YWCA. It was revealed that two employees were reportedly paid extra money by whites to report on what went on in the Negro YWCA’s meetings. This information also made it to the national NAACP’s leadership. Walter White wrote to John McCray, editor of The Lighthouse and Informer, “I do not know whether these reports are accurate but I have been told to avoid talking to them as they will not only give a distorted and inaccurate

picture but will promptly run to the white folks with the story.”

Following her speech, Elizabeth Waring would later be featured on “Meet the Press” where she further attacked white South Carolinians for their racism.

Black women’s organizations and individual black women in particular, supported Elizabeth Waring for her bravery at the YWCA. The Charleston Metropolitan Council of Negro Women, founded in 1935, and affiliated with the National Council of Negro Women, applauded her “unfaltering courage, strength, and integrity.” They supported interracial cooperation promoting “justice, amity, understanding and cooperation among all women regardless of race, creed of people or color racial change.” The Charleston Metropolitan Council of Negro Women proclaimed their commitment to racial justice in South Carolina while recognizing the efforts of Waring and other liberal whites throughout the South:

As time goes on may others join you in helping to bring about the type of world that He has left us, that all men are brothers under the skin. The Negro wants only a chance to live, feed his family, minister to his sick and to educate his children so that they might be law abiding citizens. We felt that there are other members of your race who feel as you do but there are not as many who have the courage to stand as you did. Christ had only twelve and some of them faltered; but as His eternal word stands today we know yours will stand.

In their response to the speech, black women also paralleled Christian duty with racial activism. Although they clearly appreciated Elizabeth Waring’s support on civil rights issues, her own relationship with black women was

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problematic revealing obstacles to interracial work that other women confronted. Elizabeth Waring formed a close friendship with Ruby P. Cornwell of Charleston that sustained her through the tumultuous years in Charleston after the YWCA speech.

Ruby Pendergrass Cornwell, a native of Foreston in Clarendon County, began her formal education at Miss Lucy Laney’s School in Augusta, Georgia, later known as Haine’s Institute. She attended the ninth grade at Avery Normal Institute in Charleston and continued her education at Daytona Normal and Training School (today Bethune-Cookman College) in Daytona, Florida. After earning a bachelor’s degree in English at Talladega College in Alabama, she returned to Charleston to teach at the Avery Institute in 1925. Although she spent the better part of her career teaching in the Charleston county public school system and led the first Head State Program in Charleston county, Cornwell also created a legacy as a civil rights activist. During the 1960s, she was part of the women’s auxiliary of the Charleston Campaign for Freedom, which along with other organizations throughout South Carolina called for mass demonstrations in the cities where immediate steps toward segregation had not been taken.

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27 Charleston Metropolitan Council of Negro Women to Mrs. J. Waties Waring, 30 January 1950, Johnette Edwards papers, box 1, folder 1, Winthrop University Archives.
In 2002, in celebration of her activism and her 100th birthday, Charleston’s Mayor Joseph P. Riley, declared 21 March, “Ruby Cornwell Week.”

Cornwell and Waring’s friendship is revealed through a series of letters they wrote to each other while Waring was in Charleston and later in Weekapaug, Rhode Island. Waring’s letters stress the intensity of her feelings toward the African Americans she came to know. “When the Judge and I opened our home to entertain Negro friends we opened our hearts first and sincerely meant it as love and honoring those particular people as friends.” Yet she was also aware that many questioned their motives for helping blacks in Charleston, “the idea was implanted in the Negro suspicious mind that the Warings were lonely and had turned to the Negroes as a substitute for the ostracism by the white people since the Judge’s primary decision giving the Negro the right to vote . . . Even Mirrriam DeCosta, the recipient of benefits to herself from me, sat in my living room questioning in her mind what I was getting out of my crusade for Negro rights.”

While Waring’s letters were ripe with praise and adoration, they were also filled with disillusionment. “On a personal level Judge Waring and I have come to the unhappy conclusion that the Negro people we selected as close friends in love and sincere feeling of EQUALITY, the only basis of friendship, have taken us too much for granted and mistrusted and not respected our friendship. Came cheap to

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31 Elizabeth Waring to Ruby Cornwell, 13 July 1951, Ruby Cornwell Records, Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, South Carolina (hereafter cited as Avery Research Center).
them."\textsuperscript{32} In Waring’s estimation, African Americans in Charleston did not understand and the intensity of she and her husband’s desire for racial change. She perhaps did not understand that while many liberal southern whites urged gradualism in racial activism, many blacks did as well.

J. Waties Waring and his wife believed their activism had given African Americans the “key to open the door” to first class citizenship. But, they also felt that blacks in Charleston were unwilling to work for civil rights unless influenced by whites.\textsuperscript{33} Finally, despite the fact that they had invited blacks into their home and formed friendships with many of them, the social isolation from Charleston’s white society became too much. The Warings withdrew their help from African Americans after leaving Charleston and after the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court Case decision in 1954. When they quit the South they made their home in New York until their deaths in 1968.

Even before Judge Waring gave his decision easing formal barriers to black voting and his wife became a racial activist on blacks’ behalf, black women’s organizations had been working to get African Africans to the polls. In 1945, for example, when Ethelyn Murray Parker, publicity chairman of the South Carolina and Charleston federation of colored women’s clubs invited John H. McCray, editor of the Lighthouse and Informer, to speak to the organization about voter registration she also informed him that delegates had been given ten thousand

\textsuperscript{32} Elizabeth Waring to Ruby Cornwell, 13 July 1951, Avery Research Center.
\textsuperscript{33} Elizabeth Waring to Ruby Cornwell, 21 October 1955, Avery Research Center.
bulletins about voter’s registration to distribute in their communities.\textsuperscript{34}

Furthermore she impressed upon him the importance of black women’s commitment to gaining first class citizenship and the role of the SCFCWC in facilitating this. “The president of every club is being urged to keep before her members the importance of the ballot, and to have every member registered. Some clubs have already registered one hundred percent.”\textsuperscript{35} South Carolina black club women celebrated winning the right to vote in the state primaries and encouraged black club women use this achievement to their advantage. The SCFCWC further prided itself on its efforts to transform politics in South Carolina. Although the organization also purported interracial activism and claimed that work along “interracial lines” had been “effective” very little evidence exists to prove this claim.\textsuperscript{36}

When black leaders organized on a state level such black women’s organizations as the SCFCWC and the Columbia Women’s Council (CWC), were particularly involved in political efforts as they urged black South Carolinians to register to vote at county courthouses.\textsuperscript{37} Many of the meetings of the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs focused on women as potential leaders and blacks obtaining full citizenship in South Carolina. Such speakers as Marian D. Wilkinson and Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown of Sedalia, North

\textsuperscript{34} Ethelyn Murray Parker to John H. McCray, 27 September 1947, John Henry McCray Papers, reel 14, SCL.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} South Carolina Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs to National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, 1950, National Association of Colored Women Convention, Minutes, Reports, and Greetings, reel 12.
Carolina, urged black women to assume leadership roles in African Americans’
fight for the ballot in South Carolina. They women also called upon adults,
proper conduct from young people, institutions, homes, schools, and churches to
do their part in promoting first class citizenship for African Americans.\(^{38}\)

Because some of its members were affiliated with the Progressive
Democratic Party, the SCFCWC supported its agenda and often invited John H.
McCray, to speak to their organizations to galvanize support among women for
voter registration. They further linked the push for voting rights to the
encouragement of leadership skills and civic responsibilities. Hazel O. Reese,
chairman of the program committee for the Orangeburg district of the state
federation of colored women’s clubs, invited McCray to speak citing “we are
desirous of having someone bring a message which would deal with civic affairs
which might be of interest to women . . .” McCray, like many black activist men,
appreciated black women’s enthusiasm for political and civic efforts and
acknowledged the clout of black women’s organizations like the SCFCWC.

“It is comforting to note that our women, 60 percent of the voting population, are
giving serious though to the role they should play in governmental affairs.

\(^{37}\) “Women’s Council Push Registration,” *Lighthouse and Informer*, 2 April 1949,
front page.

\(^{38}\) “Woman Leader Hits Adults, Churches,” *Lighthouse and Informer*, 11 May
1947. Charlotte Hawkins Brown founded the Palmer Memorial Institute for
African Americans in Guilford County, North Carolina. She led this school for
Hawkins Brown and Palmer Memorial Institute* (Chapel Hill: The University of
And it is even more heartening when so power and useful and potent an organization as the Federation is pushing the interest.”

Black women like Annie Bell Weston and Modjeska Montieth Simkins, who were members of the SCFCWC, were further able to use their membership and their positions as leaders in male-led organizations to promote their political agenda. In a 1947 speech entitled “Women Fail to Use Their Political Power,” Weston, secretary of the Progressive Democratic Party focused on women’s abilities to makes changes in South Carolina, arguing that not only did they have the power to obtain the vote for African Americans, but also to, “corrupt the practices of the courts, the sadistic tendencies of the law enforcement officer, the inequalities of the educational systems and the unwholesome recreation conditions.” These issues concerned black and white women’s organizations alike in the 1940s and Weston asserted that black women were best able to improve African American conditions generally, but only if they worked to obtain registration and voting rights for blacks in South Carolina.

Although Modjeska Simkins was a well-known Republican who had worked with the South Carolina Republican party, she maintained a close relationship with Progressive Democratic Party founders, John H. McCray and Osceola McKaine, planned the organization’s conventions, and wrote its statements and resolutions. As state secretary of the NAACP Simkins and other

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39 Hazel O. Reese to John H. McCray, 7 January 1947; John H. McCray to Hazel O. Reese, 10 January 1947, John Henry McCray Papers, reel 14, SCL.
40 “Women Fail To Use Political Power Says Secretary of Progressive Democratic Party,” John Henry McCray Papers, 1947, reel 14, SCL.
41 Woods Aba-Mecha, 204.
black women activists traveled to various black communities to advance the organization’s political agenda. In 1947 for example, Simkins spoke at a meeting of the Sumter NAACP where she urged African Americans to “put up an all out fight for discrimination” positing that “discrimination and segregation are the most poisonous of American life.” Another female member, Flosteen Tarleton spoke to the Sumter NAACP on the subject “America Is Willing to Try Democracy.”

Black women also promoted black voter participation through the Columbia Women’s Council. Modjeska Simkins’ involvement in male-led organizations like the NAACP and the Progressive Democratic party allowed her to fine-tune her leadership abilities. However, her involvement in the Columbia Women’s Council in particular illustrates the political astuteness and determination of educated, black middle-class women. Founded in 1947 under the leadership of Mrs. Horatio D. Nelson, another black activist from Columbia, the local political action organization aimed to make “Every Qualified Woman A Registered and Intelligent Voter.” Like other black women’s organizations, it was a “non-partisan, political action and civic uplift organization.”

\[42\] Sumter NAACP Minutes, 23 November 1947, Sumter NAACP Records, SCL.  
\[43\] Ibid., 25 July 1948.  
\[44\] Woods Aba-Mecha, 12.
One of the major projects of the group was to increase the number of African Americans registered to vote and to promote voter education as they discussed such issues as the City Manager Plan and the methods for registering and qualifying to vote properly.45

Between 1947 and 1949, the group’s activities included Citizenship Training projects for its members, mass gatherings for the dissemination of information on current civic and political problems, citizenship discussions with students from such historically black institutions of higher learning as Allen and Benedict Colleges, special city block drives to increase registration, and an annual social held in May for registered voters who offered proof of registration. Another of the CWC’s projects was a Political Action Mass Meeting, held in December 1949 at Bethel AME Church in Columbia to encourage pastors of churches in Columbia and Richland County to inform their congregations and the public at large about the upcoming election. The main speaker for the event, Reverend Maxie C. Collins, was introduced by Simkins and led a discussion entitled “South Carolina and the 1950 election” and a round table discussion on “Your Importance in the 1950 Elections.”

In 1950, the organization sponsored another political action rally at Benedict College that focused on problems in Columbia. CWC members addressed such specific issues as street and traffic lighting, lack of public restrooms and drinking facilities for African Americans, police protection, slum

clearance, inferior public facilities for blacks, the lack of paved streets in black areas of the city, and finally, integration in municipal government and service. Utilizing members’ connections, the CWC presented African American ex-Congressman Arthur W. Mitchell from Illinois at a program at Zion Baptist Church in 1951 to encourage more black participation in the political process.47

Although they did not collect membership dues, the CWC presented plays in order to raise money for its efforts. These performances stressed black women’s contributions as a force for change and a conduit for better race relations in South Carolina. In 1950, for example, they sponsored “Women’s Role in American Life” and “The Twentieth Century Women in 1951.” Simkins was an important part of both of these activities and chaired a discussion on “Women in Civic and Political Life.” Like many other women’s organizations, the CWC gave particular attention to the integral role that women played in politics, social, and racial reform.48

Like the CWC, after the war, the United Council of Church Women and the YWCA turned their attention to pressing civil rights issues such as voting rights for all Americans. In 1946 at a session in Washington, D.C., the United Council of Church Women voiced their opinion that “a free vote” should be guaranteed to all citizens of the United States. It is unclear whether women from

southern states were present. Another session of the annual meeting of the United Council of Churches in 1946, held in Grand Rapids, Michigan was devoted to the consideration of “the equal but separate tenets of some states and the segregation practices in states that have civil rights laws on their statute books.” Two recommendations came from this session that asserted the crucial role of women in changing unjust conditions nationally and locally: (1) That in states having civil rights laws, church women encourage the acceptance and practice of the laws. (2) That church women continue to bring pressure to bear on government powers against the undemocratic practices in the administration of city affairs it the Nation’s Capital.\(^{49}\) In this same year southern church women met at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina to protest the “glaring inadequacies of the so-called democratic practices in our southland.” In particular they protested the filibuster of Senator Theodore G. Bilbo of Mississippi, against the appropriation for the Fair Employment Practice Committee and the verbal attacks of Senator James O. Eastland, also of Mississippi, on blacks in the armed forces.\(^{50}\)

Like the national branch, UCCW-Columbia began to pay more attention to racial injustices and child welfare issues. Meetings embraced the theme, “My Community Begins With Me, Just as My World Begins at My Door”; yet, it appears that throughout most of the 1940s, its members pursued racial changes

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\(^{48}\) Wood Aba-Mecha, 353.

\(^{49}\) *New South*, vol. 1, no. 12 (December 1946): 15.

\(^{50}\) “Southern Church Women Protest Undemocratic Actions of Their Legislators,” *The Church Woman*, vol. 12 (January 1946): 37.
slowly and conservatively, if at all.\textsuperscript{51} But, at the very least, they discussed the topic in their meetings. In 1946, UCCW-Columbia members invited a minister to speak to the group who gave a lecture on the “Christian and Race.” The lecture gave the members information about the conditions between the races in South Carolina. The women ended the meeting with a devotional that focused on the theme of “Brotherhood,” although they did not truly practice it.\textsuperscript{52} Thus, as these women worked for improvements in South Carolina, they did so cautiously within the confines of United Church Women where their activism was less likely to be considered controversial. Although they supported missionary efforts and schools for African Americans, UCW in South Carolina avoided racial integration and other such issues until the 1950s and 60s.

In the post war years, southern black and white women increasingly worked together in efforts to promote racial justice. In June 1947, a gathering of more than 200 black and white southern women met at a “Conference on Human Rights and World Order” held in Atlanta, Georgia. The conference, a joint project of the Georgia Council of Church Women, the Women’s Society of Christian Service of the Methodist Church and the Southern Regional Council, brought together women from 13 southern states and represented 11 different religious denominations in addition to 55 other organizations and institutions. Many recommendations resulted from this meeting, providing evidence of the

\textsuperscript{51} Church Women United Minutes, 2 May 1947, November 1947, and 21 March 1944, History of the Woman’s Interdenominational Missionary Unions, South Carolina, 1915-1940, box 1, folder 1-2, Winthrop University Archives.
\textsuperscript{52} Church Women United in Columbia Minutes, 15 November 1946, Winthrop University Archives.
possibilities of interracial activism. Conference attendees offered recommendations for the “unalterable opposition to the ‘white primary’ because it is in direct violation of the Constitutions of the United States and the U.N., of the Social Creed for the Churches and the principles of the Christian religion.” They also advocated better training of public officers, particularly policemen, to insure fair treatment and the observance of civil rights for all persons and groups, especially blacks.

In a section entitled “Human Rights in Earning a Living,” conference attendees recommended that local organizations of church women conduct community surveys to ascertain the economic, educational, and recreational activities for all people in the local community; that they work for Federal aid to education and vocational education for all races and classes; and that they advocate better employment practices and work for civil rights as embodied in the F.E.P.C. (Fair Employment Practices Committee), and for the basic protection of domestic employees and others not covered by social security. This gathering of southern church women, which represented a cultural, racial, and economic cross-section of the South, reveals that there was no lack of complacency in the first years after World War II.

Southern white church women continued this attention to racial issues when delegates from twelve states attended a two-day meeting in Atlanta, Georgia in 1949, sponsored by the Southern Regional Council, a national organization

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formed to promote civil rights. At this meeting they vowed to go to registration
and voting centers with their cooks and maids in order to safeguard their right to
the franchise. They pledged to make voting “legally and actually safe for all,” as
well as preaching the belief that “all men, white and Negro, are entitled to equal
justice.”

Dorothy Tilly, a prominent Methodist church woman, member of
Truman’s President’s Committee on Civil Rights, and field secretary for the
Southern Regional Council played a key role in this endeavor. In 1949, she
issued “An Urgent Call At An Urgent Hour to Women Leaders of the South”
calling for a meeting of women’s church groups and the YWCA to meet in
Atlanta, Georgia. Tilly had long been involved in reform activities, first, as a
member of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching
and later as charter member of the Southern Regional Council. She believed that
integration was inevitable and that southern churchwomen should play prominent
roles in the process. Eleanor Roosevelt was also a conference participant and
addressed the audience about the recent U.N. Declaration of Human Rights and its
relationship to local communities.

Although conference attendees did not expect pronouncements or
resolutions to come from the meeting, they did adopt a plan of action for which

54 “Southern Women Pledge Voting Help to Aides,” Lighthouse and Informer, 17
September 1949, front page; Nina Mjakij ed., Men and Women Adrift: The
YMCA and the YWCA in the City (New York: New York University Press,
1997), 161.
55 David R. Goldfield, Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern
Culture, 1940 to the Present (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press,
1990), 51.

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they held a discussion entitled “What Can the Press, the School, the Church, and Women’s Organizations Do to Make for Better Human Relations?” Those in attendance were presidents of state Councils of Church Women. Mrs. C.C. Whithington of Greenville, South Carolina attended this meeting where she participated in planning “A Program of Action” to implement changes in their communities. Among the most important elements of this planning was their assertion that women take initiative to examine race relations and cooperate with local authorities to repel racial violence in their respective communities.

Churchwomen in Atlanta, led by Tilly, formed a “Fellowship of the Concerned” and pledged to “enlist the aid of others in putting the following program of action into effect in our communities.” They outlined church women’s commitment to change in the south, to ensuring that “opportunity for registration and voting is legally and actually secure for all.” They advocated affiliating with other groups working for the same objectives. And they supported urging local schools “to cooperate in using existing materials to build better human relations,” “to affirm in personal relations and religious and civic work our conviction of the dignity of all human beings and the ideal of equal justice,” and to conduct a “Home Town Self-Survey” to force their respective communities to examine race relations. The Fellowship also sponsored interracial meetings to break down barriers between women and promote racial understanding. They also expressed concern about better law enforcement and the appointment of African American policemen.
Furthermore, Eleanor Roosevelt and Dorothy Tilly urged southern church women to visit courts and use their influence in the interest of equal justice.\footnote{\textit{Southern Church Women Draft Action Program," New South, vol. 4, no. 9 (September 1949): 2-3; Goldfield, 51.}}

The agendas of white women’s organizations like the YWCA and United Church Women were considerably more conservative than those of black women. As was the case in nationally, black and white women were deeply involved in religious based organizations like the YWCA and used the organization and its Christian convictions to justify and facilitate racial activism. Because the organization embraced women from different social, economic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, black women and girls in particular were drawn to community YWCAs.

In southern states, black women were often considered subordinates in local YWCA affairs. Black women’s experiences in local branches in the state were overshadowed by white members’ prejudices as they held majority status. Black women were forced to form separate branches, but were still subjected to regulation from the Central (white) YWCA. For the most part, interracial activism was limited to black and white women on staff or in leadership positions. This was also the case in South Carolina.

Just as the Truman administration’s stand on civil rights stirred some southern white liberals to activism, the National YWCA pressured South Carolina Ys to take action on racial injustices. After authorizing a commission to study interracial policies and practices in community YWCA’s in 1940, the National
YWCA passed an Interracial Charter in 1946, mandating that the “implications of
the YWCA purpose be recognized as involving the inclusion of Negro women
and girls in the mainstream of Association life, and that such inclusion be adopted
as a conscious goal.” Consequently, black women began to demand the end of
second-class status local YWCAs. The national YWCA went on record against
separate chapters for white and Negro women and pledged its efforts to the
integration of Negroes into the full program of the Association. This effort was
not forthcoming in most South Carolina YWCA branches.

The Greenville, Columbia, and Charleston branches of the YWCA,
provide examples of the possibilities and limits of racial and interracial activism
on the local level in the late 1940s and 1950s. Incorporated in 1917, the
Greenville YWCA made the strongest efforts to improve conditions for African
Americans and women in South Carolina. In 1929 the Central YWCA, was
propelled by Christian doctrine to question the “race problem” in South
Carolina. These efforts expanded in subsequent decades, particularly in the late
1940s.

57 Mary S. Sims, The YWCA: An Unfolding Purpose (New York: Woman’s
and Trends in Race Relations, vol. 4, no. 5 (December 1946): 140.
59 “Annual Report for 1929, Greenville YWCA, box 1, folder 1. See also
“Southern Town Works on Plan to Aid Negroes,” New York Herald Tribune,
American, 5 May 1950 and 19 May 1950; “Negro Survey To Be Presented At
Meeting May 29,” and “Straw in the South Wind: Negroes Begin to Share Larger
Civic Role,” Christian Science Monitor, 10 November 1950, Greenville YWCA,
box 1, folder 28, SCL.
Greenville county was heralded by many as more progressive than other South Carolina counties. Located in northwest South Carolina where slaveholding never flourished, Greenville’s percentage of African Americans was low compared to other parts of the state, but its citizens could not boast of better race relations than existed in Charleston or Columbia. One African American who had worked throughout the South described it as a “cracker” town.  

Olive H. Walser of the national board, found this to be the case when she visited Greenville in 1946. Although Walser was sensitive to community mores, she recorded that Greenville was “more democratic than many in this area.” She also noted that while Greenville YWCA members were often annoyed by local business leaders’ conservatism, they were generally able to “count on a good deal of cooperation and common sense” when dealing with race relations.  

Although the white Greenville YWCA had been established some thirty-one years earlier, it was not until 1948 that black women, influenced by National YWCA’s mandate for integrated local YWCAs, approached the white YWCA and asked it to set up a “Y” branch for the black community. Before this point, black women had assisted the black community in Greenville through the Phyllis Wheatley Community Center which housed the negro branch of the Greenville County Public Library. Phyllis Wheatley members were also hesitant to join

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61 Visitation Report, Greenville, South Carolina, 5-6 November 1946, National Board of the YWCA Records, Series IV, A, reel 213.2, SSC
62 Visitation Report, Greenville, South Carolina, 4 March 1946, National Board of the YWCA Records, Series IV, A, reel 213.2, SSC; Joseph Turpin Drake, “The
forces with white women. When teenage girls from the black community asked
for Girl Reserve club work, the Central YWCA was happy to oblige them.
However, Phyllis Wheatley members objected because they did not trust white
members of the Central YWCA and did not want it or any other organization, for
that matter, to draw off its constituency.63

As part of an effort to improve conditions for blacks in Greenville County,
the white branch turned to the Greenville Community Council for advice on the
matter. The result was a county-wide survey on the conditions of Negro citizens
in Greenville County in 1949.64 Representatives from both races put in over ten
months of work into the survey. Mrs. C.C. Withington who would later become
president of the South Carolina Council of Church Women led the committee.65

Some results of the survey were recommendations for the admission of
Negro doctors to practice in Greenville General Hospital and the establishment of
a city park and state park for blacks (known as Pleasant Ridge State Park for
Negroes). The YWCA also set up a typing course for African American girls
when no business training was available for them and with the help of the
Kiwanis Club established a day camp for Negro children.66

This self-contained, local survey also had larger implications for race
relations in South Carolina. Black and white South Carolinians recognized the

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63 Ibid.
64 New South, vol. 5, nos. 4 and 5 (June 1950): 1.
benefit of interracial cooperation as a conduit for community improvement.
According to one committee member, “the best thing about the survey was that it
got people together. We didn’t know each other well enough. Now we do.
Meeting and working together—not as people of two races, but as citizens with a
common purpose—has been a release and a relief.”

Greenville YWCA members clearly wanted to improve race relations in
South Carolina. When Mrs. E.A. Mudge, YWCA national board member, visited
Greenville and she asked what YWCA members saw as its greatest need, they
responded “More courage in moving forward in race relations.”
Greenville
YWCA members also voiced concern about other political and social issues
facing the black community, such as the failure of city council to appoint Negro
policemen and the drowning of a man at the Pleasant Ridge State Park for
Negroes. This prompted them to send a letter to then Governor James Byrnes
explaining the inadequacy of its facilities and potential funds for improvement.
The governor responded that nothing could be done to procure more funds for the
park. The Greenville YWCA heralded the achievements of African Americans
and women, supporting Reverend W. R. Martin, a Negro candidate for school
trustee and Mrs. Girard C. Rippy, candidate for alderman and the first woman to
ever run for office in the Greenville City Council.69

68 Report of Local Visit By National Board Member, March 1949, Greenville,
South Carolina, National Board YWCA Records, Series IV, A, reel 213.2, SSC.
69 Public Affairs Committee, Greenville YWCA, 4 June 1953 and 3 September
1953, Greenville YWCA Records, box 1, folder 18, SCL.
Though more progressive on racial issues than some other South Carolina Y’s the Greenville YWCA approached the topic cautiously. Its members worked to improve conditions for African Americans but not to integrate them into the larger society. Although they did not mention them specifically in their minutes Greenville YWCA members were aware of the changes taking place nationally. In November 1953, members Mary Slattery and Mrs. Joseph H. Cook attended a meeting sponsored by the Southern Regional Council and the Fellowship of the Concerned in Atlanta, Georgia, which dealt with the possibilities for educating the public concerning the anti-segregation suits pending before the U.S. Supreme Court. The consensus of the meeting was that “all interested persons should do everything possible to help prepare the people of the South for a Court decision outlawing segregation in the public schools.” Members of the Greenville YWCA had been discussing this issue since September and December 1953 when rough drafts of two letters and materials dealing with segregation were prepared by the secretary and forwarded to Greenville county ministers and all members of the Greenville county delegation.\(^7\)

The Columbia YWCA also had a pattern of interracial activism that dated from the early 1940s. Although the interracial committee, also known as the Public Affairs committee, had always existed, it often not did not have a structured program or course of action. However, its meetings always included reports from the Phyllis Wheatley Branch. White members also acknowledged

\(^7\) Public Affairs Committee Minutes, Greenville YWCA, 3 September 1953, 5 November 1953, and 3 December 1953, box 1, folder 18, SCL.
black women as members of the larger Columbia YWCA, and unlike other central Y’s, Columbia YWCA members acknowledged the autonomy of black women members of the Phyllis Wheatley branch. By 1950, the Branch had a separate budget and its own paid employed and volunteer leadership. It also sponsored its own adult night school, which opened in 1949, offering courses in reading, writing, history, arithmetic, geography, letter writing, parliamentary procedures, health, and art. By 1953, the Central YWCA and the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA, were moving toward becoming one association. According to a 1952-1953 report to the National Board of the Young Women’s Christian Association, the board of directors of the Columbia YWCA voted to invite representatives from Phyllis Wheatley to attend board meetings resulting in a “close and cooperative relationship.” Elizabeth G. Ledeen, executive director asserted, “we are now moving in the direction of an integrated Association.” Unlike the white leadership of the Charleston YWCA, Ledeen was much more hopeful about the outcome of desegregation: “The process of integration is beginning and it is our hope that we will move steadily in that direction though no doubt it will be a gradual process.”

As a result of Elizabeth Waring’s incendiary speech to the Coming Street YWCA, race relations were not only tense in the Charleston YWCA, but

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71 “Young Women’s Christian Association 36th Annual Membership Meetings,” 9 February 1950, Columbia YWCA Records, box 3, folder 72, SCL.  
72 “Narrative Report for the Program Year, 1952-1953, to the National Board of the Young Women’s Christian Association,” Columbia YWCA Records, box 3, folder 77, 11, SCL. Eight years before, Phyllis Wheatley members stopped attending board meetings because they were never sent notices. Elizabeth G.
throughout Charleston generally. Attempts for interracial activism came to a screeching halt. When Kathleen Carpenter of the National YWCA visited the city in March 1950, she reported that the Charleston Association “feels very strongly now that further progress inter racially will have to wait a period of time until the Waring incident has blown over.”

When Pauline R. Schaedler of the National YWCA visited the Charleston in 1950, she noted that like many other southern Associations, the Charleston YWCA continued to operate as two separate organizations. However, during her visit, she pointed out how much more effectively and successful the Charleston YWCA could become if it operated as a “total Association.”

By 1954, the Charleston YWCA showed some interest in examining racial tensions in South Carolina when it invited Mrs. F.P. Byrd, who led a discussion on “Creating a Climate for Good Human Relations through the YWCA.” The importance that members of the Coming Street YWCA gave to integrated meetings was demonstrated in their minutes that meticulously reported whether or not YWCA events were integrated. After the 1954 meeting at which Mrs. F.P. Byrd spoke, the secretary noted “black and white women in attendance.” Although many of the Charleston YWCA’s events were not integrated, black members planned events with white members in mind. In 1955 for example, Mrs. Tracy, chairman of the Hospitality committee for the Coming Street YWCA, who

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Ledeen claimed this was not a deliberate policy, it just “happened.” It was not until 1950-51 that black women were invited to meetings.  
73 Kathleen Carpenter, Visitation Report, 22-25 March 1950, Charleston, South Carolina, reel 213.2, SSC.
was planning a flower show for September or October, expressed “they are hoping to make it interracial.”\textsuperscript{75} Despite the eagerness of some black women to integrate YWCA activities, such goals would not be realized until the 1960s.

In South Carolina during the years before the \textit{Brown v. Board of Education} Supreme Court decision, the issue of racial violence receded, but action on voting rights intensified. After \textit{Elmore v. Rice} black organizations rallied to the cause of voting rights leaning heavily on the capabilities of women and women’s organizations to bring change with the least amount of radicalism and retaliation. Such black women’s organizations as the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, the Columbia Women’s Council, and female leadership in the male-led South Carolina NAACP evidenced a consistent pattern of racial activism and with the momentum of the civil rights movement, they increased their efforts for racial change.

The \textit{pre-Brown} era also saw the formation of organizations, some interracial in nature and others whose national charters mandated integration but in reality demonstrated little of this at the local level. While black and white women in the Greenville and Columbia YWCA worked for changes in black communities and attempted to move closer to becoming one Association, the Charleston YWCA found any discussion of racial and interracial activism severely limited after Elizabeth Waring’s speech in 1950.

\textsuperscript{74} Pauline R. Schaedler, Visitation Report, 30, 31, March, 1 April 1950, Charleston, South Carolina, National YWCA Records, reel 213.2, SSC. \textsuperscript{75} Charleston YWCA Records, Coming Street Branch, Charleston, South Carolina, 1955.
United Church Women was still unable to achieve real racial integration to solve local ills but they too paid more attention to racial injustices than before.

While some individual black and white women formed interracial alliances and even friendships that facilitated racial understanding, where they had been nonexistent before, the tinge of paternalism and in some cases disillusionment, continually rendered such relationships fraught with tension. But in the end, all of these women and their organizations had similar goals, to comprehend and foster racial change in South Carolina. The impact of this change on its citizens would not be truly evident until the later part of the 1950s and the 1960s.
CHAPTER 3

“HOW SHALL I SING THE LORD’S SONG?”: REACTIONS TO BROWN v. BOARD OF EDUCATION IN 1950s SOUTH CAROLINA

We came from seventeen states, represented many denominations, and faced multiple problems. But one question drew us close together: How shall I sing the Lord’s song? Our days of working and thinking together helped to answer that burning question. We learned that while problems may vary in degrees in different states, all of us face similar situations. New courage is found in the knowledge that one is not alone. We who carry the responsibility of leadership in these crucial days, found the power which flows from such companionship...1

Caroline Lu Gillespie of South Carolina relayed these sentiments after attending a conference of representatives of the Christian Social Relations Departments of United Church Women from southern, border and midwestern states in Atlanta, Georgia on 21 June 1954. The church women had met to discuss the implications of the Brown v. Board of Education decision which the Supreme Court had issued on 17 May 1954. United Church Women members throughout the South and South Carolina were faced with the task of not only dealing with school desegregation but also fighting the state’s pervasive racial discrimination. The racial work of southern white women found much of its inspiration from religion as Gillespie made clear when she asked, “How shall I

1 “Echos from the Atlanta Conference,” The Church Woman (October 1954): 36-37. The General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey (hereafter cited as GCAHUMC).
sing the Lord’s song?” She recognized that similar problems concerned white women in other southern states and emphasized the “courage” of those who had found the “power” to pursue changes throughout the South.

Whites and blacks throughout the South found themselves struggling to find the “courage” to understand the implications of the Supreme Court decision. However, it further provided women’s organizations with opportunities to assume more active roles in improving race relations and providing equal educational access throughout South Carolina. Although many women’s organizations and individual women alike suffered personally for their activism and in some cases even withdrew from it, those who persevered were determined to use the significance of the decision to bring change in the Palmetto State.

South Carolina had a pivotal role in the school desegregation case which began as a part of Briggs v. Elliott. In 1947, 8,906 children (6,531 black; 2,375 white) were being educated in Clarendon County schools. In 1951, almost three-quarters of the county and school population was black, yet the all-white school board allocated more than 58 percent of public school funds to white schools. Furthermore, thirty buses transported white school children who needed rides; there were no buses for black school children. When a group of concerned black residents petitioned the school board for buses to transport their children, the chairman of the school board replied: “We ain’t got not money to buy a bus for your nigger children.” But of course, there was always money available for buses
for white children.\textsuperscript{2} Reverend Joseph A. DeLaine, an AME pastor and
schoolteacher, encouraged black residents of Clarendon District 26 school district
to speak up for themselves and their children. In 1948 one of those parents filed
suit to obtain school buses, which according to the \textit{Plessy v. Ferguson} doctrine of
“separate but equal,” should have been provided. The suit was dismissed on a
technicality and the plaintiff found that he could not obtain credit at any store in
the county.\textsuperscript{3}

In 1949, DeLaine met with Thurgood Marshall and other NAACP officials
in Columbia to decide on another course of action. They began to circulate a
petition for twenty names to go to court. On 20 December 1950, Harry Briggs, a
thirty-four year old navy veteran with five children, and twenty-four other
Clarendon County residents who had signed the petition filed suit against the
Summerton School District.

Harry Briggs and his family suffered greatly for their part in this case. His
wife Liza Briggs, worked as a chambermaid at a Clarendon County motel and was
pressured to take her name off the petition or the motel would not be able to
obtain supplies. Her name was not on the petition, but her husband’s was and she
was informed to tell him to remove it. Liza Briggs refused, citing her husband’s
ability to decide to remove his own name if he so chose. The motel gave her a

\textsuperscript{2} Richard Kluger, \textit{Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education}
\textsuperscript{3} Walter J. Edgar, \textit{South Carolina: A History} (Columbia: University of South
week’s notice and then terminated her employment.\footnote{Kluger, 23.} When Harry Briggs’ credit was cut off at Summerton banks, he went to a bank in Sumter, some twenty-three miles north until officials discovered who he was and called in his loan.\footnote{Ibid., 24.}

*Briggs v. Elliott* was the first legal challenge to school segregation to stem from the twentieth-century South. The case came to federal trial in 1951 in Charleston where the state’s legal counsel, Robert M. Figg admitted that black and white schools were unequal. However, he also argued that the state had just begun a $124 million program to create a school system that was equal and separate. The court ruled 2-1 against the plaintiffs who then appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.\footnote{Edgar, 522.} This case and the four others that joined it, became Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. Its outcome would forever change America.\footnote{Kluger, 26.}

When the Supreme Court decision was handed down in 1954, it was met with varied reactions throughout the nation and the South. Although in Washington, DC, President Eisenhower had outlawed segregation in the District of Columbia’s public schools by executive order, he privately felt that the *Brown* decision had set back progress in the South by at least fifteen years.\footnote{David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940 to the Present* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 78, 87.}
Furthermore, many liberal whites who had been sympathetic to African Americans’ call for justice perceived forced integration as a threat to white identity and summarily withdrew their support.

In South Carolina, an atmosphere of “shock, disbelief, anger, rage” reigned as whites were confronted with the Brown decision. Not long after, a “Committee of 52,” which included businessmen, authors, clergy, and politicians, published a declaration supporting separate schools to preserve “public education and domestic tranquillity.” Members of this same organization called on state officials to “interpose the sovereignty of the State of South Carolina between Federal Courts and local school officials.” They vowed to resist the “clear and present danger” to state sovereignty “without resort to physical strife, but without surrender of our position.” They also claimed that the Supreme Court relied “not upon the body of established American law, but upon the dubious conclusions of sociologists and psychologists whose number includes persons tainted with Communism” and that pressure from NAACP and other “self-serving organizations” has “lowered the will of politicians and the public generally to resist encroachments upon the sovereign rights of states.” To the members of this organization, such pressure endangered “the public school system of South Carolina and the harmonious relationship between the white and Negro races.”

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9 Edgar, 524.
The extent of shock in South Carolina over the decision also led to the emergence of white supremacist groups throughout the state and political and economic pressure on blacks who participated in cases or signed petitions. ¹¹

As white Citizen’s Councils formed throughout state, the state association held a rally at Township Auditorium in Columbia in 1956. Among the featured speakers were former state governor Olin Johnston, J. Strom Thrumond, U.S. Senator from South Carolina, who had run for president on the Dixiecrat ticket in 1948, and Mississippi’s James O. Eastland, who would later call for an investigation of Supreme Court justices who had been “influenced” by Communist doctrine. The White Citizen’s Council organized its first branch in Elloree in Orangeburg, South Carolina in early August 1955, following a petition by African Americans for school integration. Indeed, its goal was to destroy “the financial backbone of the blacks in the community.” This included loss of jobs, evictions from farms, withholding personal credit, and denying home mortgages and installment loans. ¹²

Many white women responded in kind to the Brown decision. Not all religious women heard the scripture in the same way that Caroline Gillespie did. Some of them also associated civil rights activism with “Godless” communism. For example, in 1955, Protestant Episcopal women’s auxiliaries throughout the state approved a resolution upholding segregation in the state’s public schools.

¹¹ Edgar, 527. He notes that in Clarendon County, Harry and Liza Briggs lost their jobs, as did Joseph DeLaine and anyone associated with him.
Invoking communism as a cause, they declared that “integration is a plan of the Communist party…communism acknowledges no God except communism…It is our duty to see that those in high offices in our government are not influenced by Communist doctrine…”\(^\text{13}\) Thus, they saw integration as many whites did, as a threat to “national security” and to religion.

Individual white women also felt southern desegregation efforts were subversive. Cornelia Dabney Tucker of Charleston, a militant lobbyist for women’s suffrage who had also fought against subversive influences in school textbooks, was particularly critical of the Supreme Court school decision. She saw it as forced racial amalgamation by federal law and urged support of Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi in his call for a Senate investigation of the “modern scientific authority” upon which the original ruling was based.\(^\text{14}\) Tucker later sent letters to state and national commanders of the American Legion claiming that the “desegregation edict of the Supreme Court of the United States has become a matter of national security.” In the letter she also enclosed marked copies of a recent speech in the U.S. Senate by Senator Eastland, which included assertions that some of the authorities cited by the Supreme Court had socialistic backgrounds.\(^\text{15}\) Tucker circulated a petition calling on South Carolina senators to investigate these authorities, obtaining 400 names and maintaining that she was doing this “because I hope it will not become necessary to close our schools,

\(^\text{14}\) “Mrs. Tucker Renews Fight For Segregation In Schools,” *The News and Courier*, Charleston, SC, 1 June 1955, 5-A.
which are essential to the education of both white and black children.”\textsuperscript{16} Finally, Tucker wrote to President Dwight D. Eisenhower urging support of Senator Eastland and describing her purpose as “an earnest endeavor to call to the attention of the nation the Communist angle” of the Supreme Court decision.\textsuperscript{17}

Although their records are sparse, there are hints that reveal the feelings of secular white women’s organizations such as the South Carolina Council for the Common Good (SCCCG) regarding the course of events after the Supreme Court case. Its members had always dealt with the issue of race and change in South Carolina tacitly. In 1951 the program proposals for the annual meeting listed interracial problems under social studies workshops. Unfortunately no information is available to substantiate the workshop’s success.\textsuperscript{18} Yet, minutes from a 25 September 1956 meeting illustrate that the organization supported equal if separate educational opportunity for all children in the state of South Carolina. They also supported federal aid to education and libraries and stressed that they would do so “Only with Maximum Local Control,” clearly reifying state and local mores.

\textsuperscript{16} “Petition Now Has About 400 Names,” The News and Courier, Charleston, SC, 7 June 1955, 9-B.
\textsuperscript{17} “Mrs. Tucker Writes To Ike,” The News and Courier, Charleston, SC, 29 June 1955, 12-A.
\textsuperscript{18} Program Proposals for Annual Meeting of South Carolina Women’s Council for the Common Good, 6 October 1951, box 24, folder 640, SCCHR.
Thus it was not surprising that the SCCCG set up a committee for “Inter-Racial Problems,” although at several meetings in the early 1960s, the committee chairman failed to present a report on its findings in the community. 19

South Carolina’s political leadership staunchly supported segregated school systems. Governor James F. Byrnes spoke for many white South Carolinians in 1951 when he asserted, “We will, if it is possible live within the law, preserve the public school system, and at the same time maintain segregation. If that is not possible, reluctantly we will abandon the public school system. To do that would be choosing the lesser of the two great evils.” In fact, in the same year, legislation sponsored by Byrnes authorized the selling or leasing of public school facilities to private individuals or groups in the event that segregation was ordered to an end. 20 After he became governor of South Carolina in 1950, Byrnes received a legislative sanction for an initial $75 million dollar bond issue, and a 3 percent sales tax to finance a broad school construction program designed to equalize Negro-white physical facilities in public education in an attempt to forestall integration. 21

Segregation’s strict maintenance in South Carolina was also evident by the way the state’s politicians managed to avoid school integration from 1956 to 1963. Governor James Byrnes for example, had previously supported

controversial New Deal legislation in South Carolina and had established himself as a political moderate in doing so. He did not, however, support the *Brown* decision and upon leaving office in 1955 urged white South Carolinians to massive resistance.\(^{22}\) Legal barriers erected to prevent school integration in South Carolina were the longest standing of any southern state.\(^{23}\) No African American student was enrolled in a white public school until nine years after the *Brown* decision, although black parents in Charleston initiated an effort to enroll their children in District No. 20 (downtown Charleston) schools in the 1950s. Most of the petitioners were federal employees, independent business people, ministers, and unionized dockworkers who did not have to fear white economic reprisals. School officials refused to offer transfer requests for almost a year. The *Post and Courier* published the petitioners’ names, using information as intimidation. After this affront the numbers of African American parents attempting to secure entry into all-white schools for their children decreased.\(^{24}\) Indeed, South Carolina schools would not integrate until Harvey Gantt was admitted to Clemson University in 1963.

As whites mounted massive resistance, African Americans in South Carolina worked to ameliorate the oppressive conditions in which many blacks found themselves after the *Brown* decision. As the South Carolina Conference of

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\(^{22}\) Edgar, 524.

the NAACP counteracted the Citizens Council’s efforts to ruin black citizens, black women like Modjeska Simkins were at the forefront as she participated in relief work in Elloree and Clarendon County. In fact, Simkins had worked closely with Reverend DeLaine to prepare the statement used as the foundation for *Briggs v. Elliott.*

Because blacks in Elloree and Clarendon counties did not have access to adequate financial resources and were the victims of Citizen’s Councils’ economic reprisals after the *Brown* decision, Simkins and her brother Henry Dobbins Monteith, president of the Victory Savings Bank, the only black owned and operated bank in South Carolina, helped them secure financial support. This support included helping qualified blacks receive bank loans. Simkins did much more than just help African Americans qualify for loans however. She also secured donations from blacks from outside of South Carolina. In 1955, an appeal to outside sources in *Jet* magazine brought donations from across the country as well as abroad. In particular, Simkins received funds from individual women and women’s organizations. A December 1955 letter from Loreice Hackney, president of the Young Women’s Civic League of Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City, of which Adam Clayton Powell was minister, galvanized the community to help blacks facing white economic sanctions and boycotts.

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24 Millicent Ellison Brown, “Civil Rights Activism in Charleston, South Carolina, 1940-1970” (Ph.D., diss., Florida State University, 1997), 78.
25 Edgar, 522.
26 Woods Aba-Mecha, 238.
27 Ibid., 239.
This is to invite you to bring greetings to a City-Wide Non-Sectarian, Non Partisan Mass Meeting to solicit canned goods and money for those Negro people in Clarendon County, South Carolina and Mississippi who are victims of economic sanctions and boycotts. The meeting is being spearheaded by the Young Women’s Civic League of this Church and will be held in the Church auditorium on Tuesday evening, December 13th at 8:30 p.m.

Monies and food will be equally divided and turned over to a Special Relief Fund set up by the NAACP for South Carolina, and a similar fund set up by Dr. T.R.M. Howard of Mound Bayou, for Mississippi.28

This was not an isolated incident as women from across the country wrote informing the national and South Carolina NAACP of programs forming to help blacks in Clarendon County. For example, letters from a “club of St. Louis women, young wives of business and professional men” and the “Rosemont Home Improvement Association” of Baltimore, Maryland eagerly asserted their support.29

In the aftermath of the Supreme Court decision, black women in South Carolina seized the opportunity to increase their efforts for first class citizenship for African Americans. Between 1953 and 1961, Myles Horton’s Highlander Folk School developed a Citizenship Education Program (CEP) on the Sea Islands of South Carolina. Founded in 1932 in Monteagle, Tennessee, Highlander served as a regional model for progressive education and politics. Interracial in nature and closely associated with the civil rights movement, in the 1950s and 1960s,

28 Loreice Hackney, President, Young Women’s Civic League to Dr. Channing Tobias, 1 December 1955, Papers of the NAACP, Part 8, Reel 28, Reprisals, 1940-1955.
29 Letter from Margaret Bush Wilson to Reverend J. M. Hinton, president of the South Carolina NAACP, 23 November 1955 and Letter from Carol E. Haysbert of the Rosemont Home Improvement Association to Roy Wilkins, executive
Highlander hosted blacks and whites who studied, worked, and played together. Many were able to overcome their racism by associating with teachers and students from other races and religions.\textsuperscript{30} And, black women in South Carolina were an important part of this effort as individuals such as Septima Clark and Bernice Robinson developed literacy classes within the Citizenship Schools in 1957.\textsuperscript{31}

Septima Clark, born in 1898 in Charleston, was the daughter of a former slave and a mother who had been born “free issue” in Haiti where she had been taught to read and write. A graduate of the Avery Normal Institute in Charleston, Clark spent many years teaching in the public schools of South Carolina. It was while she was at Avery that she began to work for racial freedom and justice. For example, in 1919 she collected over twenty thousand signatures on a petition to have black teachers hired by the Charleston County School District. As a member of the NAACP, Clark worked to make black teachers’ salaries equal to whites with comparable qualifications. When the state required that South Carolina teachers take a national teacher’s examination, she took the test and passed with an “A.” Clark’s involvement in the Highlander Folk School transferred over to the Citizenship Schools where she helped to curb illiteracy among blacks on the

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South Carolina Sea Islands. Her cousin Bernice Robinson, a licensed beautician and seamstress, was the first volunteer teacher at the Citizenship School although she was initially hesitant to do so. Born in 1914 in Charleston, Robinson graduated from high school in New York and was recruited by Clark to participate in school workshops after which they opened the first Citizenship school in 1957. She often taught using newspaper ads from grocery stores to provide arithmetic problems. In February 1957, under Robinson’s tutelage, the students, many of whom were over sixty years old, were awarded certificates from the Johns Island Literacy School. This resulted in requests for additional literacy schools from nearby islands.

With a literacy program to help adults on John’s Island become responsible citizens, the program also accelerated the NAACP’s voter registration drive there and throughout Charleston County. Black women and their organizations had been working for voter registration for African Americans since the 1940s. By meeting two evenings week, previously unqualified women and men were prepared to register as voters and to cope with community problems in approximately three months. Using volunteer teachers and minimal equipment, the program was developed for about the cost of eight dollars per person. The citizenship school is a testimony of the activism of black women in the South

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(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 93. Although well known, Highland has received little attention in civil rights narratives.
32 Idella Bodie, South Carolina Women (Orangeburg: Sandlapper Publisher, Inc.), 118-121; Sims, Profiles of African American Females in the Low Country of South Carolina, 19.
33 Highlander Reports (1 October 1947-30 September 1958), box 32, folder 854, SCCHR.
Carolina lowcountry who recognized the necessity of literacy for equal citizenship. Such black women as Alice Wine memorized sections of the Constitution so she could register to vote and became a clerk in the cooperative general store run by the school. Elizabeth Jenkins, a Burke High School librarian, joined the staff in 1955, and Mary Lee Davis, a beautician from North Charleston offered her shop for adult literacy classes. These individuals were an integral part of the progress of the Citizenship Schools.\footnote{Millicent E. Brown, “Civil Rights Activism in Charleston, South Carolina, 1940-1970” (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1997), 122, 123.} Admittedly, there is a dearth of information and more investigation needs to be done on the many unknown characters in the civil rights narrative in lowcountry South Carolina. Using Clark and Robinson and other black women as examples however continually lends credence to the tenacity of black women’s activism and leadership at the local level in the state.

In contrast to women like Clark and Robinson economic reprisals caused many to withdraw their support from civil rights organizations like the NAACP. Rosa Brockington, for example, a practical nurse in Lake City, South Carolina renounced the association after admitting she was once a member and after discovering what she claimed were the “real motives” of the organization:

I formerly was a member of that organization but neither I or any of my children are at present associated in any way with that group or association. I have only recently become aware of the real motives and aims of the NAACP, the complete integration of the races. I do not agree with their program of forcing inter-mixture of white and colored children in the public schools. I have complete faith in the colored race and the integrity of my race and am not ashamed to associate with them. Had I
realized what the true motives of the NAACP were, I would have never become affiliated with them.\textsuperscript{35}

Brockington further asserted that she had spoken her true feelings on the matter and had not been coerced in any way.\textsuperscript{36}

When some African Americans disavowed any association with the NAACP, they did so much to the glee of white politicians. Indeed, Senator J. Strom Thurmond gloating over these events and the economic reprisals some African Americans faced, asserted that he was “glad to see a great many Negro people beginning to recognize that they are being misled and are removing their names from petitions asking for integration in schools.” Thurmond led the fight against the \textit{Brown} decision. In March 1956 he authored a “Declaration of Southern Principles” attacking the Supreme Court. When the document was published, 19 of 22 southern senators and 82 of 106 representatives had signed it. Thurmond later filibustered for a record 24 hours and 18 minutes in an unsuccessful attempt to block the passage of civil rights legislation.\textsuperscript{37}

While national and local black organizations throughout the South were attacked for their activism, in 1955 at least three state legislatures considered bills to ban public employees from membership in the NAACP. South Carolina’s governor, George Timmerman, supported segregation stating that it was the “will of the people of South Carolina to continue to provide good, equal and separate

\textsuperscript{35} “Negro Woman Renounces The NAACP,” \textit{The News and Courier}, Charleston, SC, 14 September 1955, 1-B.
\textsuperscript{36} “Ex-Member Denounces NAACP; Denies Coercion,” \textit{The Palmetto Leader}, Columbia, SC, 1 October 1955.
\textsuperscript{37} Edgar, 527-8.
Determined to maintain the racial status quo in South Carolina, in 1956 he signed the act barring NAACP members from state, county, or municipal public employment. Approximately 7,300 African American teachers were affected by the new law, which allowed persons dismissed for NAACP membership four months to petition a state circuit court for a hearing.\(^39\) The law was later repealed under threat of adverse court action and black teachers’ appeals to the Supreme Court that the law was invalid.\(^40\) Timmerman also pressured local black colleges such as South Carolina State College in Orangeburg, and Allen University and Benedict College, both in Columbia, to purge faculty members who supported desegregation.\(^41\) When Allen failed to comply, Timmerman got the State Department of Education to withdraw accreditation for their education program. However, this only gave African American students a reason to apply to the educational program at the University of South Carolina.\(^42\)

NAACP membership had a particularly negative effect on Septima P. Clark.\(^43\) Some blacks and most whites resented her interracial activities because

\(^38\)“Thurmond Makes Comments On State’s Racial Situation,” and “Governor Says Segregation Is Will of People,” The News and Courier, Charleston, SC, 15 September 1955, 1-B.
\(^41\)Edgar, 528.
\(^42\)Ibid.
\(^43\)“Bill Would Ban Employees From The NAACP,” The News and Courier, Charleston, S.C. 26 August, 1955, 1-B.
they were too aggressive.⁴⁴ Because of this and her invitation to an integrationist to speak at a PTA meeting, she lost her job in the Charleston County School System and her teaching contract was canceled in 1956. Clark not only lost her job, but also her retirement pension from the South Carolina’s public school system after teaching in it for nearly four decades. When she signed her name to 726 letters that were sent to black teachers urging that they protest the law, only 26 answered. Clark was fifty-eight years old when she was fired. It was not until 1976 that Governor James Edwards wrote Clark acknowledging that she had been terminated unjustly and was entitled to her pension.⁴⁵

Clark, of course, was not the only black teacher to lose her job because of NAACP membership. Between 1955 and 1957, a number of teachers were fired because of their membership. In May 1957, Charleston County School Superintendent Gordon A. Garrett informed Jessica Pearson Brown that she would not be rehired to teach in school district number four at Liberty Hill Elementary School. Having received ten years of satisfactory annual ratings for her performance, Brown, an active woman with memberships in such associations as the National Presbyterian Women’s Organization, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., the Palmetto Education Association, the YWCA, and the Phyllis Wheatley Literary and Social Club, could only assume she had been fired because of her NAACP membership. Yet, she stood her ground, asserting, “I had made up my

⁴⁴ Walter J. Fraser, Jr., Charleston! Charleston!: The History of a Southern City (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 409.
mind long ago that if the question ever came up, I would never deny my membership in the NAACP." Charleston County civil rights activist J. Arthur Brown’s sister Arthurlee Brown McFarlane, who lived and taught in a neighboring county, was blacklisted from teaching and library positions. Another black teacher, Ethel Jenkins Grimball, was not allowed to teach anywhere in the ninth district in Charleston County because her father was activist Esau Jenkins.47

Black leaders and their wives were also subjected to reprisals for being outspoken. The church of Reverend J.A. Delaine, who had initiated school desegregation proceedings in Clarendon County, St. James African Methodist Episcopal in Lake City, was burned. Later, gunshots were fired into his home. As a result of the incident, according to one report, Mrs. Delaine was placed “under medical treatment and prostrate at the residence of her parents in Columbia.” After this she was afraid to return home to Lake City and afraid to board with friends less she place their lives in danger.48 This also happened to South Carolina State NAACP president James Hinton and his wife. Nine pellets were removed from the Hinton’s home and Mrs. Hinton reported seeing a car speed away after the firing.

47 Brown, 81.
Hinton, who was in Augusta, Georgia when the incident occurred, refused police protection asserting that “Mrs. Hinton is not afraid.” When asked if he thought the NAACP stand on desegregation was a cause, Hinton replied, “You can have your own thoughts.”

From the late 1940s through the 1950s, the NAACP was labeled a Communist front organization by those who sought to destroy it. Consequently, officials in the national chapter expelled members known to associate with Communist organizations. Prominent NAACP leaders like Modjeska Simkins did not escape these scathing accusations. In 1956, Simkins, rather than adding to the red-baiting hysteria surrounding the organization, refused to attend an NAACP meeting in New York:

I shall not risk placing myself in the position of being listed as the cause of some further attack upon [the] NAACP. As devoted as I have been to [the] NAACP over a period of many years, I have never believed that [the] NAACP, America’s most outstanding civil rights organization, is the sole answer, or that it is the only organization that can make a distinct contribution in the civil rights struggle. Nor am I so asinine as to believe that the NAACP can do the job alone….I know, as you do, that no organization that has dared to make a frontal attack, whether sincere or classified as feigned, by some, has escaped the Communist smear. No one who thinks rationally on the matter of constitutional liberty and human dignity for Negroes can escape the smear artists. They are spraying filth everywhere. To dare advocate peace and constitutional liberty for all men is to invite a coating of filth.

This of course did not quell NAACP activism in South Carolina. In fact, the sixteenth annual meeting of the South Carolina NAACP in Rock Hill, in 1957, had as its theme “Determined to Secure at Home What America Would Guarantee

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Abroad,” which thumbed its nose at American democratic efforts abroad when they were not practiced at home. At its seventeenth annual meeting in 1958, held in Charleston, the conference theme “Your participation in the Program of Voter-Registration today will determine the quality of your government tomorrow” further solidified the South Carolina NAACP’s commitment to full and equal citizenship for African Americans. Black women and their organizations were active participants in these proceedings as such women as Mamie Fields, president of the federated colored women’s clubs in South Carolina, and numerous other black women activists participated in sessions like “Workshop on Involvement of Women in Programs of Voter-Registration and Political Action.”

Reactions to the Brown decision did not just result in black intimidation. Many whites also faced ostracism and violence for their activism, which did not escape notice outside the South. A 1955 article in the New York Times reported a segregation group meeting secretly in Memphis, Tennessee to form a national organization to fight racial integration and “other efforts to destroy the Constitution.” This meeting included such individuals as Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi who called on the new group to “fight the C.I.O., fight the

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50 Woods Aba-Mecha, 250; Modjeska Simkins to Roy Wilkins, Executive Secretary NAACP, Papers of the NAACP, Part 27, Selected branch files, 1956-1965, Series A, the South, Reel 13, 6 February 1956.
51 Ibid., Sixteenth Annual Meeting, South Carolina Conference of Branches, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Mount Prospect Baptist Church, Black and Allen Streets, Rock Hill, South Carolina, 18-20 October 1957 and Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the South Carolina Conference of Branches of National Association For Advancement of Colored People To Be
N.A.A. C.P. and fight all conscienceless pressure groups who are attempting our
destruction” and South Carolina’s own Senator J. Strom Thurmond. 52

This of course, was only the tip of the iceberg of reactions in South
Carolina. In 1955, Dr. Chester C. Travelstead, dean of the school of education at
the University of South Carolina, delivered a speech to summer school faculty
entitled “Today’s Decisions for Tommorrow’s Schools” in which he declared “I
find no conclusive evidence that any one group of men is foreordained to be
superior or inferior to other groups of men. For races or nations to think and act
upon the assumption that theirs is the superior race or nation and that all other
groups are inferior is to invite disaster and downfall. None of the great religions
dictates such a creed.” 53 University officials favoring segregation wasted little
time dismissing Dr. Travelstead. 54 Travelstead commented on his dismissal from
the University, citing it as “a result of my views.” 55 In 1956 in Kershaw County,
South Carolina, 52-year-old Guy Hutchings, a white Camden high school band
director, was beaten by hooded locals who accused him of favoring integration.
The previous summer, a cross was burned in Camden mayor Henry Savage’s yard
after a Methodist sponsored inter-racial group was driven out of the community

Held At Emmanuel A.M.E. Church, Charleston, South Carolina, 16-19 October
1958.
52 “Segregation Group Confers in Secret.” New York Times, 30 December 1955,
1.
53 “Dean Who Fought Bias Leave Post: South Carolina U. Educator Reported
Ousted After an Attack on Segregation,” New York Times, 24 November 1955,
24:3.
54 W.E. Solomon, “The Problem of Desegregation in South Carolina,” Journal of
1955, 19.
under anonymous threats of force.\textsuperscript{56} Newspapers throughout the country reported an increase in racial violence after the \textit{Brown} decision. A report published jointly by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), the racial and cultural relations department of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and the Southern Regional Council in 1959, listed 530 specific cases of violence, reprisal, and intimidation, and general widespread erosion of civil liberties.\textsuperscript{57} Indeed, the AFSC established a program, the Rights of Conscience Committee, providing legal fees and financial assistance for those affected by white economic reprisals in the South.\textsuperscript{58}

Even women’s organizations serving the public welfare were held suspect. In 1956, a private, inter-racial luncheon in Aiken, South Carolina sponsored by the YWCA caused a number of complaints to the police department by local whites. The group of eighteen women, of whom eight were black, included representatives from Aiken, Columbia, Charleston, and Greenville, South Carolina. In the meeting’s defense, Mary Reed Cook, executive director of the Aiken County YWCA, asserted that she had made the luncheon reservations with the understanding that the group would be integrated and that the restaurant manager had agreed to services on that basis.

\textsuperscript{56} “Epidemic to Fear” An Editorial Reprinted from Cheraw Chronicle in \textit{New South}, vol. 12, no. 2 (February 1957):12.
\textsuperscript{58} American Friends Service Committee, Inc., to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 13 December 1955, Papers of the NAACP, Part 18: Special Subjects, 1940-1955, Series C: General Office Files, Reel 33.
Although Aiken police chief E. M. Hanna admitted he had received a number of complaints, he adopted a “hands off” policy as he found no state law making it a violation for mixed groups to dine together in private facilities.\footnote{59}{“Aiken Is Site of Bi-Racial YWCA Lunch” The News and Courier, Charleston, SC, 6 January 1956, 1-B.}

Individual white women activists were not exempt from suspicion and reprisal as a result of their activism. One individual subjected to more severe reprisals was Claudia Thomas Sanders, wife of a Gaffney, South Carolina physician, who suggested that desegregation could be accomplished in the public schools of the state by starting with the first grade. “Children are not born with prejudice,” she declared, “If adults could only learn from children their ability to judge character and worth without regard for externals,” she continued, the desegregation process “would be immeasurably lighter.” She was also a contributor to a pamphlet entitled South Carolinians Speak: A Moderate Approach to Race Relations, published to “promote free and reasonable discussion of the problems involved in race relations.”\footnote{60}{Landers, 204.}

We must bring to this problem of human relations all the knowledge we can gather about the causes of prejudice and the strategies that are effective. We must move slowly because we are dealing with human beings within the framework of democracy. We must move surely because our social conscience and Christian ethics leave us no alternative.\footnote{61}{

A native Charlestonian who could trace her ancestry back to the early colonial period, Sanders also was a leading Episcopal churchwoman, and a member of the American Association of University Women. She was indeed
unusual in her position, as many white women would not have been brave enough to publicly support integration. Not unaware of the bastion of white supremacy however, Sanders faced retaliation for her activism. In November 1957, an explosion rocked her home, tearing a hole near the chimney, breaking six windows, and cracking a wall in the living room. Fortunately, she, her husband, and a guest from Louisville, Kentucky were in another part of the house and escaped injury.\textsuperscript{62} Any chance of conviction in the case was futile because the prosecution’s chief witness, a self-confessed participant, was accidentally killed before the trial.\textsuperscript{63}

The fear of reprisal for some South Carolina church women was also very real. Former UCW-SC president Edith Dabbs and her husband faced scathing attacks from the conservation Charleston newspaper the \textit{New and Courier}, for their activism.\textsuperscript{64} The 1960s would reveal changes in UCW-Columbia’s ideology that reflected the hostile situation in which the organization found itself.

By the late 1950s South Carolina public schools had not integrated despite the Supreme Court decision. However, many South Carolina whites urged

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\item[\textsuperscript{61}] As quoted in “South Carolinians Speak,” \textit{New South}, vol. 13, no.3 (March 1958): 15.
\item[\textsuperscript{63}] The pamphlet also contained contributions and calls for moderation from other women like Helen Burr Christensen, a civic leader in Beaufort, who urged that the “Negro must receive equal opportunities, but must realize that equality cannot be bestowed, it must be earned,” and Julia Rees Reynolds of Sumter, who asserted that “the time is ripe for a more widespread Negro representation on school boards, city councils and juries and in the Legislature.” She also called for admission to graduate and professional schools on the basis of “intellectual and moral qualifications.” From “12 In South Offer Racial Solutions,” \textit{New York Times} (23 October 1957), 25:1.
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compliance with the *Brown* decision. Among the organizations formed in South Carolina after the Supreme Court decision, the most prominent perhaps was the South Carolina Council on Human Relations (SCCHR). Founded in 1955 as an affiliate of the Southern Regional Council, the association was dedicated to “equal opportunity for all peoples of the South.” It severed its affiliation with the SRC in 1963 becoming an independent organization and adopting as its mandate: “to carry on an educational program for the improvement of educational, economic, civic, and racial conditions in the state in an endeavor to promote greater unity in South Carolina.”

Even so, the organization touted itself as “making no pronouncements of what should or should not be done.” According to its president in 1955, Reverend J. Claude Evans, the organization’s position on racial activism was moderate. The SCCHR instead placed emphasis on “establishing more and better communication between the races, for finding out the facts involved in each local situation and for making bi-racial studies of local involvements and possibilities.” The organization’s executive state director, Alice N. Spearman, later Wright, who was also former executive director of the South Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs, expressed much of the same sentiment arguing that the Council “contributes more by stressing processes rather than panaceas.”

Spearman is representative of individual white women who produced a pattern of civil rights activism as they interacted with different organizations throughout South Carolina. After the *Brown* decision, Spearman,

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64 Correspondence dated 21 January 1960, box 24, folder 652, SCCHR.
65 South Carolina Council on Human Relations, 1934-1976, finding aid, 1, SCL.
aware of the impact the decision had on South Carolina, wrote to Esther Cole Franklin of the National YWCA requesting an annual statewide conference for local YWCAs to devise strategies for continuing change in the state. Passionate about the need for racial progress in South Carolina, Spearman declared, “I feel there is no more vital issue in South Carolina at the present than public response to the Supreme Court ruling against segregation.”

After taking over as executive director, Spearman encouraged liberal white women to become members of the SCCHR. In 1955 she asked her friend Harriet Porcher Stoney Simons, president of the League of Women Voters, to become an SCCHR board member asserting, “I do not see how we can do without you.” However, like many liberal whites, Simons was very cautious about her participation in the SCCHR after the Brown decision and either shied away from civil rights activity or stressed moderation and patience in racial change. This was particularly the case after an incendiary speech by keynote speaker Marion A. Wright, former president of the Southern Regional Council, a SCCHR board member, and uncompromising integrationist. His speech had pleased black board members, most of whom were also members of the NAACP. Unfortunately, most white SCCHR members perceived NAACP as a radical organization whose demands for racial justice were too aggressive and thus discouraged SCCHR membership for those affiliated with the organization. This angered such black

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67 Alice Spearman to Esther Cole Franklin, 18 February 1955, box 34, folder 946, SCCHR.
members as Modjeska Simkins and Robert Hinton and intensified racial tensions as both resigned from the SCCHR board.  

Spearmann’s activism is evident throughout the 1930s and 1940s as well as the 1950s and later the 1960s. The daughter of a wealthy planting and banking family, Spearman had spent a year at the YWCA’s National Training School in the 1920s. Her attendance at this school and at Converse College for Women in Spartanburg, South Carolina facilitated her involvement into a circle of liberal thinkers. She maintained close ties to such organizations as the YWCA, the South Carolina Council of Human Relations, of which she was executive secretary, the South Carolina Council for the Common Good, and the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). Spearman even attended the NCNW’s annual regional conference in 1957 in Greenville, South Carolina. The theme was appropriately, “Education a Force for Changing Frontiers in Human Relations.” While there she served on a panel entitled “The Council Woman at Work in Her Community for Changing Frontiers in Our Present Day Educational Field.” Also in attendance was Sarah Z. Daniels, who would later become the first African American president of United Church Women in South Carolina. She became the mainstay of the SCCHR until the mid-1960s. Spearman also reached out to black women and to women generally in pursuit of an alliance against racial injustice. She and black activist Modjeska Simkins had worked together on the New Deal public works projects where they protested against the planning committee’s practice of

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68 Daniels, 231.
giving menial jobs to blacks and professional jobs to whites. Simkins, a member of the NAACP, Commission on Interracial Cooperation, and the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, once recalled that Spearman “exemplified the bull in the china closet type.”

Although they often fought against paternalism in their efforts, Simkins and Spearman were able to cooperate because both believed that black and white women working together should play a prominent role in political and civic action programs and racial cooperation in the state. Spearman also fervently appealed to black women affiliated with the YWCA in the Charleston area in order to solicit participation for an open meeting of the SCCHR in May 1955. In this same year, Spearman wrote to Anna D. Kelly, a member of the black branch of the YWCA in Charleston for support of the SCCHR. Always concerned about the nature of interracial work in South Carolina, she inquired about the YWCA in Charleston as well as the existence of other bi-racial organizations in the area.

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69 Annual Regional Conference, Region III, National Council of Negro Women, Fuller Normal and Industrial School, Greenville, South Carolina, 19-20 April 1957, box 11, folder 348, SCCHR.
70 Daniels, 230.
71 Woods Aba-Mecha, 284; “Mrs. Simkins to Address Florence NAACP,” Lighthouse and Informer (1 May 1954); Hall, 102. In fact, Spearman had been elected by Converse students to represent them at the southeast regional summer conferences that the National Student YWCA held at Blue Ridge, North Carolina. It was there that she met African-American secretaries for the first time, and educated blacks on an equal basis. She delighted in telling her family that there were African Americans in attendance who were superior to them intellectually, culturally, and spiritually; Marcia G. Synott, “Alice Norwood Spearman Wright: Civil Rights Apostle to South Carolinians.” From Janet L. Coryell ed., Beyond Image and Convention: Explorations in Southern Women’s History (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 188.
72 Alice N. Spearman to Anna D. Kelly, 15 April 1955, box 11, folder 345, SCCHR.
However, her attempts to reach white women were often met with excuses and evasion because they deemed the organization too controversial. Spearman found this to be the case when she issued an invitation for membership in the SCCHR to the South Carolina Education Association which graciously refused stating a previous engagement.\textsuperscript{73}

Like Alice Norwood Spearman, many whites called for interracial cooperation throughout the state. In Greenville for example, retired school district superintendent L. Peter Hollis, called for cooperation between the races and criticized leaders for failing to provide leadership. Hollis had urged blacks to vote, and supported their representation on the city council, the school board and in the legislature.\textsuperscript{74}

Unlike women’s organizations in other parts of the state, the Greenville YWCA supported moderate racial and social activism in South Carolina as it often played hostess to such women’s organizations as the Greenville Social Worker’s Club and the Council of Church Women.\textsuperscript{75} Greenville YWCA members spent considerable time discussing the Supreme Court case in their meetings and prepared themselves to aid blacks and whites in South Carolina regardless of the decision. Many of them wrote letters to state legislators advising them that “whatever the Supreme Court holds to be the law with reference to the

\textsuperscript{73} Letter to Hester S. Medlen, of the South Carolina Education Association, 1 May 1955, The Palmetto Education Association was the black teachers’ organization, box 11, folder 345, SCCHR.

\textsuperscript{74} Archie Vernon Huff, Jr., Greenville: The History of the City and County in the South Carolina Piedmont (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 402.

\textsuperscript{75} “Facts in YWCA Facilities,” February 1958, box 1, folder 5, SCCHR.
segregation suits now pending must be accepted and adhered to both as to letter and spirit.” Southern white women were also concerned about the possibility of state officials closing public schools in opposition to the Supreme Court decision and the impact this would have on children throughout the state. The Greenville YWCA asserted that “the public school system of S.C. must be maintained and that any tampering with it in an attempt to circumvent a Court decision will do irreparable harm to the educational opportunities of South Carolina’s boys and girls.”

This sentiment was not unusual among white women’s organizations in South Carolina. The South Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs, of which Alice N. Spearman was executive secretary, voted to offer an award to the club that worked to develop citizen participation to preserve the public school system in South Carolina. They also felt that abandoning separate public school systems, which many whites supported as an alternative to desegregation, should only be used as a last resort.

As further evidence of the Greenville YWCA’s stance on desegregation when South Carolina formed a “Segregation Committee” with an endorsement from Governor George Timmerman, and issued a reported urging adoption of new measures to defend segregation, among which was repealing the compulsory school attendance law, the Greenville YWCA opposed the repeal. According to

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its president, “the repeal of the law will do nothing about solving our racial
problems and will be detrimental to the welfare of South Carolina’s children.”

This certainly was not the limit of the Greenville YWCA’s fight for
justice in South Carolina. In 1956, members of the Board of Directors of the
Greenville YWCA spoke out against the South Carolina General Assembly as it
had proposed bills prohibiting municipal, county or state employees from holding
membership in the NAACP and depriving churches accommodating NAACP
meetings of their tax exempt status. The Board of Directors called efforts to
suppress the NAACP a violation of “the democratic and Christian ways of life.”

Members of the Greenville YWCA understood the NAACP as one “committed to
the defense of civil liberties and religious freedom.” And, they also understood
that in order to ensure religious freedom, it was imperative to maintain separation
between church and state. As the Greenville YWCA asserted: “If the General
Assembly can dictate to Negro churches what meetings may be held in their
church buildings, it can dictate to white churches what meetings may be held in
theirs. If it has a right to legislate concerning one policy of a church, it has the
right to legislate concerning all other church matters.” Board members carefully
stated that they did not endorse the NAACP, its leaders or its activities, but
strongly supported the principles of religious freedom and democracy for
everyone, regardless of organizational affiliation or race. For members of the

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78 William Bagwell, School Desegregation in the Carolinas: Two Case Studies
79 “Statement Approved by the Board of Directors of Greenville YWCA, 14
March 1956,” box 2, folder 33, Columbia YWCA Records, SCL.
80 Ibid.
Greenville YWCA, this was especially true in the aftermath of the *Brown*
decision, “The continuation of full realization of both democracy and Christianity
require that we hold fast to these principles at all times, but especially so now that
we are in a period of stress and tension.”

While the Greenville YWCA supported *Brown* and attacked efforts to
resist desegregation, it moved slowly toward integration in its own organization.
As autonomous organizations, local YWCAs were only bound morally and not
legally to uphold the policies of the national YWCA. Southern YWCAs upheld
principles of Christianity in their pronouncements, describing their local YWCAs
as:

> A fellowship of women and girls dedicated to realizing in our common life
> those ideals of personal social living, to which we are committed by our
> faith as Christians. The YWCA is essentially interested in helping each
> individual to develop her greatest potential . . . in realization of self, in
> service to others and in knowledge and love of God.  

Despite this sentiment, some white women still adhered to local customs and
traditions that made it difficult for them to imagine dismantling segregation in
southern YWCAs

The physical facilities of the YWCA reveal the spatial nature of race
relations in local YWCA’s throughout South Carolina. The Greenville YWCA

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81 Ibid.
82 “YWCA Facts—Program and Principles, Greenville, SC, 1958,” box 1, folder
3. In 1957, the YWCA Greenville presented a central and branch facilities report
to the board of directors on physical plant and facilities. When outlining areas for
possible centers or branches of the YWCA, the 106 North Calhoun Street was
only recommended as a branch. From Young Women’s Christian Association,
Central and Branch Facilities, 9 December 1957, 25-26, box 1, folder 5,
Greenville YWCA, SCL.
listed a building at 118 West North Street which included a residence for 67 young employed women, dining room, office space, meeting and recreational rooms. However, there is but sparse mention of the facilities for black women and girls: “The cottage at 106 North Calhoun Street is currently rented to bring programs to Negro women and girls.”83 In 1957, the YWCA Greenville presented a central and branch facilities report to the board of directors on physical plant and facilities. When outlining areas for possible centers or branches of the YWCA, the 106 North Calhoun Street was recommended only as a branch, thus depriving black women of autonomy within the central branch. White members did work to improve conditions in the black YWCA. While maintaining separate facilities, the Greenville YWCA participated in efforts to obtain a new and modern facility for blacks which would enable them to receive distinguished African American visitors as well as providing a segregated indoor swimming pool. However, the indicators of paternalism were always present. The YWCA Campaign for the new building was presented to African Americans and African American women in Greenville as “a test, keenly watched, of the progress of the Negroes toward full civic maturity.”84

The Greenville YWCA’s interracial activism was consistently tested by the pervasive racism in 1950s South Carolina. However, one Greenvillian proved the YWCA to be a conduit for such activism when she informed her sister, a newcomer interested in interracial activism, “if you must work interracially, do it

83 Ibid.
through the YWCA. Working there, people in the community will not consider you a ‘crackpot.’” Thus, as the 1950s progressed the Greenville YWCA provided opportunities for black and white women to work together for racial change, not only in Greenville, but throughout the state. At some points however, Greenville YWCA members were apprehensive about asserting the civil rights agenda of and even their affiliation with the National YWCA. In a 1958 report of the Capital Fund Committee to the United Fund of Greenville County, when the YWCA listed its community associations, it stressed that “though there is not official connection, the Executive, four Board members, and one Young Adult leader have been active in this organization.” Also, the Greenville YWCA reported its relationship with the National YWCA as “excellent” during a time when many southern YWCA’s were questioning continuing their affiliation with the National YWCA because of its position on civil rights activism.\(^86\)

The Charleston and Columbia YWCAs moved more timidly than the Greenville Y in the wake of \textit{Brown v. Board of Education} decision. While the Greenville YWCA attempted to make peace with the decision, relationships between black and white members of the Charleston YWCA became more contentious.\(^87\) In 1955, Carrie Lou Ritchie, executive director of the Charleston YWCA invited Virginia Prouty, a Charleston native and a member of the Charleston YWCA, who was also part of the national staff, to speak to the board

\(^{85}\) Ibid., United Fund of Greenville County.

\(^{86}\) United Fund of Greenville County Report of Capital Fund Committee Concerning Requests from YWCA and YMCA for Permission to Conduct Capital Fund Campaigns, 3 April 1958, box 1, folder 5, SCCHR.

\(^{87}\) Ibid.
of directors and membership about the World Fellowship Observance. In
Prouty’s report she commented on the angst among whites after the Supreme
Court decision:

The tension which is felt by the board and staff members is understandable
and very real. Having been away from Charleston for some time, I was
shocked when I saw and heard the “tumult and shouting” due to the
Supreme Court decision. I feel that Miss Ritchie needs all the support that
we as a National staff can give.

She is desirous to do all that she can to move the Association ahead, and I
am sure she will succeed in her efforts eventually.  

Although the Greenville YWCA made slight progress in interracial
relationships, for the Charleston YWCA, all progress in that direction stopped
after the Brown decision. In 1955, for example, the fear of integrated attendance
at the World Fellowship Observance reached crisis proportions. In previous
years, the World Fellowship Observance had been held at the Greek Orthodox
Church in Charleston and planned jointly by the Central and Coming Street
branch of the YWCA. After the Brown decision, fear prevailed among white
members of the Central YWCA. Many white members on the World Fellowship
Committee suddenly decided that they could not participate in an integrated
meeting and consequently resigned. Board members of the YWCA feared any
publicity, especially from local papers like Charleston’s News and Courier.  

When Hattie Droll of the national YWCA visited Charleston in 1956, she
noticed that most of the members of the YWCA Board took great pride in

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88 National Board YWCA Records, Virginia Prouty, Visitation Report,
Charleston, South Carolina , 18 November 1955, reel 273.3, SSC.
89 National Board YWCA Records, Hattie Droll, Visitation Report, Charleston,
South Carolina, 8-11 October 1956, reel 273.3, SSC.
“keeping alive the historical atmosphere of Charleston” or rather, maintaining the status quo. Yet, she noted that younger people had grown bored with the Charleston’s traditions and wanted to “emphasize the present rather than the past.”\textsuperscript{90} When she returned in 1957, Droll noted that there was only token representation of blacks on Central’s administrative committees and the few integrated affairs like the YWCA’s World Fellowship Observance were held with as little publicity as possible. Droll further revealed the extent of white Charlestonians’ reactions to the Brown decision and the damage done to already fragile interracial relations in the Charleston YWCA when she reported that the “subject of desegregation is almost unmentionable in Charleston and the Citizens Councils have become more active there as it has in all South Carolina.” She further recorded the YWCA’s reaction to recent events asserting that, “Interracial gatherings are more conspicuous. Fear is greater. The Board of the YWCA follows the community trends and attitudes.”\textsuperscript{91} Unfortunately, the Charleston YWCA would not move ahead as a part of the National YWCA. During the next decade the Charleston YWCA would sever its ties with the National YWCA.

The Columbia YWCA also became increasingly anxious as a result of the Supreme Court decision. In 1953, when white Y-Teen members wanted to include Y-Teen members from the Phyllis Wheatley branch at the state conference, the Columbia YWCA made plans to slowly implement this over the course of three years. Black members had attended the leadership conference the

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} National Board YWCA Records, Hattie Droll, Visitation Report, Charleston, South Carolina, 16 November 1957, reel 273.3, SSC.
previous year and wanted representation at the state conference.\textsuperscript{92} The conference, scheduled to meet in Charleston in 1956, was the subject of much discussion in Columbia YWCA meetings. As a committee of Y-Teens made plans for the conference in spring 1956, the Charleston YWCA board decided that if any blacks were invited, it would not host the conference. The Greenville Board on the other hand had voted to make the conference interracial. Although Y-Teen members felt they were equipped to handle closer interaction with black Y-Teens, they were stumped by their parents, who did not favor an interracial meeting. Thus, white teen members decided they should wait until their parents were more accepting of the idea, although they did consent to having a black staff member meet with them at the conference.\textsuperscript{93}

The Columbia YWCA board decided to follow the normal procedure of rotating hostesses and have the meeting in Charleston as planned. However, one member, Mrs. J.W. Haltiwanger, proposed writing a letter to Mrs. Welborne, a National Board member from the Southern region, suggesting, “in this time of present tension in the South that the YWCA meeting be held for business purposes only and not to include the serving of meals to interracial groups.” The Y-Teen State Conference held in Charleston on 13-15 April 1956 was an all-white affair. By 1959, small changes had occurred.

\textsuperscript{92} Central, Administrative Board Minutes, November 1955, box 4, folder 89, Columbia YWCA, SCL.
At the 1959 meeting, Lucy Steward, program director of the Y-Teens and three Columbia Y-Teens attended the Virginia-Carolina Y-Teen conference, which had been held in North Carolina that August. Two were from the Phyllis Wheatley branch and one from the Sumter branch. 94

Although strides were made among Y-Teens, older members of the Columbia YWCA were much more cautious about any public interracial meetings. Black women like Hattie Droll attended meetings at the Columbia YWCA in the 1950s and saw its members working to “stress more strongly the true meaning of the YWCA.” This suggests that there was a desire among white YWCA members to align themselves with the dictates of the National YWCA. But, because of local reactions to “mounting tensions on the racial questions” the Columbia YWCA reported that “integrated inclusiveness is at standstill” and that they did not want to undo any progress that had been made up to that point. Throughout the 1950s, then, integrated meetings were restricted to branch representatives at Board meetings. 95

Like the Columbia YWCA, the South Carolina Council of United Church Women worked to preserve the morality and spirituality of Christian people, both black and white and were committed to promoting racial harmony in South Carolina. Formed in 1948, the state council assumed the lead in preparing for the

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93 Board Meeting Minutes, 8 December 1955, box 4, folder 89, Columbia YWCA Records, SCL.
94 Ibid., 12 January 1956, 8 October 1959, 12 November 1959, box 4, folder 89, Columbia YWCA Records, SCL.
95 Columbia YWCA Records, 12 September 1957, “Basic Standards, Report Form for Community YWCAs, Young Women’s Christian Association of the United
*Brown* decision. Publicity chair Edith Dabbs of Mayesville wrote *The Church Woman* acknowledging church women’s commitment to Christian democracy and to changes yet to come. “The Council of Church Women of South Carolina is two years old but at the state meeting recently the skeleton organization was finally completed with constitution and working regulations. It is still in the throes of its infancy but the women enlisted hold the conviction that Christianity is the only answer to world confusion and are ready to meet the challenge.”

At a meeting in 1951, UCW-Columbia members suggested that “local Negroes should be urged to organize a council.” No records indicate that such a segregated branch was formed yet the organization clearly assumed a more proactive role in improving race relations in South Carolina in the 1950s particularly with the angst surrounding *Brown*. Indeed, the state council took steps to prepare its members for whatever changes might occur when the court decision was handed down. In 1951, Dabbs, whose husband was president of the Southern Regional Council, issued a letter to local branches announcing a meeting with Esther Stamats of the national UCW. Although the outcome of the meeting is unclear, Dabbs urged white women to attend to discuss “big implications of which we are a part” and “the genius of leadership in such an adventure toward a New World.”

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*States of America, Triennium, 1958-1961,” box 1, folder 3, 6, Columbia YWCA Records, SCL.*

The end of the letter reveals the state council’s commitment to racial change as Dabbs further encouraged United Church Women to “please come---it is a great door open.” 97

In 1953, the state council called upon church women to investigate conditions in South Carolina public schools using a pamphlet called “A Check List for Your Local Schools.” Published by the Southern Regional Council, the checklist suggested conducting a statistical and comparative study of black and white schools in the state by asking such questions as “What is the average salary of white and Negro teachers with comparable training and experience? What is the current operating expenditure per white and Negro pupil? How do white and Negro school buildings compare in age, appearance, type of construction, toilet facilities, lighting, ventilation, heating, auditoriums, gymnasiums, athletic stadiums, cafeterias, and libraries?” 98 By conducting such an exercise, the state council, clearly more progressive than local councils, forced white women to confront inferior conditions in South Carolina’s black schools.

Carolina Lee Gillespie, chairman of the Christian Social Relations Committee of the United Church Women of South Carolina, stressed the seriousness with which the organization regarded the school desegregation case. Members of the state council felt that Christian people should be informed and prepared to give guidance should Brown order school integration. 99 Gillespie

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97 Correspondence from Edith M. Dabbs, Chairman, Public Relations, the South Carolina Council of Church Women, box 24, folder 637, SCCHR.
99 30 January 1954, box 24, folder 637, SCCHR.
further asserted that southern church women were “nearing the threshold of an historic moment in the history of our nation and indeed of the world. Regardless of the decision of the Supreme Court, Christian people will have to be acquainted with the moral an spiritual issues which are at stake.”

Despite white southerners’ responses to the Supreme Court decision, once it had been issued Edith Dabbs, now president of the state council of UCW, immediately sent a letter to state governor James F. Byrnes expressing the position of United Church Women of South Carolina. “Both on a national level and statewise, we have always maintained that enforced segregation had no place in Christian activity and constituted a very real threat to our Democracy.” State political leaders were clearly dedicated to maintaining segregation in South Carolina. Thus when United Church Women looked to them to foster change, they looked in vain.

Dabbs also recognized United Church Women’s unique role in facilitating racial change throughout the state declaring that, “United Church Women come from practically every Protestant denomination in South Carolina and are the mothers and teachers, the home makers of our state.” Looking with faith to black and white South Carolinians to accept racial progress, Dabbs ended her letter to the governor by highlighting their morality and integrity.

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100 Ibid.
102 Open Letter to Governor James F. Byrnes from Mrs. James M. Dabbs, President, United Church Women in South Carolina, 19 May 1954, Southern Regional Council Papers, Series IV, Reel 156.
Carolinians are not a hating people. Our citizens can be counted on, after a little shouting and letting off steam, to settle down to adjustment. As we work together to build a new and finer way of life for all our people, we shall realize that for the first time in history we need no longer cringe in apology before any other group. We are free at last . . . and free to build a shining model of Christian Democracy before the world.  

Although general white consensus against the Brown decision limited the activism of some white women’s organizations in South Carolina, others chose to stand as an example of racial change. A gathering of southern church women on 21-22 June 1954 in Atlanta, Georgia reinforced these mandates. Attendees included chairmen of Christian social relations committees and presidents of state council of church women from such southern states as Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Although it is not clear if any black women attended, conference attendees adopted a resolution that affirmed their belief in “human brotherhood and the inclusiveness of Christian fellowship and a Christian society in which segregation is no longer a burden upon the human spirit.”

At the two-day conference, leaders pointed out such specific problems with southern desegregation as the amount of time necessary for whites to adjust and the fact that the Supreme Court decision called for immediate segregation. Attendees studied strategies, techniques, and organization procedures to put in operation immediately in each state. Many of these women most likely struggled to overcome their upbringing in conservative, racially segregated communities.

103 Ibid.
However, because some of these women were also mothers they expressed recognition and concern that segregated schools perpetuated prejudices being instilled in white children.

Church women also wondered about the plight of black teachers who might find themselves unemployed after the decision. They did not consider that some black parents might want only improved conditions in black schools rather than forced enrollment of black children in previously all-white schools. Conference attendees also openly criticized many southern ministers and churches that failed to speak in favor of the Supreme Court decision. Indeed, to them it was imperative to encourage clergy members to take a positive Christian stand on such issues and help Christian women find solutions to the “bitter climate of opinion” in their respective states. Finally, they adopted a statement that affirmed their acceptance of the Supreme Court decision.\(^{105}\)

After attending this conference, South Carolina members reaffirmed their commitment to work for racial justice in South Carolina. They supported the Supreme Court decision because it gave them an opportunity to translate Christian belief into democratic ideals. Caroline Lu Gillespie replayed these sentiments at the Atlanta Conference in regard to the Supreme Court decision:

> We came from seventeen states, represented many denominations, and faced multiple problems. But one question and one purpose drew us close together: How shall I sing the Lord’s song? Our days of working and thinking together helped to answer that burning question. We learned that while the problem may vary in degrees in different states, all of us face

\(^{105}\) “Southern Leaders Confer,” The Church Woman (March 1954): 30-31, 1222-3-3:18 GCAHUMC.
similar situations. New courage is found in the knowledge that one is not alone . . . \(^{106}\)

Members of local United Church Women chapters struggled among themselves and with their communities to determine what changes “singing the Lord’s song” might mean locally. \(^{107}\) South Carolina church women realized that they were not alone in combating the injustices of racial and social discrimination. Although they were ambivalent about the shape their activism and the risks involved would assume, church women realized that Christian doctrine mandated that they do something to bring about more harmonious race relations and that as church women, they were charged with this responsibility. This sentiment was not limited to well known organizations like United Church Women.

The national branch of United Church Women urged local branches to assume the lead in implementing racial change in their communities. It was not enough for a church woman to simply “fold her hands and pray for a peaceful conclusion to the whole matter.” The national UCW prescribed such specific actions for local branches to United Church Women to take as “speaking up when race is mentioned to let people know where you stand,” “know the facts so that you can answer prejudice and opposition with irrefutable truths,” and “try to arrange for conversation between Negro and white citizens for better understanding of the problems involved and ways and means of meeting them.” \(^{108}\)

The national also urged local chapters to study facts about segregation in their

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\(^{106}\) “Echos From the Atlanta Conference,” The Church Woman (October 1954): 37.

\(^{107}\) United Church Women, Minutes of Meeting, 6 March 1956, box 24, folder, 652c, SCCHR.
community, in schools, housing, churches, and public facilities. It advocated cooperation with other community agencies and creation of a concrete plan of action in accord with Christian principles to aid community changes and challenges.\textsuperscript{109} Registering its concern about growing threats to teachers in southern states who were members of the NAACP, the national UCW perceived charges of communism as a very real threat to American civil liberties as well as to the multifaceted activism of United Church Women. According to one church woman, “If our Board of Education could decide that teachers could not be members of the NAACP, the time might also come when teachers would not be permitted to join United Church Women.”\textsuperscript{110}

Throughout South Carolina there were those who saw United Church Women as the catalyst for racial change. Among those who recognized the importance of United Church Women’s role in racial activism was Father Maurice V. Shean of The Catholic Rectory in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Though he was not actually present at the 1956 meeting, he suggested through his

\textsuperscript{109} “Workshop on Race Relations” \textit{The Church Woman} (November 1955): 32-33.
\textsuperscript{110} “Coming to Grips with Segregation” \textit{The Church Woman} (October 1955): 19.

Throughout South Carolina women’s Christian organizations supported racial change particularly within churches. In 1955, the Woman’s Society of Christian Service of the Kingstree Methodist Church of Kingstree, South Carolina issue a resolution in which they took a stand on racial policies in the Methodist church. They called for “unrelenting commitment to remove segregation from every part of our church life” and that “the national executive committee of the woman’s division of Christian service has recently adopted a memorial to be sent to the 1956 general conference asking the Methodist church to remove from its own body every trace of discrimination and segregation based on race and thereby make possible a national and world wide fellowship without racial barriers in any form.” box 24, folder 638, 26 December 1955, SCCHR.
secretary, Mrs. Joseph Bonetti, that United Church Women urge state governor George Bell Timmerman Jr., to appoint a bi-racial council of women to study desegregation in the state. In addition to this suggestion, meeting participants actively addressed concerns about desegregation in South Carolina by organizing themselves into discussion groups with such titles as “What Can You Do?” or “What is the Church’s Responsibility and Place?” The groups further queried how they might translate their findings into local communities, concluding that it was necessary to get blacks and whites to meet together for discussions enabling better understanding of problems that existed between the races.111

Those in attendance were well aware of the obstacles to organizing such a meeting. Grace T. Kennedy of Bennetsville, South Carolina and secretary of the UCW Christian Social Relations, lamented that whites in her community had refused to meet with blacks for discussions of any kind. Moreover, five United Church women members in attendance requested not to received further information about desegregation, claiming they were “unprepared for it at present.”112

The national council, deeply committed to its mandate to promote racial justice, encouraged South Carolina church women to help facilitate desegregation and racial understanding. In November 1956, it sent Esther C. Stamats, Director of the Department of Christian Social Relations, to lead a workshop for United Church Women of Columbia on “Human Relations” to offer tactics to deal with

111 United Church Women, Minutes of Meeting, 6 March 1956, box 24, folder, 652c, SCCHR.
112 Ibid.

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racial issues. Organized into small groups the participants questioned, “What holds us back?” and “What next steps can you take in your community?” They outlined such obstacles as the breakdown in communication, fear of reprisals, pressures to conform, and threats to freedom. The minutes for the workshop reveal the anxiety some women felt. The secretary reported that “attendance was very poor” but it also affirmed optimistically that of those who did attend “everyone was exceedingly interested.”

The national council also pressured United Church Women in South Carolina to take the obvious step toward integration by welcoming African American women into their organization. In 1957 when Mrs. David Baker, editor of The Church Woman, spoke to the Columbia organization about her experiences with a team of Christian women who had traveled abroad, she emphasized the “interdenominational, interracial, and intercolor composition” of its teams with church women around the world. Despite encouragement from national leaders, white hostility toward desegregation and increasing racial tensions locally limited white women’s attempts to integrate within their organizations or communities.

The national UCW continued to push local chapters to work for better racial and social conditions throughout the nation. At the 8th National Assembly of United Church Women in 1958 in Denver, Colorado, whose theme was

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113 Minutes, United Church Women of Columbia, 26 November 1956. The national United Church Women referred to such meetings as “Race Relations” workshops. Church women in Columbia clearly changed the name to deter any attention away from activism deemed controversial and thus dangerous. 
114 Ibid., 3 January 1957.
“Christianity and Freedom,” members affirmed that while there were still many
tensions present, there had been significant progress in race relations. However,
they encouraged Christian women who were committed to change in their
communities to be its guiding conscience. The national UCW supported southern
church women’s work for the elimination of discrimination in housing, public
schools, health and recreational facilities, transportation and public
accommodations. The national organization also urged women to support efforts
in their local communities to establish interracial councils to work on community
programs in addition to recommending that the President of the United States to
call a White House Conference on integration as soon as possible. The national
UCW suggested that women be a positive Christian influence by working with
people in the community and using church facilities to foster a better
communication between the races.\footnote{New South, vol. 13, no. 12 (December 1958): 14.}
Finally, for their national assembly, United
Church Women extended invitations to Arthur B. Spingarn, national president of
the NAACP, requesting that it send a “fraternal delegate” to represent the
organization.\footnote{Mrs. W. (Dorothy) Murdoch MacLeod, General Director, United Church
Women to Arthur B. Spingarn, President, NAACP, 14 August 1958, Papers of the
NAACP, Part 24, Special Subjects, 1956-1965, Series B, Foreign Affairs,
Leagues and Organizations, Reel 32.} Thus, the organization further committed itself to fighting racial
injustice in the United States. However, despite the model of integration practiced
by the national UCW, before the 1960s, local councils in South Carolina did not
aggressively pursue integrated membership.
As the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision ordered school desegregation, reactions varied throughout the South and throughout South Carolina. For whites, the decision was met with reactions that ranged from outright hostility to withdrawal of support from those who had urged racial change in the state. Some blacks also withheld their support when they were faced economic reprisals and outright violence from the white establishment. This did not stop the activism of black and white women’s organizations however. Although even at this point instances of interracial interaction were still limited, some individual black and white women were able to reach across the racial divide to affect limited change throughout the state and some local groups like the Greenville YWCA became more assertive on racial issues.

But, black and white women’s goals differed by the end of the 1950s. For black women and their organizations equal educational and political access were still primary goals. White women and their organizations increasingly withdrew from overt racial activism after the *Brown* decision and instead focused on poverty and migrant workers in South Carolina. The 1960s would prove a crucial decade as both groups of women struggled to understand their communities in new and at times frightening ways.
CHAPTER 4

“MAY WE PRAY THAT WE BE GIVEN STRENGTH AND FAITH TO STAND TOGETHER, THOUGH OUR DEGREES OF BELIEF MAY DIFFER”: SOUTH CAROLINIANS CONFRONT DESEGREGATION AND BLACK VOTING RIGHTS

In 1963, the National Board of the YWCA issued an “Urgent Memo on Civil Rights,” which outlined new policies and goals for YWCAs throughout the country including supporting civil rights legislation, sponsoring the 1963 March on Washington, and accelerating the desegregation of community YWCAs. In Charleston, South Carolina, white members of the Charleston YWCA vigorously objected to these goals, which would later lead to its disaffiliation from the National YWCA. Although she did not support desegregation, Virginia Prouty, executive director of the Charleston YWCA, invoked the Christianity upon which the YWCA was founded, urged members in the local and national organization to “pray” for “strength and faith” as they were caught in the middle of this controversy. As desegregation and voting rights for African Americans in South Carolina became realities, white and black South Carolinians found themselves questioning how they would deal with a society where separation of the races was no longer the law and local activists increased efforts for first class citizenship.
As in previous years, black and white women’s organizations throughout the state responded to these issues in various ways. Black women and their organizations continued to focus on obtaining voting rights for African Americans and access to better schools for their children. White women on the other hand, increasingly turned away from controversial racial activism after the Brown decision and instead focused on the state’s pervasive poverty. Individual black and white women’s activism encompassed both objectives. These mixed responses reflected changing times as South Carolinians reexamined what had always been traditional and familiar and as both groups of women dealt with the reality of desegregation and black voting rights.

Although desegregation and voting rights for blacks were explosive issues for whites throughout the South and often resulted in mob violence, most white South Carolinians did not have the stomach for mob violence in the 1960s and rejected it as they had Ku Klux Klan activity in the 1920s. Unlike African Americans in other states, many black South Carolinians were less forceful in their demands and preferred working within the existing system to change the racial status quo. Also, even as late as the 1960s, South Carolina was a relatively small place where, despite racial segregation, blacks and whites often lived and worked across the racial divide.
Harvey Gantt, once quoted for saying, “If you can’t appeal to the morals of a South Carolinian, you can appeal to his manners” correctly captured the civility and gentility of black and white South Carolinians that assisted racial segregation’s end in the state.¹

Much of the activism to correct racial injustices did not come from average South Carolinians. Instead, forces working behind the scene ensured that the ensuing transition from segregation to desegregation would be peaceful. Businessmen particularly were interested in expanding South Carolina’s economic growth. They saw an example in such southern cities, like Little Rock, Arkansas where in 1957, before the desegregation of Central High School, eight new factories had opened. After televised confrontations between blacks and whites, four years would pass before another corporation would invest in the city.²

South Carolina businessmen were aware of the impact that similar encounters could have on business interests their state. In 1961, at the Watermelon Festival in Hampton County, Charles Daniels, the largest businessman in South Carolina and owner of the Daniel Construction Company, stood before a crowd and asserted that:

Desegregation issue cannot continue to be hidden behind the door. This situation cannot satisfactorily be settled at the lunch counter and bus station. We have a definite obligation to increase the productivity of our Negro citizens, to provide them with good jobs at good wages, and to continue to assure them of fair treatment . . . By raising their education and economic status, we would raise the whole economy of the state.”³

² Ibid., 537
³ George McMillan, “Integration with Dignity: The Inside Story of How South Carolina Kept the Peace,” The Saturday Evening Post, 16 March 1963, 17; Archie
The impact of Daniel’s words were felt throughout the state and especially in places like Greenville where businessmen and community leaders formed an advisory committee and decided that segregation was incompatible with economic growth in South Carolina. In 1962, Greenville’s chamber of commerce formed a biracial committee of top corporation, industrial, religious, and civil leaders that was supported by the city’s black and white leadership. The committee, without “fanfare or demonstrations” desegregated the city’s lunch counters, some restaurants, and other facilities.⁴

South Carolina politicians also saw the wave of change and began to publicly support gradual desegregation. Although after the Brown decision, Governor George Bell Timmerman, Jr. encouraged white South Carolinians to support continued segregation with proposals to equalize school resources and even threatened to close state public schools, his efforts were to no avail. Governor Ernest F. Hollings, Timmerman’s successor and a native Charlestonian, had long opposed school desegregation but was aware of violent collisions in other southern states. He believed that change was inevitable, remarking from a press conference in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1962, that South Carolina would not have “a Little Rock or an Oxford” if schools were desegregated.⁵ Thus, in 1963, aided by such individuals as Greenville businessman Charles E. Daniels, Senator Edgar Brown, textile lobbyist John Cauthen, Clemson president Robert

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Edwards, and Greenville News editor Wayne Freeman the way was paved for Harvey Gantt’s admittance to Clemson University, without incident, and consequently the move toward eventual desegregation.⁶

Businessmen and politicians also acquiesced to desegregation in South Carolina because they were concerned about the negative image that the state projected nationally. Segregation conflicted with the liberalism of the 1960s as African Americans resisted it and racial injustice in South Carolina. The behavior of black South Carolinians, particularly young women and men, belied any adherence to the racial status quo as was evident by the number of sit-ins and demonstrations that occurred throughout the state. The first reported civil rights demonstration in South Carolina came in Greenville in response to two episodes at its municipal airport. In 1959, an African American airman was ordered out of the white waiting room. In October 1959, baseball star Jackie Robinson, in Greenville to speak at the state conference of the NAACP, was verbally abused and threatened with arrest when he entered the white waiting room.

Consequently, on Emancipation Day, 1 January 1960, the NAACP sponsored a march of 250 African Americans from Springfield Baptist Church in downtown Greenville to the airport to protest these infringements upon African American civil rights.⁷

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⁶ Fraser, 414; Edgar, 538.
⁷ Archie Vernon Huff, Jr., Greenville: The History of the City and County in the South Carolina Piedmont (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 402.
In the early 1960s, the South Carolina Student Movement Association, led by African American students from Claflin and South Carolina State colleges launched sit-ins in Charleston, Columbia, Denmark, Greenville, Manning, Orangeburg, Rock Hill, Spartanburg, and Sumter, South Carolina. As a result, more than 400 students from Claflin and South Carolina State Universities were arrested. The South Carolina Student Movement Association, offered this statement regarding its activism:

It has been . . . the thinking of the students that services and treatment of all patrons should be the same. When these demonstrations were begun, it was expected that there would be more (people) arrested and penalties imposed. We . . . fully understand that freedom had a price tag on it. Those of us who wish to be free are willing to suffer and pay the penalty.  

Understandably, most whites did not respond well to displays that clearly exposed and challenged a segregated society. Tom Waring, editor of Charleston’s News and Courier and J. Waties Waring’s nephew, asserted that law officers should use “the whip, the rope, the knout, gun or anything else” to protect private property and preserve social order. His pronouncement came too late. Once the demonstrations began, they would continue for the next several years. 

Like whites throughout the South, white South Carolinians fought to maintain segregation in the state’s school systems. In fact, nine years after the Brown decision, not one African American student was enrolled in previously all-

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9 Ibid., 413.
white public schools. In the early 1960s, however, the vestiges of segregation began to fall, at least at the college level, as African Americans launched numerous challenges to South Carolina’s all-white institutions of higher learning.

Before the 1960s, most African American college students attended one of the state’s historically black universities or left South Carolina altogether to attend college. But this began to change when Lucinda Brawley, following in the footsteps of Harvey Gantt, became Clemson University’s first coed in September 1963 without court action, as a freshman majoring in mathematics.\(^{11}\)

Also in September 1963, when three black students applied for admission at the University of South Carolina, among them was Henri Monteith, Modjeska Simkins’ niece who in 1962 filed a suit (Monteith v. University of South Carolina et al) against the university’s all-white policy. Monteith’s mother, Rebecca Monteith, was clearly the force behind her daughter’s lawsuit. Unapologetically critical of South Carolina’s African American colleges, Monteith asserted in 1963 that African Americans colleges and universities were partly to blame because they did not “compare favorably with white schools” in their academic regimen. A Columbia schoolteacher, Rebecca Monteith was criticized after referring to Allen University and Benedict College, private, church-supported African American universities, as “two bit” schools. However, Monteith maintained her position, thus assaulting the failings of both black and white South Carolinians

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\(^{10}\) Edgar, 536.

\(^{11}\) I.A. Newby, Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina from 1895 to 1968 (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1973), 332; The two later wed in 1964.
and asserting that “many Negroes have been hindered from doing our best work by other Negroes in positions of authority.” She further insisted that “My people have been the victims of deliberate miseducation and deliberate denial of adequate educational opportunities by the very public officials who were supposed to provide this ‘separate but equal’ education.”

Once a freshman in pre-medicine at the College of Notre Dame in Baltimore, Maryland, Henri Monteith faced only one obstacle to enrollment at the University of South Carolina--her race. Indeed, the University of South Carolina acknowledged in a U.S. District Court in June 1963, that Monteith had in fact been denied admission because she was African American. The University’s lawyers also argued that her suit to gain admission to the university was premature because she had not applied for the 1963-64 academic year.

Monteith however, was more than qualified to matriculate at the University. She had graduated from St. Francis de Sales High School in Powhatan, Virginia, a private institution where she was class president and had ranked well academically. When questioned about her suit, Monteith asserted that she had applied for admission to the University because it was close to home, offered the courses she wanted to take, and was cheaper than having to attend school elsewhere. She was also an example of South Carolina African Americans who preferred to work within the system to pursue moderate racial change when

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she claimed that she did not believe in “racial fanaticism.” In July 1963, the University of South Carolina board of trustees voted to comply with federal court orders to admit qualified African Americans students in the fall term. It was the second formerly all-white, state-supported university to desegregate in South Carolina. 

Even moderate activism involved personal risk. On 26 August 1963, fifteen days before registration was to begin at the University of South Carolina, an explosion created a five foot long and one foot deep crater about two hundred yards from the Monteith home. Although no one was injured, the explosion shattered windows in the homes of Monteith's uncles, who lived nearby. Slightly shaken but undaunted by the experience, Monteith declared that she would still enter the University of South Carolina: “I am not disturbed to the point of changing anything.”

In 1961, at least four African American girls sought admission to the all-white Winthrop College for Women in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Winthrop’s president, Charles S. Davis, however, said the applications were incomplete and asserted “since the newspapers were informed immediately (by Negroes) we do

15 “USC To Admit First Negroes For Fall Term,” Southern School News, vol. 10, no. 2 (August 1963), front page. The last time USC had an African American student before this was during Reconstruction.
not know whether these are serious applications or publicity seekers." It was clear however, that Winthrop had no intention of accepting African Americans into its student body.

Winthrop would not enroll its first African American student until 1964. It became the first publicly funded school in South Carolina to desegregate without a court order when Cynthia Plair Roddey, an honor graduate of Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina and an elementary school teacher in the Rock Hill school system, registered for the graduate program. An example of African American women’s often unintentional activism, Roddey did not want to be the center of attention at Winthrop College. Perhaps this was why the university relented and allowed her to enroll. Roddey wanted only to pursue a master’s degree and live close to her home in Rock Hill, thus clearly limiting her presence on campus. When she arrived for enrollment at Winthrop, she declined newspaper interviews and pictures and appeared annoyed when a cameraman snapped a picture of her on the way to her first class. In September 1964, two more African Americans planned to enroll at Winthrop College that fall. By 1965, all of the formerly white public colleges and universities in South Carolina had desegregated.

19 Newby, 332.
The following year, African American children began entering South Carolina’s formerly all-white public schools. In such cities as Charleston, this included Millicent Brown, daughter of state NAACP president and civil rights activist, J. Arthur Brown, proving that for South Carolina’s blacks, racial activism was often a family affair. J. Arthur Brown’s mother, Millie Ellison Brown had been arrested in 1962 for participating in a demonstration at the Fort Sumter Hotel, because it did not serve African Americans. His daughter Minerva was the original plaintiff in the NAACP case Brown v. Charleston County School District 20 to desegregate Charleston city schools and was one of the fifteen arrested in the first sit-in of 1960 led by the South Carolina Student Movement Association. Millicent replaced her older sister when she graduated from high school and was among the first eleven African American children admitted to formerly all-white public schools in 1963. 21 When summarizing her experiences in South Carolina’s first public school desegregation in 1963, Millicent Brown was nothing less than gracious. She recalled her experience at the formerly all-white River High School as “no worse than I had expected, and a lot nicer than I had anticipated.” She maintained that although she was initially lonely, the students were kind to her and her instructors were “very cooperative.”

21 Millicent Ellison Brown, “Civil Rights Activism in Charleston, South Carolina, 1940-1970” (Ph.D., diss., Florida State University, 1997), 186.
Unlike other southern states, desegregation in South Carolina was relatively peaceful although integrationists encountered censorship and repression.\textsuperscript{23} This was particularly true for the South Carolina’s African American teachers who were often the most ardent activists. In Orangeburg, South Carolina, for example, third grade teacher Gloria Rackley lost her position in a black school in 1963 by the Orangeburg School Board because of her racial activism. Her dismissal sparked a boycott by African American students and teachers. Rackley, who later brought suit against the Orangeburg school system, had been arrested for participating in racial protests in both Orangeburg and Charleston counties. In 1961, police arrested her in Orangeburg for attempting to enter white washroom facilities. In 1962, she filed a suit to desegregate the Orangeburg Regional Hospital alleging that she been removed from the white waiting room at the hospital after she had taken her daughter for treatment. It was not until 1965 that the U.S. District Court gave the hospital sixty days to submit a plan for full desegregation of its facilities. After her dismissal, Rackley turned her case over to NAACP lawyer Matthew Perry and continued her racial activism. Rackley was also one of the plaintiffs on her daughter’s behalf \textit{in Adams v. Orangeburg School District 5}, which led to desegregation of the city’s schools in September 1964. She was later offered a job by the state NAACP and elected third vice-president of the organization.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24} “Dismissed Teacher Plans Court Move to Regain Position,” \textit{Southern School News}, vol. 10, no. 5 (November 1963): 13; “U.S. Judge Orders Hospital to Plan
Lesser known African American organizations in particular enlisted the services of black women. Charleston blacks for example founded the “Charleston Campaign for Freedom” in 1963, calling for mass demonstrations in southern states where steps toward desegregation were slowest. The goals included desegregation of all public facilities, restaurants, hotels, lunch counters and drinking fountains, equal employment opportunities, inclusion in white collar jobs, and appointment of African Americans to city standing committees. The women’s auxiliary of this organization included middle-class African American women who had long histories of civil rights activism in Charleston and South Carolina such as Ruby Cornwell, MayDe Brown (mother of Millicent Brown, who desegregated Rivers High School), and Johnetta Edwards. It was these women’s activism that resulted in the desegregation of many public facilities in downtown Charleston.

Black and white women’s organizations like the YWCA responded differently to these changes in South Carolina. The Greenville YWCA, for example, highlighted among its program and services for the 1960s education, employment, leisure, and racial integration. A meeting between the black Birnie Street YWCA and the predominantly white board of directors of the Greenville YWCA reveals the lengths to which the organization went to bring change in South Carolina.

Although the organization maintained segregated branches, members of the YWCA board included such educated, middle-class black women as E.E. McLaren, a graduate of South Carolina State College and New York University, Lena White, a Benedict College (Columbia, South Carolina) and Wayne University graduate, and Harriett Williams, a Spelman University and Atlanta University alumna. These women came from leading families in Greenville’s African American community. A comparison of African American board members and white board members reveal striking differences. Although both groups of women were married, African American women were most often listed as leaders in their own right in the African American community. White women’s achievements essentially highlighted their husbands’, brothers’, families’ businesses and/or political connections. This suggests that although both groups of women were wives and mothers, African American women’s attitudes toward marriage and domesticity varied from that of white women. Although black and white women were mothers and homemakers first and foremost, black women clearly saw their community uplift as an extension of their domestic duties. South Carolina historian Asa Gordon, extolled this variation in an excerpt on Marian Birnie Wilkinson, who established the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, but the sentiment is illustrative of other African American women who juggled roles as wives, mothers, and community leaders: “the career of Mrs. Wilkinson and others like her in this state
proves that the progressive colored woman has shown herself capable of using the new freedom in such a way as to preserve the old family life and at the same time give the woman a chance to function as a productive member of the social order."  

Most of the African American women on the board also had more education than did white women board members, as they typically attended at least two institutions of higher learning. With two exceptions, most attended South Carolina’s, historically African American colleges and universities for their undergraduate education.  

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27 YWCA Administrative Building Fund Campaign (Study), 1960, 16-17, Greenville YWCA, box 1, folder 6, SCL.
29 Birnie Street Committee and Board Meeting, 10 December 1969, box 1, folder 2, SCL.
as they positioned “civic training” as part of the YWCA’s program, as important as religious and moral training. Moreover, the Greenville YWCA formed a Public Affairs Committee which met regularly to study “good citizenship” and urged voter registration, which would assume a more prominent role on its civil rights agenda throughout the 1960s.

The Greenville YWCA also actively supported plans to improve school, library, and public recreation facilities. In a state where political contests often stooped to race-baiting politics and politicians from the time of Wade Hampton and the end of Radical Reconstruction urged that social stability be placed above all else to ensure that the lines between race and class were clearly drawn, YWCA members worked to change the political system by initiating efforts along with such women’s organizations as the Council of Church Women, American Association of University Women, and the League of Women Voters. They urged state and local political candidates to “raise the level of the campaign by discussing issues and not resorting to demagoguery.”

They had embraced this cause earlier. In 1958, they issued a statement appealing to political candidates to “deal with the race issue in a dignified manner.”

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30 YWCA Administrative Building Fund Campaign (Study), 1960, 55, Greenville YWCA, box 1, folder 6, SCL; John G. Sproat, “Firm Flexibility”: Perspectives on Desegregation in South Carolina. From New Perspectives on Race and Slavery in America: Essays in Honor of Kenneth M. Stampp (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 171. Sproat argues that the idea that some were born to rule and others to be ruled became a important instrument of control during the “desegregation crisis.”

Although many southern YWCA’s questioned how they should react to the changing racial order and thus define their relationship with the national YWCA, the Greenville YWCA solidified its position, asserting that their YWCA had no “family skeletons.” Indeed, in most aspects, the Greenville YWCA was integrated. According to the 1960 report, the board of directors, all association committees and councils were integrated. Members from the white and African American centers attended regional and national meetings together. However, black and white members continued to meet in separate facilities and the housing, residence, camping, and public food service provided by the YWCA remained segregated.

Moreover, the Greenville YWCA was not without its dissenting membership. Soon after African American women and girls were offered membership in 1949, three white members withdrew and three others resigned from the Board of Directors. Later, older members and other former leaders in the organization often chose to continue to pay dues and retain their membership, but failed to attend all-association meetings, most likely because they did not want to be personally involved with “controversial” aspects of YWCA activism. On the other hand, newer members of the organization and the board had worked interracially through other organizations and thus brought this experience and an added impetus to the Greenville Y’s racial activism.

The Greenville YWCA supported black women’s desire for autonomy
within the organization. In 1961, they proposed a Calhoun Street Center on the Birnie Street site which they later purchased. In its February 1961 “Survey, Analysis, and Plan of Fund-Raising for YWCA of Greenville,” they argued that a new facility would provide a “usable center for many Negro activities.” White women recognized the spatial limitations of the current facility and posited that the building would provide “space and facilities for a really vigorous and significant YWCA program for Negro girls and women, such as is physically impossible in the present five-room bungalow.” In its fund-raising campaign, the Greenville YWCA pointed out the relative lack of wealth of its board of directors and the city’s black community.32

Black women themselves wanted to retain a YWCA in the black community. Because integrated membership often meant white paternalism and unequal membership for African American women, Birnie Street members stressed that a separate YWCA made them feel more secure and lent them more opportunities for leadership and growth. Some local African Americans however objected to a separate YWCA. In 1962, the Greenville Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance opposed the construction of separate Ys because it would “perpetuate segregation.” Led by Reverend C. Hayes, Alliance president and pastor of Allen Temple A.M.E. church in Greenville, the members asserted, “The proposed branch of the YWCA building that is to be built on Birnie Street is a black mark on Christianity.” Hayes also commented, “While it is understood

32 “Survey, Analysis, and Plan of Fund-Raising for YWCA of Greenville, February 1961,” 53 and 61, YWCA Greenville, box 1, folder 7, SCL.
among the ministers that our position may not prevent the building of a segregated YWCA in Greenville (for there are those in our community who have a vested interest and who are sustained by the institution of segregation), we the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance would want it to be known that we defy the promotion of segregation in any form.”

Reverend Hayes clearly pointed out those African Americans whose business or community interests benefited from segregation. But, he also turned to Christian convictions to support its dismantling. Like many African Americans, Hayes felt perpetuating segregation created more problems than it solved.

However, for black women, a separate organization did not preclude interracial activism. They also wanted “opportunities for wider experiences and for recognition.” Thus, they acknowledged the benefits of interracial activism through participation in the Greenville YWCA, as well the opportunity a separate branch provided to showcase black women’s skills as community leaders.

One such individual who embodied the benefits of black women’s separate and interracial activism through the Greenville YWCA was Hattie Logan Duckett, who had originally organized the Phyllis Wheatley Center, which later became the Birnie Street Y. According to historian Asa Gordon, the Wheatley Center, resembled the “work of a YMCA and a YWCA combined.” A teacher in the Greenville city school system, Duckett graduated from Claflin College in Orangeburg, South Carolina and later studied in New York and Chicago, after

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34 Ibid., 75.
which time she became a social worker. Although information on Duckett is sparse, her sister Mae Logan recounted that she used to call their home the “house of refuge” because Duckett always took in strangers and anyone needing a place to stay temporarily. This concern for human welfare led Duckett to organize the Phyllis Wheatley Center to provide opportunities for African American boys and girls in Greenville. However, Duckett, like other black women activists in South Carolina, recognized the need for interracial cooperation with white women.\textsuperscript{35}

Most YWCA members, black and white, were proud of the Greenville YWCA’s accomplishments and were prouder still to be members of the organization. In light of the national civil rights movement, the national YWCA intensified its mandate to integrate local YWCAs, particularly focusing on southern YWCAs. According to Susan Lynn, by June 1963, only 13 percent of YWCAs in southern states were desegregated. By 1965, 60 percent were. Slowly but surely, due to membership demands and an overall changing political environment, some southern YWCAs like that of Greenville moved to desegregate.\textsuperscript{36}

While the Greenville YWCA worked to implement national policies, in 1960s South Carolina, they had to tread lightly and acknowledged this to be so in a 1960 report. For example members ensured that national policies were not highlighted in local newspapers. Although the board was integrated, its

\textsuperscript{35} “Mrs. Duckett’s center helped all races,” Greenville Piedmont, Friday, 14 February 1975, YWCA Greenville, box 1, folder 19, SCL; Asa Gordon, Sketches of Negro Life and History in South Carolina (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1929), 187.

\textsuperscript{36} Lynn, 145.
membership took care to keep interracial pictures of YWCA activities out of local papers. And when all-association YWCA activities were reported, no attention was called to the fact that they were integrated.\footnote{YWCA Administrative Building Fund Campaign (1960), 75, Greenville YWCA, SCL.}

As the Greenville YWCA kept tabs on racial developments in the county, it noted two lawsuits, to open airport and library facilities to all citizens, in addition to sit-ins at lunch counters throughout the city. Rather than allow blacks to use the libraries city officials elected to close them. In 1960, Mrs. John F. Chandler, president of the Greenville YWCA, protested closing the city library to Kenneth Cass, mayor of Greenville. Chandler recognized the tide of change in South Carolina and the importance that education assumed along with this change. She informed Cass that, “In this rapidly changing era when education assumes increasing importance, to deny citizens the use of books is our opinion is not only deplorable, but also a disaster.” Under the auspices of her organization Chandler requested that “the City Council as a corporate body take appropriate action to open the library to all citizens without delay.”\footnote{Mrs. John F. Chandler, President, Greenville YWCA to Honorable Kenneth Cass, Mayor, City of Greenville, 15 September 1960, YWCA Greenville, box 1, folder 18, SCL.}

The organization noted that local and state policy persisted in resisting integration and maintaining segregation at all costs. But Greenville YWCA members also acknowledged that its city was in a more favorable position than many southern communities to accommodate racial changes. Not only did it have smaller number of African Americans in its population than many southern
communities, but also it had a “silent moderate group” that supported changes.\(^{39}\)
Thus the Y leaders recognized their role in improving racial conditions in Greenville and posited that the YWCA’s activism was accepted because the organization maintained separate facilities for black and white women. Indeed, the YWCA was one of the few places where blacks and whites could meet to discuss racial issues and most likely the only place in the white community with integrated dining facilities.

The Greenville YWCA clearly saw itself in a controversial, yet necessary position to advance racial progress, characterizing its work as “quiet and progressive” and a “conscious effort not to precipitate a crisis” and noting that it had “hazards as well as opportunities for moral leadership.” Invoking the Christian convictions upon which the organization was founded it further offered that in “unobtrusive, unspectacular, and moderate ways” the Greenville YWCA had given “Christian leadership in Greenville to advances in the development of interracial relations.”\(^{40}\) Thus, the organization worked carefully to change race relations in Greenville and South Carolina, while remaining mindful of the difficult racial climate in which it worked.

Although racial restrictions on the black and white branches of the Greenville YWCA had been lifted, black and white members did not discontinue use of their respective facilities. For the black and white women in leadership positions in the YWCA racial integration was relatively easy, as many had

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\(^{40}\) Ibid., 74, 76, 88.
established interracial contacts as a result of their early activism. Like many women involved in racial work, they shared a middle-class status and perspective. However, this was not the case for the general YWCA membership. ⁴¹

As a consequence of local social mores which proved difficult to eradicate, the general membership of the Greenville YWCA, unlike its integrated leadership, had few opportunities to interact in the 1960s. ⁴² Yet, there was some movement in that direction. African American members began to participate in daytime and nighttime classes and programs, including swimming classes, at the white YWCA. Integrated activities seemed to work best among young people as the Y successfully cooperated with an interracial religious youth council. ⁴³

Black women’s autonomy within the YWCA was dependent upon maintaining separate facilities however. The Birnie Street YWCA created programs to support the African American community, such as an enrichment program for low-income mothers as well as periodic programs on sexual morality. As the 1960s came to a close, the Greenville YWCA supported Birnie Street teen programs on race relations and in the theme of the day, courses on “Negro” heritage, in addition to working jointly with the Greenville Council of Church Women by writing letters to local newspapers supporting juvenile correction

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⁴² Ibid., 46.
⁴³ Greenville YWCA Program Report 1965, box 1, folder 30, SCCHR.
Despite this, black and white members of the Greenville YWCA maintained separate facilities until the 1980s.

Unlike the Greenville YWCA, the Charleston YWCA’s limited efforts for interracial cooperation evaporated in the 1960s as the national YWCA pushed its civil rights initiatives. When the sit-ins began in the early 1960s, the national YWCA was one of the first organizations to publicly lend its support by offering funds and legal aid, endorsing the 1963 March on Washington, and participating in the National Women’s Committee for Civil Rights, which met with President John F. Kennedy in July 1963, in addition to urging local branches and southern branches, in particular, to end discrimination in their organizations.45

The Coming Street YWCA had been a branch of the Central George Street YWCA since the 1920s, but when the Y’s national board began to encourage local associations to integrate, the Central YWCA regarded this move as an entrenchment upon their local autonomy. The Charleston YWCA immediately opposed the program because it required local chapters to support civil rights legislation and the March on Washington scheduled for 28 August 1963, and because they claimed the national board spoke for all local associations without their consent or representation.46

The national board planned no action against the Charleston YWCA for disapproving the program however. Ruth Hill, the Y’s regional director claimed

44 “Minutes-Birnie Street Committee and Board Meeting,” 10 December 1969, Greenville YWCA, box 1, folder 2, SCL.
45 Lynn, 145.
46 “No Action Planned Against Local ‘Y’”, News and Courier, 2 October 1963, 17-A.
that there was “correspondence” between the Charleston Association and the national office but recognized that because the national contributed only “material and ideas” to the local association and not financial assistance that “local groups have a certain amount of self-determination.”

The Charleston YWCA did, however, take modest steps to bring its city closer into step with national ideals. In October 1963, a month after they disapproved the civil rights directive from the national board, the Association added an African American to its executive committee. It also formed a six-member biracial committee consisting of three members from the “Negro” branch’s committee on administration and three members from the board of directors. Virginia Prouty, Charleston Y executive director, stated that the biracial committee’s role was to “meet with the president and executive director to determine what steps need to be taken by both groups to make for more meaningful relations in the YWCA and in the community.” According to Prouty, “Relationships between national and the local YWCA have been and continue to be excellent. At no time has there been any thought of disaffiliation.” However, events that followed indicate that there was in fact some discussion about disaffiliation from the National YWCA.

Rather than desegregate, the Charleston YWCA sought to circumvent the national’s directive by creating new but separate YWCA facilities. In a letter to the National Board, Mrs. Bonum S. Wilson, president of the Charleston YWCA,

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47 Ibid.
48 “’Y’ Board to Add Negro,” News and Courier, 3 October 1963, 1-B.
and Virginia Prouty made the Charleston position very clear that for more than ten years the YWCA had been working and planning for new facilities for the branch and central YWCA. They had anticipated breaking ground for this in fall 1963, but concluded that “The present civil rights situation, together with the directives from the National Board, will more than likely halt this badly needed construction.”

The letter focused on the services it provided to the black and white communities in Charleston. It reported that integration in the Charleston YWCA occurred mainly among its leadership as most black and white women interacted with each other only in committee and board meetings and leadership training sessions. They also argued that they had accomplished much by helping to eradicate school dropouts and illegitimacy and by creating adult education and citizenship programs. The Charleston YWCA clearly saw itself fostering better race relations within the confines of a segregated society. Mrs. Bonun S. Wilson relayed this sentiment in 1963 to Mrs. Archie D. Marvel, President of the National Board of the YWCA, “Within the bounds of the mores of this community the YWCA had helped to set the pace for understanding and communication.”49 The Charleston YWCA prided itself for having kept the lines of communication “open” with the branch YWCA and saw only progress in its relations yet to come.

However, they could not comply with the national YWCA’s civil rights agenda and asserted, “under the circumstances, we feel that we cannot and must not promote further integration at this time.”

Furthermore the formation of a biracial committee had very little to do with changing the segregated policies of the Charleston’s YWCA. Virginia Prouty asserted “the Charleston YWCA will not be altered by the pro-integration policy of the YWCA’s national board.” The committee had been formed merely to bring black and white leaders of the Charleston YWCA together to “further understanding between branches.”

When the Charleston Ys executive committee initially received copies of the memo, members were so upset that they called for disaffiliation. According to Prouty, the biracial committee would help avoid disaffiliation or dissolution of either branch by allowing each group to discuss ways to remain segregated and autonomous of the national YWCA.

The Charleston YWCA’s reaction to the National Board’s memo was indicative of racial tensions in Charleston. Virginia Prouty described black and white Charlestonians as “very tense and on a razor’s edge” in a telephone conversation with Florence Harris, correlator of the YWCA’s southern region. Prouty was emotionally traumatized by local events, as there had been a number of demonstrations in Charleston that had cost her several nights sleep. Black members were upset as well, not with the national YWCA but with the executive committee of the Charleston YWCA. Anna Kelly, executive director of the

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50 Ibid.
51 “YWCA Hasn’t Altered Race Policy,” News and Courier, 22 December 1963, 14-A.
Coming Street YWCA, contacted Prouty and voiced her opposition to the Charleston YWCA’s letter to Edith Lerrigo, general secretary of the national board. Because there were no black members on the executive committee, their opinions were not represented in the letter.\footnote{52}

The national board of the YWCA dealt with the Charleston YWCA very carefully as it was clearly aware of the fragile nature of race relations in its southern associations. However, it urged the Charleston association to make a decision on integration that fell in line with the new philosophy of the national board. Edith M. Lerrigo hoped that local branches would comply with national policy. She expressed great confidence in the Charleston YWCA’s ability to align itself with other YWCAs across the country as they worked to make their organization more inclusive. “I feel sure that we can count upon the leaders of the Charleston Association to make their decisions within the frame of the Christian task of the YWCA,” she wrote. Lerrigo urged the Charleston YWCA to carefully consider its decision and recognized that because it was not financially supported by the national YWCA, it did indeed function as an autonomous entity. Although she left the decision of compliance with the national policy up to the leaders and representatives of the Charleston YWCA, Lerrigo urged that this decision could best be made by representatives from the central and branch YWCAs, thus subtly urging interracial cooperation. \footnote{53}

\footnote{52} Mary Jane Willet to Sallie N. Johnson, 22 August 1963, National YWCA Records, box 124, folder 10, SSC.

\footnote{53} Ibid.

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Leaders of the Charleston YWCA received funds from organizations like the Charleston United Fund and were thus concerned about any actions that might alienate contributors. This was clearly the case when the executive director of the Charleston United Fund told Florence Harris that he was “critical and astonished” that the National Board would support anything as “questionable” as the March on Washington. He also informed her that the Charleston YWCA had used appropriate methods to “building relationships” but that supporting any radical activities would “undo in Charleston all that had been previously done in improving communications between the two races.”

The national YWCA had underestimated how pervasive segregation was in the fabric of Charleston life. When the national YWCA’s memo was printed in the News and Courier, Virginia Prouty expected to be overwhelmed with phone calls. She received only one, from a woman who exclaimed, “I will never donate to the YWCA again!”

White members of the Central YWCA understood their Christian duty differently from that expressed by the national YWCA. And, indeed, for most white YWCA members, it did not include racial inclusiveness. Although black women in South Carolina assumed great risks and were often stigmatized for their activism, it did not stop them from pushing for integration in female-led organizations.

The integrated activism that had existed with the Greenville YWCA was not reflected in local YWCAs in other parts of South Carolina. Unlike black and

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54 Mary Jane Willet to Sallie N. Johnson, 22 August 1963, National YWCA Records, box 124, folder 10, SSC.
white members in Greenville, in Charleston, even at the leadership level perpetual
tension existed between the branch and the Central YWCA. However, many
black members had tried to foster better and integrated efforts with the Central
YWCA. After the National Board passed its resolution changing its purpose and
policies in 1963, the newly formed biracial committee met in December 1964 to
interpret its meaning for members and new board members. Some white
members subtly proposed listing such courses as Russian and ceramics in the
Central YWCA’s bulletin, but made it clear that they were being taught at the
black branch. Another member proposed a new building if there were to be
integrated classes. The apprehension among some white members was palpable.
When Phyllis Shaffer mentioned the course proposal, member Eleanor Craighill
declared that she did not believe in interracial mixing. In 1965, after the National
Board sent a letter to the Charleston YWCA asking for compliance with a
directive from the Civil Rights Commission, Virginia Prouty and two program
staff members resigned.56

Because of the touted “Christian” purpose of the YWCA, black members,
through aware of the racial dynamics of the South and South Carolina, were
surprised by white members’ negative reaction to the changing purpose of the
YWCA’s mission. And many white members were quite upset by the National
Board’s support of what were considered controversial topics in Charleston in the
1960s. Black members however, were adamant about keeping a YWCA in the

55 Virginia Prouty to Ruth Hill, Correlator, Southern Region, National Board
YWCA, 3 October 1963, box 124, folder 10, SSC.
city and pushed the Association to adopt the National’s directives. In March 1965, when the Association received a letter from the National Board urging compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, black member Mrs. Metz urged discussion among its members. Emily Fielding pointed out small steps toward integration in one YWCA class and moved that the Charleston YWCA’s Committee on Administration be in accordance with the Civil Rights Commission’s request for racial inclusiveness, particularly because it was also in compliance with the purpose and philosophy of the YWCA.57

Even as they did this, black women maintained contact with officials on the National YWCA board and discussed their findings in their own meetings. In April 1965, Mrs. Metz met with Hattie Droll, part of the field staff for the Southern Region of the YWCA. When she reported back to the Coming Street YWCA, Metz discussed the importance of a “closer union” of the Central and Branch YWCAs in Charleston urging that they “work toward creating a feeling of one association.”58

Black women interpreted compliance with national YWCA policy differently from white women. For them compliance did not mean a loss of community resources. Rather, it meant increased resources and community participation in a program that ensured racial inclusiveness.

56 Committee on Administration Meeting, 16 December 1964, Charleston YWCA, Charleston, South Carolina.
57 15 March 1965, Charleston YWCA Minutes, Charleston, South Carolina.
58 12 April 1965, Charleston YWCA Minutes, Charleston, South Carolina.
For white women, accepting the mandates of the national YWCA almost certainly meant a loss in financial resources from the white community especially since they functioned autonomously of the national organization.  

Throughout the 1960s black women and some white women worked to maintain a relationship between the members of the Central and the Coming Street YWCA, while continuing to push for integration and better facilities for African Americans. In September 1965, Mrs. Singleton of the Coming Street YWCA gave a report from the Pool Committee stating that it was not possible to build a pool in the black areas of Charleston and instead proposing that blacks be allowed to use the Central YWCAs swimming pool. Phyllis Shaffer further elaborated on the committee’s findings concluding that she did not see any reason why blacks should not have their own pool. Although a few white members favored integrating their pool, most immediately rejected the idea. This clearly demonstrated that for white and black members alike the basic tenets of the YWCA were subject to interpretation. Many white members were held by the mores of a racist, segregated society. They struggled with and often won the battle to use their interpretation of Christian activism to support injustice.

Black women’s compliance with the national board’s policies were not unlike those of predominantly black organizations that looked to the federal government as its “national chapter,” thereby recognizing that compliance meant improved conditions and federal support. Black women understood the YWCA

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59 15 March 1965, Charleston YWCA Minutes, Charleston, South Carolina.
60 20 September 1965, Charleston YWCA Minutes, Charleston, South Carolina.
both nationally and locally as racially inclusive. The national board stressed this same understanding. According to Dorothy I. Height, director of the office of racial integration of the national board that had been appointed in 1965, “As women and girls of goodwill, it is easy to talk among ourselves and to justify token integration. But the times demand that we give leadership to becoming a truly open Association in an open society. Our Christian Purpose impels us to eradicate the vestiges of racism within Associations themselves.”

Height herself had a long history of civil rights activism. She was director of training for the National Board for eighteen years and had also been president of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) since 1957. The organization had an active role in southern civil rights activism throughout the 1960s. While president of the NCNW, Height also sat on the Council for United Civil Rights Leadership which facilitated a close relationship with the national board of the YWCA.

As white members of the Charleston YWCA were faced with desegregation, they were deeply concerned about what they perceived as the national YWCA’s movement away from Christianity in its programs. Nancy Hawk, president of the board of directors in Charleston, wrote the board of directors claiming that charter members of the YWCA were displeased with changes in the National YWCA’s policy.

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62 Lynn, 146.
In 1966, the Charleston YWCA sent an integrated group to the National Conference in the Region in Atlanta, Georgia. According to Hawk, instead of discussing the Guides to Participation, “the delegation discovered that the Conference was set up to influence their thinking and that the summary of each discussion group, as well as the final summary, embodied actually the feeling of the National Staff and the representatives rather than that of the regional participants.”

White YWCA members saw the change in the YWCA’s national policy as a “forerunner of eventual elimination of Christianity as the core of the YWCA and the transformation of this important international association into a congress of women dedicated to economic and social reform.” Consequently, at its annual membership meeting in May 1966, the Charleston YWCA held its first discussion on withdrawal from the YWCA of the USA. A motion to disaffiliate was defeated by 103 votes by members from the Coming Street YWCA. White YWCA members offered as its reasons for withdrawing from the National YWCA objections to proposed changes in the wording of the YWCA statement of purpose which would delete the words “Committed by our Faith as Christians”

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63 Mrs. John C. Hawk, President, YWCA Board of Directors, Charleston, South Carolina to the President, YWCA Board of Directors, June 1967, YWCA Greenville, box, 1 folder 20, SCL.
and objections to National’s stands on such issues as halting bombings in
Vietnam, seating Red China in the United Nations, guaranteeing minimum wage
for all persons, abolishing capital punishment, and of course full integration of the
organization.64

Nancy Hawk and charter members of the YWCA were distressed at the
prospect of severing ties with the National YWCA, but also argued that they had
built a strong organization with little contact with the National Board. Thus, they
felt they had little to lose from disaffiliation and posited that they had more to
offer the community if “we stress our Christian commitment.”65

Some white women did not necessarily agree with the policies of the
National YWCA but urged that the Charleston association maintain affiliation.
Judith Wragg Chase, argued that “You don’t stop a head of buffalo by stepping
aside,” thus urging continued affiliation. Another member, Laura Martinez,
simply called the disaffiliation move what it was, “a race issue.” 66

For black women in Charleston, fighting racism and other social injustices
assumed a central position as part of the YWCA’s “Christian” movement. After
the George St. branch discussed disaffiliation from the National Board, hostilities
among black and white members clearly reflected how differently both groups
perceived the YWCA as a community institution. In March 1967, Nancy Hawk

64 Charleston, South Carolina YWCA;“Policies Attacked, YWCA Votes to Quite
Hawk, President, YWCA Board of Directors, Charleston, South Carolina, to
President, YWCA Board of Directors, St. Louis, Missouri, 13 February 1967,
National Board YWCA Records, box 28, folder 1, SSC.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
asked to hear the Coming St. Branch’s plans since it had chosen to remain affiliated with the national board and was intent upon “blocking disaffiliation efforts.” In Hawk’s estimation, black women should have voted for disaffiliation and then applied for a charter which would have allowed both groups to remain autonomous. She also felt that racially separate organizations were best in order for the Charleston YWCA to retain its “Christian” commitment. While Hawk admitted that the Charleston YWCA was open to everyone, the board felt that the “purpose” of the organization must “contain a Christian commitment if the organization is going to continue Christian.” Integration and national involvement in local affairs in Hawk’s estimation negated the effectiveness of the Charleston YWCA as a Christian organization. She further asserted “It seems to our board that there is a strong movement in this country to water down Christian beliefs until they are acceptable to anyone, thereby making them more popular. We feel it is time an organization of Christians reiterated those precepts of their faith which make it unique without regard to its popularity. We think the crises of our modern world need a stronger, not a weaker, Christian commitment.”

Christianity for many white members of the Charleston YWCA meant local autonomy, white leadership, and adherence to southern mores. White YWCA members perceived its service to the community as one with which “we will have to be free to make decisions ourselves” and one which allowed them to retain their “traditional” and racially exclusive definition of Christianity.67

67 “YWCA Meeting Set to Plan Break With National Assn,” News and Courier, 6 March 1967, 10-B.
68 Ibid., 10-B.
Black women however did not perceive the YWCAs Christian purpose in quite the same way. For them, affiliation and abiding by National rules meant an expanded definition of its Christian purpose and was important as the YWCA’s agenda was closely linked to the civil rights changes they themselves were pursuing in Charleston. Finally, they wanted to keep a YWCA branch operating in Charleston. In a move that impacted both black and white YWCAs members, the overwhelming majority of the local board of directors favored the break because policies at the national level were “far from traditional.” With few exceptions those who had opposed disaffiliation were members of the predominately black Coming Street Branch.

Opposition to disaffiliation did not stem merely from members of the Charleston YWCA. Indeed this controversy filtered throughout YWCA branches around the nation. A letter from Mrs. William M. Ankeney, president of the YWCA board of directors of Dayton, Ohio reveals how other white women interpreted the greater cause of the YWCA beyond the support of superficial Christian values. The revised statement of purpose from the National Board expanded a restrictive definition of Christian duty. Mrs. Ankeney agreed with this sentiment positing, “We do not feel that acceptance of the proposed statement of purpose would make us less Christian, but rather that through it, we might find a new greatness, a deeper commitment, and a better understanding of what is required of us as Christians in today’s world.”

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69 Charleston YWCA Minutes, March 1967, Charleston, South Carolina.
70 Mrs. William M. Ankeney, President, YWCA Board of Directors, Dayton, Ohio, to the President, YWCA Board of Directors and Executive Director,
An even more poignant letter came from Dora Schofield, president of the YWCA of Tidewater Area of Virginia. As a southern state, the assumption might be that Virginia understood and supported Charleston’s dilemma. However this was not the case with the Virginia YWCA. Its members supported the purpose and hoped for its adoption stating, “We are living in a time of change; unless the YWCA keeps abreast of the changes and moves towards the future, as it always has, with faith and confidence, we will cease to be a vital, living force in the Community, Nation, or World.” Similar sentiments were clear in YWCA letters from other parts of the country.  

Though there was some dissension, the new Statement of Purpose and amendment to the National YWCAs constitution was overwhelmingly accepted.  

Some white members of the Charleston YWCA did not see the break in quite the same terms and even hinted at communist infiltration of the organization. One member, Mrs. R. L. Kerr, ironically argued that the national YWCA had changed from a Christian organization into a “secular, socially conscious one.” Mrs. Harry Lindstedt, attacked the “socialist” stand the YWCA had taken “on many issues” and declared that the organization had “made

regarding the Charleston, South Carolina YWCA Letter, 12 April 1967, YWCA Greenville, box 1, folder 20, SCL.

Dora Schofield, President, YWCA of Tidewater Areas of Virginia to Mrs. John C. Hawk, President, YWCA of Charleston, YWCA Greenville, box 1, folder 20, SCL.

Erskine, 97.
pronouncements in areas best left to the experts.”\textsuperscript{73} Mrs. Maxwell Anderson insisted that a “Christian organization should stay out of politics.”\textsuperscript{74}

In March 1967, the Charleston YWCA failed to obtain the two-thirds majority necessary for disaffiliation. The vote, which represented the second attempt to break ties with the national YWCA, was held during the Charleston YWCAs’ annual membership meeting. In response to the vote Nancy Hawk quipped, “The proposal is defeated for now. I can’t say at this point what may take place in the future.”\textsuperscript{75}

This of course did not put an end to the controversy in the Charleston YWCA. In May 1967, at a meeting held at the College of Charleston gymnasium to accommodate a large crowd, a final vote of 538 to 102 affirmed the Charleston YWCA’s withdrawal from the National Board of the YWCA of USA. This marked the end of a 61-year affiliation with the National Board. Both the George Street and Coming Street YWCA were disaffiliated by the vote.

Not all white members of the Charleston YWCA supported disaffiliation however. After the final vote Mrs. George C. B. Tolleson immediately stood and announced that she was withdrawing her membership from Central and retaining her membership at the Coming Street branch.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
Remarkning on the final decision to sever ties with the National Branch Tolleson quipped, “I presume the next step for this organization is to secede from the union!”

After the vote, black women wasted little time in creating a new YWCA for the Charleston area. In June 1967, the Coming Street YWCA held its first meeting to initiate plans to reorganize a community YWCA for the Charleston area. The Coming Street branch, according to Nancy Hawk, was still a part of the Central Charleston branch and only eligible for discontinuation by an act of the Board of Directors, Branch Committee on Administration, and a vote of the entire membership. According to Hawk, black members were acting as though they were no longer a branch of the Central YWCA. Because the Coming Street YWCA was still understood to be a branch of the YWCA of Charleston, black members were expected to remain members and uphold their responsibilities until they wrote a formal letter requesting disaffiliation. However, black women were determined to adhere to the mandates of the National YWCA and recognized the Central YWCA’s failure to do so. When they questioned the Central YWCA about whether or not it was still operating under the National YWCA’s constitution, they discovered that white members operated under their own constitution, having deleted all references to the National YWCA.

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77 Ibid., 3 June 1967.
78 Committee on Administration Minutes, 19 June 1967, Charleston YWCA.
79 Ibid.
Providing a real opportunity to exercise autonomy, the National Board assisted the Coming St. branch in becoming a provisional YWCA, the first step to becoming a community YWCA. Local attorneys, several of them civil rights activists, assisted the Coming Street branch in reorganizing and securing deeds to property from the George Street YWCA.  

African American women were adamant about retaining a local YWCA in the Charleston community and asserting their disaffiliation from the Central YWCA. Most black members refused to support continued affiliation because white members made it clear that their presence was not wanted. One member Mrs. Singleton, reported that she and other members had had “past unfriendly experiences” at the Central YWCA. She further declared that she saw no advantage of remaining a “Branch to Central whose membership and leaders have always shown they did not accept us.” Furthermore, although the Coming Street branch was supposed to have a representative on the Board of Directors, no one from the Branch had been elected to serve making it further clear that white members desired neither black members’ input, nor their presence.

Because the national YWCA had a copyright on the “Y” name, the local board of directors had to consider plans to change the name of the Charleston organization. And black members questioned why the Central YWCA continued to refer to itself as the YWCA, when they had chosen disaffiliation from the National body. Executive director of the YWCA of Greater Charleston

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80 Ibid., 1967-1968.
81 Committee on Administration Minutes, 19 February 1968, Charleston YWCA.
Inc., at 106 Coming Street, Christine Osborn Jackson, declared to Charlestonians that her organization was the “only real Young Women’s Christian Association in this area.” While African American women were aware of the social mores in Charleston, South Carolina, they had a greater duty to pursue racial change for the city’s African Americans in particular, and for all people in general. They recognized that in order for the Charleston YWCA to be useful in this capacity, it had to remain affiliated with the National Board. Thus, after the Charleston YWCA formally disaffiliated itself from the National Board on 15 March 1969, the directors of the Coming Street branch organized the YWCA of Greater Charleston. The new organization received a charter from the state on 14 March 1969 and applied for a national charter which it received on 2 February 1970. This made the YWCA of Greater Charleston the only community YWCA for the South Carolina low country.

To further assert its autonomy, members of the former Coming Street YWCA announced their intentions to purchase the property at 106 Coming Street from the Charleston YWCA. Under the terms of sale the YWCA of Greater Charleston would assume a $53,000 mortgage from the Charleston YWCA. When the first closing was held at First Federal Bank of Charleston on 15 July 1969, the George Street YWCA and the Coming Street YWCA met in separate offices.

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83 “New YWCA Called Only ‘Real’ YWCA,” News and Courier, 16 December 1969. 5A. Christine Osborn Jackson is also Coretta Scott King’s first cousin.
84 Charleston YWCA Minutes, 2 February 1970.
The closing was later canceled because the George Street YWCA refused to acknowledge the YWCA of Greater Charleston’s existence and hence the autonomy of African American women.\(^\text{85}\)

After much time and deliberation, the second closing was held on 15 August 1969. The Charleston YWCA deeded the Coming Street property to Geneva P. Singleton, president of the YWCA of Greater Charleston Inc., which she in turn deeded to the YWCA of Greater Charleston. With this action, not only did the YWCA of Greater Charleston receive deeds to the property at 106 Coming Street, but also a $53,000 mortgage to be paid within 15 years. Also, at this very moment, the Coming Street branch of the YWCA ceased to exist. According to Christine Jackson, the sum was not a “purchase price” but a settlement of its obligation to the Charleston YWCA. Perhaps as a final slight to African American women’s autonomy in the YWCA, the terms of agreement for the sale, which was financed by First Federal Savings and Loan Association, gave the Charleston YWCA a fifteen day option on the property if it was offered for sale within three years after the completion of sale to the new YWCA.\(^\text{86}\) The Charleston YWCA had underestimated the ingenuity of African American women however. On 28 March 1982, the $53,000 mortgage was paid in full, almost three years before the payoff date.\(^\text{87}\)

\(^{85}\) Charleston YWCA Minutes, 15 July 1969; “New YWCA Called Only ‘Real’ YWCA,” News and Courier, 16 December 1969, 5-A
\(^{86}\) “Greater Charleston YW to Buy Coming St. Branch,” News and Courier, 14 June 1969, 10-A.
\(^{87}\) Charleston YWCA Minutes, 28 March 1982.
This saga did not end with warm feelings among black and white members of the YWCA or white members and the national YWCA. The George Street YWCA realized in the 1960s that the national YWCA had a copyright on the “Y” name, yet it continued to use it. In the 1970s, the National Board of the YWCA initiated a lawsuit against the George Street YWCA to discontinue use of YWCA name and symbols. In 1971 the trial was conducted in federal court with Judge Sol Blatt, Jr. presiding who decided in favor of the National Board YWCA. The George Street YWCA appealed the ruling to the 4th District Court in Virginia but it was later dropped. In 1972, the George Street YWCA became the Christian Family Y, the name it has retained until this day.  

The George Street YWCA and the Coming Street YWCA’s devolution into separate entities resulted in a different outcome than had occurred with the Greenville YWCA. Although those in leadership positions in both Associations met to discuss YWCA programs and policies, unlike the Greenville YWCA, Charleston’s basic membership never came together in integrated programs. Nor did they use common facilities. The Coming Street YWCA sought to include white Charlestonians in its programs, particularly after it became the YWCA of Greater Charleston. And, indeed, it was able to retain a few white members who had objected to the George Street YWCA’s position against integration. However, due to societal mores that were slow to erode, most of its functions and facilities benefited only African Americans.  

88 Charleston YWCA Minutes, September 1971, 1-3 November 1971.
Both Associations proved the different interpretations of the YWCA’s “Christian” purpose. For George Street members it meant racial exclusiveness. For the Coming Street YWCA the purpose to them clearly meant including all Charlestonian in its programs. Finally, this saga also chronicles the determination of African American women as they sought to include all in their YWCA programs but also sought autonomy and agency as they meted out its benefits to the African American community.

Other female-led religious organizations looked to the national civil rights movement and used its tenets to evaluate the need for change and activism within their communities. Most often, for these women, racial activism was limited to desegregation within their own ranks. The Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina Branch of the Woman’s Auxiliary for example, which included women from Anderson, Richland, Greenville, Spartanburg, Aiken, and Newberry counties, provides an example of internal organizational desegregation. Founded on October 1922, at Grace Church in Anderson, South Carolina, this group of Christian women was composed of baptized members of the church and structured along the lines of the National Council of the Church. The mission of the organization was threefold: missions and church extension, religious education and Christian Social Service. Christian Social Service, a categorization in many women’s Christian organizations, was almost always codified language for race work or interracial cooperation.
However, when the organization was founded, there had already been a long history of work among the “colored” congregations of the Episcopal Church. Although committed to racial activism in its rhetoric, the Women’s Auxiliary had to seriously examine its commitment to an improvement in race relations in South Carolina, which meant that the membership had to examine the its segregated existence. Despite the mandate of the Women’s Auxiliary, two separate organizations existed, one black, the other white. The black branch of the Woman’s Auxiliary in the Diocese of South Carolina had been organized in 1914 in Spartanburg, South Carolina. 

From the time that the General Convention adopted a resolution authorizing the women of the Episcopal Church to organize there had been separate organizations. But, by the 1960s, Episcopalian women’s auxiliaries around the country and throughout the South had already desegregated. South Carolina and upper South Carolina still had two separate organizations of Episcopal women. At the 1961 Triennial of Episcopal Church Women, in Detroit, Michigan, a resolution was presented to delete all references to a “minority group.” A separate group of church women suggested a division among Episcopal Church Women which was not in keeping with the purposes of

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89 History of the Woman’s Auxiliary of Upper South Carolina, n.d. and A Brief History of the Diocese of Upper South Carolina, Episcopal Church Women of the Diocese of Upper South Carolina Records, box 1, folder 1, Winthrop University Archives.
the organization. The by-laws committee of the Triennial referred this resolution to the national committee, which was made up of five members including Mrs. Everette Hall, a representative from Dillon, South Carolina, and recommended that any diocese with a racial minority set up a bi-racial committee to examine the implications of the by-law.

In 1962, the Bishop of the Diocese of Upper South Carolina, aware that South Carolina was out of step with the rest of the nation, urged South Carolina Episcopal women to form a biracial committee to facilitate better communication between the two organizations.\(^\text{92}\) When the two groups of women met in December of the same year, black women expressed their views on separate organizations asserting, “we are all members of one church, working in one fellowship and it is time we worked together as Christians.” Black women strongly supported immediate integration, white women were divided. However, white women who supported desegregation did so cautiously and emphasized that with “succeeding meetings” and by studying the methods by which other dioceses had unified, the Episcopal Church would be better able to “contribute to that end.”\(^\text{93}\)


\(^{92}\) Ibid.

\(^{93}\) Minutes of the first Meeting Bi-Racial Committee, 15 December 1962, Records Relating to the Bishop’s Committee on Race Relations, box 11, folder 43, Winthrop University Archives.
In 1964, at their annual meeting, the Episcopal Church Women of the Diocese of Upper South Carolina dissolved their organization and reorganized as the integrated Episcopal Churchwomen of the Diocese of Upper South Carolina with the following resolution:

The Committee studying the question of unification of the majority and minority branches of the Episcopal Churchwomen recommends to the Board of the majority group that unification of the two groups be accomplished on the diocesan and district levels in the total participation and program of the Episcopal Churchwomen of the Diocese of Upper South Carolina . . .

Episcopal Church Women and the Diocese of Upper South Carolina had been committed to improving conditions for African Americans in the state. Before this point however, the Diocese, like many predominantly white religious institutions, had adopted a careful position on desegregation as it affected the Episcopal Church. In 1964, at the annual convention of the Diocese, though some ministers asked that racial discrimination be banned in all diocesan activities and on diocesan property, leaders failed to act on desegregation in its schools and facilities. The Diocese of Upper South Carolina would later examine desegregation more closely through the Bishop’s Commission on Race Relations which was formed in 1969.

Episcopal women in particular were enthusiastic about the organization. They had already taken the initiative to deal with race relations in their organizations, but still looked to Diocesan leadership to guide them through the

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94 Mrs. Emanuel Owens, Jr., past president to Mrs. H.B. Richardson, president, Episcopal Churchwomen-Diocese of Upper South Carolina, 4 February 1964, Records Relating to the Bishop’s Committee on Race Relations, box 11, folder 43, Winthrop University Archives.
changes occurring throughout the South. Moreover, the religious principles of
women’s organizations insisted that in the eyes of God, all men were created
equal. Although the Bishop’s Commission’s leadership was male, a significant
portion of its membership was female. One woman, Mrs. Robert Brown, wrote to
the Right Reverend John A. Pinckney, Bishop of the Diocese of Upper South
Carolina, “I do hope that as bishop of our diocese you will see fit to lead us in
showing to God and the people . . . that we truly believe that all men are equal in
His sight.”

Episcopal Church Women were not alone in their commitment to racial
change in South Carolina and within its own organization. The Orangeburg, South
Carolina district Women’s Society of Christian Service of the Woman’s Division
of Christian Service of the Methodist Church, for example, asserted in a 1960
resolution that “racial segregation cannot be an expression of Christian love,” and
that “Christian people must seize the moral initiative during these times of stress
and change lest unworthy elements cause an erosion of the freedoms we now
enjoy.” Thus, throughout South Carolina and the South, many Christian
women’s organizations reconciled their religious beliefs with daily practices as
they recognized that segregation and undemocratic practices were not compatible
with Christianity.

95 The Right Reverend John A. Pinckney, D.D. Bishop from Mrs. Robert G.
Brown. 12 December1969, Records Relating to the Bishop’s Committee on Race
Relations, box 11, folder 43, Winthrop University Archives.
96Ibid., “A Resolution,” 23 April 1960, box 24, folder 642, Winthrop University
Archives.
Although white women’s organizations, even while moving towards integration in their own groups, slowly moved away from civil rights issues like voting rights, black women pursued them tenaciously. It was during the 1960s that the drive for voting rights, which had engaged South Carolina blacks since the 1940s, became a formal project for civil rights organizations. The Voter Education Program, a national effort which included church and local organizations throughout the South, was designed to reach 90,000 potential voters over twelve months. The Voter Education Program (VEP) was formed in 1962 in reaction to thousands of African Americans who felt acute frustration due to their lack of such basic skills as elementary reading and writing which were required for voter registration. As the number of voting rights cases in Southern counties increased under Attorney General Robert Kennedy, the Kennedy administration encouraged the creation of projects to help blacks register to vote. Philanthropic organizations provided funds for the Voter Education Project and were administered by the Southern Regional Council.

These funds were channeled to such direct-action organizations as the SCLC and SNCC, which allowed grass roots organizations to teach African Americans elementary skills to pass registration tests and provided moral support when they went to vote.97

Black women such as Modjeska Simkins and Septima Clark, both of whom had fought for African American voting rights in the 1940s and 1950s,

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intensified their efforts in the 1960s. Modjeska Simkins’ association with the NAACP facilitated her activism for voting rights when she was sent to Washington as a delegate to the Conference on Voting Restrictions in Southern States, at Asbury Methodist Church, in 1958. The conference’s purpose was to “present, in human terms, a comprehensive picture of the current situation on voting rights in the South.”

Septima Clark’s association with the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee had begun in the 1950s and increased in the 1960s especially before the Voting Rights Act passed in 1965. African American women and their organizations had been involved in such efforts in earlier decades. As we have seen, in the 1950s Highlander had formed the Citizenship School in the South Carolina and Georgia Sea Islands to teach such fundamental elements of citizenship as citizenship responsibility, reading, writing, and voter registration. The courses were taught by local African Americans such as Septima Clark and her cousin Bernice Robinson. Septima Clark as director of education at Highlander, was not only instrumental in establishing a citizenship school on the South Carolina Sea Islands, but also worked for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Her work at Highlander had prepared her for this task and she joined the SCLC staff in 1961 as director of education and

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99 “The Citizenship Program Continues to Expand,” Highlander Reports (1 October 1960-30 September 1961), box 32, folder 348, SCCHR.
teaching. Her cousin Bernice Robinson continued teaching at the citizenship school and later became a consultant for teacher-training workshops all over the South in addition to working on voter registration in Mississippi.

The Citizenship School also helped local African Americans critically examine their history in South Carolina. According to Sandra Oldendorf, many of the school’s students displayed a “learned helplessness.” They often believed that it was better for whites to make political decisions thus negating African Americans’ agency. Clark and Robinson reprogrammed this thinking and taught South Carolina blacks that their experiences were valuable and that they were quite capable of making their own political choices while broadening their horizons and encouraging them to use resources available locally to solve problems.

The supporters of the VEP and the quest for first class citizenship for African Americans was not limited to Highlander or to black women. Many organizations embraced the cause. In South Carolina, Alice N. Spearman through her position as executive director of the South Carolina Council on Human Relations worked tirelessly to recruit white and black women to promote black registration and voting. She sent letters to heads of such organizations as the State Council of Farm Women urging them to attend the second Conference on

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101 Ibid., 178.
Registration and Voting in 1961 at the Penn Center on St. Helena’s Island in Beaufort County. In her letter to Mrs. Marion McLester, president of the State Council of Farm Women, Spearman, aware of deeply entrenched racism and racial violence in South Carolina’s rural areas, especially requested her attendance and expertise to examine difficulties with voting and registration in those areas. Spearman was adept at targeting black and white women heads of organizations or women in community outreach organizations. Like her letter to McLester, in a letter to Sarah Daniels, a home demonstration agent and later president of the SCUCW, Spearman urged her to attend the meeting and asserted that “because of your work as a home demonstration agent and your keen interest in building first class citizenship, we feel that you are admirably equipped to analyze and discuss the road blocks in the way of registration and voting which obstruct Negroes in small towns and rural areas.”

The workshop on voter registration, whose theme was “Register Today . . . so you can Vote for a better tomorrow,” was held from 1-3 April 1961 in Frogmore, South Carolina. It was designed to organize individuals from small rural towns where few African Americans had registered or registration was difficult generally. The workshop, organized by Alice Spearman and Courtney Siceloff, director of the Penn Community Center, also reached out to

103 Alice N. Spearman to Mrs. Marion McLester, 24 March 1960, box 26, folder 683, SCCHR.
104 Alice N. Spearman to Mrs. Sarah Daniel, 24 March 1960, box 26, folder 683, SCCHR.
organizations involved in voter registration in South Carolina like the SCCHR, NAACP, Palmetto Voters League, CORE, SCLC, and others. And, it involved students from such African American colleges as Howard University and Claflin College in addition to students from Cornell University and the American Friends Service Committee. The combined efforts of this and other such meetings resulted in the South Carolina Voter Education Project in the later 1960s.  

Although Modjeska Simkins was a member of the Columbia Women’s Council in the 1950s, in the 1960s she used the all-black Richland County Citizen’s Committee as a vehicle to further promote change in South Carolina’s political system. The Richland County Citizen’s Committee (RCCC), was formed under the auspices of the South Carolina Citizen’s Committee which had been formed in 1944. The local group received its charter in 1956 and adopted as its motto “Leading the effort toward keen community awareness in Non-partisan Political Action in Richland County.” Simkins had been assigned by the RCCC to produce written communications for the organization. She was public relations director and an official correspondent for the organizations among which duties included writing its charter.

Simkins was well suited to the various tasks within the organization as a result of over twenty years’ involvement in many civic organizations. As a correspondent for the RCCC, she enlisted a direct, almost brutal style in her

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105 Correspondence, 23 March 1960, Alice N. Spearman to Courtney Siceloff, 23 March 1960, Elizabeth Siceloff to May F. Kennard, 30 March 1960, box 26, folder 683, SCCHR.
106 “Vote Against Hate on February 25,” (No year), Modjeska Simkins Papers, Modern Political Collections, SCL.
messages to various political officials and African American constituents in
Columbia. Simkins was also not afraid to attack white supremacy. In one such
announcement she encouraged African Americans to “Vote Against Hate on
February 25,” in the city council election. Simkins invoked the institution of
slavery in South Carolina’s history against politician John Adger Manning.
Moreover, she criticized white southern women’s failure to promote racial justice
and refusal to recognize their own subordination under the guise of white
supremacy, consequently revealing the fallacy of the protection of southern white
womanhood. But she also used flattery to enlist the aid of white women.

While these birds are trying to make monkeys and jackanapes of Negro
people they are also placing their white women in the position of easy
marks and prostitutes. Their sheet would show that they do not believe
that one white girl or woman knows one thing about how to say “NO” to
any man who approaches her, particularly if he should chance to be a
Negro, and that they have no faith whatsoever in the “purity of our
women” that they boast so much about protecting.

Our opinion of white women is far more exalted than this. Our varied and
rewarding contacts with white women of all ages prove to us that these
men are painting a vile image of the ethical standards of the greater
percentage of their females.

It astounds us that white women themselves have not risen up in public
reprimand against such men who discredit their morals before the entire
world.

Negro men have never been known to so lower the dignity of their
women. If they had ever become so depraved as to dare to do so, they
would never have escaped the immediate, searing, and publicly known
wrath of their women. Why have white women allowed these cheap
bigots to get by all through the years with this libelous attack upon their
carer by saying in effect that their women do not know how to say
“NO” to any man?

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The Richland County Citizens Committee urges you to vote . . . Thereby you will discredit this long worn-out lying attack upon our people and upon thousands of exemplary white women known personally and most favorably to us in Columbia.108

Simkins’ activism did not stop at chastising white political candidates and allying white and black women. She also targeted African Americans whom she found complacent about the changes taking place in South Carolina. In a 1965 voting announcement, Simkins urged African Americans to go to the polls to vote and to transport others on 15 June 1965. To those who hesitated she instructed “Don’t worry about spending a little gas money on the full freedom fight. What we do may mean the great difference between joy and sadness for us on June 16, the day after.”109

In the 1960s, many white women’s organizations learned to tread the fine line between racial activism and local conservatism. Such organizations as the Greenville YWCA carefully adhered to the mandates of its national branch, yet worked quietly to integrate the organization and its facilities, so as not to upset the racial status quo. Rather than accept the mandates of the national YWCA for racial inclusiveness, the Charleston YWCA chose disaffiliation

But black women and their organizations stepped up activism that had been cultivated in the 1940s and 1950s. While white women’s organizations switched to the less controversial task of confronting poverty in South Carolina as

108 “Vote Against Hate on February 25,” (No year), Modjeska Simkins Papers, box 2, folder 39, SCL.
109 “Friends! Voters! Our Job is Cut Out for Us!, Modjeska Simkins Papers, Modern Political Collections, box 2, folder 39, SCL.

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we shall see in the next chapter, black women used the momentum of the national civil rights movement to pursue voter registration for African Americans.

This did not mean, however, that black and white women, whatever their activism, worked together on an everyday basis. Indeed, even in the 1960s, interracial activism was still limited to black and white women in leadership positions such as Modjeska Simkins and Alice N. Spearman, with similar socioeconomic backgrounds and long histories of civil rights activism. These women established long term friendships and political alliances to effect racial and social change throughout the state.

The later half of the 1960s would reveal more of this increased activism by black women and black women’s organizations. For black women and their organizations in particular, increased federal and local political intervention expedited their activism as well as encompassing the activism of working class black women. White women and their organizations turned to the overwhelming poverty in South Carolina and the burgeoning women’s movement.
CHAPTER 5

“AGREED TO DIFFER, RESOLVED TO LOVE, UNITED TO SERVE”: THE LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF INTERRACIAL ACTIVISM

As civil rights efforts gained increasing importance in the South it converged with other developing movements. According to Numan Bartley, “the civil rights victories of the mid-1960s achieved the original aims of the movement.” But at the same time, as such black leaders as Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. saw it, this did little to improve situation of poor African Americans in southern states and in northern states, for that matter.¹ Consequently, during the later years of the 1960s the civil rights movement expanded its objective beyond legal rights to include poverty.

In 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act providing for federal marshal presence in southern states, including South Carolina, to monitor voter registration.² A cornerstone for Johnson’s “Great Society”, the act had begun as the 1963 Civil Rights Bill but failed to move through Congress before President John F. Kennedy’s assassination in Dallas, Texas. It later became the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

According to historian John A. Andrew III, for Johnson, the Voting Rights Act was to redeem the moral promise of the American Dream.³

However, there were still problems implementing voter registration in South Carolina. After the enactment of the Voting Rights Act African American leaders complained about white officials who intentionally slowed voter registration process in such counties as Allendale, Barnwell, Charleston, Dorchester, Jasper, and Orangeburg. Federal observers were later sent to Clarendon and Dorchester.⁴ Clearly, obtaining the right to vote held great significance for African Americans in South Carolina and in other southern states. Not only did it result in improved services in African American communities; the ballot gave those who acquired it a sense of pride. Still many African Americans depended on whites for employment and credit. This kept many of them from exercising their right to register and vote.⁵

Although the voter registration drives directed by CORE, the Voter Education Project, the SCLC, and the NAACP were notable in 1965, they were not entirely able to combat the long-term effects of deeply entrenched racism in South Carolina.⁶

Indeed, the Voting Rights Act only made a dent in the South Carolina’s racial status quo. South Carolina politicians challenged the act, claiming it was

unconstitutional and would result in placing illiterate African Americans on juries. Of course they overlooked the fact many whites were only slightly more literate. According to Reverend J. Herbert Nelson from Orangeburg and state president of the NAACP, “We have had illiterate whites on juries for 300 years and nobody said anything about it.” But this did not stop the number of blacks who registered to vote the summer after it was passed. By September 1965, 7,000 African Americans registered to vote, and by October that number had increased. However, in addition to African Americans’ lack of education that disadvantaged them at the polls was the fact that registration offices were not often open.

Because many African Americans in South Carolina were agricultural workers, registrar’s offices were open during hours when most blacks could not leave work to register.7 According to Reverend I. Dequincey Newman of Columbia, and a field reporter for the NAACP, “More registration days and longer hours would practically serve all our problems. In most rural counties, there hasn’t necessarily been a conscious effort to prevent Negroes from registering but it is an economic fact of life that they can’t.”8 Thus, it was not only education that limited African American registration, but also economics.

Armed with the newly won right to vote, the number of registered black voters in South Carolina grew from 58,000 to 220,000 by 1970. African Americans voted Democratic and actively participated in Democratic Party matters. By the end of the decade, according to South Carolina historian Walter

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6 Burton, 199.
7 “Negro Leader: Court Ordered,” The State, Columbia, South Carolina, 26 December 1965, 3-D.
Edgar, their “representation at the state convention was virtually proportional to their numbers in the total population.” Nor did South Carolina’s political developments stop there. In 1968, Democrats elected twelve African American South Carolinians to its delegation to the national party convention. And, by 1970, Herbert U. Fielding of Charleston County and James L. Felder and J.S. Leevy Johnson of Richland County became the first African Americans to serve in the General Assembly since the 1890s.9

As African Americans exercised their newly won right to vote, whites reckoned with desegregation throughout the state. Desegregation in public school education remained slow in South Carolina. Although by the end of the 1960s, public schools had slowly begun to desegregate, black admittance to formerly all-white schools often meant not more than token African American representation. In fact, it was not until 1963, as a result of Brown v. School District 20 of Charleston County, which ruled that racial differences should be a factor in school placement, that formerly all-white public schools were desegregated.10 But as desegregation occurred in public schools throughout the state, South Carolina whites responded by creating private schools with private funds or applying for tuition grants from the General Assembly. In 1964, for example, John H. Walen, a Columbia newsman and avowed segregationist, exemplified white resistance to school desegregation by not only applying for tuition grants for his two sons, but also by driving them 45 miles daily to the private Wade

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 451.
Hampton Academy in Orangeburg after Columbia schools admitted 22 African Americans. The tuition grant program had been created as a “safety valve” against desegregation in the state’s public schools.\textsuperscript{11} Whalen’s request was denied when Board of Trustees of Richland County School District No.1 voted unanimously to stand by its previous decision not to participate in the South Carolina’s tuition grant program.\textsuperscript{12}

Despite Whalen’s support for continued segregation there were some heartening developments even with token desegregation in South Carolina. In Rock Hill for example, Maggie S. Bailey an African American and a resident of the city who taught in neighboring Chester County became one of nine candidates for two seats in a special election for the Rock Hill school board.\textsuperscript{13} Furman University, in Greenville, despite its difference over a desegregation policy with the white State Baptist Convention, which contributed to the school’s financial support, received its first African American students in January 1965 making Furman the first private college in South Carolina to desegregate.\textsuperscript{14}

Even South Carolina’s professional teaching organizations were not exempt from desegregation. In 1965, the all-black Palmetto Education Association (PEA) offered a unification proposal to the formerly all-white South

Carolina Education Association (SCEA) arguing that “true unity and integration of the profession can be achieved only through the cooperative efforts and mutual interaction of the two existing associations.” This statement was in compliance with the resolution of the National Education Association, which in 1964 called for the elimination of racially segregated teacher organizations. Later in 1965, the SCEA dropped its racial requirements and opened the membership to African American teachers.

Among South Carolina’s black and white women’s organizations, these years revealed increased attention not only to desegregation and voting rights, but also to poverty which was rampant in the state and affected 12 percent of all whites and 50 percent of all blacks. Additionally, health and nutrition problems in South Carolina concerned women’s organizations because they were among the most serious in the nation. They also continued their quest for improved education in the state’s public schools. White women’s organizations in particular turned their attention to the burgeoning national women’s movement. By the mid-1960s however, such white women’s organizations as the Rock Hill, South Carolina branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), which had previously not taken a stand on school integration, finally got on the bandwagon. On their calendar of events for 1964, not only was there an entry for the publications for the President’s Commission on the Status of

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Women, but also a listing of committees within the organization including one on civil and political rights. By the end of the decade, the Rock Hill AAUW not only acknowledged mandates from the national AAUW to raise $150,000 for the Coretta Scott King Scholarship Fund, but also invited Timothy Welsh, an English instructor from Winthrop College who taught in the Upward Bound program, as their speaker who emphasized that “Black is beautiful” and declared that the “nature of the race “problem” in South Carolina was a “white” problem.\(^\text{18}\)

For other white women’s organizations, the momentum of the civil rights movement did not catch on quite so easily. The South Carolina Council for the Common Good (SCCCG), contrary to its name, did not directly embrace opportunities for racial change in South Carolina. Although the organization’s history reveals many efforts that contributed to improvements in social welfare in South Carolina, its history of racial activism in the 1960s were meager. In earlier decades, the organization conceded that racial problems existed in South Carolina and had even suggested that black and white leaders meet to discuss them. Yet, only a few members of the SCCC such as Mary Frayser, Christine Gee, and Alice Norwood Spearman Wright, actively worked for racial change. By the 1960s, there was little movement beyond these individual efforts.

\(^{17}\) Peirce, 381.  
Indeed, the glaring lack of sensitivity toward African Americans was evident, as by the 1960s some members of the SCCCG refused to capitalize the word “Negro” in their correspondence or other SCCCG documents.\(^\text{19}\)

SCCCG’s reluctance to concern itself with the racial situation in South Carolina historian, Arnold Shankman argued, may in part have been because the organization was facing the decline in membership and poor attendance at seminars and SCCCG meetings by the end of the 1960s. But he also concedes that the organization could have done more to improve race relations in South Carolina.\(^\text{20}\)

While many African American leaders thought the most progress had been made with African Americans obtaining the right to vote, black women leaders like Anna D. Reuben and Modjeska Simkins, who was a member of the Richland County Citizens Committee (RCCC), still held up education as the true key to first class citizenship. As the wife of the president of the predominately black Morris College in Sumter County, Reuben had experienced first hand the benefits of education for African Americans in South Carolina. As one of the founders of the South Carolina NAACP, she argued that the biggest achievement was educational attainment. Reuben, like many black women activists, further asserted that African Americans had to assume responsibility for their own uplift. “This [education] is important to the Negro because it exposes him to the opportunities which will develop his skill and aptitude and make it possible for

the Negro to compete in areas that have been previously closed. As new opportunities open, one had to be educated and qualified. Negro advancement is a two fold responsibility.”21 This would be the black women activists’ creed for African American advancement for the rest of the decade.

Although the RCCC had been formed in 1944 and chartered in 1956 and had supported numerous civil rights causes over the years, the 1960s catapulted it into more intense long-term crusades. Modjeska Simkins, one of the RCCC’s more vocal members, spared no energy in calling attention to incidents of racial discrimination throughout the county.22 Using her position as the director of publicity and public relations for the RCCC, Simkins, after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, urged African Americans to get out and vote. To this end she undertook other projects that directly correlated with helping African Americans exercise their right to vote, such as adult education programs. The RCCC had long worked to improve conditions for African Americans in Columbia’s City Schools. The organization additionally wanted improvements in the adult education courses being taught in its schools. For example, when the white Columbia City School board sought to relocate the all-black Booker T. Washington High School that offered adult education courses, Simkins wasted little time composing a letter in protest. Arguing that the “utter contempt aroused by the consideration of your Booker T. Washington High School Citizens Education Center pamphlet forces us to send you this letter,” Simkins pointed out

20 Shankman, 96.
21 The State, 26 December 1965, 3-D.
22 Moore, 425-6.
that the courses offered to African Americans in the adult education program were
“positively elementary in nature.”

Her arguments demonstrate the regard with which black women held education as a conduit to obtaining first class citizenship in South Carolina. The situation also demonstrated the relative lack of power blacks had in South Carolina. Although the RCCC with Simkins’ assistance managed to temporarily stall the school board’s plans to dismantle the high school, by 1974 it had closed and the property was sold to the University of South Carolina.

South Carolina was not monolithic as its communities perceived desegregation differently, ranging from outright refusal in Charleston to gradual integration in Greenville. However the national headquarters of women’s religious organizations like United Church Women also urged their local chapters to facilitate racial change in southern communities.

UCW in South Carolina was the second major women’s organization to confront directives for integration from its national body. At a 1962 national meeting in Columbus, Ohio, the organization’s board of directors reacted to civil rights protests by issuing a “Christian Social Relations Resolution” and encouraged individual church women and local and state councils of United Church Women to “build a climate of opinion in which no person can be subjected to the kind of cruel, retaliatory tactics now being used; and to strive to

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23 Modjeska Simkins Collection, Modern Political Collections, University of South Carolina, “To the 1964 Adult Education Advisory Board,” box 3, SCL.
destroy as rapidly as possible the pattern of segregation in their communities.”

This would not prove to be the case in South Carolina as the UCW in the midst of controversies and inconsistencies became increasingly silent and reserved in its activism in the 1960s.

In the 1950s, under the presidency of Edith Dabbs, United Church Women was still, at least tenuously, an interracial organization. This was not the case in local branches of United Church Women, although the Greenville branch had participated in integrated activities as early as the 1940s. Dabbs by this point had become a resident of Charleston where she faced scathing attacks from the News and Courier, the local paper, for her activism. Other white members of the organization faced ostracism or even violence for their activism. As a result, the leadership of United Church Women of South Carolina adopted a defensive position in the 1960s by no longer overtly promoting itself as an interracial organization and by refusing to support the growth of the South Carolina Council on Human Relations and its position on interracial cooperation and racial change. For several years many members of the SCCHR had not been

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25 Christian Social Relations Resolution, Board of Managers, United Church Women, 2 May 1962, box 24, folder 652c, SCCHR.
27 According to Andrew Secrest, during this time South Carolina newspapers generally failed to offer any editorial leadership to the racial problems confronting South Carolina. They also failed to meet the standards of professional responsibility generally accepted in American journalism. The three leading daily newspapers in South Carolina are The News and Courier of Charleston, The State of Columbia, and The News of Greenville. The Chronicle of Cheraw, South Carolina, of which Secret was editor, often offered a more liberal view of events occurring in the state. From Andrew Secrest, “In Black and White”: Opinion and
invited to the UCW’s annual meeting. Notices were sent only to members of the Board of Directors, who were presumably all white, and to other white members. This effectively served to alienate many black members of the organization. Before this point, members of both organizations had worked together, particularly because United Church Women was an interracial, all-female organization and the SCCHR’s membership, although predominately male, was headed by a woman and integrated.28

Alice N. Spearman, executive director of the South Carolina Council of Human Relations and a member of United Church Women, chastised the latter organization for yielding to white pressure and ignoring their by-laws mandating interracial cooperation and racial understanding. In her estimation, “No one has the right, not even an officer, to set aside the provision in our by-laws that annual membership meeting be held.” However, she urged that despite the decision of the board of the organization, as many women as possible attend a meeting to be held at St. John’s Episcopal Church in Columbia, South Carolina to discuss the changes taking place in a joint meeting with the SCCHR. Spearman also called for black women’s cooperation in this matter. In a confidential letter to black member and officer of UCW-South Carolina, Sarah Daniels of Morris College in Sumter, South Carolina, Spearman requested that she bring other black women who would be interested in the agenda of the SCCHR. With such a request, Spearman hoped to return the United Church Women to its former usefulness as

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28 Correspondence, 21 January 1960, box 24, folder 652, SCCHR.
an integrated organization. She was adamant about maintaining organizations such as the UCW, which was able at least up to a point, to function interracially.\(^{29}\) Clearly, many of Church Women United’s members were only marginally concerned about the atrocities some South Carolinians faced daily. But not all were apathetic. Indeed, many urged that any Christian woman from South Carolina should be willing to put “cause above personal prestige” and thus continue their work for racial change in the state.\(^{30}\)

United Church Women of South Carolina became even more hesitant to take the lead in improving race relations as the national branch stepped up its racial activism. Nationally, United Church Women had received a three year grant for $66,000 from the Field Foundation, which allowed it to establish a program entitled Assignment: *Race* at its 9th national assembly in Miami Beach, Florida in 1961. The program was designed to launch a nationwide, interdenominational attack on racial discrimination in churches, housing, schools, and places of employment. The UCW used money from the Field Foundation to recruit and train women to work for improved race relations in their communities. The program consisted of a three-pronged goal: full participation for all without racial distinctions in local churches and denominations, the council of church women, and the community, where women were to focus on areas where racial tensions were the highest and needs were the most pressing.\(^{31}\) Assignment: *Race*,

\(^{29}\) Alice N. Spearman to Sarah Daniels, 21 January 1960, box 24, folder 637, SCCHR.

\(^{30}\) Correspondence, 20 January 1960, box 24, folder 652, SCCHR.

which lasted from 1961-1964, was directed nationally by Carrie E. Meares of Fountain Inn, South Carolina who was a former YWCA director and a graduate of Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina. As a precursor to Assignment: Race, United Church Women officials submitted reports on local councils approached for workshops for racism programs. For South Carolina, they received a report only from Columbia.

In fact, it appears that in the years before the 1960s, local councils in South Carolina, unlike the national organization, did not aggressively pursue integrated membership or projects on race relations and civil liberties. According to earlier summaries of reports from CWU State and Local Councils in 1957-1959, South Carolina had numerous councils yet, in 1957 and 1958 only two were involved in economic and industrial relations. None were involved in race relations and civil liberties. As of 1959, only one council was involved in the aforementioned endeavors. Although strong and visible racial activism from UCW-Columbia women was slow in coming, the organization expressed awareness of racial inequalities and social issues in South Carolina when other local chapters and white women’s organizations were reluctant and even afraid to do so.

Few records exist to document black women’s participation in the UCWSC. However, at least one black woman held a leadership position in the state organization. Mrs. James W. Watson, who in 1963, was president of the

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32 “Report on Localities Approached for United Church Women Workshops, 29 March 1957, 1224-4-2:03 Racism Program, 1225-2-3:03, Summaries of Reports
Woman’s Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the AME Zion Church had served on the state and national Board of the Managers of UCW and on the board of the UCW of South Carolina. She was also a public school teacher for fourteen years in addition to being an instructor of literature and music at Clinton Junior College in Rock Hill, South Carolina.\(^{33}\)

By the mid-1960s, United Church Women, which had become Church Women United, increased its support of racial and social causes in South Carolina, even after its questionable position earlier in the decade. Although it did not have the overt tension among black and white women as was the case in the Charleston YWCA, black women even at this point, were barely present in United Church Women activities. This was perhaps because the UCW did not have the resources of the YWCA and their activities did not include daily interaction with black women, their organizations, or facilities.

UCWSC’s failure to truly pursue racial matters in the 1960s is evident in reports from UCW regional meetings. Where other councils around the country were concerned with racial matters among a slew of other concerns, the South Carolina council shifted it interests to the predominately African American migrant workers in Charleston and throughout the state. The organization’s migrant committee took on new importance, particularly after record breaking rains in June 1962, which were disastrous for Charleston county farmers, migrant workers, and local farm laborers, many of whom were black. Under the auspices

of United Church Women of South Carolina, Reverend Vernon F. Frazier, led a crash feeding program for these individuals. Charleston’s branch gave approximately $400 worth of food to migrants unable to work in the area and started a drive to secure clothing and other supplies for migrants.\(^{34}\)

After President Lyndon Johnson announced his nationwide war on poverty in 1964, business, civic, and religious organizations sought to form coalitions to attack problems that pervaded the nation.\(^{35}\) In response the national UCW formed Women in Community Service (WICS) in 1964, which was affiliated with the Women’s Job Corps, and recruited young people and young women in particular, to work for its anti-poverty program. A joint effort by United Church Women, the National Council of Catholic Women, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the National Council of Negro Women in cooperation with the National Board of the Young Women’s Christian Association, WICS volunteers worked to alleviate poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and malnutrition.\(^{36}\)

Because new federal laws now protected African Americans from legal discrimination, the trajectory of the civil rights movement turned to economic initiatives such as poverty that had a disproportionate impact on blacks. In accordance with this in 1965, the national UCW formed a three-year program with the theme “People, Poverty, and Plenty.” Possibly because local UCW branches found fighting poverty less controversial than fighting for civil rights,

\(^{34}\) Church Women United, Resolution adopted for 1969-70, Winthrop University Archives.

\(^{35}\) Margaret Shannon, \textit{Just Because}, 138.
they followed suit as chapters of WICS formed in South Carolina. UCW-Columbia and the South Carolina Council on Human Relations assisted these efforts by co-sponsoring Project Head Start programs in twenty-five counties in South Carolina. This allowed the UCW to engaged in racial activism without direct references to race. Project Head Start operated for eight weeks during the summer and provided skills and training for children from deprived homes who were entering first grade in the next academic year. WICS members were also concerned about young women from poor families throughout the state. In Charleston, at the WICS organizational meeting, women met to discuss ways to improve impoverished young women’s situations. Mrs. Paul Pfeutze, of the WICS national headquarters in Washington, DC, addressed the women and outlined the ways in which participation in the Job Corps program uplifted young women.37

It is through this organization that black women were also able to facilitate change.38 In 1965, Mrs. Calvin R. Greene was installed as project director of WIC in Charleston. Greene was a librarian at Charles A. Brown High School in Charleston, a graduate of South Carolina State University, and had received a master’s degree in library science from Indiana University. Trained to help the

36 Helen Turnbull, CWU/WIC Staff Liaison to CWU State and Local Presidents in South Carolina, 26 July 1968; UCW-Columbia Records, box 3, folder 12, Winthrop University Archives.
37 “WICS Organize Local Chapter,” The News and Courier, Charleston, South Carolina, 21 May 1965, 10-C.
38 Alice N. Spearman to Mrs. Herbert McAbee, 26 May 1965, Church Women United in South Carolina, box 1, folder 3, Winthrop University Archives.
less fortunate, she had also been a Job Corps volunteer and a social welfare worker at St. Catherine’s Auxiliary of the Blessed Sacrament Roman Catholic Church in Charleston. Other women installed as assistant directors of WIC in Charleston were members of the local Council of Jewish Women, Council of Negro Women, and United Church Women.39

In addition to participation in WICS, UCW-Columbia also worked to alleviate poverty throughout the state in other ways. In 1966, it held a worship service with the theme “Poverty and Affluence.” This worship meeting was later restructured as a study course and a yearly worship event. In 1967, UCW-Columbia invited Latitia Anderson of the Division of General Studies at the University of South Carolina and head of the South Carolina Headstart Program to speak to members about how the philosophy of the “Poverty and Affluence” programs could be used to help people in South Carolina’s community. Clearly recognizing the impact that such an organization as United Church Women could have on this kind of activism, Anderson urged members to “become active in this service to the community.”40

Although United Church Women’s efforts improved living and health conditions among poor black migrant workers, they were not pioneers in assisting them and their families. Black women and their organizations had been doing this since the early decades of the twentieth century. They had on-going projects to bring health and social change to African Americans on South Carolina’s Sea

39 “Mrs. Greene Installed as WICS Director,” The News and Courier, Charleston, South Carolina, 19 June 1965, 12-B.
40 UCW-Columbia Minutes, 2 February 1967, Winthrop University Archives.
Islands. When, for example, Septima P. Clark, a member of United Church
Women in Charleston, was a young teacher on John’s Island in the 1920s, she was
instrumental in securing funds from the Gamma Xi Omega chapter of Alpha
Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. to help blacks obtain ringworm treatment and
diphtheria immunization. She also enlisted the support of a white women’s
Presbyterian group and white Charlestonian Mrs. Ashley Halsey who then used
her influence to improve the island’s water system, help families upgrade their
diets, and convince landowners to inspect tenant homes.41

It appears that by the end of the 1960s and into the early 1970s, United
Church Women councils in South Carolina focused almost solely on migrant
poverty. In 1968, UCW-Columbia member Mrs. F.E. Reinartz, suggested taking
a trip to Charleston for a “Go-See” tour of migrant camps.42 Because many of the
migrant camps were on the Charleston Sea Islands, CWU-Charleston was
especially concerned about the conditions and care of migrant children. As many
of the migrants in the South Carolina lowcountry were African American it is
possible that United Church Women found it easier to help them because it
enabled them to align themselves with national movements focusing on
economics and poverty without subjecting themselves to any suspicion for racial
activism. Indeed, their efforts served only to improve living and health
conditions; it did not threaten the status quo by calling for equality or first class
citizenship. To this end, church women developed day-care activities and

41 Edward H. Beardsley, A History of Neglect: Healthcare for Blacks and Mill
Workers (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 103
provided clothes and health kits for families through their May Fellowship Day offering. They also sponsored African American minister Willis Goodwin as a chaplain in the migrant camps as part of Rural Mission Inc., on Johns Island.\textsuperscript{43} Church Women United of Charleston also helped secure funds from the Office of Economic Opportunity in the mid-1960s to create the South Carolina Commission of Farm Workers to help expand services available to migrant workers.

In addition to Church Women United’s efforts to aid migrant workers, they also participated in South Carolina’s Adult Basic Education (ABE) program in the late 1960s and 1970s. ABE was designed to “eliminate the inability of adults in need of basic education to read and write English.” According to the 1960 Census, 23 million Americans over twenty-five years of age had completed less than eight years of schooling.\textsuperscript{44} It is also in this capacity that black women’s names emerge as members of Church Women United, as they most often spearheaded these kinds of programs. With the help of Alice Leppert of the Church Women United national staff, the program, which included such black members as Johnetta Edwards and Ada Campbell in Charleston County, held workshops for Charleston volunteers under the leadership of Adult Education professors from the University of South Carolina. Septima P. Clark was co-chairman of the local unit of basic education volunteers in Charleston and helped

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\textsuperscript{42} UCW-Columbia, Representatives Meeting, 27 September 1968, Winthrop University Archives.
\textsuperscript{43} “Godwin to Speak on Rural Missions,” The State, Columbia, South Carolina, Legislative Report, 29 January 1971, 16-A.
\textsuperscript{44} The South Carolina Church Woman, vol. 1, no. 2 (January 1971): 2.
\end{flushright}
to plan workshops in cooperation with local and state Adult Education leaders.\textsuperscript{45}

In Columbia, church women supported the Greater Columbia Literacy Council that also trained volunteers to help those who could not read.\textsuperscript{46}

Unlike the Voter Education Project of the 1960s, which educated and prepared African Americans for the benefits of first class citizenship, ABE raised the education level of adults, but it would also help them become better informed voters.\textsuperscript{47} However, it also presented less of a challenge to the status quo than the Voter Education Project, which called for equality in voter access for African Americans.

Nationally, United Church Women membership had been integrated since the 1940s and pushed for this in local UCW chapters. However, there was not substantial integration UCW-SC until the 1960s. Black women must have certainly been interested in United Church Women programs and may have even sought membership. However, before the 1960s there was virtually no mention of black participation in UCW in South Carolina generally with the exception of Anna Reuben.

Reuben’s resume is evidence that she was clearly prepared for racial activism in South Carolina. Wife of the president of the historically African American Morris College in Sumter, South Carolina, in the early 1950s, she

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\textsuperscript{46} Barbara H. Stoops, “Church Women Observe World Day of Prayer,” The State and Columbia Record, Columbia, South Carolina, 2 March 1969.
became first African American in UCW-SC. It is not clear however exactly what her position was within the organization. Reuben was a graduate of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee and Columbia University in New York City. She was also a former secretary of the South Carolina NAACP, assistant supervisor of the Junior Baptist State Convention of South Carolina, and chairman of the executive board of the Sumter Branch of the YWCA.48

By the 1960s some local UCW branches were integrated. United Church Women in Aiken, for example had always been integrated. In 1967, a member from Columbia admitted her that council had been “playing at being a part of the national group for many years” and that only the Aiken, South Carolina council had been fully integrated from the beginning.49 Although there is little extant documentation, United Church Women in Aiken whose motto was “Agreed to Differ, Resolved to Love, United to Serve,” had proudly maintained integrated membership since 1953: “Entering our tenth year of existence as an ‘integrated’ council, we have indeed felt the sustaining arm of our Lord,” and “Our bi-racial aspect has been a unique experience for us all and we truly believe our work,

48 UCW-Columbia Records, approximately 1952, newspaper name unknown. The December 1963 issue of The Church Woman, listed Mrs. James W. Watson of Fayetteville, North Carolina as the new president of the Woman’s Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the AME Church. Watson had also served on the state and national board of Managers of UCW and on the board of UCW of South Carolina. A teacher in the Fayetteville public schools for fourteen years, Watson had also been an instructor of literature and music at Clinton Junior College in Rock Hill, South Carolina for four years.
49 Mrs. G. M. Howe to Mrs. Casper Jones, 11 December 1967, Church Women United Records, Winthrop University Archives.
though done quietly, has been blessed.”\textsuperscript{50} Thus, United Church Women in Aiken, highlighted the possibility and the benefits of interracial activism among black and white women for racial and social improvements in South Carolina. Also, it appears that only United Church Women in Aiken actively sought out predominantly African American women’s clubs throughout South Carolina and offered them branch membership.\textsuperscript{51}

In Orangeburg county, where there was a large population of educated African Americans and two African American institutions of higher learning, there existed a predominantly black chapter of United Church Women. In 1965, the Episcopal Church of Women of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church (black) sponsored a community forum entitled “Knowing the Time” which local African American church women in Orangeburg used to create an organization through which women of all faiths could convene to discuss social problems. Other community church women responded overwhelmingly to these efforts and they too were later invited to attend the community forums. They would eventually form United Church Women in Orangeburg in 1965.

\textsuperscript{50} Newsletter, February 1963, United Church Women in Aiken, box 1, folder1, Winthrop University Archives.

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Although the Aiken and Orangeburg chapters of United Church Women provide examples of the possibilities of integrated racial activism, black members of United Church Women in South Carolina, United Church Women in Columbia were not visible until the 1960s and more so in the 1970s.52

As some black women’s names appear in UCW-Columbia minutes along with their church affiliations, it is clear that UCW-Columbia was at least, marginally integrated by the late 1960s. Black women members of UCW-Columbia were few and possibly only token members of the organization. However, one black woman stands out as an active member, Mrs. J.W. Witherspoon. Myrtle Ruff Witherspoon was born on 25 July 1898 in Newberry County, the daughter of Silas and Hattie Caughman Ruff. A product of the Newberry County Public Schools, she was a graduate of the Normal division of South Carolina State College. Witherspoon’s name does not appear in UCW-Columbia records until 1967, yet it is clear that she used her involvement to promote changes for African Americans in Columbia and throughout Richland County.

51 “Dickie” to Waltena Josie, 8 April 1971, United Church Women in Aiken Records, box 1, folder 3, Winthrop University Archives.
52 “In Celebration: The 25th Anniversary Celebration: Church Women United in Orangeburg, Orangeburg, South Carolina, May 24-25, 1991,” Miller F. Whitaker Library, South Carolina State University, Orangeburg, South Carolina. Hereafter Miller F. Whitaker Library. There was one white member, Ann Johnson, a member of Orangeburg Lutheran Church. She served on numerous committees and as secretary and chaplain for many years. I suspect there were other members, but have not been able to find any information on them.
It appears that Witherspoon was most active in South Carolina’s Office of Economic Opportunity and served on a similar committee in UCW-Columbia, requesting donations and volunteers from among its members. She assumed a more prominent position in UCW-Columbia in the early 1970s, and served as its president from 1970-1971.53

Black women also assumed leadership positions in UCW-SC. In 1971, Alice Waltena Josie, was president of Church Women United in South Carolina. She was also the first president of Church Women United of Orangeburg from 1966-1969. Like most Church Women United members, Josie’s faith transformed into activism from the time she was an undergraduate at South Carolina State College in Orangeburg. She was an active member of the Episcopalian church and a former high school teacher. After she organized and became the first president of Church Women United in Orangeburg, she was elected as state president of Church Women United and as a member of the National Board of Managers.54

Although it is not clear what their relationship was to the UCW before the 1960s, both Myrtle Witherspoon and Waltena Josie surpassed many white members of UCW in education and organizational skills. This enabled them to become leaders in the organization and to actively involve themselves in UCW programs that served African American communities. Integrated membership in

UCW by the 1960s illustrates how far white women members had come as they adopted its national mandates for integrated councils and its agenda for combating racial injustice.

United Church Women in South Carolina, Columbia, and Orangeburg made small steps toward racial and social improvements in South Carolina despite deep-seated racial attitudes that limited any activism deemed controversial. As was the case with the national UCW, in the 1940s religion proved a powerful incentive encouraging women to examine their own communities as they realized that Christianity was incompatible with undemocratic practices. Unlike members of the Charleston YWCA however, UCW members agreed on how it should be used to serve black and white South Carolinians. The Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court Case in the 1950s was an important watershed for UCW-Columbia and UCW-SC, as members further acknowledged racial problems in South Carolina and throughout the South. Although some United Church Women members shied away from overt racial activism after the Brown decision, others pushed the organization to live up to the example of the national UCW, which called for church women to fight racial and social injustices.

United Church Women in Columbia and South Carolina also struggled with black women’s participation although they supported separate but equal efforts on black women’s behalf. Yet, some branches, like United Church Women in Aiken, had proudly maintained integrated membership since the 1950s. In
Orangeburg, black church women extended the services of the women’s organizations of their respective churches and created a predominately African American branch of United Church Women although it welcomed members of all races and denominations. By the late 1960s, black women were token members of the UCW-SC and UCW-Columbia and at least two women, Myrtle Witherspoon and Waltena Josie, also held leadership positions thus attesting not only to their assertiveness, but also to the growth in consciousness of white members since earlier decades.

The Columbia Council of Church Women United also embraced women from other faiths as well in the late 1960s. In 1967 for example, one of the council’s projects was a “Living Room Dialogue” in which twelve women from Protestant and Catholic denominations met monthly in each others homes to dispel myths and confusion between the churches. In this same year they also passed a motion to invite three Jewish women to attend a Church Women United luncheon as guests of the organization and in 1968 they noted the official affiliation of the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches with Church Women United.\textsuperscript{55}

Even with such developments in the membership of United Church Women, black and white women largely continued to work separately for racial and social change, supporting such causes as Adult Basic Education and alleviating poverty among migrant workers in the South Carolina lowcountry. But

\textsuperscript{55} UCW-Columbia Minutes, Representative Meeting, 8 December 1967, Winthrop University Archives.
they understood that utilizing skills as women and understanding Christianity necessitated democratic practice in the South. Despite tremendous obstacles to interracial activism, United Church Women branches throughout the state implemented small but important steps toward racial and social justice in South Carolina.
CONCLUSION

From the 1940s to the 1960s, black and white women and their organizations worked for racial and social change in South Carolina although they often disagreed on the form it should assume. In the 1940s, as blacks and some whites used the rhetoric of the war years to promote racial activism, white women and their organizations attempted to foster racial understanding between the races. This often meant discussing racial problems or attempting to solve them through such organizations as the YWCA and United Church Women while at the same time maintaining segregation.

Black women’s goals in the 1940s included obtaining equal pay for teachers and voting rights. Although they attempted interracial alliances during this decade, black women most often met with failure in doing so. However, this did not preclude the activism facilitated by all-black organizations. Black women used the resources of such organizations as the NAACP, where they were often leaders, the South Carolina Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, and the Progressive Democratic Party and its women’s auxiliary, not only to fight for class citizenship, but also to secure support from other middle-class black women.
After World War II and amid discussions surrounding *Brown v. Board of Education* in the late 1940s and early 1950s, blacks and whites in South Carolina supported racial and social activism in various ways. For African Americans, the years before the school desegregation case were highlighted by victory with *Elmore v. Rice* in which J. Waties Waring declared that blacks could not be excluded from South Carolina’s democratic primary. Black women found themselves involved in this court case as individuals and as members of organizations like the Columbia Women’s Council that worked to further include African Americans in the political process. Individual black and white women were also able to form tenuous alliances for interracial activism as was the case with Elizabeth Waring, Ruby Cornwell, Modjeska Simkins, and Alice Norwood Spearman although they often faced incredible odds in doing so.

Under the auspices of religiously inspired organizations like United Church Women and the YWCA, white women began to pay more attention to racial injustices in South Carolina after World War II. Indeed, within such organizations, religion often was the driving force for political activism. Although YWCAs in South Carolina were still primarily interested in promoting improvements in segregated facilities and fostering better race relations, not racial equality, the intensity of this activism varied in different parts of the state. The Greenville and Columbia YWCAs were clearly more outspoken about racial injustices in their cities. The Charleston association, which had always been
hesitant to address racial issues, experienced increased racial tensions in the community and between black and white YWCA members after Elizabeth Waring’s speech to the Coming Street YWCA in 1950. United Church Women in South Carolina and Columbia had by this point at least begun to pay more attention to racial injustices throughout the state and were encouraged by its national body to combat them. But even as they attempted to do this, many of its members shied away from racial activism not only because they feared reprisals, but also because they were unprepared to deal with the ramifications of desegregation in their communities.

When the *Brown v. Board of Education* was handed down by the Supreme Court on 17 May 1954, blacks and whites in South Carolina understood that change was inevitable but they interpreted it in different ways. Some blacks resisted the decision and membership in organizations like the NAACP, which had spearheaded the case because they feared economic reprisals. However, most African Americans welcomed the decision as catalyst to further activism. Black women and their organizations in particular, used the decision and the momentum of the civil rights movement to continue to push for access to equal educational opportunities and voting rights.

Although many religious organizations in South Carolina saw it as a Christian duty to promote racial and social change, during the 1960s they displayed different understandings of Christian activism. For white women in the
Charleston YWCA, their understanding of Christianity directed them to support racial injustice when they resisted the national YWCA’s civil rights agenda. Black women, on the other hand, not only saw their Christian duty differently and supported the national agenda, but they also pushed the Charleston YWCA to integrate its membership.

As racial tensions increased in South Carolina, United Church Women in Columbia withdrew their support for racial changes after the Supreme Court decision, although their national chapter supported them, and instead turned to less controversial activism like addressing the poverty of migrant workers in lowcountry South Carolina. This resistance to racial activism reached a climax in the 1960s when United Church Women decided not to hold interracial meetings any longer and the Charleston YWCA voted for disaffiliation from the national YWCA because of its civil rights agenda.

Even by the 1960s, black and white women, with the exception of a few individual leaders, failed to achieve truly interracial activism. Among organizations like the YWCA and United Church Women that were integrated nationally this would not occur in South Carolina except to a limited extent by the end of the decade. Unfortunately, it was difficult for most white South Carolina women to imagine black women as their equals and work with them integrated organizations. South Carolina was unique in this regard as local YWCAs and United Church Women branches in other parts of the country had long since
integrated their memberships. Still, white women’s efforts, though limited, were courageous because they often supported racial and social change in the face of a hostile environment.

That black women were able to form and maintain predominately African American branches of such organizations as well as promoting activism through their own, attests to their quest for autonomy and agency to impact changes most relevant to their communities. They skillfully used racial exclusion to their advantage to work for changes and opportunities denied South Carolina’s African American population.

Both groups of women assumed considerable risks and overcame many obstacles to improve racial conditions throughout South Carolina. By the end of the 1960s, white women and their organizations’ focused on combating poverty in South Carolina because it did not call direct attention to race. Such activism was considered less controversial. For black women, however, responding to the national civil rights movement, such issues as voting rights and equal educational access remained virtually unchanged over the decades.
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