STATUS SEEKERS:
LONG-ESTABLISHED WOMEN’S ORGANIZATIONS AND THE WOMEN’S
MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES,
1945-1970s

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an examination of four long-established American women’s organizations that were active in the decades immediately following World War II. It is part of growing body of work that places the roots of second wave feminism in the decades prior to the 1960s. The focus of this dissertation is the non-college student, non-radical women who addressed the main social movements of the postwar era by promoting civil rights and feminism. These organized women were targeted by conservative critics who employed the anti-communist hysteria of the Cold War in a largely unsuccessful attempt to stifle liberal activism. Each organization focused on a agenda that gradually expanded to include civil rights and feminism. They are feminist precursors.

Each group in this study formed prior to World War II to address one of the major aspects of American life: work, education, family, and religion. The American Nurses Association (ANA) saw itself as chiefly a labor organization. Because the vast majority of nurses were of women, the ANA discovered that it could not promote better nursing and improved working conditions without elevating the status of women workers and without addressing the issue of racism within health care. The American Association of University Women aimed to provide a place for educated women in public life. It discovered that it could not provide such a place while discriminating on
the basis of race, but its support for social justice threatened the status of the organization during the Cold War. The sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha aimed to elevate the black race and believed that women were the key to doing so. It pushed for advancement for women as part of a wider strategy to advance African Americans. Church Women United formed to promote Christian values. It fought against racial and gender discrimination within the churches and society at large because such behavior did not fit ideals of Christian conduct.

The history of major nationwide women’s organizations in the postwar era provides important insight into a transitional period for American feminism. These groups did not disband because feminism fell out of favor after women won the vote. While they were challenged by a conservative political climate, these large organizations remained vibrant and prepared the ground for liberal activism to flourish in the 1960s.
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I would also like to thank Yulonda Eadie Sano, Cherisse Jones, Ellen Fout, Stephanie Gilmore, Jacki Della-Rosa, Audra Jennings, Mindy Farmer, Karen Huber, Michael Flamm, Nancy Garner, Brian Page, Leila J. Rupp, Stephanie Shaw, David Stebenne, David Steigerwald, Dustin Walcher, Jane Berger, Ron Green, and Stephanie Smith for reading drafts. Donna Guy, David G. Horn, and Warren Van Tine kindly served on my dissertation committee. Ellen and Robert Fout, Katy Allison, Joby Abernathy, Elena Labrador, Diana Storch, Raji and Polonium helped me maintain my sanity through graduate school.

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Cora J. Neumann, my mother, graduated from the Brooklyn Hospital School of Nursing in 1952. During the course of a forty year career that took her from private duty to hospitals to home care, she became a certified registered intravenous nurse who gleefully answered to the nickname of La Vampira and who thought exercise guru Jack LaLanne was the very model of male beauty because he had great veins. My mother died during the completion of this dissertation. It is dedicated to her memory and that of my grandmother, Eltsie M. Johnsen.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract...........................................................................................................................................ii
Acknowledgments..........................................................................................................................iv
Vita....................................................................................................................................................vi

Chapters:

**Introduction**...............................................................................................................................................1

1. **Angels of Mercy and Agents of Change: The American Nurses Association**

..........................................................................................................................................................22

2. **Fulfilling the Obligations of the Educated Woman: The American Association of University Women**

..............................................................................................................................................................82

3. **Serving Mankind by Empowering Women: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority**.................................124

4. **Escaping the Christian Mystique: Church Women United**.........................................................166

**Conclusion**........................................................................................................................................215

**Bibliography**....................................................................................................................................220
INTRODUCTION

In 1950, Cynthia Wedel looked much like any other minister’s wife in her forties with two children. A dedicated member of the Episcopal Church, she served in the Woman’s Auxiliary and taught part-time at a church-sponsored school. As an older, devoutly religious woman, Wedel does not match the common image of a feminist. Yet, in the 1950s, Wedel spoke and wrote often of the need for the churches to embrace a new role for women that acknowledged their equal importance with men. She is one of many organized women activists who, in pursuit of narrow goals, set the stage for the rise of the second women’s movement in the 1960s. This dissertation examines activism by the American Nurses Association (ANA), the American Association of University Women (AAUW), Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA), and Church Women United (CWU) in the decades after World War II. As Wedel recognized at the twilight of her life in 1978, such groups were “deeply involved” in the women’s movement and acted as “a bridge between militant feminists and more conservative women.”

1 Although a typical 1950s woman in many ways, Wedel earned a PhD in psychology in 1957 and then taught for many years. In 1969, she became the first woman to head the National Council of Churches. For her biography, see Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg, “Cynthia Clark Wedel,” in Notable American Women: Completing the Twentieth Century, 1976–2000, Susan Ware, ed. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004). For an interview with Wedel, see Martha Edens and Cynthia Wedel, “Women and Ecumenism questionnaire,” 13 July 1978, box 56, folder 48, CWU Papers
This dissertation examines organizations that came into existence prior to World War II and thrived throughout the 1950s and 1960s. It contributes to the literature on modern United States history in several ways. The 1950s are a more complex period than scholars usually present, as my work shows. It is impossible to fully consider the postwar period with considering the place of religion, the impact of World War II on women’s labor, and the influence of anti-communist hysteria upon long-established organizations that were not expressly political. This study is also part of a new body of historical literature that shows the impact of the Cold War upon the civil rights struggle.

I argue that these older groups formed a third branch of the women’s movement that complemented the liberal branch and the radical branch that sprouted in the 1960s. The AAUW, the ANA, AKA, and CWU challenged the second-class status of women with the aim of empowering women to get and use a quality education, to obtain a well-paying job and respect in the workplace, to strengthen the family, and to persuade the church to consider women’s issues. These are issues that would be raised in the 1960s and 1970s by feminist organizations. Other groups that comprised this third wing would include long-standing women’s organizations such as the National Council of Jewish Women, the National Council of Negro Women, the Women’s Division of the United Methodist Church, the International Ladies’ ...
Garment Workers Union, and the National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs.

As Wedel recognized, the older organizations engaged in activities that allowed feminism to later flourish but the members of these groups generally did not identify explicitly as feminists. I am defining feminism as the evaluation of society with the aim of restructuring it to afford greater opportunities for women. The four groups can be categorized as feminist precursors. Although they did not expressly embrace feminism, the members of these groups did promote greater opportunities for women. They focused much of their attention outside of the traditional political arena in an era when women were effectively barred from positions of power within politics. By doing so, they paved the ground for the rise of the second women’s movement in the 1960s. Feminism did not crest out of nowhere. The movement had deep roots that were set by the organizations in this study. These groups addressed every major aspect of American life from education to employment to the family to religion.

The selection of these groups presents the opportunity to examine how women’s organizations addressed the two major social movements – civil rights and feminism – that shaped the postwar world. Much of the dissertation has a Southern

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2 Issues pertaining to Native Americans, Latin Americans, and immigrants were not addressed by the groups in this study, possibly because no groups were pushing for action on these matters within the organizations and perhaps because such issues attracted comparatively little national attention in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s. African Americans had more lobbyists. None of the organizations in
flavor because feminist activity in the South has largely been overlooked by scholars who have chiefly focused on the Northeast. To historians familiar with the conservatism of the New South in the years since Ronald Reagan’s 1980 presidential victory, it is difficult to imagine that liberal activism once flourished below the Mason-Dixon line. This work fills a gap by including Southern feminist activity in the historiography. Additionally, many of the defining issues of the postwar period, such as the civil rights movement, were coming out of the South.

While the dissertation shows the success of African American women in working through white-dominated organization to advance civil rights, I do not include Latinas. None of the organizations in this study had Latina members working for Latina issues. All of the groups in this study were pushed to take action by both rank-and-file members and the national leadership. No organization was strictly top-down with respect to activism. No push came from Latinas. Additionally, the intensity of the African American struggle for rights and the size of the black population in comparison to the Latino/a population forced more national attention

upon blacks.\textsuperscript{4} As Rodolfo Acuña notes, the overwhelming presence of African Americans made it difficult for Mexican Americans and other minorities to convince people that they belonged to the civil rights movement. The courts did not even classify Mexican Americans as an “identifiable ethnic minority with a pattern of discrimination” until a 1970 decision by the U.S. Court for the Southern District of Texas in \textit{Cisneros v. Corpus Christi Independent School District}.\textsuperscript{5} While ethnic segregation was as detrimental as racial segregation, none of the organizations in this study spent much energy addressing ethnic problems.\textsuperscript{6} By contrast, addressing racial discrimination did force the organizations in this study to become more feminist because the members ultimately expanded opportunities for black women.

The ANA, started in 1896, sought to better working conditions and pay for women workers. The AAUW, begun in 1881, worked tirelessly to ensure that women received an education commensurate with that provided to men and that women could use the critical thinking skills that they had honed in classes. AKA, established in 1908, provided African-American women with a sorority of their own that would fight both sexism and racism in order to uplift the race. CWU, created in 1941 by a merger of three women’s groups, insisted that women had a vibrant role to play in the leadership of Protestant churches. These groups attracted tens of thousands of

\textsuperscript{4} The courts did not classify Mexican Americans as an “identifiable ethnic minority with a pattern of discrimination” until the 1970 in \textit{Cisneros v. Corpus Christi Independent School District}.


\textsuperscript{6} None of my organizations listed membership numbers for people of Hispanic descent in the 1945 to 1975 time frame.
members with their influence extending past their dues-payers. In the years that followed their establishment, these organizations flourished and came to form part of a post-World War II progressive coalition.

The history of major nationwide women’s organizations in the postwar era provides important insight into a transitional period for American feminism. These groups did not disband because feminism fell out of favor only to reemerge in the 1960s. They were vibrant, active, important organizations through the postwar years. The vast range of improvements in the lives of American women that were made possible by feminist activists would not have been put into place without a strong base of everyday, ordinary people who welcomed these changes. Desiring a dramatic change and implementing that change are vastly different tasks. The groups that I examine kept the fires burning and made implementation possible. I am showing the reach of feminist activism into postwar American society. By the end of this study in the mid-1970s, feminism was entrenched as seen by the high level of public and legislative support for equal rights for women in a range of areas including education and employment.

I challenge several dominant paradigms about women’s history. Historians often date the beginning of the first wave of the women’s movement to the meeting held at Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. Women gathered and demanded legal, economic, and social changes to the status of women, including suffrage. This first
wave ended when women got the vote in 1920. Whether women’s activism settled into the doldrums or many women channeled their energies into other reform movements, the period from 1920 until the 1960s seemed more quiescent in regard to gender hierarchy than the previous seven decades of suffrage battles. Several historians have traced feminism throughout the so-called doldrums years, including Susan M. Hartmann, Leila Rupp, and Verta Taylor but the focus of these studies has been on explicitly feminist activity. Dorothy Sue Cobble addresses women labor activists but does not acknowledge the ANA, one of the largest organizations of working women in the United States. Susan Lynn in her study of the postwar progressive coalition sees a bridge between older groups, such as the AAUW, and the feminist movement of the 1960s. Lynn focuses on middle class women in urban areas. I also address working class women in rural and suburban areas as well as a religious organization that is more reflective of mainstream America than Lynn’s American Friends Service Committee. I am categorizing the ANA as an organization that largely consisted of working class women in the immediate post-war era though it became more middle-class as time went on. The majority of nurses in the postwar period were products of hospital-based schools of nursing that offered  

free tuition and board in exchange for labor on hospital floors. A young woman with an interest in science but without the ability to pay for higher education went into nursing. As a nurse, she performed skilled labor but she also completed unpleasant manual tasks that mark a job as being working-class.8

The second feminist wave, unlike the first wave, lacked the single unifying theme of suffrage. Historians still debate such fundamental factors as the second wave’s beginning and end, goals and philosophy, activities and major milestones, successes and failures. Some scholars find the origins of the women’s movement in World War II. This view, most closely associated with historian William Chafe, holds that labor force participation rates of married women led to changes in women’s roles in society. More recent works have challenged this thesis, as does this work. Black and working class women, such as nurses, have long worked outside the home without becoming feminist.9

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8 Moving patients, wiping up blood and other bodily fluids, making beds with “hospital corners”, and cleansing the sick are tasks that registered nurses performed in this era.

9 The description of people of African ancestry has a problematic past. For the first six decades of the twentieth century, “Negro” was the standard, polite description for an African American. The term “Colored” was also common, although more colloquial than “Negro.” By the mid-1960s, “Black” had become the preferred term and it never went out of usage. “Afro-American” and “African-American” became popular in the 1970s with the hyphen dropped out of African American in the late 1990s. “People of color” appeared in the late 1980s and remained as an umbrella term for non-whites and white Hispanics. In accordance with modern scholarly practice, I am only using “Negro” and “Colored” in direct quotations. In accordance with standard practice among historians of the United States, I am using “black” and “African American” as synonyms. For a history of usage problems, see Randall Kennedy, Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002).
That the period of the 1960s and 1970s contained considerable feminist activity is without doubt, and this activism has been examined by Hartmann, Benita Roth, Ruth Rosen, Sara Evans, Winifred Wandersee, and Cynthia Harrison among other scholars. These studies have left a gap in the literature by addressing only organizational activities that centered upon explicitly feminist concerns, an absence that has been only partly remedied by Marisa Chappell’s work on political groups. 10 Few of the works, moreover, contain material pertinent to the activities of the older women who comprised the bulk of CWU. Hartmann’s study of male-dominated liberal organizations, including NCC, and her essay on CWU member Pauli Murray are notable exceptions. 11

While the changing political climate of the early 1960s inspired some women to become involved in the women’s movement, most historians have cited participation in the civil rights and anti-Vietnam movements as key to explaining the reemergence of feminism in the 1960s. This interpretation holds that white women

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11 Evans; Susan Hartmann, *The Other Feminists* and Hartmann, “Pauli Murray and the ‘Juncture of Women’s Liberation and Black Liberation’.” *Journal of Women’s History* 14, no. 2 (2002): 74-77.
who participated in civil rights organizations began to see similarities between themselves and the blacks they sought to help, much as the suffrage movement grew out of the abolition movement in the nineteenth century. Other women were involved in the New Left, a term that refers to a loosely affiliated movement of chiefly twentysomething adults who were critical of American society and politics, particularly the war in Vietnam. Women involved in both movements became dissatisfied with the limited role allotted to them and turned to feminism. This explanation suffers from a lack of complexity. Scholars paint a picture of a movement that is white, primarily middle class, young, and, typically, unmarried. Such a picture misses the women who came to feminism through groups that were in existence long before these movements flourished. Newer works have argued that the second wave needs to be understood as a several different feminist movements that were largely organizationally distinct from one another and largely organized along racial/ethnic lines. This recent scholarship sees more than civil rights and the New

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Left as the bases of feminism but most of these works still trace the roots of the second wave to the early 1960s.\textsuperscript{13}

Additionally, in spite of the vast amount of literature on the second wave, there are very few studies that examine older women or women away from the Northeast.\textsuperscript{14} However, not all feminists are found in the North. Some of them had Southern accents. And some of them were older, often long past their twenties. As I


show, women in the 1950s had their feminist consciousness raised and some of these women were long out of school and employed within the home.

From the beginning feminism’s re-emergence had many voices. This dissertation examines some of these voices. Chapter one begins with an examination of the ANA, the most conservative of the four organizations that I examine and the one that focused most on workplace issues. Postwar America glorified motherhood, and celebrated women’s biological differences. As historians have shown, it also endorsed hierarchical gender roles linking femininity with submissiveness and subordination. Nurses were both challenging American standards by working outside the home and reinforcing gender norms by being subordinate to physicians and performing tasks long associated with domesticity. Despite the belief of many feminists that nurses were content with second-class status, the ANA expanded its activities beyond its original focus on nursing. After a fitful start, it actively promoted civil rights within health care. I show the difficulties of integrating nursing by focusing on the recalcitrant states of Louisiana and Georgia. Integration and professionalism were linked, with racial discrimination hampering efforts to advance nursing. The ANA struggled mightily to get nursing recognized as a profession and the leaders of the organization saw university-based education as crucial to this process. By the 1970s, the ANA had embraced feminism, albeit somewhat hesitantly.

In this dissertation, the term “nurse” refers to a graduate of one of the two educational programs – baccalaureate (BSN) or diploma – that prepared students in the postwar era for positions as registered nurses. I do not address practical nurses or nurses’ aides.

Nursing history, along with much of women’s history, has often been written by scholars with an explicit political agenda. Early nursing leaders believed that a portrayal of nursing as a scientific field was absolutely crucial to its professionalization.\(^\text{16}\) The first histories of nursing were glorious stories of the progression of nursing from a dark and chaotic past to the arrival of the trained nurse. By the 1970s and 1980s, social historians and nursing historians began to examine nursing in a more complex manner. Nurse historians, by and large, have not made the connections between nursing and broader historical scholarship.\(^\text{17}\) Susan Rimby Leighow, Susan Reverby and Susan Gelfand Malka, heavily influenced by the history of women, are notable exceptions. Leighow focuses on labor force participation in the


\(^{17}\) For a history of the conflict between scholar nurses and historians of nursing, see Sioban Nelson, “The Fork in the Road: Nursing History Versus the History of Nursing?” *Nursing History Review* 10 (2002): 175-188.
This study attempts to remedy this gap. Ruth Rosen argues that Friedan, no stranger to leftist politics, purposely limited her focus in *The Feminine Mystique* to middle-class white women in order to be heard and not silenced or distracted by anti-communist witch hunters. Considering the difficulties that Friedan experienced in both finding a publisher and publicizing the book, this explanation is quite reasonable. See Rosen, 6.

In my second chapter, I look at the AAUW. Focused on women’s education, the AAUW also promote economic advancement for women, engaged in a heated internal debate over the ERA, and eventually grasped feminism. It struggled with the issue of civil rights for African Americans and hesitated to open its doors to black members. More so than the other organizations that I address, the AAUW struggled to maintain its strength during the Red Scare when red-baiting scarred many a liberal organization. Red-baiting threatened AAUW’s ability to function by suggesting that its agenda was simply a front for the promotion of communism. The impact of the anti-communist hysteria has been noted by others.

Often mentioned in histories of the women’s movement, the AAUW provides a good study of an already-established organization that slowly came to adopt feminism. Susan Levine’s excellent work on the AAUW does consider the

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19 Ruth Rosen argues that Friedan, no stranger to leftist politics, purposely limited her focus in *The Feminine Mystique* to middle-class white women in order to be heard and not silenced or distracted by anti-communist witch hunters. Considering the difficulties that Friedan experienced in both finding a publisher and publicizing the book, this explanation is quite reasonable. See Rosen, 6.
organization as a transitional feminist group but does not place the organization within the context of other feminist organizations. She argues that feminism was reborn in the 1970s by a constituency of college-educated women, a conclusion that might surprise the many working class nurses and church ladies. Christina Greene does place the AAUW within the context of a coalition of women’s groups dealing with racial conflict but she includes only a cursory discussion of the AAUW’s activities.  

In chapter three, I look at AKA. As an organization of black women, AKA addressed different issues than those that consumed white activists. It supported a woman’s right to work, in part because black women had always worked, but it also focused on bettering the black family through greater opportunities for black women. Black women sought civil rights and this goal became a chief aim of the sorority, as it did for other organizations dedicated to serving the interests of African Americans. But while the sorority pressed for civil rights, it showed an increasing interest in promoting the specific interests of black women, even when these interests clashed with the goals of black men. Not an expressly feminist organization, AKA nevertheless spent significant resources on feminist goals.

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The contributions made by African Americans to feminism remain a barely explored topic. Both Cheryl Townsend Gilkes and Tracey A. Fitzgerald argue that some organized black women were hostile to the feminist movement since they believed that it did not address the problem of racism. Rosetta E. Ross addresses black religious women’s activism in the twentieth century but focuses on civil rights.\(^{21}\) Scholars have recently considered black women’s involvement with the reproductive rights movement but all of these scholars assume that such involvement began in the 1970s with the feminist movement.\(^{22}\) They do not consider the history of established black women’s groups, perhaps in part because these organizations have been the focus of few studies. AKA is the subject of no other historical study. Lawrence C. Ross Jr.’s work on the sorority is essentially a listing of AKA activities and famous members. Walter “Big Walt” Anderson’s “unauthorized history” of AKA is lacking in any analysis. Paula Giddings’s examination of Delta Sigma Theta concludes that it was created to change and benefit individuals rather than society. I

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build on Stephanie Shaw’s work on the Jim Crow era by arguing that black women of
the postwar period continued an earlier focus on the uplift of the race.23

My last chapter addresses an organization, CWU, that is perhaps the most radical of them all. Like the ANA, the AAUW, and AKA, CWU was composed of mature women who did not join CWU to further feminist interests. They joined to satisfy a narrow aim. The members were Christian women who actively debated exactly what that meant. The nexus of religion and feminism in the first women’s movement has formed the basis of many a book and an essay, yet there is a silence surrounding religion and the women of the post-World War II years.24 Feminist historians, perhaps mindful of the myriad ways that religion has been employed throughout the ages to chain women to domestic responsibilities, have expressed little interest in viewing either traditional churches or traditional religions as fields of empowerment for women except in the arena of civil rights.25 However, CWU

24 The best history of feminism within the church comes from a feminist theologian, Mary A. Kassian, who does not address CWU. See Kassian, The Feminist Gospel: The Movement to United Feminism with the Church.
members were empowered by their religion. I show how they struggled against red-baiting, segregation, internalized racism, and a male-dominated church that wanted to restrict women to being the spine of organized religion instead of its brains.

This neglect of the history of modern church women parallels the refusal of the churches to consider the public lives of women. In 1952, Kathleen Bliss, one of the highest placed women in the World Council of Churches, called for the churches to provide guidance to women in areas other than marriage and home life.\(^\text{26}\) The failure of the churches to do so sparked both divisions within ecumenism as well as the creation of a body of literature.

Scholars who address the topic of religion and feminism fall into several categories. Many of them are either hostile to the feminist movement or hostile to male-dominated religion.\(^\text{27}\) In the latter works, the authors attack the oppression of women by organized religion and insist that there is no place for women within contemporary religious organizations.\(^\text{28}\) The philosophers and sociologists who produce

\\(^{27}\) Protestant historian Donald E. Miller’s work focuses on women who accept a biblical interpretation of gender roles that does not include participation in politics while Catherine Tumber sees feminism as contributing to an erosion of public life. See Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) and Tumber, *American Feminism and the Birth of New Age Spirituality: Searching for the Higher Self, 1875-1915* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).
\\(^{28}\) Naomi R. Goldenberg argues that the feminist movement in the West is engaged in the destruction of the church while Rosemary Radford Ruether wants to rebuild the church from the ground up. Sheila Tobias identifies religion only with anti-feminism. See Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism*
these writings see the rise of the neo-pagan and the Goddess religions as part of a shifting of power to women. This categorization ignores the empowerment that many women, notably African Americans, have found within traditional Christian denominations.29

Defining feminist spirituality as a movement that originated in the 1960s or the 1970s and as one that has little to do with Christianity implies that Christian women in the United States have a history of accepting oppression.30 It also suggests a level of contempt for Christian feminists. As Susanne Heine has observed, liberation for the feminist church insider is mocked by outsiders as something false. Christian theologians in recent years have attempted to make a connection between feminist theory and religion to illuminate the persistent controversies surrounding feminism.31

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29 Cynthia Eller writes that no other spiritual movement is as “strong as feminist spirituality in providing a sense of identity, mission, and meaning that is indissolubly linked to femaleness.” Cynthia Eller, Living in the Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 208.


The remaining scholars who study Protestant women and religion fall into either the Christian feminist or professional historian camps. Scholars, such as Susanne Heine, Constance F. Parvey, Dorothy A. Lee and Mary Bader Papa, have produced works that suggest that one can be both a Christian and a feminist. These writings are aimed at Christians and are based upon re-readings of the Bible. Gilkes, an ordained Baptist minister as well as a sociologist of note, is one of the foremost scholars of black women and religion yet she does not address ecumenism. Perhaps because Baptists do not believe in ecumenism, Gilkes may be unaware of the involvement of black women from such denominations as the African Methodist Episcopal Church and African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church within CWU. The only study of ecumenism in the black churches notes that most ecumenical organizations of the 1960s included no women thereby completely missing CWU. Cherisse R. Jones, uses the Columbia, South Carolina chapter of CWU to examine the limitations of white women’s advocacy for racial justice and covers the same era as this study. My work addresses CWU across the nation. The convictions of CWU

32 Judith Ezekiel notes the importance of religious ideal to consciousness raising. See Ezekiel, *Feminism in the Heartland* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002).
34 Mary A. Sawyer does address divisions between men in the NCC and is one of the few scholars to take note of the WCC. See her *Black Ecumenism: Implementing the Demands of Justice* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994).
members are chronicled by CWU insiders in the only two book-length studies of the organization: Gladys Gilkey Calkins’ *Follow Those Women: Church Women in the Ecumenical Movement* and Margaret Shannon’s, *Just Because: The Story of the National Movement of Church Women United in the U.S.A., 1941 through 1975.*

The second feminist wave had a broad range with roots that extended into working women’s organizations, women’s education, civil rights organizations, and the churches. This dissertation examines this base of feminism. Studies of the postwar decades have largely ignored the women who belonged to established women’s organizations. Yet these activists represented a substantial segment of postwar American society. To fully understand the changes that took place within the U.S. during the mid-twentieth century, it is necessary to write them into history.

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CHAPTER ONE
ANGELS OF MERCY AND AGENTS OF CHANGE:
THE AMERICAN NURSES’ ASSOCIATION

In 1964, Hildegard Peplau, a professor of nursing at Rutgers University,
explained why the low status of women should worry her fellow members of the
American Nurses’ Association (ANA). “The nurse scientists,” she wrote, ‘are going
to be few and far between if current and future collegiate students are not aided to
recognize and become comfortable with their native capacities . . . and get themselves
above and beyond the current image of women.”36 The public mage of women
hampered the efforts of the ANA, one of the largest organizations of working women
in the United States, to professionalize nursing. The ANA, along with the AAUW,
AKA, and CWU, did not organize specifically to better the position of women in
American society, unlike many of the organizations commonly associated with
second-wave feminism. ANA leaders acted to better the status of nurses and saw the
association as a labor organization that incidentally happened to be entirely female.37

When the professional goals of nurses overlapped with feminist and civil rights

36Hildegard Peplau, “Letters to the Editors,” American Journal of Nursing, 64, no. 9 (September 1964): 68.
37ANA leaders referred to the organization as a labor one by the 1950s. In earlier years, some ANA
leaders objected to the categorization of nurses as workers. For example, in 1913, the California State
Nurses Association fought a bill to include nurses in laws that restricted the hours of women’s labor
because they did not want nursing classed as a trade and nurses labeled as mere laborers. See Susan M.
Reverby, Ordered to Care: The Dilemma of American Nursing, 1850-1945 (New York: Cambridge
University Press, 1987), 127.
concerns in the postwar years, ANA members embraced these new causes albeit with the same sort of hesitation shown by the AAUW. A look at the ANA shows how feminism and civil rights set deep roots among working, middle-class, overwhelmingly white women.  

In this chapter, I provide a brief history of the ANA and of nursing. I look at the challenges faced by nurses in the climate of heightened domesticity that marked the immediate post-war years. In the 1950s, ANA expanded its activities beyond its original narrow focus to actively promote civil rights within health care. At the same time, the ANA struggled mightily to get nursing recognized as a profession, and the leaders of the organization saw university-based education as crucial to this process. By the 1970s, the ANA had embraced feminism, albeit somewhat hesitantly.

One of the many women’s organizations that emerged in the late nineteenth century, the ANA came from the same era as the AAUW and AKA. The ANA began in 1896 as the Nurses Associated Alumnae of the United States and Canada, the first professional association for women. The Canadians splintered off into their own organization in 1907 and, in 1912, the name of the group changed to the ANA. It aimed to raise the standards of nursing, initially by pushing for state registration of

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nurses that would mandate standardization of training.\textsuperscript{39} In the post-World War II era, the ANA consisted of the nurse associations in all of the states plus the District of Columbia and U.S. territories (Virgin Islands, Guam, and Puerto Rico as well as Hawaii and Alaska before statehood) and accepted only nurses with advanced degrees, known as graduate or registered nurses.

The strength of the ANA steadily grew over the decades, with the group claiming the allegiance of over 190,000 registered nurses by the start of the 1960s.\textsuperscript{40} The ANA ever had only one goal: to encourage high nursing standards. The means by which it would achieve this goal changed over time.

Like other professions dominated by women, nursing underwent profound changes in the years following World War II.\textsuperscript{41} It had originated as one of the maternal crafts, a service traditionally performed by women with little or no training who served for love not gain. Throughout the centuries, many nursing functions blurred with domestic, charitable, and religious activities.\textsuperscript{42} Not until Florence

\textsuperscript{39} Reverby, 123.
\textsuperscript{40} “Statement of Julia C. Thompson to the House Committee on Ways and Means on H.R. 4700 July 15, 1959” box 246, folder 5, American Nurses’ Association Collection in the Department of Special Collections, Boston University.
\textsuperscript{41} There has been some disagreement within nursing about the nature of nursing. Considering the amount of higher-level education required for modern nurses and the intellectual dialogue within nursing, I believe that it is a profession. Members of the ANA agree that it is a profession. For the argument that it is a profession, see Barbara J. Callaway, \emph{Hildegard Peplau: Psychiatric Nurse of the Century} (New York: Springer, 2002). For the argument that it is a craft, see the introduction to Tom Olson and Eileen Walsh, \emph{Handling the Sick: The Women of St. Luke’s and the Nature of Nursing, 1892-1937} (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2004).
\textsuperscript{42} In the United States, the vast majority of nurses have not been linked to Catholic orders and there is very little literature pertaining to American nuns who nursed. The Nursing History Bibliographic Project found only two dissertations completed in the years 1981-1997 that focused on nuns. These
Nightingale launched the modern nursing movement by setting training standards and eliminating extraneous functions did nursing become a recognized secular profession. Many of the early nursing leaders, such as Lillian Wald and Adelaide Nutting, saw nursing as a mission to heal, akin to a religious calling. Many other Americans, including doctors and hospital administrators, saw nursing as only a lowly service, slightly above the servant level. By the time that World War II

works are Mary Carol Conroy, “The Historical Development of the Health Care Ministry of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth” (Ph.D. diss., Kansas State University, 1984) and Mary Patricia Tarbox, “The Origins of Nursing by the Sisters of Mercy in the United States: 1843-1910” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University Teachers College, 1986). In their reference to notable American nurses, Vern Bullough and Lilli Sentz only list two nuns, one of whom was a Canadian. The second nurse, Agnes Shoemaker Reinders, known as Sister M. Theophane, left her order in 1964. Although one nun, Sister Delphine served as a national ANA board member in the late 1960s, nuns did not constitute a substantial bloc of the ANA members and never acted as a group. Nuns rarely appear in ANA papers. It is possible that most nuns did not regard professionalization as an important issue and, for this reason, did not join the ANA or perhaps they regarded the ANA as too secular. See Jonathon Erlen, “The Nursing History Bibliographic Project: Doctoral Dissertations in the History of Nursing,” Nursing History Review, 12 (2004), 193-229; Vern L. Bullough and Lilli Sentz, American Nursing: A Biographical Dictionary (New York: Springer, 2000).

There is no contradiction in categorizing nursing as both a secular profession and a religious calling. For many nurses it was both. For example, the British Nightingale believed that she had a calling from God to become a nurse. After training at institutes run by Protestant deaconesses and Catholic nuns, she opened her own school of nursing in 1860. She believed the focus of a school should be on nursing education rather than nursing service. While other training schools offered courses lasting only a few weeks or a few months, Nightingale enrolled students in a year-long program that included coursework on anatomy, surgical nursing, physiology, chemistry, food sanitation, ethics, and professionalism. The Nightingale School is considered the first modern school of nursing and the beginning of nursing as an organized profession. Yet, Nightingale would have been horrified to be classed as a worker. She had a higher calling. See Monica E. Baly, Florence Nightingale and the Nursing Legacy (London: Croom Helm, 1986) and Barbara Montgomery Dossey, Florence Nightingale: Mystic, Visionary, Healer (Springhouse, PA: Springhouse, 2000).

Many of the early twentieth century rank-and-file nurses, unashamed of working for money, saw nothing wrong with commercialism but the ideology of sacrifice remained enormously powerful within nursing, especially among the leadership. See Reverby, 131.

As one example of the positioning of nurses as servants, anecdotes abound of tips given to nurses in hospitals until professionalization extinguished this practice by about 1960. It may have continued longer outside the hospital setting. The author’s mother, a home health care registered nurse, received a tip from a patient in the late 1980s, much to her shock and discomfort.

In the 1950s, nursing was often seen by the general public and many in the health care field as an attractive profession for an intelligent woman until she married.\footnote{For a discussion of nursing as a way to find a husband, see Linda Hughes, “Little Girls Grow Up to be Wives and Mommies: Nursing as a Stopgap to Marriage,” Janet Muff, ed. \textit{Socialization, Sexism, and Stereotyping: Women’s Issues in Nursing} (St. Louis: C.V. Mosby, 1982), 157-168.} As part of the celebration of domesticity of the immediate postwar years, nurses were confronted with pressure to become wives and stay-at-home mothers. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, best selling books like Marynia Farnham’s and Ferdinand Lundberg’s \textit{Modern Woman: The Lost Sex} (1947) popularized the notion that “normal” women desired only to be wives and mothers and that women who attempted anything else threatened the “natural” separation of gender roles on which the healthy family depended.\footnote{Marynia L. Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg, \textit{Modern Woman: The Lost Sex} (New York: Harper, 1947).} In a 1953 column in the \textit{Shreveport} (Louisiana) \textit{Times}, Mary Haworth advised a twenty-four year old registered nurse who was under pressure by her fiancé to quit working. The woman, named P.R., had studied long hours for years to become a nurse, loved her work and took it seriously. Her fiancé
wanted her to hand in her notice and immediately begin keeping house and bearing children. “It seems all the sacrifices are expected of me; and frankly I resent it . . . don’t I have any rights?” P.R. explains, echoing the complaints that Betty Friedan would chronicle a decade later in 1963’s *The Feminine Mystique*. Haworth tells the young nurse that she can choose either nursing or marriage while strongly implying that a mature, mentally healthy woman would pick the latter.  

One of the so-called “pink-collar” careers, nursing in the twentieth century was a woman’s profession. Along with careers in teaching, libraries, and social work, nursing provided personal satisfaction and met the criteria for women’s work. A nursing career drew on years of socialization and a consciousness bred to serve. Women who took up nursing could assume a social role consistent with the home. Nurses remained subordinate to (mostly male) doctors, served others, and had limited possibilities for advancement. This pattern of subservience and female submissiveness led to an undervaluing of the contributions of nurses that was reflected in the salaries that they received. Like female teachers and secretaries, nurses earned relatively steady but low incomes.

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49Mary Haworth, “Mary Haworth’s Mail”, *Shreveport (La.) Times*, 27 December 1953, box 19, Louisiana State Nurses Association, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.

50 The extent to which nursing had become a woman’s job in the eyes of the general public is seen by the military’s refusal to accept male nurses despite the urgency of World War II. As Mary T. Sarnecky found, many in the military hierarchy viewed male nurses as homosexual because they were “feminine.” See Sarnecky, *A History of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 297.

51 Bullough, 36.
Yet the women who donned white caps and crisply starched uniforms did not completely match their sisters in the other traditional occupations. Contrary to public perceptions, nursing offered a considerable amount of independence, responsibility, and power to women who had an interest in science. As one nurse put it in 1953, “Practically anyone can have a baby, but not everybody is capable of being a nurse. And I resent being asked to toss it aside to wash dishes and diapers.”52 The field attracted women who wanted to make a difference in the lives of others and the descendants of Florence Nightingale enjoyed an occupation that had much more glamour than most women’s jobs. As angels of mercy, nurses could claim the moral high road and, under the rubric of patient care, they could take an active role in attempts to reform society.

As World War II faded into history, the changes that it had wrought brought more women workers into medicine. The labor force participation rate of women, particularly women with young children, rose dramatically during the war years. With the end of the war, many women moved out of the labor force, although with the new knowledge that they could serve the family by wage earning as well as performing household economies.53 As Susan Malka has observed, many nurses also discovered a postwar contradiction unique to nursing. While women were

52 P.R., “Mary Haworth’s Mail,” Shreveport (La.) Times, 27 December 1953, no folder, box 16, LSNA Collection.
encouraged to move out of the labor force, nurses were desperately needed for the burgeoning hospital industry, and the overwhelming majority of nurses were women.  

While nurses were not immune to societal pressures to move back into the home, they could not be charged with taking the jobs of men. Schools of nursing traditionally did not accept men or married women, although this began to change in the 1950s in response to a growing nursing shortage. While the increased use of technology usually meant a decreased demand for labor, the opposite occurred within nursing. The development and spread of complex medical equipment created a steadily rising demand for highly trained nurses who could operate the new devices, a situation that led to a shortage of registered nurses that would continue into the millennium.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, many nurses wanted to address economic and gender discrimination issues within health care while remaining silent on society-wide social issues. Perhaps fearing marginalization by male political leaders and the general public, the ANA declined to portray itself as a women’s organization and, with the notable exception of the President’s Commission on the Status of Women, generally refused to work with other women’s organizations since it saw no

54 Manka, 23.
55 “Nursing School is Specialty at Northeast State,” Baton Rouge (La.) Morning Advocate, 1961, no folder, box 16, Louisiana State Nurses Association, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.
commonality of interests with them. State chapters did not always make the same
decision, however. Mississippi nurses, as one example, considered the advantages of
affiliation with women’s organizations and in 1961 elected to join the Mississippi
Women’s Cabinet of Public Affairs.56

Despite protestations to the contrary, the ANA had all the characteristics of a
women’s organization. In 1953 the ANA catalogued the sex and race of professional
nurses. It discovered that men comprised only 2.4% of all registered nurses in the
United States in 1950 and that 3.5% of all female registered nurses were nonwhite
(Asian, African American, and Latin American). Of all the female registered nurses,
62% were married (not widowed, divorced, or separated) and of these women, a little
less than half, 46% remained in the workforce.57 In 1953, only 26.3% of married
women in the general population were employed outside the home.58 Many registered
nurses, perhaps drawn by economic concerns or callings to serve, remained in the
workforce after marriage.59

56 MNA Board of Directors Minutes, 29 July 1961, box 3, Mississippi Nurses’ Association Collection,
Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi.
57 “ANA Statistical Digest for Your Economic Security Program,” December 1953, box 5, Louisiana
State Nurses Association, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries,
Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA.
58 U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Civilian Labor Force, By Color and Sex, and Marital Status of Women:
1890 to 1957,” in Historical Abstracts of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957 (Washington,
59 Susan Rimby Leighow contends that many nurses explained their employment in terms of public
service and this unique justification allowed nurses to combine career and family. Susan M. Hartmann
agrees that the expansion of roles for women could be seen as compatible with national interest during
the Cold War. See Leighow, “An ‘Obligation to Participate’: Married Nurses’ Labor Force
Participation in the 1950s,” in Joanne Meyerovitz, Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar
In the 1950s and 1960s, a good number of nurses still worked in private duty and not on hospital staffs. These nurses were hired by patients or the families of patients to provide care for a set period of time in either the patient’s home or in the hospital. Nurses chose this employment for a variety of reasons. Until World War II, hospitals would not hire married women, and after the war a few nursing directors still maintained this policy though staffing concerns caused many to drop the marriage bar.\textsuperscript{60} Nurses with childcare responsibilities often preferred the flexible hours of private duty. Many of these nurses had no particular interest in the larger issues surrounding nursing. They belonged to the ANA because membership helped them to keep their jobs and care for their patients.

Nurses sought to join ANA because membership brought the prestige and benefits associated with a professional organization. Elizabeth Porter, ANA president in 1953, succinctly described the membership benefits when she explained that the public would pay adequate salaries when properly informed and convinced of the worth of the nursing service provided.\textsuperscript{61} As they were expected to provide advanced medical care in an era of ever-more complicated medical devices, nurses needed continuing education in order to remain worthy of good pay. ANA leaders offered

\textsuperscript{60} Bullough, 44.
workshops and programs about the latest trends in nursing. As one young white woman phrased it, “How could we possibly keep up-to-date and continue to function as professional nurses, if we become stagnant and unaware of the rapid changes taking place in our profession.” Ohio nurse Beryl Chickerella joined ANA because she thought, “it is important to . . . remain current.” Chickerella had initially spurned ANA membership in 1958 but later joined the organization to advance her career. This is the same reason that many skilled male workers joined unions – to gain additional knowledge and to advance their careers.

The benefits of ANA membership also attracted black women. The ANA had a few black members, including Mary Mahoney, the first black professional nurse, from its 1896 inception but these women gained ANA membership in a roundabout way through their alumnae associations. For example, in Mahoney’s case, all graduates of the New England Hospital for Women and Children nursing school who

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63 Chickerella became an R.N. in 1958 but did not join ANA until after completing her Master of Science in Nursing in 1972. Returning to academia after serving as a staff nurse and Head Start nurse convinced her of the need to remain current. Chickerella subsequently served as the chair of the Ohio Nurses’ Association Practice Committee and chair of the Liaison Committee with the Ohio State Medical Association and Ohio Osteopathic Association. Beryl Chickerella, interview by author, 16 August 2004.
64 Mahoney later helped found the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN) in 1908 because the ANA proved so unresponsive to the needs of black nurses. She rarely missed a chance to recruit new NACGN members and the organization established an award in Mahoney’s name in 1936 for her efforts to raise the status of black professional nurses. Since the merger with NACGN, ANA issues the award. See Althea T. Davis, Early Black American Leaders in Nursing: Architects for Integration and Equality (Boston: Jones and Bartlett, 1999), 26-59 and Helen S. Miller, America’s First Black Professional Nurse: Mary Eliza Mahoney 1845-1926 (Atlanta: Wright Publishing, 1986).
belonged to the alumnae association automatically received ANA membership. In 1916, the association had instituted the policy of accepting members through state organizations. To join the ANA and enjoy the professional benefits that it offered, black women had to enter through their state nurses’ associations but, in these early years, sixteen southern states and the District of Columbia refused to admit African American women. In 1939, the ANA president announced that state chapters would be polled on the integration of the profession. However, the survey was apparently never sent and the matter was dropped.

To advance the concerns of black nurses, African Americans had founded the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN) in 1908. The ANA ignored NACGN until 1946 when the black nurses demanded full admission to the ANA instead of backdoor admission through their own black organizations in those cases where state ANA chapters refused to admit them. The NACGN-sponsored resolution called for the extension of membership to all qualified nurses irrespective of race. Likely influenced by the war, the ANA convention approved the resolution. In World War II, nurses and other Americans who went overseas experienced an unsegregated world while blacks proved themselves to be crucial to victory. Blacks

65 Very, very few black women graduated from predominantly white nursing schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The New Hospital for Women and Children, widely known for its progressive policies, only accepted one black nursing student per year in the 1870s and 1880s. See Miller, p. 24.
67 Shaw, 60.
and liberal whites came out of the war with a determination to uproot racial ideologies and institutions at home. Accordingly, in 1950, NACGN voted to merge with ANA and officially disband.\textsuperscript{68} Nursing thus became the first health profession in the United States to integrate.\textsuperscript{69}

While the black nurses were delighted to celebrate the funeral of NACGN with thank you scrolls, it is possible that white nurses were not paying that much attention to this death. There were very, very few black registered nurses in 1945 and most worked in jobs within the black community that whites did not want. White nurses may have thought that they would never have to deal with black nurses seeking ANA admission. The rise of the hospital movement after 1946 dramatically changed this employment picture for nurses of all races.

The ANA sought to increase the professional status of women while struggling to accommodate the older notion that nurses had a primary responsibility to serve the health needs of the community. For black nurses, the conflicts between the pursuit of individualistic goals and community goals were heightened by the responsibility they held as the health care leaders of African-American neighborhoods. In 1950, both African American and Caucasian nurses wore caps and

\textsuperscript{69}Black doctors were unwelcome in the American Medical Association and the various specialty groups for physicians well into the 1960s. Black dentists and pharmacists had the same problems. For a history of blacks in medicine, pharmacy, and dentistry, see Byrd.
dressed in white uniforms, but the similarities ended with their white shoes. Black and white nurses did not experience nursing in the same way. Both groups of nurses suffered to an extent from society’s habit of devaluing the labor performed by women, but in the black community, nurses enjoyed a high level of respect and responsibility. Seen as the professionals most sympathetic to black health care needs, African American nurses served as role models for young women seeking upward mobility.

As a community resource, black nurses in the postwar years faced a responsibility that white women did not. They were expected to defend and elevate the black community and, in the 1950s and 1960s, this meant that black nurses fought to integrate the nursing profession. With the integration of nursing, blacks would have greater professional opportunities, greater status, and access to better health care. Once they were in the door of the ANA, African American nurses could use the machinery and status of the association to advance the attack against racism. ANA membership promised greater respect, recognition, acceptance, status, education, jobs, and better pay.

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70 Darlene Clark Hine has suggested that the black nurses in the South, who typically worked in isolated communities in private practice, developed a greater sense of autonomy and control because of their isolation; Hine xxi.
71 Stephanie Shaw looks at the special obligations of black professional women. See Shaw, What a Woman Ought To Be and To Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
ANA membership enhanced the professional reputation of a nurse. In publication after publication, white nurse leaders stressed that professionalism was the primary benefit offered by the ANA. For black nurses, professionalism had an additional benefit. In hospitals, professionalism served as the strongest method of attack against racism. As one registered nurse explained, “This [nursing] student felt that because I was a Negro I might not be competent….No matter how she feels, she has to respect the graduate.”

If the ANA succeeded in raising the status of professional nursing and black registered nurses were firmly fixed as members of this class through their ANA membership, then respect for the skills and competence of African-American nurses would also rise in American society.

A general rise in respect for the black nurse would improve the employment prospects for black women. Many African American nurses could not find employment in hospitals, although the postwar national nursing shortage did force many hospitals to integrate their nursing staffs. Discriminatory practices based on race were legal in all nonprofit and proprietary hospitals until passage of the 1964 Equal Employment Opportunity section in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. While Northern black nurses determinedly fought against institutional separatism, Southerners focused their energies on addressing the urgent health care needs of the

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72 ANA Intergroup Relations Program, “Summary of the Replies of Negro Nurses to a Questionnaire to Learn About Their Participation in ANA,” 30 July 1955, box 10, LSNA Collection.
74 Discrimination Against Negro Nurses is Fading,” Pittsburgh *Courier*, 21 February 1953.
South’s black poor.\textsuperscript{75} Black nurses, in short, often sought private employers out of necessity rather than choice.

Private duty nurses generally found work through professional registries, yet district nurse associations that did not accept black nurses to membership also did not place these nurses on the registry list.\textsuperscript{76} Some ANA chapters would approve black nurses for the registries, but decline to take a stand against discriminatory hiring practices.\textsuperscript{77} In the southern hospitals that did employ black and white nurses, African American nurses were seldom considered for positions above the general duty level and infrequently received equal pay for equal work.\textsuperscript{78} They did not receive the respect due professionals. When the black nurses dissolved their own group and turned to the ANA, they stated that integration could not be achieved by a minority group alone, and they placed their confidence in the willingness of white nurses to work with them.\textsuperscript{79}

To combat racism within its ranks, ANA took a number of actions. In 1946, ANA had adopted a resolution recommending that all state and district nurses

\textsuperscript{75} Hine, xx.
\textsuperscript{77} Marjorie Kasun, “Registries and Intergroup Relations,” \textit{American Journal of Nursing} 59, no. 2 (February 1959): 234-235.
\textsuperscript{78} “Progress in Nursing,” \textit{Pittsburgh (La.) Courier}, 8 May 1954.
associations eliminate racial bans to membership as soon as possible. Two years later, ANA inaugurated the Individual Membership Program as a temporary measure to allow African-American nurses excluded from membership in state associations to join the ANA directly.

By 1950, five state associations in the District of Columbia, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and Georgia still refused to admit African-American nurses. Several of the other state associations that integrated contained districts that banned blacks from holding membership. In Mississippi as late as 1959, the state association accepted African-Americans as members and about 8 black nurses attended the state convention (allowed into the professional meeting only), but the Natchez, Warren, and Vicksburg chapters declined to welcome black members.

Admission to state membership did not always bring significant improvements for black nurses. The Florida State Nurses’ Association admitted African Americans in 1942, but did not permit any type of participation other than the payment of dues. One of the foremost nurse educators and the second African-American admitted to FSNA membership, Mary Elizabeth Carnegie, likened this to taxation without representation. Blacks gained full participation in Florida in 1948

80 “American Nurses’ Association Intergroup Relations Program,” box 358, folder 12, American Nurses’ Association Collection in the Department of Special Collections, Boston University. 81 MNA, Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors Meeting, Post Convention, 31 October 1959, box 3, MNA Collection; MNA, Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, 28 March 1963, box 3, MNA Collection.
and Carnegie became the first African-American elected to a state nursing board of
directors in 1949.  

In 1950, as part of the merger agreement with the NACGN, ANA created the
Intergroup Relations Program (IRP) to promote integration within the ANA.
Concerned about favorable publicity for nursing, ANA developed long range goals
though the IRP that included putting black and brown faces in audio and visual
materials to help demonstrate that the nursing profession offered opportunities and
services to all people regardless of race. ANA also planned to work to achieve “full
and optimal utilization” of nurses from all racial groups. In 1952, ANA convention
delegates voted “to promote full participation of minority groups in association
activities, and eliminate discrimination in job opportunities, salaries, and working
conditions.” ANA issued a professional code dictating the ethical responsibility of
a nurse to provide services on a non-discriminatory basis. It also planned to
promote the acceptance of African-American students into schools of nursing.

Many Southern schools did not admit blacks, forcing many would-be nurses
to leave for training in the North. In Mississippi, for example, the state government

82 Mary Elizabeth Carnegie, “The Path We Tread,” in Black Women in the Nursing Profession: A
Documentary History, ed. Darlene Clark Hine (New York: Garland, 1985), 149-156; Mary Elizabeth
Carnegie, The Path We Tread: Blacks in Nursing 1854-1990 (New York: National League for
Nursing Press, 1991), 77-78.
83 ANA Intergroup Relations Program, Philosophy Objective and Long-Term Goals of the Intergroup
Relations Program, October 1955, box 10, LSNA Collection.
84 “Brotherhood Has To Be Lived,” American Journal of Nursing 52, no. 2 (1952): 163.
86 “Progress in Nursing,” Pittsburgh Courier, 8 May 1954.
provided funds for the education of African American nurses who could not attend a school in the state. The Mississippi Nurses’ Association (MNA) had once sought to establish a correspondence training school for African American women but the governor in 1913 had refused to charter it. The proposal was never reintroduced.

Several decades later, education still remained a major interest. The MNA in 1948, as part of a state committee on hospital care, advocated means to educate non-white nurses and attract minority members into professional nursing but these also went nowhere. In 1948, about half of all Mississippians were African American but less than 3% of graduate nurses were black. As of 1950, there were no schools of nursing exclusively for black students in Mississippi, though one was in the planning stage, and only a few schools accepted African Americans on a limited basis. The African American students who did receive admission did not receive full access to clinical facilities and were therefore not as skilled as white nurses. Not surprisingly, though the white Mississippians found it shocking, many of the black Mississippians who received their degrees in Northern states preferred to remain in the North, probably

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87 The out-of-state Negro Scholarship Funds from the Board of Trustees Institutions of Higher Learning provided money to train black nurses. Report of the Committee for Reappraisal of Mississippi Nursing Needs and Resources, 1960, box 19, MNA Collection.
88 MNA, “Minutes of the Annual Meeting,” Record Book of the Mississippi State Association of Graduate Nurses (23 October 1913), 100.
89 Mississippi Commission on Hospital Care [Mississippi Nurses’ Association and the Mississippi State League of Nursing Education], Report of the Committee to Develop an Integrated State-Wide Nurse Education (Jackson, 1948), 5.
because they were not optimistic about finding work in the Magnolia State. The state government in later years suggested sending “young women of special promise” out of the state for nurse education only if they promised to return to Mississippi to practice.

In 1954, the year the Supreme Court *Brown* decision desegregated public schools, of the 1,200 schools of nursing in the U.S., only 710 accepted students without regard to race or color. This did not help health care in Mississippi or in other states with similar situations, as many registered nurses fully realized. The ANA periodically surveyed the nursing resources of the nation and urged schools of nursing to select students without regard to race but generally left educational matters to the National League of Nursing (NLN). Pressure to integrate the schools would not come from the ANA despite its professed interest in the matter.

Louisiana serves as a good example of how Southern professional women struggled with all of the implications of desegregation. Blacks formed about thirty-five percent of Louisiana’s population but only two percent of the state’s nursing supply. Among the ranks of 5,869 registered nurses in Louisiana in 1950, only 142 were African American and 128 of these women worked in New Orleans. An

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91 Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors Post-Convention, 31 October 1959, MNA Collection; Minutes of the Board of Directors, 2 December 1951, MNA Collection.
93 The NLN combined seven nursing organizations including the Association of Collegiate Schools of Nursing. See “The American Nurses’ Association and the National League for Nursing: A Joint Statement on Functions and Activities,” *American Journal of Nursing*, no. 1, 56 (January 1956), 23-26 and Grace E. Marr to Rabbi Julius Feibelman, 7 May 1954, folder 10, box 95, LSNA Collection.
unusually high number of these Southern black nurses, 84 women, worked in hospitals. White professional nurses did serve black patients and black practical nurses commonly helped white patients. However, no Crescent City hospitals used black professional nurses to serve white patients. New Orleans had a School of Nursing and Flint-Goodridge Hospital that were both affiliated with historically black Dillard University. A segregated ward at Charity Hospital also provided jobs for black nurses. Nurses seeking advanced training however, had to leave the state to obtain it. Dillard University sent nurses seeking psychiatric specialization to Kings County Hospital in Brooklyn, New York. It is doubtful that many of these nurses returned to Louisiana since the state suffered from a chronic nursing shortage throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

African American professional nurses in the Crescent City enjoyed far better opportunities for education and employment than most Southern black nurses. Yet Louisiana had substantially low overall numbers of black nurses and the barriers that excluded professional black nurses remained high in the state. In a 1955 survey of Louisiana nurses who had left their home state for greener pastures, black nurses stated “better climate” as a reason for practicing elsewhere. The white nurses who

94 Louisiana State Joint Committee for the Improvement of Nursing Services, “Shortage Distribution Quality: Survey of Nursing Resources and Needs in Louisiana,” folder 13, box 95, LSNA Collection.
95 ANA Intergroup Relations Program Background Information for Conference with Officers of Louisiana State Nurses Association, 14 July, 1954, folder 13, box 358, ANA Papers; Christine Causey to Grace E. Marr, 10 June 1953, folder 13, box 358, ANA Papers.
96 Flint-Goodridge Hospital
97 Schools of Nursing Accredited by the Louisiana State Board of Nurse Examiners, Pelican News (12-15 November 1951), 45, folder 13, box 95, LSNA Collection.
compiled the report dismissed this concern by explaining that the problem could be easily “controlled in summer by air-conditioning.” Clearly not all white nurses truly listened to black concerns. The chief issues for nurses of both races remained better salaries and benefits. The low status of black professional nurses affected the valuation placed on the labor of white professional nurses.

The Louisiana State Nurses’ Association (LSNA) accepted African American members in 1949 as did the ANA-affiliated Louisiana Association of Student Nurses, but the fight over integration at the state level continued for several years as white registered nurses pushed for the LSNA to reconsider the issue. The status accorded health care workers appeared to be the major area of disagreement. A white LSNA leader, Christine Causey, declared in 1953 that white patients “have accepted the negro nurses exceedingly well.” She attributed the racial difficulties to “the acceptance by white doctors and by the white professional nurses than from the patients.” A black physician, George Thomas supported Causey’s conclusions to a point. Thomas observed that, “Most black hospital workers were aides, not registered

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100 LSNA Joint Closing Session, 10 November 1949, box 4, LSNA Collection; LSNA Joint Closing Session, 16 November 1950, box 4, LSNA Collection; “Vote Admission of Negro Nurses,” New Orleans Times-Picayune, 19 November 1950, p. 16.
101 Christine Causey to Grace E. Marr, 10 June 1953, folder 13, box 358, LSNA Collection.
nurses. They just weren’t at the top.”\textsuperscript{102} Mobility of black nurses between black and white patient care was less constrained than that of (nearly all-male) black physicians presumably because women were perceived as less threatening and white Southerners were accustomed to black service workers. But black professional nurses were threatening to white professional nurses.

In 1954, the LSNA amended its constitution and by-laws to provide individual membership for African American nurses who could not join at the local level. At this time, Louisiana members also approved a statement that implied that they considered local bans on African American members to be un-American. They vowed to keep working for full integration.\textsuperscript{103}

The nurses who supported integration faced a decided lack of support from the community. The mayor of New Orleans through the 1950s, DeLesseps S. Morrison, wrote that segregation “was deemed advisable by most Southerners in order to prevent conditions leading to racial intermarriage.”\textsuperscript{104} One of the New Orleans hospitals, the Southern Baptist Convention-controlled Southern Baptist Hospital, had a self-declared nondiscrimination policy but refused to put it into practice even

\textsuperscript{102} George Thomas, M.D. 1986 interview, New Orleans, Louisiana, quoted in Wilbur H. Watson, Against the Odds: Blacks in the Profession of Medicine in the United States (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1999), 92.
\textsuperscript{103} LSNA Closing Business Meeting, 16 December 1954, box 4, LSNA Collection.
though this meant turning away black patients.\textsuperscript{105} A Louisiana nurse called one of the best-known physicians in the state, a man with some power over nurses, a “rabid” member of the White Citizens Council. Hotels and other public meeting places often refused to allow African American nurses to participate in functions.\textsuperscript{106}

ANA offered verbal support to pro-integration Louisiana nurses. The head of ANA’s Intergroup Relations Program, an African American nurse, declared that in a state like Louisiana where loud opposition to integration existed, it was important to demonstrate to nurses and laypeople alike that integration could take place in an employment field and in a professional organization to the advantage of both blacks and whites.\textsuperscript{107}

Most of the opposition to integration in Louisiana came from white nurses in New Orleans, probably because the very rarity of black professional nurses in the rest of the state made the issue of integration moot outside of the metropolis. In the 1950s, New Orleans was a typically prosperous major Southern city. While the Crescent City had a reputation for tolerance because of its cosmopolitan background and European heritage, a strong tradition of segregation remained.\textsuperscript{108} Unlike many other areas of the South, New Orleans had a strong African-American community as

\textsuperscript{107} Grace Marr to Viola Jefferson, 18 April 1955, box 358, folder 13, ANA Collection.
\textsuperscript{108} See Haas, 253, 268-270.
well as, by the mid-1950s, a black university-run hospital with a school of nursing attached. In the white part of the city lay the Garden District, the American answer to the French Quarter with large lots, picturesque housing and the most desirable area in the city which to live. The New Orleans District Nurses’ Association owned a house in the Garden District that it used for meetings and social gatherings. If black nurses joined the New Orleans group, then these African American women would become property holders as well. They would be free to bring their families to the Garden District house for social activities as other members of the district did. Many whites, in the community and in nursing, opposed sharing ownership of the house with African-Americans. However, this opposition had a strong class dimension.

More importantly, the admission of black nurses would increase economic competition among nurses. About half of the New Orleans members were private duty nurses and these were the nurses who were most opposed to black members. Hospitals had begun to replace private duty nurses with staff members to care for private patients. Hospitals generally preferred to hire younger women, perhaps because of the physical demands of nursing, while most of the New Orleans nurses

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110 New Orleans, like the rest of the country in this era, suffered a nursing shortage. It should be kept in mind that a shortage could still result in economic competition since the jobs with better conditions and better pay could conceivably go to better educated blacks at the expense of less well-trained whites.
were part of an older age bracket. Additionally, these nurses may have possessed few of the tools – education and income – necessary to better their lives. Resting near the bottom of the white social structure, they were most threatened by upward black mobility. Fearing the loss of their livelihoods, these white nurses blocked black nurses from competing with them. There were no private duty black nurses in New Orleans, presumably because they could not get on the district’s professional registry.

The New Orleans meetings became so acrimonious that white nurses complained about the conduct of the private duty nurses. In March of 1954, New Orleans voted to exclude blacks from membership and to consider the issue permanently closed. Unfortunately for the private duty nurses, they had rarely taken an interest in district matters before the issue of integration came up and they did not hold any positions of power within the district. Consequently, pro-integration nurses easily found a way to manipulate the organization into giving support to black

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111 Schools of nursing typically had age limits for enrollment because of the physical demands of nursing.
112 Many, if not most, white nurses outside of religious communities were working class. They became nurses because they could trade labor as a probationary nurse on a hospital floor for an education in a hospital school of nursing. While white sharecroppers and factory workers were below nurses on the status scale, the nurses were often the daughters of such working class people. Emptying bed pans, as private duty nurses did, is not that high a status job but working conditions were more comfortable than on the factories or farms. J. Wayne Flynt explores the resistance of poor Southern whites to desegregation. See Flynt, Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979).
113 Christine Causey, a pro-integration white Louisiana nurse who later achieved national prominence, stated that New Orleans had no black private duty nurses. Report of Field Visit to New Orleans, Louisiana, 21 October 1954, box 10, LSNA Collection.
114 Ibid.
professional nurses. These leaders set the meeting places and, in ever greater numbers, educational programs were held in establishments where all ANA nurses were welcome.\textsuperscript{115} New Orleans integrated in practice before it did so by ballot.\textsuperscript{116}

By 1954, Georgia remained the only state association that refused to admit black nurses. When the ANA failed to make much headway with its policy of encouraging integration, African American nurses decided to attempt a different means of persuasion by organizing into a separate group, the Georgia State Association of Registered Nurses (GSARN). Black nurses in Georgia worked diligently to enroll members in their local and state organizations and encouraged attendance at the bi-annual ANA conventions. In short, they demonstrated that black Georgians sought to belong to a professional nursing organization and that their numbers could not be ignored. Some years later, Georgia nurses recalled the heated discussions at ANA conventions surrounding the delay by Southern states to include African-American members. Mary Saunders, a white hospital nurse, remembered long speeches on the floor at conventions of the white nurses organization, the GSNA, about “how everybody was going to get venereal diseases if they

\textsuperscript{115} Christine Causey to Grace Marr, 21 December 1954, box 10, LSNA Collection.

\textsuperscript{116} It is interesting to note that New Orleans experienced no trouble over the integration of transportation. In 1958, a leader of the Greater New Orleans Citizens Council complained, “What’s the matter with you white people? Aren’t you interested in the preservation of the white race?” School integration, begun in the poor Ninth Ward in 1960, did however prove to be ugly. This opposition had a strong class dimension since parents in the middle and upper middle class neighborhoods near Tulane University did volunteer to accept black children. This area includes the Garden District. See Haas, 253, 268-270.
The organized black nurses in Georgia employed a strategy that went right to the heart of white nurses. They formally petitioned the Georgia state group to open its membership, pointing out that doing so would help white patient care. There were about 400 African-American nurses in the state and many of them cared for whites. The black nurses pointed out that, “Only Providence knows the number of White patients who were denied special nursing care and maybe a prolonged life because a well-trained and otherwise qualified Negro nurse could not attend a special clinic or workshop open only to White nurses.” The black nurses never mentioned black patient care. Yet they probably tweaked the consciences of women who recalled that the Code of Ethics declared that the “fundamental responsibility” of a nurse is to conserve life, to alleviate suffering, and to promote health.  

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118 ANA Intergroup Relations Program, Information About Intergroup Relations in Nursing in Georgia, 14 November 1957, box 357, folder 8, ANA Collection.
119 Georgia State Association of Registered Nurses to Laverne Johnson, 21 December 1959, box 357, folder 8, ANA Collection.
120 Dietz, 192.
In 1960, the Georgia State Nurses’ Association polled its membership and found that while 604 members were in favor of integration, 646 nurses opposed it. At its convention that year, the ANA considered forcing the Georgia nurses to choose between integration and continued affiliation with the ANA. One Georgia nurse, a supporter of integration, expressed the opinions of many other ANA members when she stated that eliminating a state organization because it failed to cooperate entirely with the parent organization was undemocratic.\textsuperscript{121}

But by 1960, many other nurses had begun to connect integration with professionalism. A Michigan nurse argued that she found it difficult enough to explain the role of a professional nurse and did not need the extra burden of explaining matters that did not relate to patient care. She charged the Georgia nurses with violating standards of professionalism. A New Yorker concurred, arguing that expelling Georgia would increase the stature of professional nursing in the United States and throughout the world. This last nurse also raised the ghost of Florence Nightingale, asking, “As nurses are we truly brave?”\textsuperscript{122} Since many women were attracted to nursing by its heroic image, a call for the descendents of Nightingale to show similar courage had great emotional pull.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{121} ANA Convention Proceedings, 1960 House of Delegates and Sections, box 150, ANA Collection.
\textsuperscript{122} ANA Convention Proceedings, 1960 House of Delegates and Sections, box 150, ANA Collection.
\textsuperscript{123} The nursing version of the physician’s Hippocratic oath is the Nightingale pledge. Graduate nurses in this era were likely to have sworn to “maintain and elevate the standard of my profession.” Dietz, 190.
As the fight for integration heated up, the ANA found it increasingly difficult to promote all of its programs in the states in which tensions remained high.\textsuperscript{124} Southerners often characterized the ANA’s support of federal legislation such as civil rights legislation and collective bargaining provisions as “socialistic” and “contrary to the American way of life.”\textsuperscript{125} The charges, a weak attempt at red-baiting, never stuck. To combat the ANA’s perceived liberalism, Georgia nurses in 1961 attempted to form a rival organization with disgruntled nurses from Louisiana, Mississippi and other states with a conservative history. The proposed Southern States Nurses’ Association met a cool response though, perhaps because other Southerners did not want to lose the cache and benefits of ANA membership, and the idea quickly died.\textsuperscript{126}

In 1960 ANA delegates had voted to continue to encourage Georgia to accept all qualified professional nurses.\textsuperscript{127} In 1961, ANA’s Executive Board decided that Georgia’s segregationist policy had become an embarrassment. Not necessarily more liberal than the nationwide rank-and-file, ANA leaders acted to protect the image of the nursing profession. Georgia nurses were told to integrate by May of 1962, the date

\textsuperscript{124} Grace Marr to Rabbi Julian B. Feibelman, 10 September 1958, box 358, folder 13, ANA Collection.
\textsuperscript{125} Along with most labor organizations, the ANA fiercely opposed the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act that revised the Wagner Act of 1935 in ways that tremendously benefited employers at the expense of employees. The ANA specifically objected to the exemption of nonprofit hospitals from an obligation to collectively bargain with employees. The vast majority of hospitals were nonprofit until the 1990s. See Anne Zimmerman, “Taft-Hartley Amended: Implications for Nursing,” \textit{American Journal of Nursing}, 75, no. 2 (February 1975), 284; ANA 1958 Conference on Legislation Evaluation, box 135, folder 2, ANA Collection.
\textsuperscript{126} MNA Minutes, Meetings of Executive Committee, 18 November 1961, box 3, MNA Collection.
\textsuperscript{127} ANA Convention Proceedings, 1960 House of Delegates and Sections, box 150, ANA Collection.
of the national convention, or face removal from the national organization. The African American organization, GSARN, disbanded in September 1961, but the Savannah chapter continued meeting to provide black nurses with social support.

The African American nurses needed a strong support network. Georgia integrated with many of the Georgians claiming that they voted to accept blacks simply because they were fearful of losing ANA affiliation. While this assertion is probably true, blaming integration on forceful outsiders also gave the Georgia nurses a degree of protection from ardent supporters of segregation within their state.

When revisions to the Hill-Burton Hospital Construction Act in 1965 prohibited any further use of federal funds to build segregated hospitals, blacks began to use previously all-white hospitals. Historian Wilbur Watson reports that, following the Hill-Burton Act, steadily increasing numbers of black physicians referred black patients to these previously all-white facilities while seeking staff positions and surgical privileges at them. Considering the better equipment and facilities at white hospitals, it is logical to assume that black nurses did the same thing as black physicians. Such racial desegregation increased the competition among hospitals for registered nurses and jeopardized the jobs of the less-qualified professionals – both

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128 Harmon G. Perry, “Nurses Get Date to Integrate,” Atlanta World, 28 July 1961, box 357, folder 8, ANA Collection.
129 As of 1995, the Savannah club continued, but in the form of a phone network since many of the nurses could no longer come to the meetings. Cannon, 272.
130 Margaret B. Dolan to Cornelia Knight, 14 November 1961, box 357, folder 8, ANA Collection; Mathilda Scheuer to the Presidents of State Nurses’ Associations, 3 November 1961, box 357, folder 8, ANA Collection.
black and white. The decline in the number of black owned and operated hospitals reduced employment opportunities for black nursing personnel.  

By fighting for integration, ANA members alienated some of the rank-and-file, enraged many southern doctors, and jeopardized the association’s position as the leading organization for professional nurses in the South. Why would the organization take such a risky position? The leaders of the AAUW sought to keep quiet the forced integration of its Washington, D.C. chapter specifically because of the risks involved. However, members of the ANA gained much more than most AAUW members did from integration. To achieve professional standing in the eyes of the general public and all the benefits that it brought, the ANA simply could not tolerate blatant discrimination within its ranks. Segregationists in the 1950s and 1960s, featured in magazines and on television in attacks that reminded many of the white supremacists of Nazi Germany, were no longer respectable people in the eyes of many Americans. While most ANA members may not have felt strongly about segregation, they also did not necessarily care to be linked with extremist rabble intent upon causing harm. ANA broke with the segregationists to maintain the good name of the organization and to create a climate that would support the advancement of nursing.

African American nurses, frustrated by ANA inactivity on the subject of race, formed a caucus in 1970 to work within the association to promote “actions on meaningful issues” that affected the health and welfare of American citizens. Specifically, they sought more support for recruiting and assisting black student nurses as well as increased black involvement in ANA leadership positions.\(^{132}\) Unfortunately, the decision to form a caucus came at the same time that ANA had to drastically cut staff to avoid bankruptcy.\(^{133}\) As staff morale plummeted and the interim executive director focused on keeping ANA alive, the organization drifted somewhat. Arguing that the ANA continued to show little interest in the professional development of black nurses and that black health care received little priority, a group of black nurses formed the National Black Nurses’ Association (NBNA) in 1971.

Clearly, the leaders of the ANA did not address civil rights to the satisfaction of all nurses. The 1950 decision of NACGN to merge with ANA did not entirely fulfill its promise. While the situation for black nurses had improved considerably by the 1970s, equality with whites had not been fully achieved. While older black nurses, notably Mary Elizabeth Carnegie, were content to work within the ANA for changes, younger nurses did not want to be patient. The formation of the NBNA reflects disappointment with the ANA but also a generational split between the NACGN

\(^{132}\) House of Delegates Reports, 1970-72 Convention, box 152, ANA Collection.

\(^{133}\) Hildegard Peplau, asked by the ANA to serve as an interim executive director, barely managed to keep the association afloat. For a history of the ANA’s financial difficulties, see Callaway, pp. 344-361.
activists who joined ANA in 1950 and the more radical NBNA women who left it in 1971.

Association leaders, as they had for decades, remained fixed on the professionalization of nursing. To achieve higher salaries and better benefits, nurses in the 1950s tried to separate themselves from traditional images of women as temporary workers concerned more with family matters than professional ones. As an article on social responsibilities in the ANA’s 1956 *American Journal of Nursing* indicates, this goal of enhancing professionalism ran contrary to the climate in some nursing schools and America at large. For example, The Good Samaritan School of Nursing in Phoenix, Arizona brought in the director of the Wendel-Cronan School of Modeling and Personal Charm to deliver lectures to student nurses on such subjects as social poise, etiquette, make-up and care of the skin, care and styling of the hair, exercise and diet, vocal poise and personality projection, wardrobe planning (defined as learning to dress smartly on a budget) and body poise for graceful posture. The charm course was part of the regular curriculum and, as such, students received grades on their make-up application skills. The Nebraska Methodist School of Nursing in Omaha, as part of the normal coursework, offered classes on table setting, entertaining, and how to act on a date as well as a special program called Take Off Pounds to help overweight students to reduce. Of the schools profiled, only Bellevue
Schools of Nursing in New York City mentioned helping students develop qualities of leadership such as initiative, independence, and judgment.\(^{134}\)

In view of such non-academic course requirements and determined to enhance the status of nursing as a worthy partner to medicine, the ANA began to push for all professional nurses to receive a college education. To develop nursing as a profession, the ANA had to attach it in the public mind with competence in a distinguished field. Nursing needed to disconnect from its subordinate, ministering angel image.

To achieve its goals, the ANA needed to emphasize that registered nurses played a crucial and invaluable role in health care. In the 1950s, this meant demonstrating that people just off the streets could not provide adequate nursing care. To combat nursing shortages, several Southern hospitals in the 1950s had declared emergencies and accepted men and women who walked in and stated that they wished to be nurses. The credentials of the volunteers did not appear to be of much concern and were apparently not checked, perhaps because of the common belief that nursing did not require much skill. (It was, after all, only women’s work.) Not surprisingly, women who had spent years in nursing training were absolutely infuriated by the notion that just anybody could do the job of a nurse.\(^{135}\) Susan Malka offers the example of a small Kansas hospital that expected its nurses to set up

\(^{134}\) No author, “If You Ask Me,” *American Journal of Nursing* no.6, 56 (June 1956): 645.

\(^{135}\) “Georgia Nurses” and “Community Answers Call,” 1953, no folder, box 14, LSNA Collection.
patients on respirators and mow the hospital lawn. Malka sees the hospital as
demanding an unrealistic range of procedures from its nurses. However, requiring
nurses to provide lawn care also reflects contempt for the intellectual requirements of
nursing and makes the provision of nursing care into the equivalent of a menial
task.\textsuperscript{136}

From its earliest days, the ANA had stressed the importance of nurse
education to the development of nursing as a profession, but it did not fight to change
the status of training until after World War II. The education of nurses had first
become a public policy issue in the 1920s. Following the 1923 Rockefeller
Foundation survey of nurse education and the 1926-1934 Grading of Nursing Schools
study, legislators in various states began to consider revising state nurse practice acts.
These acts typically defined professional nursing as the performance for
compensation of professional services requiring the application of scientific
knowledge and nursing skills in the care of the sick.\textsuperscript{137} The new legislation aimed to
safeguard the health of the public, protect physicians from incompetent members of a
health care team, and aid nurses by establishing a fair field of competition. It had
long been a requirement that medical practitioners meet certain fixed educational
standards and become licensed, but nurses had the option of obtaining state

\textsuperscript{136} Malka, 48.
\textsuperscript{137} “Nursing – As It is Defined in Nursing Practice Acts,” 6 November 1957, folder 6, box 103, ANA
Papers.
recognition as registered nurses and were not legally bound to obtain any qualification before pounding the pavement in search of work. In 1938, New York became the first state to require licenses of all who nursed for hire. The dramatic and sudden increase in the need for nurses occasioned by World War II forced the suspension of the law and it did not come into full effect until 1949. Other states followed the example of New York.  

By the 1950s, the states with little opposition to licensure had already enacted such measures. At this point, the ANA began to push for legal definitions of nurse practitioners as a means of promoting the economic and general welfare of nurses. When the National League for Nursing formed in 1952 to focus on assuring good professional and practical nursing service by setting educational standards and offering testing services to state licensure authorities, the ANA collaborated closely with it to coordinate programs of common concern. Specifically, the ANA defined the functions and qualifications of individual practitioners. To this end, the ANA lobbied through the 1950s and early 1960s for state laws to provide for mandatory licensure for the practice of professional and practical nursing. That the registered

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138 Jamieson, 281-282.
nurses of the ANA made a very rare venture into the realm of practical nursing speaks to the importance that licensure held for them.

The ANA also began to push the various states to separate professional nursing from practical nursing in their licensure statutes and the preferred wording emphasized changes in nursing practice. Arizona, as a typical example, defined nursing as such in 1957:

Professional nursing means the performance for compensation or personal profit of professional services requiring the application of the biological, physical, or social science and nursing skills in the care of the sick, in the prevention of disease or in the conservation of health. Practical nursing means the performance of services requiring technical skills under the direction of a licensed physician or a registered nurse.  

The preponderance of women in nursing did not mean that anyone could be a nurse. To change the pay and prestige of nurses, the ANA pushed for official recognition of the profession.

In 1957, the Colorado Nurses Association (CNA) won licensure after a two-year battle and the struggle of this state chapter illustrates the changes that were taking place among nurses as a result of ANA actions. To win licensure, registered

142 ANA, “Nursing As It Is Defined In Nursing Practice Acts,” 6 November 1957, folder 6, box 103, ANA Collection.
nurses had to demonstrate to the public that they played a critical role in health care. To do this, nurses had to be willing to challenge societal perceptions of women’s labor. They had to prove that nursing could not just be dismissed as simple women’s work. Since the low status of women affected both the pay and the prestige of registered nurses, ANA members undertook activities to raise the professional status of women workers.

In 1955 Colorado, a person had to be licensed to be a barber, a surveyor, or a cosmetologist but not a nurse. Anyone in the state, regardless of qualifications, could supply and charge for nursing services. Both the male-dominated Colorado Medical Society and the Colorado Hospital Association opposed licensure as did many of the state’s newspapers and unions. While the hospital leaders undoubtedly wished to save money by hiring warm bodies to perform nursing services, the attitudes of the other groups are more puzzling. People with very limited training should not perform the manifest duties of professional nurses from monitoring patient health to using complex medical devices. Why would physicians, sworn to do no harm and with a far better understanding of the increasing complexity of modern health care than the lay public, oppose licensure? Why would legislators consider the marking of land boundaries to be more worthy of state regulation than the recording of blood pressure and other vital signs? The answer appears to be that nursing was

Physicians and legislators, overwhelmingly male, could not overcome the influence of years of societal devaluing women’s labor to suddenly, in the 1950s, mark women as able to perform critically important work. Additionally, physicians had a long history of unwillingness to accept nurses as valued members of the health care team, with many viewing the women as essentially robots who obeyed orders issued by doctors.

Many of the Colorado nurses were initially unsure about the benefits of licensure because they did not know what it meant. The CNA focused on member education as the first step toward regulation. The CNA explained that licensure did not affect the ability of a family member to provide nursing services and that nurse training meant virtually nothing to the community without the legislation. In this era, registered nurses wore a pin and a cap to designate the school in which they had received their training. They dressed in white uniforms to distinguish themselves from ordinary people. In short, graduate nurses were immensely proud of their qualifications. The dismissal of their accomplishments struck a very discordant note.

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144 A cosmetologist is anyone performing manicures, hair cutting, styling, shampooing, makeup or other cosmetology services. The number of men working as barbers, stylists, and makeup artists at mid-twentieth century means that cosmetology can not be regarded as strictly women’s work though many women were cosmetologists.

The Colorado rank-and-file would play a major lobbying role in the licensure fight.\textsuperscript{146} The battle would engage nurses with political issues and in the political process.

For years, the CNA had sought passage of a mandatory professional nurse practice act but succumbed to opposition before reaching their goal. In 1955, the CNA decided to change. The state leaders studied nursing practice laws in other states and hired an attorney to draft a Colorado bill. For the next year, district programs were devoted to explanations of licensure and this educational process remained underway after the bill was introduced in the legislature in 1956. When the bill passed out of committee, the rank-and-file ANA members mobilized to telephone and personally visit legislators. Seventy-five nurses showed up en masse in uniform at the legislative chambers on the day of the public hearing on the bill. Perhaps intimidated by the women in white, the Colorado senate unanimously approved of licensure and only one man in the House opposed it. As the chair of the CNA committee on legislation and its public relations consultant both observed, the successful outcome of the battle left nurses with a sense of “it-can-be-done.”\textsuperscript{147} The victory can be attributed to both the intense lobbying effort and the skilled media manipulation of the nurses. The CNA made the legislators aware of the importance of licensure while also making it difficult for legislators to oppose the bill. A vote against the bill would be a vote against the nurses. To members of the general public,

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\textsuperscript{146} Ramsay, 1267-1269.  \\
\textsuperscript{147} Ramsay, 1269.
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including many legislators, nurses were the “angels” who came to their rescue when they were ill.\textsuperscript{148} The nurses who wore their uniforms to the vote guaranteed that the media would take note of them and that the general public would be made aware of the licensure vote.

While nurses had a positive image among the public, this image did not make nursing into a high-status profession. The low status accorded women’s work jeopardized both the livelihoods of nurses and the nursing care provided to the public. The further development of the nursing profession, the improvement of nursing practice, and the effective utilization of the professional knowledge and skill of nurses were all ANA goals in 1962.\textsuperscript{149} None of these aims could be achieved if nursing continued to be devalued. By 1968, the ANA mission no longer mentioned licensure but did note the concerns typical of a profession. Nurses, like accountants and lawyers of the era, would maintain individual competence and not lower the profession by engaging in any commercial activities like advertising.\textsuperscript{150} Nurses would behave as members of a profession in the hopes of receiving the benefits befitting their new stature.\textsuperscript{151}

\textsuperscript{148} Patients are generally positive about the importance of nursing care. In a 1967 study among psychiatric patients about what helped them most during hospitalization, 31 percent named nurses. See M.O. Zaslove et al., “The Importance of the Psychiatric Nurse: Views of Physicians, Patients, and Nurses.” \textit{American Journal of Psychology} 125, no. 4 (October 1968): 482-486
\textsuperscript{150} “The ANA Code for Nurses,” \textit{Ohio Nurses Review} no. 5, 43 (June 1968), 16-17.
\textsuperscript{151} Anecdotal evidence suggests that nurses without licenses could not get hired by hospitals by the 1970s. The benefit of licensure to nurses was that it filtered out incompetent nurses.
The federal government, in the form of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), had long recognized nursing as a profession.\textsuperscript{152} In the 1960s, the government took specific action in support of professional women workers, including nurses. The 1963 report of the President’s Commission on the Status of Women, American Women, specifically mentioned nursing. It noted that qualified assistants had been successful in relieving professional nurses of work that did not demand advanced training and observed that the nursing profession was almost entirely staffed by women who averaged earnings of about 60 percent of men who worked the same hours. It recommended expansion of the Nurse Corps, an issue that had been of concern to ANA as it meant increased job opportunities for members within the military forces.\textsuperscript{153} (ANA voiced support for equal opportunity for women nurses in the armed services until this goal was met in 1967.)

The ANA leaders served alongside representatives of the AAUW and CWU on the PCSW because they believed that an improvement in the position of women in the U.S. would better the status of nurses. PCSW’s support for changes such as better pay and more social services that would give women workers greater independence

\textsuperscript{152} The NLRB identified nursing as a profession, after some debate, because nurses possess both a body of knowledge which has an intellectual basis and skills. Knowledge and skills are achieved through a lengthy process of training. See Anne Zimmerman, “Taft-Hartley Amended: Implications for Nursing,” American Journal of Nursing, 75, no. 2 (February 1975), 289.

\textsuperscript{153} Mead, 41,46, 53.
and autonomy struck a particular chord with the nurses. When state commissions formed, even the normally conservative Mississippi state chapter rose quickly in 1964 to offer assistance to the governor as he surveyed the status of women in that state."

ANA leaders, including Pennsylvania nurse educator and future ANA executive director and president Hildegard E. Peplau, determined to advance the profession by transforming nursing from a helping job into one that was self-directed. They pushed higher education as the means to this end. As a young woman in 1928, Peplau had entered a diploma school, the Pottsdown Hospital School of Nursing, because she could not afford college and the education was free. Unlike most nurses, Peplau returned to school and she earned a baccalaureate in psychology from Bennington College in 1943. She became a pioneer in psychiatric nursing and taught for many years at Rutgers. Peplau was an unusual woman in many ways, not least of which was that she had experience in both types of educational environments available to prospective nurses.

154 Dorothy Height, longtime AKA member, served on the Commission but no one listed their primary affiliation as AKA. Unlike the AAUW, the ANA, and CWU, AKA was not listed as a “cooperating organization” in the PCSW report. See Margaret Mead and Frances Balgley Kaplan, eds. American Women: The Report of the President’s Commission on the Status of Women and Other Publication of the Commission (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965).

155 Mississippi Nurses Association Board of Directors Meeting, 11 July 1964, MNA Collection

156 Peplau served as executive director of ANA 1969-70, president 1970-72, and vice president 1972-74. She remained a force within ANA after leaving office. Hildegard E. Peplau curriculum vitae, 1998, courtesy of Dr. Letitia Anne Peplau.

157 Dr. Letitia Anne Peplau, Professor of Social Psychology, UCLA, email with author, 28 September 2001; Hildegard E. Peplau curriculum vitae, 1998, courtesy of Dr. Letitia Anne Peplau.
The formal training and apprenticeship of most nurses consisted of a three-year curriculum. A few four-year college programs and postgraduate training opportunities were available but no strong emphasis on advanced education existed. In 1950 the ANA clearly stated its beliefs about nursing education in a membership recruitment packet. Nurses who joined the organization were expected to agree to the following: “You support the principles of integrating professional schools of nursing into the framework of higher schools of education because it is recognized that a broader academic education is necessary as a basis for the professional nursing program.”158 Beryl Chickerella, who earned a degree from The Ohio State University in 1958 and later worked in Ohio to improve nurse education emphatically stated, “Certainly if teachers must have a college education then nurses, who hold patient’s lives in their hands daily, should also!”159 In 1963, as one example, fewer than twenty percent of Nebraska nurses still had no more than the minimum three-year degree. This relatively weak intellectual base affected the movement of nurses toward professionalism. The failure to make the baccalaureate the degree necessary for entrance into professional nursing made nursing seem less intellectual and more of a skilled trade.

159 Beryl Chickerella, interview with author, 16 August 2004.
The emergence of new theories of medical care and advances in surgery significantly modified bedside nursing care, but nurses with inadequate education struggled to understand these changes. As ANA member Eleanor C. Lambertsen argued, nursing needed drastic change to be implemented by individuals “who are not immobilized by the emotional responses of those who cling nostalgically to the past.”

Having walked in both camps, Peplau could measure the type of education that a woman received in schools affiliated with hospitals and those that were part of a university. She decided that, for the good of the profession, diploma schools had to end. Categorizing nursing as “anti-intellectual,” Peplau argued that collegiate education was a crucial step in the transformation of nursing from a “mothering, comforting” job to one concerned with enlarged health teaching and preventive services on a wider scale. She wanted nursing to become “more viable, more meaningful in terms of health.” She wanted nurses to command respect not just as ministers to the ill and dying but also as valued contributors to the world of medicine. Peplau was a bit ahead of the national ANA leaders. In 1964, influenced by the PCSW report, she had called for an entire Journal issue on women since “registered

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nurses seem largely unaware of the extent to which the social image of women governs their behavior unwittingly – and keeps the profession from advancing ahead.”¹⁶³ The Journal issue never appeared but the ANA published articles on the socialization of women in the late 1960s.

By attacking the quality of education received in diploma schools, the ANA strongly suggested that the products of such schools were inferior nurses. This internal conflict became heated. Diploma graduates responded by questioning the technical skills of baccalaureate nurses.¹⁶⁴ By the 1970s, nurses who were interested in vertical mobility had to obtain a Bachelor of Science degree and many diploma schools began to shut their doors.¹⁶⁵ However, the debate over the merits of university training versus hands-on training continued to rage into the twenty-first century.¹⁶⁶ The debate reflects differences between nursing leaders and nursing rank-and-file. While nursing leaders, such as Peplau and Chickerella, saw the benefits of university training, many other nurses were apparently unconvinced of the need for such a radical change. Like the AAUW, ANA struggled with a membership that occasionally took a more conservative stance than the leadership.

¹⁶³ Hildegard Peplau, “Letters,” American Journal of Nursing no. 9, 64 (September 1964), 68.
¹⁶⁶ Tom Olson and Eileen Walsh address the present-day debate although their research, on St. Luke’s Hospital Training School for Nurses in St. Paul, focuses on a much earlier period. See Olson and Walsh, Handling the Sick: The Women of St Luke’s and the Nature of Nursing, 1892-1937 (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2004).
The push for enhanced education of registered nurses also brought ANA into the realm of feminism. By attempting to enhance the position of women in medicine by attacking one of the major sources of second-class status, the ANA challenged the medical establishment. The association was directly at odds with the AMA in 1967 as the physician’s organization advocated an increase in diploma students. As one angry nurse phrased it, “Why doesn’t the AMA promote hospital programs for medical education? If an apprenticeship program is good enough for nursing, why not for medicine too?” 167 The AMA position reflected, once again, the belief of many physicians that nurses were not in hospitals to use their brains. To many doctors, nurses existed to carry out their orders without question and without thought. The idea that nurses could be part of a health care team was a very foreign one.

The image of nursing received a battering in the 1960s because of circumstances outside the control of the medical profession when writers began portraying nurses as sex objects who only had enough wit to follow doctor’s orders. 168 The image of “career girl as man catcher,” although certainly not specific to nursing, served to stereotype nurses in this era. While promoting an image of nursing that stressed professionalism, ANA leaders accepted advertisements with an entirely different message.

Job advertisements placed in the *American Journal of Nursing* by hospitals from the 1950s to the 1970s frequently portrayed nurses as more interested in a social life than a professional one. These full-page or half-page sections typically showed an attractive young nurse dining or dancing with a handsome man in her new city of employment. Actual nursing was either not featured or was subordinated to the fun that women presumably favor over professional activities. One 1970 advertisement attempts to recruit a registered nurse with these lines:

> Face to face with one another,
> telling secrets, killing lies.
> Sharing love’s own silent language,
> speaking only with our eyes.
> Come to me across the space
> of love’s own private sky.
> Fly to me on wings of truth
> unmasked and pure as I.  

While nursing students were pushed to develop their husband-catching skills, professional nurses increasingly grappled with a range of issues related to individualism. Registered nurses debated the question of revealing marital status to

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patients.170 Once nurses had been forbidden to wear wedding rings, now in response to a higher percentage of employed women in all fields, many wanted the right to display them and to be addressed as “Mrs.” instead of the standard “Miss.”171 Earlier generations of nurses had proudly cultivated an image with strong religious overtones of self-sacrifice but nurses in the 1960s and 1970s appeared far less certain of the image that they wanted to project. The dichotomy between the ANA’s promotion of professionalism and its journal’s acceptance of advertisements that severely undercut this image reflect this confusion.

While advertisers wooed nurses with poetry instead of patient-staff ratios in the pages of the American Journal of Nursing, the ANA showed far more hesitation than the AAUW, AKA, or CWU in tackling the major women’s issues of the day. The delay shows the ANA’s reluctance to become identified as a women’s organization. ANA addressed workplace and professional issues that pertained to women and may have feared that the controversy brought by feminist issues would hamper its ability to work for labor issues. CWU, AKA, and AAUW helped shape feminism while ANA tended to react to the actions of others. The ANA did not attempt a deeper critique of societal attitudes and practices until the early 1970s, by which time the AAUW had investigated sex discrimination in employment, AKA was

sponsoring young women in the Job Corps, and CWU had left the male-dominated National Council of Churches. Two nurses who stated in a 1968 article for ANA’s periodical that, “The question of whether wives and mothers should seek gainful employment we leave to the feminologists,” exemplify the attitude of the nursing association. Feminist issues were someone else’s concern.

However, the ANA did address the topic of subservience to male physicians by female nurses perhaps because it was a workplace issue. In 1968, the American Journal of Nursing published “The Doctor – Nurse Game” in which relations between the professionals were described as neurotic. The author, a physician who was aided in his report by a registered nurse, contended that the nurse had to be bold, have initiative, and make recommendations for patient treatment while also appearing passive. Neither the author nor the ANA suggested remedies for this unhealthy interaction.

The ANA also had a disinclination to address the concerns of nurses with family commitments although these women did form an increasing part of the profession. Many of them, as letters through the years to the American Journal of Nursing attest, experienced difficulty when they sought to enter or return to nursing school. La Rue Pope, a registered Arizona nurse who had experience teaching at a nursing school decried “the contemptible attitudes of many school of nursing faculties

who firmly believe that a woman with a home and family is not to be permitted to achieve in any kind of dual role.”

While many in the ANA chose to argue for a full range of personal choices for nurses, some within the organization still held to the old image of nurses as de-sexed beings despite the advertisements in the American Journal of Nursing. Some nurses, though a minority, strongly objected to anything of a personal nature that drew attention away from the seriousness of nursing and they sought a return to the days when nursing was akin to a religious calling. “To portray nurses... having a high time in uniform is certainly objectionable,” a nun from West Virginia wrote to the ANA in 1958 about an illustration on the cover of its journal. “The designer even went so far as to depict a nurse... holding hands with a man in uniform on the boardwalk,” she further fumed. The nun objected to such a woman being termed “professional.” To ANA leaders and most members, the freedom that such a woman enjoyed marked her as a professional. She had the competence to make decisions and did not seek or need direction from anyone.

By the early 1970s, the fight over professionalism in nursing had resulted in the ANA’s somewhat hesitant embrace of feminism. It came to serve as the determining principle behind the ANA’s public policy advocacy and nursing

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guidelines. In 1971, the ANA published an article by Virginia Cleland, “Sex Discrimination: Nursing’s Most Pervasive Problem” that linked nursing with every issue of equal rights for women including male dominated culture (medicine, hospital administration, and higher education) and professional training (diploma schools vs. baccalaureate schools). In a striking departure from diplomacy, the premier organization for nursing allowed Cleland to charge that “Nursing in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s did not have the leadership it had at the turn of the century . . . I believe that these past 30 years of weak and unimaginative leadership parallels the growth of the cult of women as sex symbols.”\footnote{Virginia Cleland, “Sex Discrimination: Nursing’s Most Pervasive Problem,” \textit{American Journal of Nursing} no. 8, 71 (August 1971), 1544.}

The ANA began to aggressively pursue feminist public policies to better the working and living conditions of its members, though it never referred to itself as a feminist organization. In 1972, the ANA joined other organizations, including the AAUW and CWU in requesting an immediate meeting with President Richard Nixon to discuss the lack of women among appointees at cabinet or assistant secretary levels. ANA also sent a telegram to the White House stressing that more women, particularly nurses, should be appointed to top jobs in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.\footnote{No author, “Women in the Federal Government: Status Static? Challenges Issued,” \textit{American Journal of Nursing}, no. 2, 73 (February 1973), 208.} Additionally, it published another essay, this one by Wilma Scott Heide, a Pittsburgh nurse who served as the third president of the National
Heide became a feminist after she sought help for depression in 1959 and was told by her physician that she was sick because she wanted to be a man. See Rebecca M. Davison, “Wilma Scott Heide,” in Susan Ware, ed. Notable American Women: Completing the Twentieth Century (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 289-291.

ANA members soon began to take a more active stance. In 1972, Thelma M. Schorr, editor of the ANA journal, credited the women’s movement with raising the consciousness of nurses and enabling them to acknowledge their own abilities. A Pennsylvania nurse that same year noted approvingly that the journal was “crammed full of relevant sociopolitical considerations.” An Ohio nurse in 1974 summarized the entire ANA route to feminism. “We are just beginning to emerge as a class of professionals,” Wendy Moffat wrote, “who refuse to be subservient to the male physician, who instead insist on an important role at his side.” A New Jersey nurse regretfully contended that nurses chose a subordinate role because they were unwilling to accept responsibility or were apathetic. With this complaint, the nurse clearly indicated that she expected nurses to behave in a new fashion and not in the old pattern.

177 Heide became a feminist after she sought help for depression in 1959 and was told by her physician that she was sick because she wanted to be a man. See Rebecca M. Davison, “Wilma Scott Heide,” in Susan Ware, ed. Notable American Women: Completing the Twentieth Century (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 289-291.
By this point, the ANA had embraced feminism. The first step in becoming feminist is consciousness raising, an awareness of the subordination of women. The ANA aided its members in the process by discussing how nurses had been socialized into subservience in a 1974 *American Journal of Nursing* article, “The Confrontation Process” by a New Jersey State Nurses Association member. The author, Shirley A. Smoyak recommended that nurses use confrontation to “gain equality and power in this society.”182

ANA members now addressed a range of feminist concerns in the early 1970s. A debate over the new term “Ms.” and the importance of marital status raged in the letters to editor section of the *American Journal of Nursing*. Other debates addressed the rights of nurses to refuse to wear caps and the purported need for more men in nursing.

When the ANA began to look at the world through feminist lenses, it tackled a broad range of problems including the pay and prestige accorded women workers as well as the factors hampering the progress of women in society. The ability to engage in family planning affected both the health of women and the opportunities available to women for professional advancement.

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Nurses had been involved in formulating national reproductive policy since obstetrical nurse Margaret Sanger began promoting birth control via *The Woman Rebel* in 1914. The ANA, however, remained silent on family planning until the late 1960s. By this time, the Pill had become the most popular form of birth control in the country, used by more than 6.5 million married women and an untold number of unmarried ones. Since its introduction in 1960, the Pill had created widespread patient acceptance of medical birth control. Its popularity cleared the path for subsequent prescription products like intrauterine devices.\(^{183}\) The increased availability of products like the Pill did not mean that nursing embraced reproductive choice. One instructor at an Arkansas diploma school in 1963 was reprimanded by the administration for giving a lecture on contraceptives to her gynecology students and forbidden to discuss the matter again. As this nurse noted, many patients discuss problems with nurses that they would never mention to their doctors.\(^{184}\)

In 1966, the ANA issued a statement on family planning that expressed its concerns about the effects of unchecked population growth upon human and natural resources. Unlike the larger movement for population control, the ANA statement explicitly declared that women had a right to control their reproductive health. The ANA leaders called for all registered nurses to “recognize the right of individuals and

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families to receive information about family planning if they wish” and to “recognize the right of individuals and families to select and use such methods for family planning as are consistent with their own creed and mores.” Additionally, and perhaps most controversially, the ANA statement outlined the responsibility of all nurses to inform individuals and families of the existence of family planning resources and direct them to such sources.185 The statement is clearly feminist but it addresses a concern specific to nursing.

Nurses, including nuns who ministered to the sick, were now informed that part of their professional duties involved disseminating birth control information. In 1968, Pope Paul VI issued an encyclical entitled *Humanae Vitae* (Of Human Life) that held that no form of artificial means of contraception is acceptable. Sister Delphine, an ANA board member and director of the nursing school at St. Vincent’s Hospital, spoke for many Catholic nurses when she said that she accepted the teachings of the Church. She also answered ANA’s fears about unsustainable growth by declaring, “My mother always said the Lord would provide.” Other Catholics opposed the encyclical and raised feminist concerns. A nurse-wife-mother shared with ANA a letter that she had written to the pope. She wrote, “You have relegated women to the category of brood mare or frigid wife.” In a homophobic aside, this nurse added, “From the tensions . . . the children will see in their homes, you will lose

them (if they are healthy), or they will submit and become homosexuals or man
haters. 186 ANA officially deemed the encyclical to be “an unfortunate document” that
“comes as a grave disappointment to those concerned with the health and welfare of people.” 187 A year later, in 1969, the Journal published an article by the president of Planned Parenthood that reported in detail on current methods of contraception. 188 In 1970, as part of its mission to inform nurses about birth control so that they could pass the knowledge to their patients, the Journal published a piece on voluntary sterilization. 189 Giving nurses such information would permit nurses to provide information that physicians might not offer to their patients. Such knowledge empowered both nurses and women.

While birth control became an issue for the ANA in the 1960s, abortion also
drew its attention and the association responded in a similarly strong fashion. By 1970, seventeen states had adopted laws liberalizing abortion. These states – Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Kansas, Maryland, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina,

Virginia, and Washington – involved nurses as they would be the ones assisting physicians.¹⁹⁰

Concerned that nurses who opposed a woman’s right to choose were refusing to nurture women seeking or receiving abortions, the ANA stated in 1972 that nurses had a professional responsibility to protect the freedom of patients. “[T]here is no place in the nursing care of any patient for punitive action based upon personal moral judgments,” wrote the editor of the Journal. To a firestorm of condemnation and a small shower of accolades, the Journal in 1972 printed an article that conveyed nursing measures that best helped the patient undergoing saline abortions. One positive letter writer argued that abortion prevented the emotional murder of the woman and another argued for the professional duty of respecting the decisions of patients.¹⁹¹ Despite pressure from some of its members, ANA stood firmly on the side of patient freedom but never promoted choice outside of professional concerns. As an organization of professional nurses, it consistently focused on the practice of nursing and did not address matters outside of its purview.

By 1975, the ANA had completely abandoned its earlier pretense of not being a women’s organization. In that year, it joined 75 other organizations, including AKA and CWU, with a total membership of over thirty million to proclaim the first

U.S. National Women’s Agenda. Issued by the umbrella Women’s Action Alliance, the agenda sought quality health care services as well as equal access to economic power, equal education, and “adequate” compensation. The leaders of the ANA had pursued these goals for years, notably through the more conservative PCSW, but did not categorize them as “women’s issues” until the 1970s.

The ANA is one of several women’s organizations with deep roots that fought to expand opportunities for women during the transitional time of the 1950s and 1960s. The organization formed to foster high standards of nursing. It also focused on professional and educational development as well as a later goal of advancing the economic and social welfare of nurses but the ANA chiefly promoted quality nursing. The means by which it would achieve these goals changed over time. When ANA leaders realized that race influenced the quality of care given to patients, the ANA integrated. When the low status accorded women threatened patients, the ANA acted to elevate the status of women. As seen in the Colorado fight over registration, nurses became engaged in political issues and the political process to protect their wards.

The ANA remained focused on nursing care. However, it helped set the stage for women’s liberation by attempting to better the quality of nursing.
CHAPTER TWO

FULFILLING THE OBLIGATIONS OF THE EDUCATED WOMAN:

THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN

In 1970, Mrs. Stuart A. Rice sat down with an interviewer to relate the history of her life. Rice, a native of Atlanta who grew up in Birmingham, graduated from Birmingham-Southern College in 1934. After receiving a scholarship to pursue graduate study in sociology at the University of Chicago, she worked as a social worker in a settlement house. Marriage brought her to Washington, D.C. In 1948, Rice resigned her membership in the American Association of University Women (AAUW). The District of Columbia chapter had refused to accept black members. As Mrs. Rice argued thirty years later and with more than a touch of aggravation, “If you can’t expect progressivism and liberalism from university women, who in the world can you expect it from?” Deeming the AAUW to be shortsighted, this lifelong activist never rejoined the group. In the postwar period, the AAUW stumbled as liberal women like Mrs. Rice clashed with conservative women over the organization’s stance on the rights and opportunities available to African Americans.

and to women. In this respect, the AAUW mirrored an increasingly divided American society.

A study of the AAUW illuminates how a large, nationwide, predominantly white, grassroots organization worked to advance civil rights and feminist goals in a conservative era. In this chapter, I sketch the early history of the AAUW, show its struggles over integration, and discuss the impact of the Red Scare upon the organization’s activism. I show that AAUW promoted education to advance the status of women and engaged in a range of efforts to give women a boost in the workplace. Its continuing struggle on behalf of women helped to put the pieces in place for the resurgence of feminism in the 1960s. Split over the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) for most of its existence, AAUW membership also divided over reproductive rights for women but consistently supported the Civil Rights Act of 1964. By the 1970s, the organization was solidly in the pro-choice, pro-ERA, clearly-feminist camp.

The AAUW struggled to preserve and increase opportunities for educated women in an era notorious for its ambivalence about women employed outside of the home. Less committed to radical change than Church Women United, lacking the American Nurses’ Association’s imperative to protect the nation’s health, and much whiter than the Africentric Alpha Kappa Alpha, the AAUW focused on making the best possible use of the minds of its economically and educationally privileged
members. The AAUW had a broader focus than the other organizations in this study, and, as did the ANA, it had members who differed dramatically in their political viewpoints. The increasingly sharp divisions in American society meant that AAUW had to step gingerly to avoid being torn apart from within.

The AAUW helped create the spaces that enabled women to work for greater gender equity in the United States. As part of a “triangle of empowerment” that also included women employed by the government and women participating in political parties, the AAUW worked at the grassroots level in areas that were not part of the traditionally defined political realm.193 Along with CWU, AKA, and the ANA, it is part of third wing of the women’s movement. Without the efforts of the AAUW and the other like-minded women’s organizations, the activist women in the triangle would not have been able to achieve liberal reforms. Like CWU, AKA, and ANA, the AAUW occasionally cooperated with the government. In common with other women’s organizations, the AAUW also shared in finding its opportunities and influence restricted by the limited influence accorded women at the midpoint of the twentieth century. With members in the countryside and in the suburbs as well as in

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193 Latin American scholars have used the term “triangle of empowerment” to describe the coalition between women in the state, women in politics, and the urban and rural women’s movement in 1980s Latin America. The description also applies to women’s activism in the United States. Irene Tinker also believes that women leaders working within national legislatures benefit from the rising public voices of women demanding a more equitable world. See Geertje Lycklama, Virginia Vargas, Saskia Wieringa, and Jacqueline Pitanguí, eds. Triângulo de Poder. Bogotá: TM Editores, 1996 and Irene Tinker, “Nongovernmental Organizations: An Alternative Power Base for Women?” Gender Politics in Global Governance, Mary K. Meyer and Elisabeth Prugl, eds. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 103.
the cities, the AAUW faced a more complicated political path than predominantly urban large women’s organizations such as the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). Progressivism and liberalism could lead to ostracism for women in isolated areas, a fact of life that the city-dwelling Rice did not recognize but that many other AAUW members knew full well.

The American Association of University Women traces its beginnings to 14 January 1882, when sixty-five women gathered to launch the Association of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA), the first organization of college and university trained women in the world. The Western Association of College Women, formed in 1883, and the Southern Association of College Women, formed in 1903, joined with the ACA to create the AAUW on 31 March 1921. The new designation was chosen to conform more closely to the titles of similar organizations in other countries that joined with the Americans to form the International Federation of University Women in 1919. By 1950, the AAUW had 118,124 paid members.195

The founders of the AAUW may have been frustrated by established, mixed-sex groups that deferred to male authority. A women-only organization could allow women to fully participate by holding leadership positions and formulating policy.

The AAUW was not expressly feminist, perhaps fearing that controversy over the term would hurt recruitment efforts on college campuses by scaring conservative administrators and parents. Nonetheless, the AAUW’s emphasis on equal opportunities for women made the organization feminist in practice.

The women who founded the AAUW united “for the sake of society” as well as to promote fellowship and knowledge. Any woman qualified for membership who had received a degree in arts, philosophy, science, or literature, from any college, university, or scientific school that met with the approval of the organization. Clearly these women intended to boost the quality of women’s education by creating a type of accrediting institution. From the beginning of the association, the leaders of the AAUW focused on women’s right to an education equivalent to that provided to men.196

With scholarships rare and government aid for the talented poor unavailable until the 1960s, college educated women have been among the privileged few in American history. In 1956, the AAUW surveyed its members and about half responded. Of these women, sixty-six percent were younger than forty-seven years. About twenty-seven percent of the women had graduated from college between 1930 and 1939, an indication of unusual prosperity since these were the years of the Great

Depression. The AAUW median family income fell roughly at $6,750, in contrast to the national family income of $4,260. Most AAUW members were married or had been married. Just over half had children with most having borne two offspring. The members who were career educators (teaching, administration, supervision, in school and college, including professional or technical institutions) averaged a bit more than one-third of the AAUW, with slightly more women identifying themselves as homemakers. Taking the whole range of occupations into account, fifty-three percent were engaged in paid employment, forty percent identified primarily as homemakers, six percent were retired, and less than one percent were students. Almost one third of the respondents reported at least one advanced degree. Most of the women joined for “study and intellectual stimulus” and many were active in other groups, particularly church-affiliated ones.197 Surveys in subsequent years would find the membership to be much the same.198

Mary Church Terrell matched most of the profile of the typical AAUW member. In 1948, she looked on paper like the perfect candidate for AAUW membership. Daughter of the first black millionaire in the South, she earned a B.A. in classical languages from Oberlin College in 1884 and received an A.M. from the

same school in 1888. After briefly teaching at Wilberforce College in Ohio, she moved to Washington, D.C. and taught at M Street Colored High School (later Dunbar High School). In 1895, Terrell became the first black woman to serve on a board of education when she joined the D.C. board. A year later, she helped found and served as the first president of the National Association of Colored Women. A dynamic speaker and a prolific writer, Terrell always made sure that her voice was heard, even famously speaking in German to the 1904 International Council of Women in Berlin. By the 1940s, she had become one of the best-known black leaders in the world. Like the members of Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA), Terrell felt strongly that she had a duty to work for the benefit of the black race, including black women. She believed that social problems would be ameliorated with the advancement of women. In October 1946, Terrell continued her lifelong fight against segregation by applying to join the all-white Washington, D.C. chapter of the AAUW.  

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200 Terrell actually applied for membership reinstatement. She claimed that she had been a member of the Washington, D.C. branch in the early 1900s. Although a longtime member vouched for Terrell, the AAUW could find no record of her earlier membership. Mrs. Clarence F. Swift, an AAUW member since 1884 and, as such, practically a founder of the organization, sponsored Terrell’s membership application. See Mrs. Clarence F. Swift, “Facts About Mrs. Mary Church Terrell’s Application for Membership in the Washington Branch, AAUW,” 24 October 1946. For Terrell’s work to improve and elevate black women, see Floris Cash, African American Women and Social Action: The Clubwomen and Volunteerism from Jim Crow to the New Deal, 1896-1936 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001).
Terrell’s application was not the first time that the leaders of the AAUW had been confronted with the issue of race. In 1941, Kathryn McHale, the General Director of the AAUW, had warned in a confidential letter to Mrs. Charles D. Crawford, an officer in the Flint, Michigan chapter, that the press or “some crusader of racial equality” could make much of the nearly lily-white membership of the AAUW. While CWU brought the races together out of a deep religiosity and the ANA integrated to save lives, the AAUW did not possess an urgent need to involve itself in race relations. To the organization at mid-century, the problem of the color line was not its problem.  

When African Americans applied directly to the national headquarters for membership in the AAUW, McHale first informed them of the existence of the all-black National Association of College Women and then stated that the national AAUW was open to anyone regardless of race, color, or creed. Branches, however, determined their own membership policies in accordance with community attitudes. Most branches preferred to select a “homogenous group,” as McHale acknowledged, that excluded African Americans.  

Less than fifty African American women held membership in AAUW branches in 1946 with most of these women existing as the only black members in their chapters. No African American members could be found in any of the seven

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201 Crawford had written to national headquarters to get a clarification of the membership policy. Kathryn McHale to Mrs. Charles D. Crawford, 10 November 1941, reel 86, AAUW Papers.
202 Kathryn McHale to Mrs. Charles D. Crawford, 10 November 1941, reel 86, AAUW Papers.
South Atlantic state chapters. A number of black women were at-large members but, lacking branch membership, they could not participate in local social gatherings or educational activities. Since most women joined specifically for these activities, these at-large members missed out on the major benefits of AAUW membership.

With inter-racial meetings banned by law in some areas and with white Southern women particularly likely to face social or economic sanctions for participating in integrated organizations, McHale and the AAUW officers did not want to stir up trouble. In Durham, North Carolina, as one example, the self-described open-minded progressives of the local AAUW chapter were inclined to accept for membership the “very nice” daughter of a local minister but North Carolina law did not allow the mixing of the races. Breaking this law might put the jobs of chapter members employed at local schools and colleges in jeopardy. Additionally, since many of the organizations pushing for integration had been branded communist front groups, efforts to integrate might well bring legal and political problems.

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203 The exact number of black branch members is 39, excluding members from Buffalo, Syracuse, Schenectady and Pearl River. These New York branches acknowledged black members but did not provide statistics. [Kathryn McHale?], “Memorandum for Board of Directors Re: Black Membership,” 4 December 1946, reel 86, AAUW Papers; Gillie A. Larew to Miss Clyde G. Carter, 11 January 1948, reel 50, AAUW Papers.

204 The Flint, Michigan and San Gorgonio, California chapters had members who adamantly refused to accept black women. Durham wanted to accept a black member, the daughter of a local minister, in 1955 but feared the repercussions. See Doris Price Rowles to Kathryn McHale, 26 Dumber 1942, reel 86, AAUW Papers; Martha S. Sawyer to Mrs. J.B. [Ellen] Replinger, 24 February 1942, reel 86, AAUW Papers; Mamie Mansfield to AAUW National Headquarters, 12 October 1955, reel 54, AAUW Papers.

205 Shannon L. Frystak, in her study of the New Orleans League of Women Voters, notes that some members did not want to endorse legislation, specifically pertaining to integration, which was also supported by communists. Frystak, “‘With All Deliberate Speed’: The Integration of the League of
The AAUW had no bylaw banning African American women from membership. However, as McHale stated, she feared that raising the issue of racial discrimination would result in unfavorable publicity that would force the AAUW to consider eliminating branches in the South. Other national officers weighed in on the subject. Ruth Wilson Tryon, on the Board of Directors, believed that forcing branches to accept blacks would be so controversial that it would ultimately damage the primary purpose of the AAUW, that of strengthening education for women. Mary H. Smith, another board member, believed that the AAUW could not maintain itself by trying to force integration on branches that it realistically knew would never accept such a change. Martha S. Sawyer, president of the Michigan chapter, agreed that correcting this injustice towards blacks would hurt the effectiveness of the AAUW.206

Other members challenged the AAUW’s acquiescence to racial discrimination. Alice L. Meadows, from Flint, Michigan, saw hypocrisy in that “We are using our organization to maintain barriers of race while we are asking support in removing barriers of equality in the educational field.” She believed that educated women should have the courage to accept African Americans, especially since the

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206 Kathryn McHale to Mrs. Charles D. Crawford, 10 November 1941, reel 86, AAUW Papers; Ruth Wilson Tryon to Kathryn McHale, 5 December 1941, reel 86, AAUW Papers; Mary H. Smith to Kathryn McHale, 5 December 1941, reel 86, AAUW Papers; Martha S. Sawyer to Mrs. J.B. [Ellen] Replinger, 24 February 1942, reel 86, AAUW Papers.
AAUW was proud of its international affiliations. In 1949, the Wilberforce, Ohio chapter published a small book that touted the achievement of black Americans and called for further action to end racial intolerance. The book, likely a response to the Terrell dispute, advised whites to “conquer your own prejudices, then courageously convert your neighbors” and “purify the atmosphere of your community of discriminatory thoughts and practices.”

Clearly, the association lacked a consensus. Other AAUW members stressed that the “special training” provided by a college education made AAUW members “better fitted” to make advances in racial understanding. Gillie A. Larew, the AAUW vice-president of the South Atlantic Region and a Virginian, viewed the debate over race as strictly an emotional question. She argued that AAUW members possessed the “good sense” to make significance advances to meet the demands of simple justice and of reason.

The Washington, D.C. branch rejected Terrell’s application after a referendum among its members decided against her by a vote of 360 to 250. The members may have been unfamiliar with Terrell, a notably forceful woman in her younger days who

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207 Alice L. Meadows to Kathryn McHale, 2 December 1941, reel 86, AAUW Papers.
208 Wilberforce, Ohio is named after William Wilberforce, a parliamentary leader responsible for abolishing slavery in the British Empire. A historically-black college was also located in the city. These factors likely made the white women of Wilberforce more sensitive to matters of race relations. Wilberforce, Ohio Branch of the American Association of University Women, *Despite Discrimination: Some Aspects of Negro Life in the United States of America*, (Wilberforce, Ohio: AAUW, 1949), pp. 81.
209 Gillie A. Larew to Miss Clyde G. Carter, 11 January 1948, reel 50, AAUW Papers
210 American Association of University Women, “Background Information on the Membership Policies of the Association and Their Application to Branch Membership,” reel 21, AAUW Papers.
had not mellowed at all with age. An active eighty-three year old, Terrell did not need the social fellowship or intellectual stimulation that prompted so many to join the AAUW. She had only one goal. As could be predicted, Terrell applied to the national AAUW for membership and was accepted. She then brought the matter of her rejection by the Washington chapter before the National Board of Directors.²¹¹

In December 1946, the AAUW Board of Directors had stated that the AAUW constitution prohibited branches from denying membership to any woman who held an approved degree from an institution on its accredited list.²¹² The AAUW took this stance because the International Federation of University Women limited membership only to those national organizations that did not discriminate on the basis of race, politics, or religion.²¹³ The international regulations had come in response to the Nazi Germany treatment of Jews. A racially-motivated ban badly tainted the worldwide image of the organization imposing it, especially in the immediate wake of World War II.

The AAUW’s international affiliations forced it to take a strong stand against racial discrimination. To maintain its reputation as a “serious educational agency,” AAUW National President Althea K. Hottel, a University of Pennsylvania sociologist, insisted that the association could not permit discrimination. “The

²¹¹ American Association of University Women, “Background Information on the Membership Policies of the Association and Their Application to Branch Membership,” reel 21, AAUW Papers.
²¹² No historically-black colleges appeared on AAUW’s accreditation list. Gillie A. Larew to Miss Clyde G. Carter, 11 January 1948, reel 50, AAUW Papers.
²¹³ Gillie A. Larew to Miss Clyde G. Carter, 11 January 1948, reel 50, AAUW Papers.
AAUW was not organized as a self-improvement or social club but for the advancement of the great cause of education,” added Bessie C. Randolph, president of Hollins College in Virginia. Dr. Anna I. Powell, Southwest Central Regional Vice-President, is another Southern woman who supported integration. Powell saw the “continued growth and influence of the Association as a creative force in the world of educated women” dependent upon the principle of non-discrimination.\(^\text{214}\) The AAUW could not argue on a world stage on behalf of women while discriminating against black women at home.

The Washington, D.C. branch responded to the AAUW’s concerns by stating that “eligibility is one thing and admission another.” The branch then changed its bylaws to block African American members. The Washington women insisted that the dispute centered on the issue of autonomy or self-government for local chapters. Anticipating a nasty fight, the AAUW sought outside assistance.

At the 1948 national meeting, the AAUW Board of Directors received a legal opinion from Owen J. Roberts, a retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice. Roberts concluded that if a branch decision conflicted with a national decision, the AAUW’s bylaws permitted the association to expel the branch. The AAUW directors thereupon warned the Washington, D.C. chapter in early April that a refusal to amend its charter and by-laws to reflect national membership requirements by 6 May 1948

\(^{214}\) “AAUW National Board Holds to Stand Taken on Membership Policy,” 9 May 1948, reel 21, AAUW Papers.
would end its affiliation with the AAUW. The directors stated “the continued growth and influence of the Association as a creative force in the world of educated women depends upon the preservation of this principle.” On 16 April 1948, the Washington branch brought suit in the District Court of the United States to enjoin the national AAUW from expelling it. A dissenting group, representing forty percent of the Washington membership, then emerged. The Washington, D.C. branch split into two parts, with one segment continuing AAUW affiliation and admitting African American members.

The AAUW did not wish to publicize the Terrell decision. Although the dispute made news nationwide, many people were apparently fuzzy on the particulars of the case including Bess Truman’s personal secretary. The First Lady created a minor scandal in metro Washington by accepting an invitation to lunch with the split-away group just at the time that her husband presented his civil rights program to Congress.

The AAUW encouraged this ignorance. Offered the opportunity to honor Terrell in a joint luncheon with the National Association of Colored Women, the

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AAUW declined the invitation. As AAUW President Bessie C. Randolph stated in July 1949, “Now that the issue is settled right, the best thing is for both races to keep quiet and let the whole matter work itself out.” Any emphasis on the interracial status of the AAUW would certainly antagonize white supremacists, seriously weaken the organization in the South, and hinder its efforts to promote women’s education within the United States. Nevertheless, at the AAUW national convention in Seattle in 1949, the association officially went on record against racial discrimination following a meeting described as “tempestuous.” Apparently, while AAUW national leaders feared retribution by racists, enough of the rank-and-file found racial discrimination too odious to ignore.

AAUW members did not lose substantial benefits by admitting black women. Extending membership to African Americans did not put AAUW women at risk of competing economically with blacks. In this respect, members of AAUW differed from the white nurses of ANA who would compete for work against blacks. However, only by sacrificing racial privileges could the members maintain their status as American elites. They lost racial advantages but boosted their standing as forward thinkers.

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218 Kathryn McHale to Executive Committee of the Board of Directors, 6 July 1949, reel 53, AAUW Papers; Dorothy Kenyon et al., “Replies to Question 1 in the Bulletin of July 6th 1949,” reel 53, AAUW Papers.

While the problem of the twentieth century may have been the color line, as W.E.B. DuBois famously noted, the problem of the communism seemed much more urgent to most Americans at mid-century. The terrors of Cold War stopped the modest, reluctantly taken, and deliberately downplayed racial advancements taken by the AAUW.

In 1951, Terrell met with AAUW officials after her name had been linked to the purportedly communist American Peace Crusade (APC). This New York City-based organization, an opponent of the Korean War, sought to settle differences with Red China and the Soviet Union through negotiations, not violence. For its efforts, the State Department labeled it a communist-front organization. The officials at State were apparently not communicating well with the Attorney General’s office, which had informed Terrell that the APC was not communist. AAUW leaders believed that the APC promoted communist propaganda, ignored positive American policies, such as the Marshall Plan, and overlooked Soviet actions that had undermined world peace. AAUW leaders also argued that the APC’s references to “the already unequal position of the Negro” did not acknowledge the efforts undertaken to improve the condition of African Americans in the United States.  

APC members believed that the co-existence of democracy and communism was possible and that military capabilities could only lead to a violent conflict. 

\[\text{Committee on International Relations to State Presidents, 21 February 1951, reel 89, AAUW Papers; Laretha Gertrude Pearson to Journal of the American Association of University Women, 26 January 1953, reel 89, AAUW Papers.}\]
APC undoubtedly appealed to Terrell because of its position that the war atmosphere undermined basic civil liberties thereby causing a heightened assault on African Americans.221 The AAUW, inadvertently giving support to the APC’s argument about the loss of free speech and free association, requested a meeting with Terrell to persuade her of the communist nature of the APC and, perhaps more importantly to the organization, to urge her to protect the image of the AAUW.

The House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) had opened a file on the AAUW in 1938, when it participated in a World Youth Congress meeting at Vassar College that HUAC identified as a communist one. In the 1940s, the association held a membership in the Washington Cooperative Book Shop, a combination bookstore and art gallery that two U.S. attorney generals, Francis Biddle and Tom C. Clark, believed Communists had penetrated.222

The Dorothy Kenyon and Esther Caukin Brunauer cases in 1950 placed the AAUW in a politically uncomfortable position. Kenyon, a New York City attorney, had a long history of promoting social reform and did not retreat from controversy. In the 1930s, she had called for leniency for prostitutes and defended burlesque houses as a bit of beauty in the lives of working men. In 1946, Kenyon joined the State Department to serve as the U.S. delegate to the United Nations (UN) Commission on

221 American Peace Crusade, “Bring Our Boys Home from Korea!” [1951?] reel 89, AAUW Papers; International Relations Associate, “Conference with Mrs. Mary Church Terrell,” February 1951, reel 89, AAUW Papers.

222AAUW to A.L. Miller, “American Association of University Women, 12 October 1951, reel 89, AAUW Papers.
the Status of Women. In that position, which she held until 1950, Kenyon advocated a more significant role for women in the UN and its agencies, particularly the World Health Organization. She also directed a campaign to establish international treaties that would guarantee equal rights for women, particularly with regard to pay, property rights, and political privileges. Kenyon’s interest in internationalism had involved her with such organizations as the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship and the American-Russian Institute, that raised doubts about her loyalty to the United States in the heat of the Cold War. In 1950, Kenyon became the first person called before Senator Joseph McCarthy’s Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee. Under oath, Kenyon said that she didn’t have “a Communist bone” in her body.”

The AAUW spoke out publicly on behalf of Kenyon, a second vice-president of the AAUW and a longtime committee member. In a press release, Althea K. Hottel, national president of the association, commended Kenyon for being a lifelong champion of human rights and individual freedom – “a philosophy which is the direct antithesis of communism.”

At the same time he targeted Kenyon, McCarthy pursued Esther Caukin Brunauer, a leading AAUW member who had once served as a paid staff member in

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224 AAUW, Press Release, 13 March 1950, reel 89, AAUW Papers.
the association’s Committee on International Relations. Brunauer joined the State Department in 1944 and worked in the Division of Internal Security. Her husband, Stephen, a Hungarian-born chemist in the Explosive Research Division of the U.S. Navy had joined the communist Young Worker’s League in 1927 for “dances and picnics,” but soon left. In 1948, the State Department charged Esther Brunauer with being “in sympathetic association with the Communist Party, to have supported its policies, and to have been a member of the American Friends of the Soviet Union.” Brunauer was cleared but transferred to UNESCO. In February 1950, McCarthy listed Brunauer or “case number 47” as one of the people made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who, nevertheless, were still employed to shape State Department policy.225

Directly charged by McCarthy, AAUW leaders denied his claims that the association supported various Communist-front organizations and allowed known Communists to hold responsible positions within the association.226 In a statement to the press, the organization declared that Brunauer’s AAUW activities “exemplified

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226 AAUW, “Extract form the Board of Directors Minutes,” 15 April 1951, reel 89, AAUW Papers; Kathryn McHale to Millard E. Tydings, 22 March 1950, reel 89, AAUW Papers.
the best traditions of American democracy” because she took an “honest, objective, and scholarly approach to controversial questions.”

The Kenyon and Brunauer cases brought the AAUW name into newspapers around the country. In 1951, the AAUW decided not to address further any public charges of communist influence for fear that it might appear that the organization had been placed on the defensive. A counterattack would only give publicity to the original attacker. By the end of 1952, the public relations situation had become so bad for the association that McHale issued instructions to the board of directors for dealing with members who demanded detailed information on the purported communist infiltration of the AAUW.

The leaders of AAUW greatly feared another link to communism and the APC formed such a link. In the meeting with an unnamed AAUW official, Terrell defended the APC. She tied American abuses of African Americans at home and in the overseas armed forces to the rise of anti-Americanism around the world. Much to the surprise of the AAUW representative, Terrell “consistently implied and sometimes even stated” that there had been no progress made on the “Negro problem.” She noted the failure of democracy in the South and the toleration of

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southern abuses by the rest of the nation while raising the possibility of armed revolt by American blacks. Despite Terrell’s attempts to turn the discussion to race relations, the AAUW official remained focused solely on the communist activities of the APC. The conversation ended with Terrell promising to withdraw from the APC, but the AAUW representative expected that she would “forget to take any action.”

At stake in this exchange were two conflicting opinions about the best way to promote freedom. As one of the member organizations of the Committee for International Education Reconstruction (CIER), the AAUW combatively promoted Americanism around the globe. It presented the United States as a model of democratic success that other countries should emulate. Along with officials of other voluntary associations engaged in overseas activities, the leaders of the AAUW believed that they had found the best way to fight communism. They had pledged the association to work for conditions favorable to democracy throughout the world as a prerequisite for national and international peace and security. To the leaders of the AAUW, the very existence of voluntary organizations that worked in partnership with the U.S. government demonstrated that the American political system was a

229Miriam E. Clippinger to Eleanor T. Dolan, [1951], reel 89, AAUW Papers; International Relations Associate, “Conference with Mrs. Mary Church Terrell,” February 1951, reel 89, AAUW Papers.
cooperative, consensual one in which the individual participated without coercion or pressure. Terrell challenged this perception.

Terrell, a world traveler willing and able to invite discussions of race with Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans, brought a perspective that the members of the AAUW could have used to promote better race relations both inside and outside of the United States. She showed the value of racial diversity in an activist organization. By pointing out the damage being done by American segregationists and racists to the international reputation of the United States, Terrell identified a danger that was rising and one that the white members of the AAUW had so far missed. American whites could not display hostility toward people of color and expect people of color to favor the U.S. over the Soviet Union. American reluctance to fully back civil rights damaged the international reputation of the U.S. and seriously wounded efforts to win the Cold War.231

As Terrell understood in 1951, communism could not be fought around the globe without demonstrating concern for the rights of blacks. By dismissing Terrell’s observations, the AAUW missed a chance to use the grassroots organization as a sort of political early warning system and agent for Americanism.

The efforts to protect the AAUW’s reputation did not quiet anti-communist right-wingers. In “The Pink Ladies of the AAUW,” a 1954 article for National Republic magazine, Frances Beck worried aloud about the danger that American youth “may receive Communist indoctrination” through the many AAUW members employed at every level of the educational system. The debate over the liberal leanings of the leaders of the AAUW would continue to percolate through the coming years.

While AAUW leaders struggled to deal with new issues of race and anti-communism in the late 1940s and 1950s, it continued to advance the status of women. In the post war years, it focused on women’s education and job opportunities. The association shared a belief with the AKA and the ANA that education formed the key to advancing the status of women. While the ANA sought to advance the state of nursing and the AKA hoped to uplift the black race, the AAUW focused on the quality of education provided to women. The association had a long-established accrediting process. It asked tertiary educational institutions to provide information on degrees granted to women; to detail the housing provided for women students; to specify whether a gymnasium is especially provided for women; to specify social activities offered to women; to provide the names, degrees, and departments of women on the faculty with a rank higher than instructor; to clarify whether the

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administration had a policy of providing equal opportunities to women for promotion and equal pay for male and female faculty members of the same rank; and, lastly, to provide the number of male and female students. AAUW officials requested this information decades before the federal government began compiling educational statistics, thereby providing a crucial service to those seeking to determine the quality of education offered to women at various schools. AAUW accreditation became a sought-after recruitment tool.

Along with making a quality education available to women, the AAUW helped women find places to use the intellectual skills that had developed. In 1945, the association asked its branches what the role of AAUW women should be in their communities. The women of Asheville, North Carolina believed that university-educated women should demonstrate the essential worth of education by identifying community needs (educational, political, social, cultural, and spiritual) and then putting into effect the needed changes. Spokane, Washington AAUW members believed that educated women had an obligation to make “democracy indivisible” by promoting the highest development of each individual including those “on the other side of the tracks.” The Parkville, Missouri members argued that AAUW members

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233 F. Louise Nardin, “Committee on the Recognition of Colleges and Universities,” 1922, reel 70, AAUW Papers.
should keep themselves informed on events and then use that knowledge in positive, constructive action.\textsuperscript{234}

In 1949, the leaders of AAUW looked ahead to the next half-century and reiterated its founding assumption that the education offered the most powerful instrument for progress and peaceful change. Ignorance would lead only to another catastrophic war.\textsuperscript{235} In 1965, AAUW members essentially repeated this belief when AAUW representatives adopted a statement of principle that “educational opportunity designed to achieve the best use of human resources is basic to the preservation of our society and its fundamental freedoms.”\textsuperscript{236}

AAUW members desired to uplift humanity and they saw educated citizens as essential for this effort. It could not succeed if women did not pursue advanced education and if women with advanced education found no places to use their knowledge. Like CWU, it viewed a world dominated by men as dangerously out of balance.

To establish engines for change, the AAUW had to begin by creating well-educated women who were prepared by a rigorous curriculum to take positions of power in American government and society. To fill public spaces with women,

\textsuperscript{234} No author, “As the Branches See It: University Women in Their Communities,” \textit{Journal of the American Association of University Women} 39 (Fall 1945), 15.
AAUW leaders needed to find women who were willing to accept positions of responsibility. The bylaws of the AAUW stated that the association would develop a program to enable college women to further the advancement of women and “to discharge the special responsibilities to society of those who have enjoyed the advantages of higher education.”  

AAUW representatives adopted the phrase pertaining to special responsibilities in 1957 in response to the worsening climate for professional women. As the head of a collegiate English department and former AAUW fellow observed in the mid-1950s, “The outlook for young women is not bright in this state, and there are not many young women with ambition. It is hard to say which precedes which: the loss of opportunity or the loss of ambition.”

In 1951, women formed a substantial part of the paid workforce. AAUW leaders concluded that almost as many women were in the labor force as in the 1945 peak year of wartime employment. But women were taking lower paid, low-responsibility, “pink-collar” jobs as indicated by *Women in Higher-Level Positions*, a survey conducted by the U.S. Women’s Bureau at the request of the AAUW. The researchers had to begin their study far below actual top-level jobs in order to find women in sufficient numbers to conduct an analysis. The AAUW blamed this trend partly on women who saw themselves only as temporary workers who would leave

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238 No Author, “When Women Enter a Man’s World,” [1955?], reel 54, AAUW Papers.
paid employment soon for family responsibilities. It also recognized something that later women’s activists would term the “glass ceiling.”

The AAUW fellowship program formed part of an effort to give women a professional boost. In the mid-1950s, the AAUW surveyed the women who had received fellowships. Half reported that they had encountered obstacles as a woman in their professional progress. These 160 women stated that men were preferred when appointments were made. As one recipient reported, “Even the women’s colleges are guilty of this, and the situation seems to be getting worse.”

The AAUW pushed at external barriers but also addressed low motivation on the part of women themselves. AAUW members sought to persuade women to go to college. In North Dakota, AAUW members held Career Days in the 1960s to impress the importance of college education on high school senior girls. AAUW leaders also pushed women to be ambitious. Typical of chapters of the AAUW, the Missouri division described one of its goals for 1963 as “the college woman’s acceptance of her special responsibilities as an educated person.” The AAUW battled against

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240 No Author, “When Women Enter a Man’s World,” [1955?], reel 54, AAUW Papers.
both the loss of opportunity and the loss of ambition. It also continued its battle against loss of pay on account of gender.

The Equal Pay Act had roots that stretched back to the early days of industrialization when factory owners paid women half the rate of men. Male workers initially sought equal pay in the belief that, if employers had to pay the same for women workers as for men, they would hire men. Pay equity remained an issue through World War II when the National Labor Board encouraged the use of wage evaluations based on job descriptions to monitor and maintain fair wage levels. The Women’s Bureau and many members of the women’s movement made equal pay into a paramount issue, with the AAUW endorsing pay equity in 1945. In that year, Senators Claude Pepper (D-Florida) and Wayne Morse (D-Oregon) introduced the Women’s Equal Pay Act to attack wage differentials in interstate commerce. If passed, the legislation would have provided for equal pay for work of comparable value. The 1945 bill failed because of strong opposition but AAUW representatives joined with members of the AFL-CIO, National Federation of Business and Professional Women, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, and the National Education Association to request equal pay planks in the platforms of both the Republican and Democratic parties. AAUW officials wanted to raise the earning status of qualified women above an arbitrary “inferior sex” level.\(^\text{243}\)

Equal pay gathered little support in subsequent years, although AAUW members continued to voice support for it. On 18 March 1953, AAUW leaders helped form the National Committee on Equal Pay for Equal Work to lobby both the public and Congress. State chapters urged passage of statewide equal pay laws, with progressivism found in the middle of the country as well as in the usual coastal places. The Missouri Division in the early 1960s attempted without success to push an equal pay for equal work bill through the Missouri legislature.

The formation of President Kennedy’s Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) in 1963 brought renewed attention to the matter of equal pay. Pauline Tompkins, General Director of the AAUW, along with Etta Engles and Edith H. Sherrard, members appointed to represent the AAUW, served on the PCSW, as did representatives from the ANA and CWU. Pushed by Esther Peterson, head of the Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor, the PCSW agreed that fairness demanded equal pay. Debate soon arose over whether equal pay meant that all

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workers at a particular job or a particular level would receive the same wages. Employers opposed the bill and members of Congress voiced fears that equal pay would take jobs away from men, but opponents surrendered when they became convinced that the bill would be more symbolic than effective because of widespread job segregation by sex. AAUW officials kept the organization’s Committee on Equal Pay for Equal Work functioning to monitor implementation of the 1963 Equal Pay Act. The passage of the legislation linked AAUW with the resurgence of feminism as did the association’s efforts to defend the right of mothers to be employed outside the home.

The members of the AAUW not only sought to increase the pay of working women. They also tried to find spaces for educated women but the association found itself stymied by the persistent notion that women belonged in the home caring for children. The AAUW needed to challenge this belief because many AAUW members were employed either part-time or full-time during some part of their child raising years. As AAUW members in the 1950s and 1960s complained, teachers typically blamed the problems of children on mothers who worked. To combat this criticism, the AAUW Committee on Maternal Employment funded a study in 1961 on the effects of maternal employment on children. Lois Meek Stolz, a noted psychologist and AAUW member who had established the child development program at Stanford University, led the study. Upon examining the literature on children of working
mothers, Stolz discovered both that it was very difficult to find families where the mother had never worked and that most of the earlier studies violated scientific standards by having no control groups for comparison. Stolz concluded that there really were no reliable differences between the children of working and non-working mothers.\textsuperscript{247}

Increasing women’s opportunities to participate in government formed a third part of the AAUW’s postwar agenda. Along with members of the AKA and CWU, AAUW members believed that women shared an obligation with men to participate in government. Accordingly, the association cooperated with a coalition of women’s organizations in 1950 to pressure Truman to appoint women to policymaking posts and to appoint a commission to integrate women into all phases of national defense. A year later, AAUW officials repeated their request. They again stated that the democracies could not match strength with communism in terms of people and that the U.S. had to be “ingenious and wise” in the utilization of what it did possess. In 1960, the Civil Service Commission conducted a survey that discovered 94\% of upper level managerial and administrative jobs in the Washington, D.C. area were

offered only to male applicants. In 1961, AAUW officials complained to President John F. Kennedy that women were not being appointed to positions of power within the government. In 1969, AAUW leaders noted the dearth of women appointees to high-level federal posts in the Nixon Administration. The frustration of AAUW members with the glacial pace of change for women in government positions is palpably evident throughout its papers.

To find positions of power for educated women, the leaders of the AAUW did not neglect the military. Nurses were the first group of women to join the military and they remained as the largest segment of military women for much of the twentieth century. Along with the female yeomen of the First World War and the women in uniform during the Second World War, nurses joined as auxiliaries who did not receive the same benefits offered men. Women earned a place in the regular military in 1948, with the passage of the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act (Public Law 625). While women were now assured of a right to serve, the law severely

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250 Military nurses belonged to the ANA but did not play an active role within the organization and may have joined chiefly to obtain the educational benefits of ANA’s journal. The division of the ANA into state chapters made it impossible for military nurses stationed overseas to participate in chapter activities.
restricted their numbers. A two percent limit was placed on the proportion of women in the regular service with full colonel or Navy captain as the highest rank allowed.  

The Korean War, which broke out in June 1950, underlined the potential importance of women’s labor. The AAUW responded to the fighting on the Korean peninsula by asking the government to mobilize all of its citizens in the fight for freedom. With no surplus of “manpower,” the AAUW insisted that it would be height of folly for the U.S. to waste the abilities and energies of its women. Only by adding to the “total resources of free people” could the democratic nations of the world avoid political and economic domination by communist countries.

Both the leaders of the ANA and the AAUW protested the unequal treatment of women in the armed forces. At the start of the Korean War, only 22,000 women were on active duty, including nurses, and the services were unable to increase these numbers despite making strong recruiting efforts. In 1950, as Defense Secretary George C. Marshall formed a committee of prominent women to study ways in which recruiting goals could be met, AAUW leaders called for removal of the statutory limitation on the number of women in American forces. The association labeled the two percent restriction “outmoded” and insisted that it was unfair to the country and to the men of the country to refuse to call upon women for their services. AAUW

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officials again argued that the U.S. should make the best possible use of the abilities and strengths of all the people.  

Marshall’s committee, the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Service (DACOWITS) suggested a combined recruitment effort to boost the numbers of military women but this effort had limited and unsatisfactory results. The members of the AAUW and the ANA had to wait until 1967 when the exigencies of the Vietnam War compelled President Lyndon B. Johnson to sign Public Law 90-130 lifting the two percent ceiling and the barrier to promotion to general officer. Women were fully integrated into the Army and Navy only in 1978, when Public Law 95-485 abolished the Women’s Army Corps and female sailors reported for sea duty aboard the *USS Vulcan*.  

While AAUW proved quick to fight for military women, it proved slow to recognize the value of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 for women as a group. In dramatic contrast to its reluctance in the 1940s to attack racism, the AAUW took a clear and public stand in support of federal civil rights legislation. The AAUW, like most women’s organizations and most liberals, had initially opposed the inclusion of the word “sex” in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. At the instigation of the staunchly feminist and remarkably small National Woman’s Party, Representative

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Howard Smith of Virginia sponsored an amendment adding "sex" to Title VII, the section prohibiting discrimination in employment. Smith, a conservative and no friend of progressive legislation, likely intended the amendment as a joke that would emphasize the silliness of civil rights and kill the bill. Believing that the “redundant” addition could sabotage passage of the legislation that it supported as part of its civil rights initiative, AAUW representatives lobbyed the House of Representatives to remove it. AAUW leaders wanted passage of the legislation without crippling amendments of any kind.\(^{255}\) Members of the association subsequently valued the addition. Already watching enforcement of the Equal Pay Act, officials of the AAUW monitored the implementation of the provision against discriminatory practices on the basis of sex included in the Civil Rights Act of 1964.\(^ {256}\)

AAUW officials also initially opposed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) before coming around to support it. The ERA, proposed by the militant Alice Paul in 1923, drove a deep wedge between former suffragists. While Paul’s National Woman’s Party arranged for the amendment to be introduced into Congress year after year, most politically active women opposed it. They feared that it would remove laws that benefited women, especially the protective labor laws that reformers

\(^{255}\) AAUW apparently believed that women were already accorded legal equality under the “due process” clause of the Fifth Amendment and the “equal protection” clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Legislative Program Committee, “Official Minutes of the AAUW Board of Directors,” 9 February 1964, reel 42, AAUW Papers.

(including Paul) had worked so hard to obtain. In 1939, delegates to the AAUW
convention voted to support the principle of equality for women but to oppose the
ERA as a method of obtaining equality. The AAUW is generally identified as one of
the traditional women’s organizations that resisted the ERA.²⁵⁷

In actuality, AAUW membership evenly divided over the amendment long
before the resurgence of feminism renewed public interest in the ERA. Throughout
the 1950s, the ERA split the association. While some members showed concern for
the needs of women without a college education who might benefit from protective
legislation, other members believed that the lack of an ERA damaged the status of all
women. The split reflects a wider division on the ERA between social feminists and
egalitarian feminists. Social feminists wanted to guarantee special protections for
women, while egalitarians wanted both men and women to be on the exact same
playing field. The split within the AAUW is representative of long-standing
differences within the wider feminist movement.

In 1953, delegates to the AAUW convention voted on continuing opposition
to ERA until the amendment provided safeguards for the health, safety, and welfare
of women. Speaking in opposition, New Yorker Lucyle Hook stated that women
needed to become first-class citizens while Barbara Mandos of New Jersey concluded
that it was time for “legal recognition of women’s twentieth century status.” The ERA

Papers; Hartmann, 103.
lost by a vote of 1,355 to 1,219, showing the AAUW to be divided almost fifty-fifty. When members renewed the debate on the following day, the AAUW delegates decided to neither support nor oppose the amendment. In 1955, a proposal that the AAUW support ERA died by a vote of only 451 to 426, again almost fifty-fifty.\(^{258}\)

In between conventions, the ERA debate continued in the pages of the AAUW’s magazine. One of the more entertaining exchanges occurred in late 1953 when Margaret F. Ackroyd of Rhode Island labeled the amendment’s emphasis on equality as matching the core of communist philosophy. Alma Lutz, member of both the AAUW and the NWP, then inquired if the Declaration of Independence should be called communistic because it contained the phrase “all men are created equal.”\(^{259}\)

A number of court rulings that found special labor laws for women in violation of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act made the issue of protective legislation moot and many women’s organizations came to support the ERA. The year-old National Organization of Women endorsed the amendment in 1967 and took

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\(^{258}\)The dramatic difference in the number of votes in 1953 and 1955 occurred because the 1953 vote was a “card count” with each delegate casting one vote and the chair of each delegation casting the remaining votes to which her branch was entitled. AAUW, “Resolution Re Equal Rights Amendment”, 17 June 1957, reel 11, AAUW Papers, AAUW, “Proceedings of the 54th General Meeting of the American Association of University Women,” 27 June – 1 July 1955, p. 28, reel 11, AAUW Papers; AAUW, “The Equal Rights Amendment,” Reports of National Officers and Committees of the American Association of University Women to the Biennial Convention, 21-26 June 1959, reel 12, AAUW Papers.

the leadership of the ERA fight from the nearly extinct NWP. Emanuel Celler, a liberal New York Democrat and chairman of the powerful House Judiciary Committee, had refused to allow a hearing on the ERA for twenty-three years. Many of Celler’s Brooklyn constituents were former garment district workers who staunchly opposed the ERA on grounds of protective legislation and he catered to their wishes. In 1970, Democratic Representatives Edith S. Green of Oregon, an AAUW member, and Martha W. Griffiths of Michigan outflanked Celler and freed the ERA for a House vote. Green held hearings on legislation to expand prohibitions against sex discrimination in education that expanded into a public discussion of general discrimination against women and the need for equal rights.

As Congress debated the ERA, AAUW asked its membership about the measure. A 1970 poll of AAUW members found 53.8% in favor of ERA and 44.5% opposed. The death of protective legislation undoubtedly influenced the number of

260 I am not sure if any AAUW members helped found NOW. Considering the level of education of the founders and the importance of AAUW membership to college-educated women, I suspect that some of the founders may have been members at one time.


positive votes. Unlike the 1953 AAUW convention, floor discussion and voting at
the 1971 conference was in favor of ERA by a great majority.²⁶⁴

Equal pay, the ERA, and abortion rights were the main concerns of the new
feminist movement. In the nineteenth century, state legislatures banned abortion to
protect women from dangerous abortifacients and to increase the birth rate among
white Protestants. The legislation did not stop abortion. As time progressed, young
white women beginning to enter the workforce, married women concerned about
family size, and women of all sorts who could not afford a child continued to obtain
illegal (so-called back alley) abortions or hospital abortions that generally were
available only to the privileged. By the 1950s, medical doctors had begun to form
hospital abortion boards to review cases in which women sought permission to end
pregnancies on medical grounds. Soon, desperate women without medical grounds
for an abortion began to seek the procedure on the psychiatric grounds that they were
suicidal or unfit to be a mother. The process was demeaning to women, as many
women reported, and it was generally available only to those with enough money to
pursue this option.²⁶⁵ By the mid-1960s, national feminist organizations, notably the

²⁶⁴ No Author, “Resolutions Provoke Intense Discussion,” American Association of University Women
²⁶⁵ Rickie Solinger, ed., Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950-2000 (Berkeley:
University of California Press, 1998); N.E.H. Hull and Peter Charles Hoff, Roe v. Wade: The Abortion
Rights Controversy in American History (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001); Carole Joffe,
Doctors of Conscience: The Struggle to Provide Abortion Before and After Roe v. Wade (Boston:
Beacon Press, 1995).
National Organization for Women (NOW), were focusing on abortion as a key to women’s liberation.

In 1971, the AAUW showed that it had fully joined the burgeoning women’s movement by voting to support repeal of abortion laws. In one of the most impassioned debates that AAUW ever experienced, both anti-abortion and pro-choice members took the floor at the association’s convention. Opponents argued that unborn children had certain civil rights and likened abortion to murder. Proponents spoke of the right of the mother with one declaring that, “To force the body of a woman to unwillingly bear a child is slavery, cruel and unusual punishment.” Joan Hayes, who had spearheaded the Hawaii Division’s successful effort to legalize abortion in that state, stated that the safety factor for abortion was four times greater than childbirth. Delegates voted 586 to 477 in favor of abortion rights before passage of *Roe v. Wade*.266

In subsequent years, the AAUW would be one of the most active organizations in the pro-choice coalition. The divisions that had once existed with AAUW over segregation, the ERA, and abortion, faded as the members of the organization became more certain about the best ways to preserve and increase opportunities for women. By the mid-1970s, the distinction between mainstream organizations such as the AAUW and newer feminist groups had begun to blur as the

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mainstream organizations began to work on issues, such as abortion, that had been initially staked out by the more radical groups.\(^{267}\)

In 1983, author Betty Friedan, one of the founders of NOW, observed that many mainstream women’s groups had become sympathetic to feminism. “The American Association of University Women, the Junior League, the YMCA, even the Girl Scouts – all these organizations that are part of the establishment – they’re all feminists! It’s not just a radical outside minority,” she proudly declared.\(^{268}\) AAUW had become a staunchly liberal organization and a senior member of the coalition of feminist groups. Much of the second women’s movement began with college-educated women. Without an education, these women would not have had the analytical skills, verbal skills, or writing skills to successfully challenge the subordinate place of women in American society. The AAUW laid the groundwork for the resurgence of feminism by promoting education, by pushing for job opportunities that stretched women’s minds, and by urging women to challenge themselves. The organization did not form a feminist network at mid-century, as the struggle within AAUW over race relations clearly demonstrates, but it played a


crucial role in expanding opportunities for women during the 1950s and 1960s that later allowed others to form the second feminist wave.

In confronting discrimination against women, some members of the AAUW argued that racial oppression diminished the organization’s intellectual reputation and made it more difficult to promote women’s causes. Other members feared that support for African American rights would lead to a reduction in support for women’s issues within and outside of the organization. With considerable reluctance and unease, the AAUW gradually backed civil rights for African Americans in the 1950s, although the fear of McCarthyism muted the AAUW’s activism on race and on gender throughout that decade. Only in the 1960s, when the Red Scare had somewhat abated, did the AAUW fully embrace an agenda dedicated to overturning restrictions based on race and gender.
CHAPTER THREE

SERVING MANKIND BY EMPOWERING WOMEN:

ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA SORORITY

In 1991, toward the end of her long life, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority member Lucy Miller Mitchell advised young black women to develop their potential to the highest degree possible but not to focus just on self-advancement. To Mitchell, African American women needed to couple advancement with “a sense of responsibility to the contributions which they are obligated to make, not only to themselves, their profession or line of work, but also to their community and to an improvement in the human condition.” With these words, Mitchell explained the motto of AKA: “Service to Mankind.” These sorority women, members of one of the oldest African American women’s organizations in the United States, aimed to advance the position of blacks in American society by working through women.

In this chapter, I provide a brief history of AKA and of black women’s social and political activism. AKA members pursued various means to uplift the black race. The organization supported coalitions, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the American Council on Human

Rights (ACHR), as a way to advance civil rights. By backing the NAACP, the organization fell afoul of anti-communists who equated support for civil rights activists with support for communism. AKA became yet another women’s organization that had to deal with McCarthyism. It supported black women’s education and employment. To AKA members, women served as the backbone of the family and an improvement in the status of women would also improve the status of the race. The uplift of African Americans began with black women.

In a society based upon the dominance of the white race, black women struggled to carve out a place for themselves. As the histories of the AAUW and the ANA show, even well-educated and professional African American women were not wholeheartedly welcomed into liberal women’s organizations. AKA members who also belonged to AAUW, ANA, or CWU had first-hand knowledge of the limitations of predominantly white women’s organizations.270 Racial uplift, a popular self-help ideology that emerged in the years after Reconstruction and remained strong into the twentieth century, offered an opportunity to prove that blacks deserved to take a respected position within American society.271 For women in particular, this ideology meant much more than political and economic opportunities.

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270 AKA had a member among the executive staff of ANA but her experience as the one in charge of monitoring racial relations in nursing undoubtedly convinced of the value of a black organization.  
271 Kevin K. Gaines argues that racial uplift ideology cannot be regarded as an independent black perspective because elite blacks sought the support of white political and business elites. See Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
White America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries commonly categorized the African American woman as either a self-sacrificing “Mammy” content to subordinate her life to serve whites or as sexually adventurous “Jezebel,” unworthy of respect or protection. While both categorizations were problematic, the second one proved more dangerous and more infuriating to organized African American women. Black women could not mount a solid defense against slurs upon their characters or sexual attacks upon their persons as long as white society doubted their morals. To African American elites, including the women of AKA, racial uplift meant an emphasis on self-help, racial solidarity, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, and the accumulation of wealth. It also commonly involved an emphasis upon patriarchal authority but the history of AKA shows that some women refuted this aspect of the ideology.

Begun in 1908 at historically black Howard University as the first sorority for African Americans, AKA enjoyed a long history of activism. In the first years of its existence, AKA marched for women’s suffrage, cooperated with the Travelers Aid

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273 The National Association of Colored Women, the largest organization of black women in the early twentieth century, formed in 1896 in response to sexual slur uttered by a white Missouri newsman who was attempting to refute Ida B. Wells-Barnett’s claims about lynching in the South. The slur was the spark that led to the NACW’s creation, with the group focusing on the uplift of the black race under the guidance of Mary Church Terrell, later involved with the AAUW. See Cash and Jacqueline Jones Royster, ed., *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 37.
274 This definition of racial uplift is drawn from Gaines’s work and he argues that uplift also included support for patriarchal authority. See Gaines, 2.
Society to help migrating southern blacks adjust to northern life, and continued its founders’ support of the NAACP.

The sorority quickly expanded to mixed race campuses, part of a widespread effort by African American greek organizations to foster community, self-respect, and a cohesive cultural unity for students on campuses where they were greatly outnumbered by their white peers. An active chapter maintained a minimum of eight members. The Beta chapter (1913) served all of Chicago, while the Gamma chapter opened at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana (1914). Epsilon (1916) covered all of Boston, the Theta chapter (1921) at Ohio State University joined a few years later and Lambda (1922) drew together women throughout New York City. These citywide chapters contained both undergraduate and graduate members. The first graduate chapter, Eta (renamed Alpha Omega) began in Cleveland, Ohio in 1918. Graduate chapters have traditionally been more active than their undergraduate counterparts, partly because they have a double-life source of members that ensures stability but also because they draw women attracted by the service reputation of AKA. By 1928, the sorority had spread from coast to coast, with 43 graduate and 35 undergraduate chapters located in 21 states.276


276 “Double-life” means new and existing members of the sorority. Any chapter can initiate new members. Women were eligible for graduate chapter membership even if no undergraduate AKA
Much more than a club for the African American elite, AKA promoted social and political service as part of its mission. The stated purpose of the sorority involved cultivating high ethical and scholastic standards, alleviating problems concerning women, and being of service to all people. This goal did not change over time. Sounding much like AAUW members, AKA members declared decade after decade that the educational achievements of the sorority members obliged them to participate in community affairs.

In 1949, AKA Supreme Basileus [President] Edna Over Gray congratulated new graduates by telling them that they held a great responsibility to use their training to attack prejudice and to develop better human relations. Twenty-one years later, Barbara Davis, editor of the Ivy Leaf, echoed Gray’s call: “Few would deny the general belief that we as black women of high moral, scholastic, and ethical standards are accountable, liable, and responsible to our fellow blacks, our youth, our conscience and our sorority in terms of how well we have examined the issues, defined the tasks, organized the strategies, and

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277 The national organization sometimes moved ahead of the membership, some of whom would have apparently preferred just a social club. Civil rights pioneer Septima Clark complained in 1980 that “quite a number of my sorority members are still afraid of me and still worry about the articles that come out in the paper saying I helped to get black teachers in Charleston or I helped to get equalization of salaries for black teachers.” See Cynthia Stokes Brown, ed. Ready From Within: Septima Clark and the Civil Rights Movement (Navarro, Calif.: Wild Trees Press, 1986), 121.

278 The sorority repeatedly uses the word “mankind” and I have chosen to modernize the terminology except when directly quoting. Walter Anderson, Ivy: An Unauthorized History of Alpha Kappa Alpha (Arlington, Texas: Milk and Honey, [2002?]).


implemented the action for . . . greater service to mankind.” As the educated elite within the black community, the women of AKA bore the responsibility for the betterment of the race. The sorority acted as medium through which its members could employ their training to help everyone enjoy a more rewarding life.

Typical of sororities and fraternities, graduate members controlled decisions by running the national office and exercising great power at yearly conventions. The sorority commonly worked through chapters, but the national officers frequently committed the organization to activities that did not require chapter labor. Chapter activities were guided towards goals that included improved health, civil rights, effective social action, and community service.

AKA members were not typical American women, black or white. The sorority conducted a survey of its membership in 1964, slightly past the midpoint year of this study. While about half of AKA members were married, the average sorority member was aged about forty, owned her seven-room home, and served as an officer in one of the three other organizations to which she belonged. Over a third of members had regular part-time domestic help and two-thirds earned more than $10,000 per year in 1964 dollars ($55,600 in 2001 dollars.) Typical of the limited job opportunities for women in this era, sixty four percent of sorority members were teachers or educational administrators. The others who worked outside of the home

were employed as physicians, lawyers, social workers, business owners, and secretaries. In terms of wealth and education, AKA membership was similar to the rank and file of AAUW but more privileged than most ANA or CWU members. The sorority had 219 chapters and 6,657 active members in 1950. By 1975, it had over 50,000 members, with 15,224 classified as active.

As membership rose, AKA became increasingly activist. In the 1920s, the sorority decided to develop nationwide programs and introduced the *Ivy Leaf* magazine to inform the membership of sorority actions. In 1934, AKA began lobbying for anti-lynching legislation and an end to the federal government’s laissez faire attitude toward white on black violence. In its anti-lynching efforts, AKA lagged a few decades behind other organized black women’s groups. The delay is not explained in AKA literature, but it may be attributable to the organization’s slowness to enter the political realm, its relatively small size through the early years of the century, and the involvement of members in other groups that were fighting lynching. Although it embraced anti-lynching some three decades after Ida B. Wells-Barnett had first attempted to marshal African American support for that goal, AKA stayed in the field longer than the NAACP, the largest African American

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284 Parker, 182
285 I do not have a listing of all the other groups that included AKA members but many members did belong to the NAACP.
organization of the day. The sorority would continue to lobby the government until 1953, some years after the NAACP had abandoned the effort.\textsuperscript{286}

By the 1930s, AKA wanted to do more than just address specific issues as they arose. It wanted to build a movement of African American women to open all sorts of doors. The conservative and massive National Association of Colored Women (NACW) promoted racial uplift, primarily through good works at the local level. It did not prepare a comprehensive attack on the institutional and political structures that permitted racism. In 1935, the sorority joined with thirteen other women’s organizations to establish a new group, the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), to promote black women’s concerns at the national level. The NCNW aimed to eliminate segregation and discrimination, especially as they affected black women. Specifically, the Council’s founders thought that constant publicity and lobbying would make it impossible for businesses and government to ignore black women and, as a result, leadership positions would become available for these women to fill.\textsuperscript{287} AKA backed the NCNW in the belief that the council would “give our


Negro women a status.”  

Just before making the first parliamentary motion to establish the new organization, AKA Addie Hunton bluntly stated her reasons for doing so, “There is not a great group behind our women to push them.” The NACW had become too deeply involved in local matters and too much oriented towards self-help for it to serve as an authoritative national voice, in the opinion of AKA leaders. As the sorority’s support of NCNW indicates, its members believed that enhanced status for black women brought the benefit of a substantial role on the national stage for black women.

The success of NCNW prompted AKA to consider forming other umbrella organizations. Like CWU, it often worked through coalitions of organizations with similar goals. The push for civil rights that came out of World War II prompted AKA to develop a new organization. The ACHR was begun in 1948 by AKA to unite the greek organizations in a non-partisan civil rights lobbying effort and help blacks fight for democracy at home.  

ACHR developed in the wake of President Harry S. Truman’s 1948 request for Congress to enact a civil rights program and the endorsement of the national Democratic Party for such a program. Truman, prompted by disgust for postwar anti-black violence in the South, became the first president to offer a civil rights program. He called for lynching to be made a federal offense,

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289 The founding fraternities and sororities were AKA, Alpha Phi Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Phi Beta Sigma, Sigma Gamma Rho, and Zeta Phi Beta. In 1949, Kappa Alpha Psi joined. See Parker, 197.
demanded the end of segregation in interstate transportation, asked for the elimination of poll tax requirements for voting, and requested the creation of a statutory fair employment practices committee. Later that year, Truman issued executive orders banning discrimination in the armed forces and in the federal bureaucracy. Although Truman’s legislative civil rights program died fairly quickly in the face of fierce Southern Dixiecrat and Republican opposition, the support of the president and the national Democratic Party for anti-discrimination efforts gave impetus to the civil rights movement.290

The ACHR, with history teacher and AKA Edna Over Gray as its head and Elmer Henderson as director of staff, represented a membership of over 70,000 people.291 ACHR objectives matched some of Truman’s goals including passage of the Fair Employment Act; abolition of segregation and the assurance of equality of training and opportunity in the various Armed Services; desegregation of the armed forces, public transportation, and public accommodations; passage of the anti-lynching and anti-poll tax bills; passage of voting rights bills; federal aid to education with protections against discrimination; revision of the cloture rule to eliminate the filibuster in the United States Senate; abolition of racial discrimination in

immigration and naturalization; and federal appointments of African-Americans.\textsuperscript{292} AKA leaders urged the membership to support the ACHR by forming local councils on human rights; lobbying Congressional representatives and senators; and making every sorority woman and fraternity brother into a registered voter.\textsuperscript{293} The ACHR took credit for a number of achievements, including passage of a 1954 expansion to the Social Security Act to cover domestic workers, many of whom were African American women. Through the ACHR, the sorority also became involved in two notable court cases.

In conjunction with the NAACP, the ACHR attempted to overturn the notorious \textit{Plessy v. Ferguson} case that established the principle of separate but equal.\textsuperscript{294} This effort led to support for the plaintiff in \textit{Henderson v. United States} (1949). In 1942, Elmer Henderson, then an employee of the federal Fair Employment Practices Commission, attempted to use the Southern Railway to get from Washington, D.C. to Birmingham to investigate discrimination in war production. The railroad refused to serve him in its dining car since all the black tables were full. \textit{Henderson} outlawed such segregation in dining cars thereby helping to set the stage

\textsuperscript{292} Edna Over Gray later became Edna Over Campbell. No Author, “Your ACHR News,” \textit{Ivy Leaf} (March 1951), 8; Giddings, 222.


for the 1954 *Brown* decision banning public school segregation. The cases argued collectively before the U.S. Supreme Court as *Brown* included a District of Columbia case, *Bolling v. Sharpe*, in which the ACHR had joined with other organizations as *amicus curiae* [friend of the court] in support of the plaintiffs. This second case involved Spottswood Bollings, Jr., a twelve-year old in 1951, who had been prohibited from attending a well-equipped white school and instead went to a black school with a science lab that consisted of one Bunsen burner and a bowl of goldfish. As its support of *Henderson* and *Bolling* indicates, AKA not only took a strong stand against segregation but helped to lead the fight.

The NAACP could not have fought so fiercely without the backing of women’s groups. As other scholars have noted, the organizational base provided by black women helped the NAACP survive the onslaught of racial terror and red-baiting that followed the civil rights victories of the early 1950s and which had dramatically reduced the organization’s membership rolls. AKA’s founders had worked for the NAACP and as time passed, the membership continued its legacy of

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297 Greene, 35.
support for this civil rights group.\textsuperscript{298} One of AKA’s fundraising drives for the NAACP in the early 1960s collected $440,000, an especially substantial amount for that time.\textsuperscript{299} This grassroots support put AKA at some risk.

As one of a handful of organizations bankrolling the NAACP’s efforts, AKA would become linked with communism in the minds of many Southerners.\textsuperscript{300} After the \textit{Brown} decision, Southern anti-communism efforts substantially increased in the belief that Communist forces must have guided the Supreme Court to its controversial ruling. Other conservatives took advantage of the Cold War climate to engage in red-baiting to help divide and weaken liberal activists. A purported link between the Red Menace and civil rights prompted the Georgia attorney general to charge that the NAACP had “allowed itself to become part and parcel of the Communist conspiracy.”\textsuperscript{301} Southern state legislatures established variously named state commissions, like the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, that saw a Communist conspiracy behind civil-rights agitation. Several states passed measures to outlaw or harass the NAACP and this legislation would remain on the books to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item The other organizations lending significant financial support to the NAACP were: Links, Inc.; Falstaff Brewing Company; National Education Association; American Teachers Association; AFL-CIO; the Masonic lodges; Omega Psi Phi and Alpha Phi Alpha. See Warren D. St. James, \textit{NAACP: Triumphs of a Pressure Group 1909-1980} (Smithtown, NY: Exposition Press, 1980), 144.
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enforce white supremacy well into the 1960s.\textsuperscript{302} As an intended effect of all this tumult, the efforts of AKA members to promote civil rights became immeasurably more difficult.

The sorority commonly worked through umbrella organizations like ACHR and NCNW. In the years after \textit{Brown}, the ACHR stayed true to its college roots by supporting the massive student activism ignited when North Carolina A&T University students launched a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro in 1960. When students took seats at white-only lunch counters, white patrons and employees became nervous and confused. In most sit-ins, the manager would simply close the restaurant for the day, losing a day’s worth of business. As the demonstrations spread, so did resistance to them. Groups of angry whites would surround the demonstrators, taunting and shouting at the activists and often burning them with cigarettes or dumping ketchup on their heads. Police would then arrest the demonstrators but the restaurant still lost considerable business. The sit-in was a potent symbolic and economic weapon against segregation. However, the national NAACP refused to recognize the significance of the demonstrations chiefly out of pique that the local NAACP chief in Greensboro had called in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) to help the students. The NAACP did provide attorneys later in

\textsuperscript{302} Fried, 175.
1960 to defend over 1600 students in twelve southern states who had been arrested for sit-in demonstrations.  

The ACHR did not hesitate to back the sit-ins. During the 1961-62 school year, it led a drive for funds to help students who had suffered financially for participating in such desegregation efforts. The ACHR disbanded in 1963 with its assets distributed to groups working at the grass roots level to achieve the same goals as the council, specifically the Prince Edward County Free School Association, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.  

The disbanding of ACHR did not mean that AKA had abandoned civil rights activism. In 1963, the brutal treatment accorded to girls and young women engaged in civil rights demonstrations prompted twelve national organizations affiliated with the NCNW, including AKA, to develop a Youth Emergency Fund (YEF). The demonstrators had reported sexual abuses in jails. The male-dominated civil rights organizations neglected to address the sexual brutalization of black females, leaving the women’s groups to address the particular problems of these demonstrators.

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303 Dr. George Simkins, head of the local NAACP, wholeheartedly supported the students. He called CORE because he believed that the Greensboro sit-in was too small for the national NAACP and he wanted any help that he could get for the students. The national NAACP refused to recognize the significance of the Greensboro sit-ins and insisted that the sit-ins were spontaneous, beginning in 1958 in Oklahoma City. See Miles Wolff, Lunch at the 5 & 10 (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1970), 36, 161-163. For the NAACP version of sit-in history, see Langston Hughes, Fight For Freedom: The Story of the NAACP (New York: W.W. Norton, 1962), 186-188.

304 Parker, 199.

305 No author, “A Call to Help Female Civil Rights Demonstrators,” Ivy Leaf (September 1963), 13.
AKA had no intention of restricting the role that women could play in the civil rights movement by encouraging them to stay off the front lines. The YEF gathered volunteers to conduct inspections of jails and provide assistance to women who had sacrificed personal and vocational responsibilities to work for the good of the race. The second objective proved easier to fulfill than the first one since none of the various black women’s organizations who played a part in the YEF apparently ever gained access to jails run by racist Southern sheriffs.

Like black women of earlier eras, AKA members worked in the community to confront and challenge racism. With their programs, the members challenged structures and practices that kept the black communities powerless and disadvantaged while strengthening the scaffolding and behaviors that made the communities strong. In the 1950s, this persistent challenge to American society involved the Cold War.

Americans simply could not demonstrate the superiority of the capitalist system to the communist system as long as racism ruled. In a play on words that capitalized upon the nation’s obsession with national security, the 1951 program emphasis of AKA centered on “Mobilizing for Human Security.” Explained Laura Lovelace, AKA president in that year, sorority members had to promote integration in order to help maintain national security. “We must mobilize our spiritual forces, as our nation mobilizes its manpower, in behalf of a better world,” she wrote to the
membership. In case the sorority skipped over Lovelace’s message, a few pages away in the same issue of the *Ivy Leaf* lay the headline “American Must Decide,” in big, bold, all-capital letters. “Our leaders act today on the mistaken assumption that world communism can be stopped by military force alone,” the anonymous author wrote. She further added, “Too little basic analysis of the reason for communism’s success to date has been made. . . The luxury of segregation and racial discrimination in America must be abolished. Here is the Achilles heel of our great armament program.”

To win the Cold War, the United States needed to persuade Third World nations to oppose communism but the people of color who ruled these nations could not be expected to support a system that treated them with contempt.

While some sorority leaders touted integration as the best weapon with which to battle the insidious communists, others echoed AAUW’s Mary Church Terrell by stressing that communism could best be fought by extending voting rights to African Americans. AKA Lee Anna Shelburne, putting pen to paper in 1963, called for a “desegregated society in our time” and then addressed the recurring AKA theme of responsibility to society. She stated that AKAs were expected to be good citizens and that citizenship required participation in the government by regular voting and by accepting occasional special duties. Shelburne argued that the preservation of

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308 Lee Anna Shelburne, “Changing With the Times: Moving Forward with Our Youth,” *Ivy Leaf* (September 1963), 3.
freedom in the atomic age required an informed and disciplined citizenry, a point that was also made in that same year by Julia Purnell. Writing to the membership in her capacity as Supreme Basileus [president], Purnell saw the U.S. standing at a crossroads of history. It could choose mediocrity by pandering to weakness or it could choose greatness by abolishing racism, “our most serious domestic evil.”  

The Alpha Rho Omega chapter of AKA applauded President Dwight Eisenhower’s 1957 decision to send federal troops to escort children to school in Little Rock because integration led to “the survival of our democratic form of government and respect for our country’s leadership in the world” as well as the opportunity for America to “outstrip the world in her contribution to . . . rich and peaceful living.”  

In essence, the AKA leaders and members articulated an opinion that the U.S. State Department had voiced repeatedly since 1949: that American racism served as an obstacle to Cold War goals.  

The Cold War also prompted AKA to consider employment issues and it struggled to prevent whites from becoming entrenched in the sciences at the expense of black would-be scientists. The launch of Sputnik, the world’s first man-made satellite, by the Soviet Union in 1957 terrified the people of the United States and

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310 Alpha Rho Omega Chapter, “A Letter to the President of the United States,” Ivy Leaf (December 1957), 25.
helped change the thrust of the Cold War. As the 184-pound satellite spun around the earth, Americans realized that the U.S. faced an enormous threat to its position as world leader. Just a few months earlier, the Soviets had fired the world’s first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and the communists took every opportunity to tout their scientific achievements to an admiring global audience. As anyone who looked to the sky could see, the U.S. no longer held first place in science and engineering. Worried Americans spotted gaps in everything from missile production to the teaching of mathematics. As an organization tied to higher education, AKA capitalized upon these Cold War fears to better the position of African Americans. Unlike civil rights organizations like the NCNW or the NAACP, the sorority could directly influence college women.

When job discrimination against African Americans eventually came to end, blacks had to be ready to take advantage of the new opportunities. If few African Americans were trained to enter newly opened fields then this victory would

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312 An ICBM travels along a trajectory of several hundreds of miles at a speed many times that of sound. The U.S. Army developed an anti-ballistic missile system, Nike-Zeus, in 1959 that could theoretically shoot down only twenty-five percent of incoming ICBMs. The U.S. conducted the first successful testing of an anti-missile missile in 1962, five years after the U.S.S.R. produced its first ICBMs. Bernard Brodie and Fawn M. Brodie, From Crossbow to H-Bomb: The Evolution of the Weapons and Tactics of Warfare (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 297-301

313 The missile gap controversy, which dominated the national security debates of the late 1950s and 1960, came about because of Soviet braggadocio about the ICBM, U.S. intelligence failures, and the desire of American military services for more money for weapons. As John F. Kennedy discovered upon entering the White House, the gap did not actually exist. Desmond Ball, Politics and Force Levels: The Strategic Missile Program of the Kennedy Administration (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988); Walter LaFeber, America, Russia, and the Cold War (New York: John Wiley, 1980), 199.
essentially be for naught as disciplines such as engineering and chemistry would effectively remain white-only. As early as 1953, the sorority urged its undergraduate members to “consider and prepare for effective occupational integration” in the sciences.\textsuperscript{314} AKA had a tradition of attracting teachers and social workers, a history that caused some amount of regret among many of the sorority members who wanted the best and the brightest of black women to enter scientific fields.\textsuperscript{315}

Categorizing the 1950s and 1960s as the years of the physicist and technician while predicting that the 1970s would belong to the biochemist, AKA members recognized that a substantial gap existed between white and black educational attainment. Between 1940 and 1960, 4.4 percent of blacks completed four years of high school while 15.1 percent of whites earned high school degrees. In 1960, 1.3 percent of African Americans held college degrees while 4.9 percent of whites completed four or more years of college.\textsuperscript{316}

In 1963, AKA decided to capitalize upon the newfound national obsession with scientific and technical education. Women were unlikely to switch to the sciences in great numbers because the humanities offered better immediate job prospects. Employers in the early 1960s were simply not especially keen to hire

\textsuperscript{314} Grace Hale Jordan et al., “Resolutions Passed at Boule and Joint Conventions,” \textit{Ivy Leaf} (March 1953), 5.
female scientists. However, the many AKAs who taught in high schools and those who would enter the teaching ranks could steer their students toward the sciences. AKA leaders urged members to advise children to take high school classes in biology, chemistry, algebra, geometry, and trigonometry as well as the courses in history, English, and government. It urged AKA members in social work to get youngsters to school and “teach the meaning of the new changes” to parents. 317 was a considerable educational gap between the races. AKA addressed this gap. 318 Those AKAs who did break through the barriers to become physicists and chemists could then serve as role models and mentors for a new generation of would-be scientists. As member Nan E. McGehee stated, “We must be prepared for the opportunities which are coming soon and we must be prepared to force the opportunities which do not now appear to be coming soon.” 319

AKA had a long-standing belief in ameliorating the effects of poverty through employment opportunities. As one of its first programs, AKA launched a Vocational Guidance Program in 1923 to prepare young people who were not on a college track for new and varied avenues of employment. White America may have ignored the poor, as social critic Michael Harrington persuasively argued in his 1962 book The Other America, but black America could not forget the less-fortunate because so

317 Leadie Clark, “Random Thoughts, Disjointed Pleas,” Ivy Leaf (December 1963), 6
318 Goldfield, 117.
many of them were part of the African American community. Harrington claimed that while most Americans enjoyed rising affluence, more than 40 million people had surrendered all hope of bettering their lives in the knowledge that they had no realistic chance to enter the ranks of the middle class. Economic concerns ranked just below racial problems as the main topic of conversation among African Americans in the 1960s. In this decade, poverty also began to attract considerable attention from the federal government and it is this development that would bring AKA into the anti-poverty Job Corps.

In the 1960s, the federal government reoriented its efforts from the 1950s focus on expanding the supply of highly skilled and professional labor to equipping every person to fill some sort of job. It also had become apparent to many, including President John F. Kennedy, that African Americans could not benefit from advances in civil rights without special economic assistance. In January 1964, the publication of *One-Third of a Nation* by the President’s Task Force on Manpower Conservation revealed that the Armed Forces regularly rejected one of every three potential draftees because of mental and physical deficiencies that resulted from a

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320 Donald R. Mathews and James W. Prothro examined the public problems talked about by black and white southerners. In order, whites focused on community (22%), economic (17%), political and governmental (16%), racial (15%), international (15%), and vague, generalized problems (7%). Blacks concerned themselves with racial (26%), economic (23%), community (20%), and political and governmental problems (9%). Community concerns included such matters as roads. See Mathews and Prothro, *Negroes and the New Southern Politics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1966), 42-43.

impoverished upbringing. Shortly thereafter, Lyndon Johnson pushed an Economic Opportunity Act through Congress that would bolster the economic position of whites and blacks alike. Johnson, with his War on Poverty, aimed to end poverty in America within a generation.

The Job Corps, part of the War on Poverty, provided young men and women with the skills necessary to succeed in the workplace. In the peak year of 1967, the Job Corps had 42,000 enrollees. Most of these enrollees were male and a substantial proportion of students were African American. Women were underrepresented at less than 25 percent of participants. Job Corps planners had focused only on male unemployment in the assumption that work force participation of women would be interrupted by marriage and pregnancy. U.S. Representative Edith Green, a longtime women’s advocate, pushed the planners to consider the prospects of young women destined to become heads of households. The Job Corps would provide basic education and work experience to advance a youth as far as he or she could go in six months to a year’s time. In 1966, there were 6 large (1,000-3,000 enrollees) men’s centers, more than 80 smaller (100-250) conservation centers that were exclusively for men, and 17 women’s centers of medium size (300-1000). All these centers provided residential facilities, health care, and counseling in addition to their

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educational and vocational programs. Participants received monthly living allowances.\textsuperscript{323} 

In the 1960s, AKA leaders decided that the organization should again embark upon some type of anti-poverty program. Domestic service and farm work, the traditional occupations of the black poor, paid poorly and offered no hope of advancement. Additionally and just as importantly to AKA, such workers generally lacked the educational skills that would enable them to work for the advancement of the race.\textsuperscript{324} In 1965, the sorority joined President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty. The sorority leaped at this chance to pull women into better economic straits. Supreme Basileus Julia Purnell obtained a contract to operate a center that would annually serve 325 women who were to be housed in the University House, a six-story residence hall located near University Circle on the east side of Cleveland, Ohio.\textsuperscript{325} Purnell announced AKA’s sponsorship of the Job Corps to members by declaring that women had a special responsibility to mold the future so that the next generation would not “fritter away the values we cherish so much.”\textsuperscript{326} Purnell’s successor as Supreme Basileus, Larzette G. Hale voiced her support for the Job Corps by arguing that AKA must promote equality in all areas of life by helping women and

\textsuperscript{323} Sar A. Levitan and Benjamin H. Johnston, \textit{The Job Corps: A Social Experiment That Works} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 4, 16.
girls become “more economically productive and socially useful” citizens of the United States.\textsuperscript{327}

The War on Poverty gave AKA an opportunity to directly and significantly change the fate of generations of Americans at little comparative risk. The government, not the sorority, financed the Job Corps center on a cost plus basis. This program expected to open new opportunities for young men and women, aged between sixteen and twenty-one, who lacked the basic education and work skills to find permanent employment. To become eligible for the Job Corps, a young woman had to be both out of school and unable to find work.\textsuperscript{328} In short, AKA members attempted to better the lives of a challenging population.\textsuperscript{329} AKA officials did not choose the women who enrolled in its Jobs Corps. A private organization, Women in Community Service (WICS) recruited and screened applicants. WICS included representatives from CWU and the NCNW. Both organizations counted AKA members among their ranks so the sorority did have an indirect say in Job Corps recruitment.\textsuperscript{330}

AKA members remained dedicated to the Jobs Corps for twenty years, despite cutbacks in the program. The Job Corps lost government backing in an increasingly

\textsuperscript{327} Parker, 184.  
\textsuperscript{329} Levitan and Mangum, 187-188.  
\textsuperscript{330} WICS consisted of women from the National Council of Catholic Women, the National Council of Jewish Women, the National Council of Negro Women, and United Church Women. No Author, “Alpha Kappa Alpha Embraces the Challenges of the Sixties: Residential Training Center for Women a Reality,” \textit{Ivy Leaf} (February – March 1965), 9.
conservative climate because it had an expensive reputation and considerable public
relations problems, which included reports of violence and predominantly black
The Job Corps, despite its many enumerated problems, is one of the successes of the
Great Society.\footnote{An in-depth historical study of the Job Corps is badly needed. The few examinations of the program are dated or incomplete. It is difficult to make a judgment about the Job Corps without such a study. However, the longevity of the program does speak to its accomplishments.}
It is still in existence today, unlike some of Johnson’s other programs. Although AKA is no longer involved, the organization can claim credit for bettering the lives of women who had little hope of ever escaping the cycle of poverty. According to a Louis Harris poll conducted in 1968, a great majority of former corps members were seen by their friends and associates as more confident of success in the future, better able to make plans for the future, and more positive toward the outside world.\footnote{The Harris and Cain studies referred to “corpsmen,” which I assume includes both male and female graduates of the program. O’Neill, 36-38.}

While men in the twentieth century focused on public protests and a legalistic strategy, women’s organizations often took a different approach to the betterment of the black race. Less involved with formal politics, black women devoted their attentions to promoting change within the black community. The family roles of women made them responsible for helping the family to adapt to a hostile environment, leading to such activities as AKA’s support of the Job Corps. This
emphasis on community work shaped much of AKA’s activism throughout the twentieth century.

Boosting the quality of African American home life and educating the mothers of the race were goals traditionally held by the black women’s movement. Racial uplift had its basis in a theory that whites judged blacks according to the lowest elements of the race. Therefore, for blacks to be able to acquire rights, the standard of living of the working class had to be raised. Since women bore primary responsibility for the maintenance of the home and the care of children, the fate of all African Americans depended upon the ability of the distaff side to perfectly perform the domestic arts. Working class blacks received cooking, cleaning, and personal care lessons from their betters. As both Floris Barnett Cash and Deborah Gray White have argued, the local focus on uplift activities seemed to many black women activists to be an inadequate response to the disastrous position of African American families during the Great Depression and a tepid response to the inadequate help provided to blacks by the New Deal.

Pressures to abandon racial uplift in the face of Great Depression fears and New Deal inadequacies did not banish this objective from the minds of black sorority

334 Tuskegee Institute also used “Lifting as We Climb” as its motto and the women’s organization likely copied it because Margaret Murray (Mrs. Booker T.) Washington helped establish the NACW. The influence of Tuskegee and Washington can be seen in the emphasis that the early black women’s movement placed upon bettering home life and teaching domestic skills. See Linda Rochell Lane, A Documentary of Mrs. Booker T. Washington (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 187.

activists but the criticisms may have prompted a shift to less patronizing activities. The sorority began efforts to boost the health of African Americans in the 1930s with the Mississippi Health Project. This Great Depression program, under the leadership of Dr. Dorothy Ferebee, began with the aim of immunizing children throughout the Delta and incidentally providing help to anyone who came to a clinic. By providing basic medical care and nutritional advice, it ultimately bettered the lives of 15,000 black Mississippians. The Mississippi Health Project ended in 1941 as a casualty of gasoline rationing during World War II but AKA’s desire to better the well being of the African American community remained undiminished.

With an embedded criticism of working class habits, racial uplift proved a tricky ideology to promote. AKA struggled through the years with the dilemma of how to raise poor blacks to the level of the middle class without driving these same people away from AKA assistance efforts. To some AKA women, racial uplift meant helping the less fortunate by providing them with the skills necessary to advance and the good health necessary to take advantage of opportunities. To other AKA women, racial uplift meant indulging one’s ego. Ida Jackson, the founder of the Mississippi Health Project, complained about the “air of noblesse oblige” assumed by many

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337 Ferebee recalled that the health project was “labeled by those racist Mississippians as a program organized by meddlesome, communist black women, coming into their Delta to stir up trouble and incite tenant farmers.” Tom Ward, “Medical Missionaries of the Delta: Dr. Dorothy Ferebee and the Mississippi Health Project, 1935-41,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 63.3 (Fall 2001): 194.
participating sorority members. Infuriated by “snobs,” she described a “Better than Thou” attitude that had been assumed by many of the AKAs.\textsuperscript{338}

Racial uplift may have been benign in intent but it had unmistakable classist implications in practice. As Deborah Gray White has noted, it made working class black women hesitant to collaborate with elite African American women. Classism may have also have determined the very activities that AKA conducted.\textsuperscript{339} The sorority never again attempted a large-scale social service effort like the Mississippi Health Project that required numbers of members to interact for extended periods of time with their darker-skinned brothers and sisters.\textsuperscript{340} Year later, in 1969, sorority members would echo Ida Jackson by complaining that the elitism of AKA fostered “pettiness, animosity, and useless competition among Black People.”\textsuperscript{341} Clearly, sharp divisions within the race remained an ongoing cause for concern. Reluctance on the part of many members to risk personal involvement with antagonistic denizens of the lower class or a simple refusal on the part of AKAs to work so closely with the working class may have led the sorority to adopt programs that were more hands-off.

Beginning in 1945, the sorority sponsored a National Health Office that advised members to get involved with health and welfare resources in their local

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{338} White, 159.
\item \textsuperscript{339} The AKA Job Corps project, discussed in later section, did not ask sorority members to drive to Cleveland to spend weeks training working class youth. Members made financial contributions to back the effort with only a very few leaders negotiating race, color, and class boundaries face to face with the Corpswomen.
\item \textsuperscript{340} The anti-poverty program did not require such personal involvement by AKA members with members of the black working class.
\item \textsuperscript{341} No Author, “Is the Black Greek System Relevant Today?,” \textit{Ivy Leaf} (May-June 1969), 33.
\end{itemize}
communities and to plan some sort of health activity in conjunction with existing agencies. The National Health Office ended in 1952 when AKA decided to focus its efforts on grants-in-aid to promote significant ongoing research. It specifically aided investigations into child development and sickle cell anemia, an inherited, chronic illness that predominantly strikes African Americans. While the underprivileged may have had their hackles raised by AKA volunteers, no one is likely to have objected to money for scientific inquiries. The grants also permitted sorority members to do good from a comfortable distance.

Although the new national focus centered on sponsoring research, local chapters continued their strong interest in social service work. National AKA encouraged local health committees to pay particular attention to community problems that affected medical care facilities, health services, recreation, welfare services, and employment. One chapter responded by establishing a program that aimed to improve dental hygiene practices among school children while offering financial assistance to help needy children with severe dental problems. Another chapter, in San Diego in 1957, helped eradicate polio in the United States by offering polio shots at the home of a member. Despite the discovery of a polio vaccine in

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343 Parker, 183.
345 Unknown, “Epsilon XI Omega Sponsors Inter-racial Project,” Ivy Leaf (June 1957), 6.
1954, polio epidemics still occurred because racial minorities had difficulty affording both the time off from work and the money to pay for doctor visits that were necessary for obtaining the multiple shots required by the killed-virus Salk vaccine.\(^{346}\) Although some children received vaccinations in schools, many did not. The March of Dimes ran publicity campaigns to impress upon parents the importance of receiving all three polio shots until the 1961 one-shot Sabin vaccine made such efforts unnecessary.\(^{347}\) AKA piggybacked upon this vaccination promotion. These AKA programs aided the working poor without condescending to them. Nothing about these various efforts proved particularly controversial, but then AKA adopted a new program.

Giving grants for health-related research and pushing members to become health leaders reflects a determination within AKA to uplift the black community. This great desire among sorority members to better the condition and raise the status of African Americans led AKA to become one of the national organizations conducting cooperative projects with the Planned Parenthood Federation, a voluntary reproductive health care organization.

\(^{346}\) The vaccine developed by Jonas Salk in 1954 required three shots to become fully effective. Albert Sabin’s vaccine, developed in 1961, used a weakened live virus and only required one shot.

\(^{347}\) The March of Dimes began as the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. In one of its most popular fundraising campaigns, people annually sent dimes to the White House to celebrate polio victim Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s birthday. The organization became popularly known as the March of Dimes and eventually officially changed its name.
Founded in 1916 by Margaret Sanger as the first birth control clinic in the United States, the Planned Parenthood Federation of America came under heavy attack by some black leaders who saw it as an attempt to reduce the numbers of poor blacks. The next few decades witnessed deep divisions over family planning among male-dominated black organizations. The NAACP, the National Urban League and leading black newspapers like the *Pittsburgh Courier* voiced support for birth control in the 1930s as a means of helping the race survive the devastating economic climate of the Great Depression. Black male nationalists throughout the twentieth century, however, linked birth control to eugenics, specifically the desire to reduce the reproduction of the least desirable part of the population. The male-centered Black Power movement in the 1960s would compare birth control to lynching as another white weapon to exterminate blacks, while some local NAACP chapters in this decade denounced the Pill as an instrument of genocide. These anti-birth control opinions resonated within the African American community and complicated efforts to establish family planning on a national scale.

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348 Sanger coined the term “birth control” and founded the Birth Control Federation of America. Much to the fury of Sanger, this organization dropped the term “birth control” because of its radical implications of reproductive limitation and became the family-spacing focused Planned Parenthood in 1942. I am using the more familiar title. Ellen Chesler, *Woman of Valor: Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 393.
lives of women by permitting them to control their own bodies never became an item on the agenda of any male-dominated organization.

The allegation of the nationalists that birth control proponents sought to render extinct the black race had considerable basis in fact, making the AKA stance in support of family planning particularly striking. As public health officers realized during the Great Depression of the 1930s, black families had the highest birth rate in the country and poor people did not commonly respond to economic pressure by lowering their birth rates. Fearful of being overpopulated by blacks, racist whites pushed birth control efforts. The South, the sector of the country with the highest percentage of African Americans, contained the first states that offered family planning services through public health programs. The sterilization of black women without informed consent in some locales, particularly those in the South, was well known in the black community and added fuel to the genocide argument. Women were rendered infertile as surgical practice for medical residents or because they or their families received government aid and their obstetrician-gynecologists hoped to save taxpayer money by reducing future welfare rolls. One federal judge estimated the number of poor women sterilized under federally funded programs at

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100,000 to 150,000, half of whom were black.\textsuperscript{352} While unethical physicians played God, nineteen legislatures in the 1950s and 1960s proposed a flurry of bills to control the fertility of irresponsible women, presumed to be black because of the racist and sexist assumption that black women were especially promiscuous. In 1958, Mississippi state legislator David H. Glass offered “An Act to Discourage Immorality of Unmarried Females by Providing for Sterilization of the Unwed Mother under Conditions of the Act; and for Related Purposes.” While the bill could have theoretically applied to a woman of any race, Glass emphasized that he targeted black women because of his belief that they bore illegitimate children with the intent of making profit from government child welfare assistance.\textsuperscript{353} AKA members could not be unaware of the deplorable history of efforts to control the African American population.

Yet black women were not as quick as many black men to condemn family planning. Women have simply not shared the disdain and hostility of many men for family planning, possibly because the responsibility for the care of the family has traditionally fallen more heavily upon women than men. Black women supported birth control as early as 1918 when the Women’s Political Association of Harlem became the first African American organization to schedule lectures on the use of

\textsuperscript{352} The estimate was made in 1973, as part of the \textit{Relf} decision ending the decades-long practice of sterilization without consent. Dorothy Roberts, \textit{Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty} (New York: Pantheon, 1997), 93.

birth control. Jessie M. Rodrique found that local clubs and women’s organizations throughout the country, including the San Francisco chapter of AKA, distributed both information and supplies to an eager clientele.\textsuperscript{354} Such activities were not always legal. While the U.S. Court of Appeals in \textit{U.S. v. One Package of Japanese Pessaries} (1936) had effectively legalized the distribution of contraceptives for medical use by exempting physicians from the ban on the importation of birth control devices, many states had anti-contraceptive laws on the books that dated from the nineteenth century. Married couples who lived in states that banned birth control gained this right to family planning only with the 1965 Supreme Court ruling in \textit{Griswold v. Connecticut}, with unmarried persons achieving the same privileges in 1972.\textsuperscript{355} The principle of a right to privacy established in \textit{Griswold} would eventually lead to the legalization of abortion in the 1973 \textit{Roe v. Wade} decision.

For most of the twentieth century, the nation followed laws put on the books in the nineteenth century by moralist Anthony Comstock. These laws categorized birth control information as a form of pornography, therefore additionally complicating African American women’s efforts to discuss matters of sexuality. Black women had organized initially to fight the popular racist charge that they were all sexually promiscuous Jezebels. Public support for birth control therefore had both legal and personal risks.

\textsuperscript{354} Rodrique, 339-341.
Despite these dangers, black women by the 1940s had begun efforts to organize to increase the availability of birth control options. To women, access to family planning literally meant survival. The *Baltimore Afro-American* reported that women commonly used pencils, nails, and hatpins to induce abortions. While the newspaper aimed to shock the reading public, it also unintentionally informed black women how to end unwanted pregnancies. Many black women did use these techniques. Statistics on abortion among African Americans women in the days before *Roe* are scarce, but 28 percent of black women surveyed by a black doctor in Nashville in 1940 admitted to at least one abortion.\(^356\) Higher levels of poverty among African Americans than whites meant that fewer blacks could afford to pay a physician for a somewhat safer yet still illegal so-called “back-alley” abortion. As a result, black women were the victims of high-risk abortions disproportional to their numbers in the population.\(^357\) Eighty percent of the deaths caused by illegal abortions in New York in the 1960s involved black and Latina women. In Georgia between 1965 and 1967, the African American maternal death rate due to illegal abortion was fourteen times that for white women.\(^358\)

Black women had ample evidence that a lack of family planning options could lead directly to maternal death. Not surprisingly, a study of African-American women

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\(^{356}\) Rodrique, 335.

\(^{357}\) Ross, 161.

in Philadelphia in 1975 found that 40 to 60 percent were practicing birth control by 1940, indicating considerable voluntary use and approval of contraceptives.\footnote{Roberts, 83.} While some black men urged black women to bear children for the good of the race, a substantial number of women ignored this call.

AKA began to actively promote birth control in the 1940s through the health care activities of local chapters. The national organization first advocated birth control in 1951. For AKA to enter this debate meant engaging in a controversial activity but one that the women felt to be necessary for the maintenance of African American health and for strengthening the black community. Entering the fray also essentially meant mounting a feminist defense of contraception since a woman’s ability to control her fertility is essential to her freedom and her equal participation in society. The AKA handbook’s definition of health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being” not “merely the absence of disease or infirmity” is one that gave the women sufficient justification to engage in just the type of community uplift program that a partnership with Planned Parenthood promised.\footnote{[Margaret Blake?], “The Evolving Philosophy of Alpha Kappa Alpha’s Health Project, Ivy Leaf (December 1956), 38.} Additionally, as the 1950s opened, the sorority had in place a National Health Program that involved using education to encourage better standards of healthful living; increasing
health services; and cooperating with health agencies to bring services to the public. Cooperation with Planned Parenthood fit neatly into this program.

Historically, the opportunity to control reproduction has unchained women from biology thereby allowing them to obtain education and participate in the workforce. AKA members, all college educated women aspiring to put their degrees to good use by serving as community leaders, clearly understood that the demands of child care would reduce a woman’s ability to engage in activities outside of the home. Not coincidentally, a great many of AKA’s national leaders throughout the years have either been childfree or mothers to one- or two-child families. Physician Dorothy Ferebee, as one example, bore a son and daughter in 1931 then resumed an enormously activist life. Along with heading the Mississippi Health Project and serving as AKA Supreme Basileus [president] from 1939-1941, she authored a popular Planned Parenthood pamphlet, “Family Planning” that AKA distributed for years. Ferebee had a long-standing interest in women’s rights, served as president of the National Council of Negro Women from 1949-1953, promoted the Equal Rights Amendment, and wrapped up her career as the 1971-1974 chair of the Washington, D.C. Commission on the Status of Women. With a larger family, it is doubtful that Ferebee would have been able to accomplish as much as she did for the African

362 Parker, 6-15.
American community. With the accomplishments of women like Ferebee in mind, AKA promoted family planning.

To the sorority, birth control had nothing to do with race suicide and everything to do with uplifting the race through black women, but in the oppressive climate of the 1950s such an argument had to be couched carefully. In a 1951 report to the membership, AKA categorized birth control as “vital to the Negro family” because it offered the hope of dropping the infant and maternal death rates. In 1946, the infant death rate for the white population stood at 31.8 per 1000 live births; for blacks it was 49.5 or 56 percent higher. In the same year, the maternal death rate was 1.3 per 1000 live births for white mothers and 3.6 for black mothers, almost three times as high. While the increased black deaths can be attributed to a range of factors, including poor nutrition caused by poverty and poor medical care attributable to racial discrimination, AKA placed much of the blame on a lack of family planning.364 Grace Henson, head of the AKA National Health Program, argued that allowing a mother time to recover between births would “do much to lower these shocking figures.” Grace Hale, an AKA and a field consultant for Planned

364 Black women commonly did not have the money to see a physician throughout pregnancy and it was difficult to get time off of work to see the doctor. Additionally, the prevalence of white-only hospitals in the South until the mid-1960s left blacks with poorly equipped second-rate hospitals. The medical services that many black women, especially those in the South, could afford and obtain simply were not as high in quality as those available to whites. See W. Michael Byrd and Linda A. Clayton, An American Health Dilemma: Race, Medicine, and Health Care in the United States 1900-2000 (New York: Routledge, 2002); Sharon A. Robinson, “A Historical Development of Midwifery in the Black Community, 1600–1940.” Journal of Nurse Midwifery 29.4 (1984): 247–250.
Parenthood, added that birth control assisted in the birth of physically and mentally normal children so spaced that they will have best likelihood for maximum development. She noted that Planned Parenthood offered marriage counseling but her emphasis stayed on the benefits of contraception.365

The notion that birth control had negative aspects for blacks simply received no AKA support. Through the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, the sorority cooperated with Planned Parenthood to disseminate family planning information and materials among the black community. Besides Ferebee, other national leaders promoted close AKA attachments to Planned Parenthood. Estelle Massey Osborne, a registered nurse and the former director of the AKA National Health Program served for four years in the 1940s as a member of Planned Parenthood’s Board of Directors and as chair of its Minorities Committee. Grace Hale, a registered nurse who pressed the ANA on the matter of civil rights, served as a field consultant for Planned Parenthood in the 1950s. One sorority member, Beaulah Whitby taught a Planned Parenthood workshop in 1951 on “Techniques of Working with Minority Groups” to enable greater numbers of African Americans to take advantage of family planning. AKA invited the birth control organization to participate in its Boulés [quadrennial national gatherings]. As part of its National Health Program, AKA leaders pushed the membership to volunteer at local Planned Parenthood chapters and to publicize

365 Grace Hale, “News From Your National Health Office and Health Activities of Chapters,” *Ivy Leaf* (June 1951), 7.
the location of the clinics. The Indianapolis chapter did so by sponsoring a Well Baby contest that informed African Americans about the services and location of the Planned Parenthood center. Other chapter representatives served on local boards and committees.  

AKA held that the medical and social advantages of family planning should be made available without reference to economic circumstance. To AKA members, honoring motherhood meant allowing women to have chosen children rather than as many as they could bear. Although there are some gaps in the archival record, the sorority appears to have made no distinction between birth control and abortion, except in that it sought to avoid the great risk to maternal health posed by abortion by disseminating information about how to avoid pregnancy in the first place. It did not enter the debate on the legalization of abortion, for reasons that are not included in AKA papers but which may have involved a preference for community work over political work. It is also possible that AKA leaders were not optimistic about the chances for success of black women in working through traditional political channels in the late 1960s and early 1970s or that they believed white-dominated organizations were sufficiently addressing the issue. AKA members could be found among the ranks of women’s organizations, including the AAUW, the ANA, and CWU, that publicly voiced support for legalization.


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The black women’s movement differed qualitatively from the movement led by white women. While white men had obvious advantages over white women, African American men were not significantly better off than the women of the race. The belief that racial issues were more urgent influenced the activities of African American women, like those who comprised the membership list of AKA. The organization helped develop coalitions such as ACHR to pursue desegregation, to provide greater opportunities for blacks, and to obtain black voting rights. It offered crucial financial support to the NAACP that kept the organization alive to pursue legal remedies for racial discrimination. Unlike CWU leaders, AKA officials did not believe that membership in male-dominated organizations weakened the clout of women. They never hesitated to work with the NAACP or with the male fraternities that also joined ACHR. AKA members did not see the interests of black men as being different from the issue of black women. All African Americans wanted to advance the race.

Organized black women never focused solely on the problems of women but instead addressed concerns related to being black in America. AKA promoted the education of black women so that such women would uplift the race. The organization supported women in the Job Corps because these women would help lift black families out of poverty. AKA leaders disseminated information on birth control because such information would keep the black family strong and out of poverty.
While AKA engaged in activities that could be described as feminist, its members shied away from that label. It helped create a climate in the black community in which feminism could flourish, but it did not explicitly promote feminism. Yet AKA’s activities certainly constituted a direct challenge to barriers upon women’s participation in the world beyond the family and household. It paved the ground to enable black feminists of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s to pursue reproductive rights, to link feminism to such bread-and-butter issues as health care and job training, and to pursue political power. AKA kept a focus on developing successful young AfricanAmerican women to uplift the community. Advancing the status of women would advance the status of the race.
CHAPTER FOUR
ESCAPING THE CHRISTIAN MYSTIQUE: CHURCH WOMEN UNITED

In the early 1960s, two women observed widespread dissatisfaction among their female friends and acquaintances. Political activist Betty Friedan diagnosed this malaise as *The Feminine Mystique* in her best selling book of the same name, which challenged the popular notion that women could find complete fulfillment in their roles as wives and mothers. Episcopal minister’s wife Hannah Ronsey Suthers identified a parallel phenomenon among Christian women, who in her view worshipped a false idol in the form of housework. She revised Friedan’s term coining the phrase “Christian mystique” to describe the belief that women should find all their happiness in the home by seeing their work as part of God’s work and by seeing its spiritual implications. Like Suthers, other members of Church Women United (CWU) refused to regard the wielding of a vacuum cleaner as a religious experience. A proper Christian woman did not have to limit herself to the domestic sphere. To achieve the “glorious freedom of the children of God,” the members of CWU labored to restore capacities for independence, self-fulfillment, and self-realization among the oppressed.367 Passionate followers of Christ, these women espoused a restructuring of American society to incorporate Christian values.

367 Church Women United (CWU) has been known as the United Council of Church Women and United Church Women. To reduce confusion, I will refer to the organization by its final name, CWU.
Church Women United (CWU) is a worldwide organization that represents millions of women, mostly Protestant. As such, it is the largest association of religious women in the post World War II years. It is one of the major ecumenical, liberal, and multiracial organizations of this era—as well as the first group to combine Christianity with feminism. Once a founder and department of the National Council of Churches in Christ (NCC), it left that male-dominated organization in the late 1960s. CWU may be best known today as the sponsor of World Day of Prayer and for its participation in the Fellowship of the Least Coin movement, a worldwide ecumenical movement of prayer for peace and reconciliation that has been in existence since 1946.


368 The 29 denominations that made up CWU in 1960 were: African Methodist Episcopal Church; African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; American Baptist Convention; American Evangelical Lutheran Church; Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church; Christian Methodist Episcopal Church; Church of the Brethren; Disciples of Christ; Evangelical United Brethren Church; Evangelical Unity of Czech Moravian Brethren in North America; Five Years Meeting of Friends; Greek Orthodox Church in America; the Methodist Church; Moravian Church in America; National Baptist Convention, USA; National Baptist Convention of America; Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends; Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.; Protestant Episcopal Church; Reformed Church in America; Romanian Orthodox Church of America; Russian Orthodox Church of America; Seventh Day Baptist General Conference; Syrian Antiochan Orthodox Church of North America; Ukrainian Orthodox Church of America; United Church of Christ; Evangelical and Reformed Church; General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches; United Lutheran Church in America; and the United Presbyterian Church of America.

369 CWU has never been a member of the National Council of Churches or the World Council of Churches because only churches or denominations qualify for membership in these councils. Church Women United, Frequently Asked Questions, http://www.churchwomen.org/newcwu/FAQ/faq11.html (Accessed January 2004).
Despite the evident importance of the church to women, histories of the women’s movement rarely consider mainstream religion. Yet some second-wave feminists found religion to be a liberating force, both spiritually and in the public world. To understand how feminism and civil rights have become embedded within American society, it is necessary to re-imagine the second-wave to include an emphasis upon traditional religious beliefs. In this chapter, I discuss the importance of religious women in the postwar world and the place of women in religion. I sketch the early history of CWU as well as provide a brief history of ecumenism in the United States. Religious beliefs determined the political actions of many people, including CWU members. The organization weathered the Red Scare and challenged the long history of racism within the churches. However, it also faced resistance to integration from within its membership. CWU nevertheless developed a comprehensive program to address racism that I examine. After discussing CWU’s merger with the National Council of Churches and its split from that group, I look at the labor force involvement of the church women. I then examine the shift that enabled CWU to go from opposing the Equal Rights Amendment to supporting it as well as the

organization’s involvement with the President’s Commission on the Status of Women and the War on Poverty. I conclude by focusing on CWU’s struggles over women’s reproductive rights.

Religion has long served as one of the pillars of U. S. society, and religious faith held a place of enormous importance in the hearts of mid-twentieth century Americans. The 1950s welcomed a religious revival that swept up millions of people seeking relief from the anxieties of the Cold War. The postwar baby boom created countless new families for whom attachment to church became as normal as increased personal prosperity and a move out to the suburbs. As the decade began, more than ninety-five percent of Americans professed a belief in God with seventy-four percent thinking about Him daily. Best selling books in those years included the Reverend Norman Vincent Peale’s *Power of Positive Thinking*, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen’s *Peace of Soul*, and Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman’s *Peace of Mind*. A 1958 study by the U.S. Bureau of the Census found that 66.2 percent (78,952,000) of Americans regarded themselves as Protestant, 25.7 percent (30,669,000) identified as Roman Catholic, 3.2 percent (3,868,000) were Jewish and 1.3 percent (1,545,000) identified themselves with other faiths.

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Most churchgoers have historically been women, and women have played a much more significant role than men in supporting community churches. Among African American congregations, women have long been described as “backbone of the church” but the phrase applies equally to churchgoing women of other races. In 1953, a survey on the Status and Service of Women in the Churches, sponsored by CWU and covering thirty communions, discovered that women made up about sixty percent of church members. An NCC report disclosed that total church giving increased more rapidly than membership among forty-seven Protestant and Eastern Orthodox communions in the twenty-one years prior to 1953. Evidently, women were not only filling pews but also digging deeply into their purses to help maintain ministers, church buildings, and church programs. The paradox lies in the fact that while women gave support, spiritually and materially, to the church, they remained in a subordinate role. They served as the spine, not the brain.

As church attendance and giving rose, interest in ecumenism reached new heights in the postwar years. Ecumenism has a rather limited history in the United States because many people of faith have held to the belief that it is better to convert than to accept those who follow different religious traditions. As evangelical Protestant John R. Rice once declared in his Sword of the Lord magazine, “Old-time

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Bible-believing fundamentalists insist that the Bible clearly forbids yoking up with unbelievers, even though one’s motives may be appear to be good.\(^{376}\)

The unbelievers condemned by Rice were ecumenical Protestants. Orthodox churches stayed out of the ecumenical movement for theological reasons until the rebuilding of Eastern Europe after World War II convinced church leaders that they would be viewed as equals in an ecumenical fellowship. The Southern Baptist Convention, on the way to becoming the largest Protestant body in the United States with nearly half of all Southerners among its members by mid-century, joined with the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod in refusing to join with CWU in the 1950 formation of the National Council of Churches.\(^{377}\) Roman Catholics did not embrace fraternization with non-Catholics until the 1964 decree on “Ecumenism” that grew out of the liberalizing reforms of Vatican II.\(^{378}\)

Despite these decidedly sectarian inclinations, religious women have a long history of cooperating with each other across denominational lines. The first women’s ecumenical association appears to have been the Female Society for Missionary Purposes, founded in 1800 by Congregational and Baptist women. A Female Society for Promoting the Diffusion of Christian Knowledge formed a year

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later. Women of other denominations, including Dutch Reformed and Methodist, organized for similar educational purposes but the great majority of women’s groups focused on sending female missionaries to countries where women were sequestered. By the turn of the century, a large interdenominational committee of women established the Ecumenical Conference on Foreign Missions in New York. The Council of Women for Home Missions soon followed in 1908, and the Federation of Women’s Boards of Foreign Missions came along in 1915. The National Council of Federated Church Women emerged in 1929. These last three bodies would join together to create the largest women’s ecumenical association.

A younger organization than AAUW, AKA, or the ANA, CWU traces its beginnings to the time just before Pearl Harbor. In 1941, as war spread around the globe, the Federated Church Women and the missionary associations met to further peace through ecumenism. They shared civic and religious goals and felt the need for a national umbrella organization to provide expertise and coordination. CWU worked on a broad range of projects, including war relief and opposition to the internment of Japanese Americans, then later reconstruction and reconciliation especially as they affected women and children; efforts for peace; and the cultivation

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380 Brereton, 149.
of just racial relations. Furthering the aims of ecumenical education and fellowship across the nation and around the globe were additional objectives.381

The membership and leaders of CWU came from nearly every Protestant denomination. Individual women from Roman Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Southern Baptist, and other religious bodies such as the Salvation Army that were not formally related to CWU participated in the movement at all levels.382 Jewish women’s groups cooperated with CWU on common social concerns and in ecumenical dialogue. In 1948, CWU estimated the number of its affiliated church women at 10 million, with 25 state councils and 1,000 local councils.383

Women practice religion in ways both similar to and different from men. Many of the elements closest to religious meaning – conceiving life, giving birth, nurturing, and providing care through the passages of life – have been connected more with women than with men. But women did not engage with religion only in the confines of church and home. In 1948, Ladies Home Journal sponsored a nationwide survey designed to determine the intensity of religious faith in the U.S. and the extent to which it governed behavior. Fifty-four percent of respondents declared that their religious beliefs had no effect upon their politics or business

382 CWU’s inclusion of Unitarians on their boards led to tension with the NCC.
383 Edith Groner in Dorothy MacLeod oral history, 15 December 1965, box 78, folder 17.
deals, but a not insignificant thirty-nine percent did indeed mix religion with politics and money matters.  

Like thereligious women in the survey, CWU members practiced religion in public life. Members of the organization shared a belief with the women of AKA and AAUW that they bore an obligation to participate in government. Dorothy Dolbey, CWU board member and a 1951 candidate for the Cincinnati City Council, ran for political office because “Citizenship is our Christian concern. We must care enough for the privileges of democracy to make them work.” In 1953, CWU named “Citizenship – Our Christian Concern” as its annual promotion. Cynthia Wedel, then a member of the executive committee and later a CWU president, explained that “If a Christian’s love for his fellowman is real and urgent, it will drive him to seek the causes of slums, juvenile delinquency, poor schools, and lack of health facilities.” In 1964, CWU President Louise Wallace stated, “No one who professes belief in Christ is exempt from some kind of responsible leadership in expressing one’s loyalty to him.”

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384 The survey did not separate male respondents from female ones because there was no appreciable difference in the answers given by both groups. Lincoln Barnett, “God and the American People,” Ladies Home Journal 65 (November 1948): 36, 239.
The religious obligation to stand fast in defense of the persecuted is evident in one of CWU’s first political activities. “A Christian Declaration of Loyalty” was a red, white, and blue pamphlet produced and distributed by the organization during the hottest part of the Cold War. Adopted by CWU in March of 1953, the publication came out just a few months before the junior U.S. Senator from Wisconsin, Joseph McCarthy, sent two of his aides to purge American government libraries abroad of such “subversive works” as the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Steinbeck. Many, if not most, Americans saw McCarthy as a heroic knight battling the dark forces of worldwide communism. The execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in June 1953 for transmitting atomic secrets to the Soviets and President Harry S. Truman’s executive order allowing government workers to be fired for dubious associations or personal habits that might make them security risks contributed mightily to a climate of fear and paranoia. Anyone who expressed qualms about the wisdom of the bomb or who associated with former or suspected Communists ran enormous personal and professional risks, as demonstrated by the shattered life of J. Robert Oppenheimer, father of the atomic bomb as well as the “pink ladies” of the AAUW.\footnote{Oppenheimer ran the Manhattan Project’s Los Alamos lab during World War II and is known as the “father of the atom bomb.” After the war, he opposed the hydrogen bomb and voiced misgivings about the arms race. Since both his brother and wife were Communists and Oppenheimer had obvious leftist leanings, he was named as a communist in 1953. Oppenheimer contested the charge but lost his security clearance and, with it, his government job. See Richard M. Fried, \textit{Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 179-180.}
Faced with this situation, “A Christian Declaration of Loyalty” constituted an act of enormous bravery. The document opened with words that also have relevance for the civil rights and women’s movements. It stated, “As Christian Americans we are dedicated to maintaining the freedom of all Americans and their institutions.” It continued, “Many valiant defenders of God-given freedom are being wrongfully accused . . . We ourselves may for our beliefs face disapproval, insinuation, or slander. . . We are sovereign American citizens, followers of Jesus Christ, children of God. We dare to speak out.”

At its assembly in the autumn of 1953, CWU attendees agreed that, “The fact that we feel the compulsive need to underscore the principles enunciated in the Constitution and Bill of Rights and reaffirm our allegiance to them as Christian women is indicative of the alarming degree to which the nation, in fear, has tended to ignore these principles.” On the local level, the Atlanta CWU chapter expressed opposition in 1953 to an “anti-subversive” bill passed by the Georgia General Assembly and signed by the governor because “We cannot stand idly by and see friends besmirched, even by inference, and live with our consciences.”

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389 Church Women United, “Recommendations and Resolutions of the Sixth National Assembly, Atlantic City, New Jersey, 5-8 October 1953, box 2, folder 14, CWU Papers.
Christian brought responsibilities that could not be ignored. Each of these statements served as a witness to the Christian faith.

In the climate of the Cold War, a charge of being a “Commie” was tossed at anyone who called for freedom of association, better race relations, and equal opportunities for all people. CWU leader and Methodist Dorothy Dolbey once endured a 45-minute harangue from a woman who insisted that her support of slum clearance formed part of the Communist line. A self-proclaimed conservative of nonpartisan political affiliation, Dolbey announced her interest to be humanity. 391

Members were also attacked for associating with “Communist front organizations.” Characterizing CWU as “a harmful and highly dangerous institution,” women who left the organization often cited the liberalism of the group as constituting a menace to society. Dorothy Faber, the conservative editor of the Michigan-based Christian Challenge, blasted CWU for supporting Communism by aligning itself with such groups as the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Fraternal Council of Negro Churches, and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. Faber urged church women to back the United States by leaving CWU. Members, like Dolbey and Wedel, ignored the insults and the risks, convinced

that they were doing God’s work. In 1958, Wedel observed that “Freedom from fear of anyone but God is one of the glorious liberties of the Christian . . . We may be despised and rejected by men – but we need have no fear if we are sincerely trying to obey God. If He is for us, who can be against us?” While the leaders of AAUW feared that an association with Communism would damage the organization’s efforts at promoting education for women, CWU did not focus on such earthy matters. As beffited a gathering of church women, the organization stressed the spiritual.

CWU had a clear intent to actively spread a message of Christianity. Simply backing male leaders by filling pews and raising funds was not sufficient service to God. To be good Christians, these women had to become involved in politics. They had a God-given obligation to help the weak and to end oppression. This responsibility mandated active participation in the public world.

The need to serve God brought CWU into the arena of race relations. CWU addressed racial issues in a variety of settings and with range of strategies. The church women proved far bolder than the members of either the AAUW or the ANA. As other historians have noted, among the few white southern women willing to buck the racial status quo, religious faith was probably their most important internal

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392 “Transcript of a Talk to the Women of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, Shreveport and Broadcast Over ‘Shreveport Party Line’ Radio Station KWKH,” 9 January 1963, box 70, folder 3 and “St. Mark’s Women Vote to Quit Church Group,” Shreveport Times (5 February 1963): 4A.
Unlike the AAUW or the ANA, CWU welcomed the chance to address racial concerns. While it had much success, especially in the North, the Southern way of life that mandated the degradation of African Americans proved nearly impossible to uproot.

From its beginnings, CWU strongly supported a goal of racial inclusiveness. The organization declared that it intended to make the organization open to all women, whether Euro-American, African American, Japanese American or Mexican American. In October of 1952, CWU issued a statement that the organization had come into being through the efforts of an interracial group and that it would continue to work until “every barrier that separates people because of race or color has been removed.” The organization further vowed to make race relations a priority because, “We determine to take steps toward the fulfillment of our Christian purposes.”

CWU also reiterated its emphasis on human rights by reaffirming its belief “on the inclusiveness of our Christian fellowship across denominational and racial lines.” CWU called upon its members “to appraise all meetings in regard to representative attendance,” “to act when another’s rights are threatened,” and “to strive for the

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integration of all Christian women in all phases of the work of local councils.”

With these statements, the church women took a clear stand in support of integration. In many areas, particularly the Deep South, CWU would stand practically alone.

The puzzle is why CWU women were willing to take the risks that others were not about to assume. The South certainly had no shortage of devout Christians but those who were willing to face harassment on behalf of blacks were rare. In Southern states, one self-proclaimed “outside agitator” observed that “Local people dare not write or speak out [against segregation] unless they are prepared to be tracked down by police in their every act, lose contracts, have mortgages withdrawn, credit ended or endure some kind of harassment.”

The intersection of racism and religion in the South began in the churches. With the exception of the racially-integrated and working-class Pentecostal Church of God of Prophecy (not a participant in ecumenical activities), most whites did not welcome blacks in their houses of worship.

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396 “Next Steps in Race Relations,” 1952, box 62, folder 1, CWU Papers
398 Clarice Campbell lived and worked in Mississippi and South Carolina. Her comments, however, also apply to the rest of the Deep South. Campbell, Civil Rights Chronicle: Letters from the South (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 183.
399 Carolyn Renee Dupont notes that both racial oppression and religiousity reached their heights in Mississippi at the same time. Mississippi, as well as Rhode Island, Louisiana, and South Carolina, claimed that eighty percent of their populations were church members in 1956. Dupont argues that religion and the Cold War helped shape southern Protestantism’s response to racial equality. See Dupont, “Mississippi Praying: White Religion and Black Equality, 1954-1966 (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, 2003), 1.
400 J. Wayne Flynt reports that the “boldest religious challenge to Southern racism” in the period between 1945 and the mid-1960s came from the most extreme of the Pentecostal sects rather than from...
from California employed at historically black Tougaloo College in Mississippi, discovered this firsthand when she attempted to attend a white church in Jackson with black friends. Guards prevented her from entering the building. As church-ins became the protest of choice for devout Northerners in the mid-1960s, Southern police habitually stationed themselves outside of the white-only church buildings to intimidate and threaten with arrest anyone, black or white, attempting integration. Those who managed to evade the guards were typically removed forcibly from church or, if white, occasionally sandwiched between two guards in a pew for the duration of the service. The guards and the police often worked without the approval of ministers but with the support of local governing boards and the majority of the congregations.401 According to Reverend W. J. Cunningham of Galloway United Methodist Church in Jackson, Mississippi, the churches seemed to be the last bastions to accept civil rights with only a very few ministers bold enough to preach tolerance after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.402

Such behavior did not mesh well with CWU’s defined purpose of “encouraging church women to come together in a visible fellowship to witness their faith in Jesus Christ and, enabled by the Holy Spirit, to go out together into every

middle-class denominations because evangelical religion crossed the color line to appeal to poor blacks and whites alike. We disagree on this claim. *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 121.


neighborhood and nation as instruments of reconciling love.” Jane Schutt, a CWU Mississippi leader, explained that she had “words to live by,” an Episcopal prayer that began, “Almighty God, who has made of one blood, all nations to dwell upon the face of the earth.” A second prayer contained the phrase, “Make no peace with oppression.” Schutt had grown up with these prayers and she debated exactly what they meant. Upon deciding that God created all men of one blood, Schutt decided that she should accept the wisdom of a higher power and be welcoming to African Americans. CWU members, such as Schutt, offered independent Christian witness.

The privileges of gender and the belief that women had little power anyway may have permitted the women to be more radical than other like-minded Christians. In many ways it was easier for white women than white men to challenge racial norms. Although women would be hurt economically if their husbands suffered a drop in income, only about one-third of white American women were employed outside the home in the early 1950s. Removed from the danger of being fired, white women who supported civil rights generally risked only social ostracism although cross burnings in front yards and threats of violence did occur. As one example, the white supremacists of the Ku Klux Klan burned a cross in the front yard

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404 Jane M. Schutt Oral History, 4-5.
of Jane Schutt’s home one December night because of her stand on integration. Schutt gathered with her family before deciding to string garlands of pine over the burned beams in an act of both Christian witness and Christmas decorating. The KKK never bothered her again, but Schutt’s children suffered the loss of friends because she invited African Americans to come to the family home for prayer groups.  

At the urging of the 1945 Committee on Race Relations, CWU recognized only those state councils that were open to all races. The ANA and the AAUW would later adopt similar policies, with considerable internal strife as a result. This policy of inclusiveness encouraged women to confront racism in their own backyards. Cynthia Wedel, a white leader looking back to 1945, remembered that many local and state laws forbade interracial meetings yet CWU ignored them all in sharp contrast to the more conservative ANA and the AAUW. She explained the impact of this policy, “Several times I can remember there would be black and white women at state Board meetings from the same town --- and they had not met each other at home.”

Local members often could prove a little slow to take up the cudgel for civil rights. Bessie Marsh, an African-American member active in Ohio and, after 1945, in Montclair, New Jersey, reported that when traveling back to Columbus, Ohio from a Cleveland CWU assembly in the early 1940s, her fellow Franklin County CWU

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407 Wedel is quoted by CWU leader Margaret Shannon in her history of the organization. See Shannon, Just Because: The Story of the National Movement of Church Women United in the USA 1941 through 1975. (Corte Madera, Calif.: Omega Books, 1977), 32.
members “suddenly forgot that they knew me and I rode all the way to Columbus with no fellowship whatever.” She later stated about the national policy, “However successful or unsuccessful it may have been in local communities, it was to me a very distinct attempt to involve Black women.”

Jane Schutt observed that what had been a large chapter of CWU in Jackson, Mississippi shrank when the CWU became a department under the NCC. The Jacksonites objected to NCC’s very vocal support of integration. The Baptists and many of the Lutherans withdrew although CWU had certainly stood for inclusiveness before the 1950 merger.

The resistance of some white women to integration within CWU did not necessarily translate into a loss of strength for the organization. And, unlike AAUW, CWU did not fear such a loss. Susie Marshall, an African American member of the Second Baptist Church in Oxford, Mississippi, helped form a CWU chapter in 1962. She was recruited by Gayle Beanland, a white Presbyterian missionary who decided to organize the chapter as a way of bringing together whites and blacks for prayer. The first members of this local came from Baptist, Methodist, Christian Methodist Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches. Whites did not join in numbers until a year later, in 1963. The church women never experienced blatant harassment although the

local newspaper, the *Oxford Eagle* refused to report on CWU’s activities.\(^{410}\) As a college town, Oxford may have been marginally more liberal than the rest of the state on the matter of civil rights but Mississippi was not exactly known as bastion of enlightenment in the early 1960s. The University of Mississippi in Oxford had just opened its doors, under pressure, to African Americans in 1962. Crossing racial lines was a bold move.

Considering the independence and activism of the membership, it was perhaps inevitable that CWU would address the institutionalization of “separate but equal.” Established in 1896 by the U.S. Supreme Court in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, this doctrine relegated many Southern black children to schools that were shanties, to textbooks tattered by years of use, and to educations that were clearly second-rate. In 1948, the federal attack on segregated schools began when the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People demanded that counties go beyond equalizing their public schools to establish a fully integrated educational system. In late 1952, the Supreme Court consolidated four similar cases under the rubric of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. On 17 May 1954, the Court overruled *Plessy* but neglected to set a firm timetable for integration.\(^{411}\)


CWU discussed the need for religious women to respond to *Brown*, the major political and social issue of the 1950s. In 1953, the Missouri Council of Church Women reaffirmed its stand on the right of every citizen to enroll in institutions of higher learning, regardless of the person’s race or color. While the Supreme Court debated the constitutional merits for desegregating public schools, women lined up at the podium of the 1954 CWU national convention to talk about race. Member after member wanted to send word to the court to vote for integration although ultimately CWU resolved to stand by any decision made by the court.

In the aftermath of the Brown decision, CWU leaders from 15 southern states met in 1955 to examine the specific problems posed by desegregation. Together they expressed concern over the prejudices being instilled in white children and they complained that only a few ministers had spoken openly in favor of the Supreme Court decision. Apart from expressing concern over racism, these women took no action, yet they did foster some debate about racism.

CWU also took a number of actions to address racism in public accommodations. Dorothy MacLeod, longtime General Director of CWU was a member of a committee of women scheduled to meet with President Dwight D.

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414 The racial makeup of the participants is not mentioned in this very brief article. However, in light of Maxine Scott’s comments about the large numbers of African American women at the 1955 UCW Assembly, it is reasonable to assume that some black women did participate in this meeting. See Scott, 22 and author unknown, United Church Women, *Christian Century*, 72 (November 1955): 1310.
Eisenhower in 1953. The committee, a mixed-race group, met with difficulty in obtaining hotel accommodations. “I was told on the side that we couldn’t have our rooms there [Atlantic City’s Grace Dodge Hotel] for which I had made reservations,” she reported, “They said, ‘We can’t take Negroes.’” MacLeod demanded that the hotel “take care of us all or you take care of none of us.” When the hotel staff dillydallied about providing rooms, the group switched to a hotel that agreed to accept an African American guest.415

In 1960, CWU went on record as opposing segregated lunch counters and in support of sit-in demonstrations as measure of protest against segregation.416 At the state level, the Commission on Human Rights of Kentucky asked CWU to join its Equal Service for All campaign. The Kentucky church women agreed to carry in their handbags a supply of small cards to be left at public eating places that they visited for meals. The cards mentioned Kentucky’s policy of equal service in places of public accommodation and asked the restauranteurs to extend their services to all, regardless of race or color.417

In 1965, CWU national leaders joined Coretta Scott King, herself a board member, in the rush to Selma, Alabama after black demonstrators were attacked by cattle prod wielding, rioting state troopers and Dallas County deputies on the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Led by Martin Luther King, the group of about a thousand blacks and

415 Dorothy MacLeod oral history, box 78, folder 17, CWU Papers.
416 Ruth Van Winkle, United Church Women of Kentucky (Danville, Kentucky: n.p., [1965], 17.
half as many whites included the Reverend James J. Reeb of Boston. Beaten by white hoodlums after the march, Reeb died of his injuries.\textsuperscript{418} Civil rights activism, even by white people of the cloth, brought readily evident dangers.

CWU did more than support civil rights activism. It developed a comprehensive program and worked with determination to raise consciousness about race among its own members. In 1957, CWU began its first major program to combat racism. From 1957 to 1959, the organization conducted forty-three Human Relations Workshops throughout the nation to help church women focus on who and what needed to be changed. Although aimed at improving race relations, these workshops also raised consciousness of gender-based discrimination among the women who participated. The participants in a typical workshop would ask each other such questions as: Who are the respected citizens in this town and why? Who really is the power in the schools, the labor market, the churches, and the welfare system?\textsuperscript{419} The participants learned not to stereotype by race, but in confronting the power of whites, they also made comparisons between the position of African-Americans and the position of women.

The largest undertaking ever attempted by CWU, “Assignment: Race” encouraged every member to explore racism in herself, her family, and her community. Begun in 1961 and lasting until 1964, the program grew out of

\textsuperscript{419} Shannon, 112.
Methodist activism. The women of the Methodist church had a tradition of being at the forefront of social action. They designed and introduced a program to bring about reconciliation between the black and white races.\textsuperscript{420} Clearly aimed at whites, the race of the majority of CWU members, the program nevertheless managed to cause some soul-searching among devout black women. It forced both black and white women to define justice and to contemplate power relations within their communities.

As part of “Assignment: Race” each participant wrote, on a pledge card, how she planned to carry out the CWU aim of justice for all the races. Each CWU member was expected to act in support of African Americans, and the card asked for a description of specific activities to be undertaken to better the lives of blacks. The very act of completing the card was empowering for many women. A white member of the Evanston, Illinois chapter, Elizabeth Hazelden, saw the assignment as a way to close ranks with other Christian women and overcome past frustrations. She wrote:

“Memories engulfed me and I thought of the various activities in which I have engaged in the years past. I felt again the strictures of inadequacy, the frustration, the spiritual weariness on the part of both Negro and white women.”\textsuperscript{421} Black women in CWU tended to focus more on economic than racial inequality when completing the cards. A black member of another local chapter, Juanita J. Saddler, skipped over integration, named poverty as the greatest evil facing society and vowed to take


\textsuperscript{421} Shannon, 114
action against economic injustice. However, Saddler also added that prejudice in any
form is “worth struggling against not only because of the growth in wholeness that
comes to anyone with the courage to face such questions.”

In trying to awaken its membership to the problems of racism, CWU had
opened the door to a discussion about all of the injustices in society. Along with
examining what it meant to be black or white in America, CWU members were
exploring what it meant to be without power or material resources.

Upon receiving the “Assignment: Race” cards, a national committee then
utilized the comments to mold a CWU educational program. Assignment: Race
helped women to be community leaders by assisting them with development of the
skills and knowledge needed to establish a movement. The program brought together
blacks and whites and encouraged these women to share strategies for making society
more Christian, more livable for all people. As women, the members believed that
they could act where men feared to tread because it was more difficult to punish
women for activism. Edna Sinclair, a white woman who led CWU from 1964 to
1967 commented that, “We were freer to integrate meetings, eating places, churches
– we were not so apt to be fired from jobs.” CWU women integrated meetings,

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422 Shannon, 115.
423 Martha Edens and Edna Sinclair, “Women and Ecumenism questionnaire,” 11 August 1978, box
56, folder 48, CWU Papers.
eating places, and churches. They learned to work together with other women in trying situations, experience that would be used later in the women’s movement. In 1963 CWU held regional meetings to further the aims of “Assignment: Race”. Hundreds of women gathered to share experiences, both positive and negative. Margaret Shannon, a white executive director of CWU who participated, related that for many CWU groups the only result achieved by the program was “an awakening to the fact that there was a problem affecting human beings in the community. However just waking up often leaves people disgruntled and therefore there was follow-up work to do.”

In 1964 and continuing through 1967, CWU adopted a plan called “Assignment Race: Part II”. This program stressed the impact of discrimination upon the community, instead of the individual. Groups answered survey questions together. Church women were able to identify elements of discrimination in housing, job training, and employment.

One of the recommendations growing out of “Assignment Race” was that the nature of the organization should be changed. Instead of top-down decision-making, a process that had made it difficult for minority women to take leadership on an issue, the CWU should divide power among all members. CWU would become a channel through which any individual Christian woman could work with others to carry out

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425 Shannon, 117.
the CWU purpose of social justice. While top-down decision-making never ended, CWU did gradually shift considerable power to individual members. Subsequent CWU workshops on a range of faith-related legislative issues, including health care, would involve as many as 30,000 participants.  

Responding to demands from members for civic activism, CWU formulated a civil rights program and many of its members became activists. CWU’s activism in the area of race relations indicates a shift among organized religious women from seeing the role of a Christian woman as merely supporting decisions already taken to assuming an active role in the power to make decisions about policy and practices. In the long run, as Margaret Shannon stated, the value of Assignment Race may not have been what CWU contributed to civil rights throughout the nation. Its greatest value was what it caused to happen within the membership of CWU.

CWU, despite scattered opposition through the years from some members, expected Christian women to put their faith into practice by supporting the downtrodden and oppressed. Supportive of civil rights, CWU members found themselves pressured in the 1950s and 1960s to halt their activities to “make the Earth fair.” Some members did indeed leave CWU because of the group’s civil rights stand, and the organization’s work did become more difficult in conservative areas,

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427 “Recommendations and Resolutions of the Sixth National Assembly,” 5-8 October 1953, box 2, folder 14, CWU Papers.
but CWU continued to fight for civil rights and now began to strongly challenge the status of women.

Viewing Christian principle as the only important factor motivating their politics, CWU members took a spiritual journey into feminism. Following in the footsteps of many first wave feminists, CWU viewed equality between the sexes as a right ordained by God. As more than one woman stated, Eve was created from Adam’s rib to be a partner, not a servant. CWU members recognized an obligation to spread the word of God and their efforts to insert Christ in everyday living ultimately took the form of supporting rights for women.

During the post-war years, interest in women’s rights declined as many women directed their energies toward child-raising, parent-teacher associations, and churches rather than national issues. But, paradoxically, as women moved away from political activism, they also prepared the ground for a resurgence of feminism. In the 1960s feminists were able to mobilize a significant percentage of women because of social trends that had begun in the 1950s. A declining birth rate, rising levels of education, and rising divorce rates all combined to change the lives of American women. Perhaps the most significant development in the 1950s, however, was increased labor force participation by women, cited by nearly all historians explaining the resurgence of the women’s movement. The female labor force was increasingly
composed of older and married women, exactly the type of women to be found in the ranks of CWU.\textsuperscript{428}

To address the pressing concerns of 1950s women, CWU began to explore the problems faced by women in the labor force. The paid labor force participation of CWU members is unknown. Anecdotal evidence indicates that many identified as housewives or minister’s wives. The members were apparently well aware, however, of prejudice toward women who worked outside of the home. Cynthia Wedel noted, “In discussing the Church’s attitude toward women who work, we need to remind ourselves again and again of the Christian doctrine of man . . . every person is an individual endowed by the Creator with certain talents and abilities and given freedom to exercise those talents.”\textsuperscript{429} In short and in sharp contrast to societal teachings in the 1950s, women had a God-given right to work.

By focusing on female employment outside of the home, CWU addressed the concerns of women trying to balance work with traditional notions of womanhood, what Betty Friedan would term in 1963 as the “feminine mystique”.

The early stirrings of feminism can be seen in CWU in the 1950s. Cynthia Wedel, CWU president from 1955 to 1958, named the increasing employment of women as the main issue affecting women during her presidency. A growing

\textsuperscript{429}Cynthia Wedel, \textit{Employed Women and the Church} (New York: National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA), 42.
consciousness of being a woman was beginning to be evident in CWU members, Wedel recollected, spurred on by the World Council of Churches Department on Cooperation of Men and Women and CWU’s participation in it, and CWU responded by becoming concerned about working women.\textsuperscript{430}

When President John F. Kennedy established a Committee on the Status of Women (PCSW) in 1961, several CWU members offered recommendations to achieve greater freedom for women in the United States. The PCSW assessed the position of women and the functions that they performed in the home, the economy and in society. The commission established sub-committees to explore in depth the following areas: education; home and community services; private employment, in particular that under federal contracts; employment in the federal government; labor standards; federal social insurance and taxes as they affect women; and the legal treatment of women in respect to civil and political rights. Hickey, the public affairs editor for \textit{Ladies’ Home Journal} served as a Kennedy appointee to the commission. Cynthia Wedel had served as CWU president from 1955 to 1958 and worked as Assistant General Secretary for Program in the NCC when appointed to the commission. Pauli Murray, an active African American Episcopalian member of CWU chosen by the commission to assist it because of her legal expertise as Senior Fellow of Yale University Law School, served on the Committee on Civil and

\textsuperscript{430} Wedel noticed a slight concern for equality of civil, social, and political rights for men and women though “this was growing.” See Martha Edens and Cynthia Wedel, “Women and Ecumenism questionnaire,” 13 July 1978, box 56, folder 48, CWU Papers.
Political Rights. They joined members of AAUW and ANA on the commission. Church Women United took part in the PCSW as a cooperating organization.⁴³¹ The PCSW completed its work in October 1963 and issued a report with proposals for reducing sex discrimination against women while also emphasizing women’s maternal role. It recommended significant changes in government policies and employment and educational practices. Ultimately, along with increasing awareness of the penalties experienced by women by virtue of their sex, the PCSW brought visibility and legitimacy to women’s concerns⁴³².

Following the report, a number of women’s groups, most notably the Business and Professional Women, argued for the establishment of state commissions on the status of women. CWU set up its own committee on the role of women. The need for the committee was explained when a member wrote in 1965: “From Genesis to Paul there needs to be some clearer understanding of what is being said to our time on the being and the role of women. Some pressures are for equality, others for women to maintain a subordinate role in the home. In the midst of all this the church seems to be saying practically nothing to help women understand who they are and to deal with these often conflicting pressures.”⁴³³

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⁴³² Mead and Kaplan, 210-213; Hartmann, From Margin to Mainstream, 52.
⁴³³ Author unknown, “Outline for Discussion UCW Committee on the Role of Women,” 26 April 1965, box 54, folder 6, CWU Papers.
Certainly their commitment to civil rights helped to raise feminist consciousness among CWU members, although an awareness of women’s subordination was present from the beginnings of the organization. Perhaps the best example of the gradual awakening of feminism in CWU can be seen in its dealings with the National Council of Churches (NCC). In 1950 the Council of Church Women decided to join with other “movement” church groups in the formation of umbrella organization, the NCC. In doing so, CWU expressed some early feminist statements. While the move offered the hope that the women’s group would gain influence through a guarantee of representation on the various sections and committees of the National Council including the Executive Committee, the decision to join the NCC met with much controversy in CWU. Fears that CWU would lose its unique identity and that the interests of women would be ignored made many women hesitate to endorse the merger. In the end, Marjorie Terrell, the head of the merger committee, helped complete the union by remarking, “it is only fair to remind ourselves that in the event of a negative decision a Woman’s Department will be set up.

434 In an interview in 1974, past leaders of CWU described four groups that joined the NCC as “movements”. These movements became the theological, student, women’s and Christian Youth wings of the NCC. United Church Men also entered NCC as a self-described movement, but faded into oblivion. The UCW leaders did not regard UCM as a movement since, as Margaret Shannon stated, “They weren’t anything but a bunch of board secretaries that were in men’s work.” Interview with Helen Baker, Margaret Shannon, Ruth Weber, and Bessie Marsh, 13 May 1974, box 78, folder 21, CWU Papers.
up within the National Council in which case the CWU will find itself outside the mainstream of the cooperative ecumenical movement.”

On January 1, 1951, the General Department of United Church Women officially started life with its General Secretary, Dorothy MacLeod, working to assure both the representation of women in all National Council matters and the independence of CWU. As some members had feared, the merger did not proceed smoothly. CWU struggled as an administrative and policy-making organization to establish its place within the Council. The women tried to preserve as much autonomy as possible, but as a subordinate of the larger group this was not always possible. Additionally, NCC made promises to CWU about the distribution of power that were not honored to the satisfaction of the women.

Some years later, leading church women attempted to explain the changing position of women within the denominations and the NCC. As Margaret Shannon, a CWU national leader in the 1940s and 1950s explained, women knew what they were

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435 Brereton, 159.
436 Dorothy MacLeod oral history, box 78, folder 17, CWU Papers.
437 In her study of male-dominated liberal organizations of the 1960s and 1970s, Susan Hartmann charts the steps taken by CWU to increase the role of women, specifically including African-American women, within the National Council of Churches. She also notes the frustrations that many CWU members experienced when working with the NCC. See Hartmann, *The Other Feminists: Activists in the Liberal Establishment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 94-100.
439 Brereton discusses the dispute over membership in more detail. CWU proposed a governing body that included four Unitarians. Much to the surprise of the CWU, the NCC General Board then set strict standards regarding the appointment of members to the boards of National Council departments. The Unitarians did not meet the new qualifications and were not permitted to take office. See Brereton, 159.
free to do in their own sphere. Women generally served as elders and lay ministers, but experienced difficulty moving out of supporting roles to a place of leadership within the church. “In the early days we had to fight every inch of the way for our voice to be heeded and our person to be involved in policy making,” Dorothy Dolbey explained when describing the NCC of the fifties. Louise Wallace, CWU president from 1961 to 1964 recalled that, “We were very aware of the lack of representation of women in the churches, as lay leaders and staff, of the denominations, frequently raised the issue and though we felt terribly under-acknowledged as leaders in the churches, there was no organized movement to initiate changes.”

While male leaders often blocked CWU members from church administration and decision-making, the women gradually became more radical in their attempts to exert influence over church and secular matters. Tensions between CWU and NCC had been building for years. The loss of CWU autonomy, a strong desire to return to grass roots activism, and the influence of feminism all contributed mightily to a desire among the women to break with NCC. In 1966, CWU became a separate movement with its own bylaws under the NCC umbrella.

Once frightened into joining the NCC for fear that a separate women’s group would be undercut by the formation of a women’s group within the NCC, the CWU

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members now believed that they had little to lose by going it alone. Edna Sinclair, the national president in the mid-1960s, explained that: “It was a gradual realization that if we went to a movement of Church women outside of the [male-dominated] National Council of Churches we would be more adequate to assist women of the church and others.”442 With CWU marginalized by the NCC, separation offered the promise of greater success for CWU activism.

In learning to analyze power relations between the races, the members of CWU also taught themselves to examine power relations between men and women. Dorothy Dolbey, who had lamented in 1951 that women did most of the volunteer work yet remained shut out of political life, sent a letter to male church leaders in 1969 in which she complained that: “All people, not just Black, are weary and literally ‘fed up’ with being left out of representation in decision making.”443 In 1972, Peggy Billings, an executive of the United Methodist Church and leader in CWU, stated before an NCC assembly that it would be easier to leave church men alone to go about their business, “if it were your business, but it’s our Lord’s business [Billings’s emphasis] . . . and we must participate.”444 She added, “Among women, many of us are experiencing a new sense of sisterhood, a new understanding of

442 Edna Sinclair, untitled typescript, 1967? box 78, folder 22, CWU Papers
444 Peggy Billings, Report of Women’s Caucus to the Assembly of the National Council of Churches of Christ, 6 December 1972, box 54, folder 34, CWU Papers.
community, revealed in a supportive, non-competitive style and an actualization of non-hierarchical process. For all of this we are grateful to God.”

CWU members had changed too much to be content with the traditional place of women in the church and the NCC did not make a strong enough effort to keep the women’s group within the organization. The remaining financial ties between CWU and the NCC were cut in 1971. “[It was a fight over how much money the women could have and how much everybody else could have,” Margaret Shannon explained. Along with a lack of representation of black women on NCC committees, the NCC was not taking the needs of African-American women into consideration. The CWU was refused money to assist these women despite the large contributions that CWU made to programs administered by NCC units. The NCC offered the women $10,000 to finance the entire CWU race program. The small amount infuriated CWU leaders, especially at a time when the NCC was in the midst of devoting money to the concerns of black men. By questioning NCC choices, the women of the church were directly challenging the men of the church over matters of policy, an area traditionally out of purview of women.

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445 Billings, Report of Women’s Caucus, 6 December 1972, box 54, folder 34, CWU Papers.
By this point, CWU recognized that the women’s movement was in full flower and it sought to maintain a position of influence for religious women within feminism. Dorothy Dolbey, CWU president from 1967 to 1971, later said “Everywhere I went I tried to translate its impact and effectiveness in political terms as well as religious,” she remembered, adding that “CWU related to the women’s movement then by encouraging women to ‘do their thing’ and sending representatives to national conferences on women’s goals and projects who then reported back to us.”

Like most other women’s organizations formed in an earlier era, CWU had long opposed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), one of the major goals of the second women’s movement. CWU opposed ERA under the belief that passage would invalidate existing legal protections for women. Through the decades, this stance met some opposition from the rank-and-file members of CWU, one of whom belonged to the Connecticut Committee for the Equal Rights Amendment. Florence L.C. Kitchelt wrote in 1952 that she supported the amendment because “Much as I should like to see women in policy-making positions, I do not believe that second-class citizens are going to be appointed, or elected, to important jobs.” Unlike the AAUW, the CWU did not debate the ERA year after year. With most members

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employed within the home and with the organization’s focus on religion, relatively few CWU members had a strong interest in the ERA. In the wake of the end of protective legislation in the late 1960s, the CWU National Board voted in 1970 to support the ERA, a year before the AAUW membership chose to back the bill.

In accord with its focus on social justice, CWU attempted in a variety of ways to assist women in difficulty. The organization’s largest effort became an ecumenical one, involving cooperation with the Young Women’s Christian Association, the National Council of Jewish Women, the National Council of Catholic Women, and the National Council of Negro Women. President Kennedy had challenged these women in 1963 to find a way to end domestic inequality, racism, and poverty.451 They responded by forming Women in Community Service (WICS), part of the War on Poverty, in 1965.

WICS served as the primary recruiter of women for the Job Corps. It solicited and screened women for the Job Corps, referred to other programs those girls who did not qualify for the Job Corps, and provided pre-Job Corps support to selected applicants. Some of the applicants went to the AKA Job Corps program. The volunteers also provided special services, such as transportation, to Corpswomen in some centers.452

452 Women in Community Service brochure, box 5, folder 3, CWU Papers.
WICS strove to bring new opportunities for women of the working class. In Arizona, CWU member Barbranell Stake recalled trying to recruit girls by discussing the program with their families. “Many of these girls came from homes where their parents didn’t want them ever to leave home. The Indian girls would be out on the reservation, but even in town in the barrios for the Hispanics, their fathers would not want them to leave the barrio,” she remembered.\textsuperscript{453} Stake, a Baptist and strong ecumenist, became involved with CWU after watching some of the women bring food to the migrant worker camps around Phoenix in the 1950s.

Following the election of President Richard Nixon in 1968, the Job Corps moved from the Office of Economic Opportunity to the Department of Labor. This transfer, ostensibly designed to coordinate labor programs to provide better service, resulted in Job Corps cutbacks and the closings of several sites including a West Coast Women’s Center in Southern California tied to the church women. WICS stopped being the sole recruiter for the Women’s Job Corps. CWU believed that the changes would be disastrous since children from slum and ghetto areas needed a complete change of environment to become responsible and useful citizens. WICS lamented that rural girls were not even considered in the Nixon administration proposals. The group undertook a new program of supportive services in the 1970s to

\textsuperscript{453} Doris Anne Younger, Interview with Barbranell Stake, 19 March 1992, box 78, folder 24, p. 12, CWU Papers.
continue its support of poor women.\textsuperscript{454} One of the most successful programs to emerge from the War on Poverty, WICS would celebrate its fortieth anniversary in 2005.

One of the largest societal changes in the postwar era involved the sexual revolution. The strengthening of home and family and the nurturing of Christian standards of behavior have traditionally been considered part of a woman’s province. In 1965, CWU tackled the sexual revolution. The church women formed a Committee on Sex Morality (containing three Orthodox and two Catholic women among the twenty-five participants) to explore present day morals and suggest some guidelines for Christian parents.\textsuperscript{455} This CWU committee focused on the Christian definition of human sexuality, extra marital relations, marriage, and church education but, surprisingly, also contemplated homosexuality. After careful consideration, the committee decided that the issue involved too many complexities for a solution to be proposed but did recommend that sex education be provided in local schools.\textsuperscript{456}

Sexuality, according to CWU, should be regarded a gift from God. The Program on Sex Values and Education in 1967 proclaimed that respect for and


\textsuperscript{455}Mrs. Fred Patterson to Committee on Sex Morality, 1 December 1965, box 53, folder 6, CWU Papers.

\textsuperscript{456}Minutes of Committee on Sex Morality of United Church Women, 13-14 December 1965, call number 1223-3-2:06, CWU Papers; Sex Morality Committee Report, no date [1965?], call number 1223-3-2:06, CWU Papers.
acceptance of all persons should guide sexual relationships, as it should all relationships -- interracial, interreligious, and intercultural. To aid in the formation of such respect, CWU recommended that women should have the help of experts to learn how to deal with their own sexuality.\textsuperscript{457}

CWU began investigating sexual morality because religion and education supported some of the moves toward a new sexual ethic that included government support of birth control clinics.\textsuperscript{458} The opportunity to control reproduction is perhaps the most important right for women. Without the knowledge and the tools to restrict childbirth, a woman cannot determine her destiny. She cannot access education, advance professionally, or maintain her own health if constantly pregnant and caring for children. Fear of pregnancy also damages marital intimacy, as those who try to be careful still get pregnant. CWU came out in support of both birth control and abortion for a brief time.\textsuperscript{459}

Most Americans had come to favor contraception by the late 1950s but thirty states still had laws restricting contraceptive advertisement and sale in 1960. In that same year, the Pill went on the market. Within two years, 1.2 million women were

\textsuperscript{457} Program on Sex Values and Education Adopted By the Commission on National Program Development of the National Board of Managers of Church Women United, 1967, call number 1223-3-2:06, CWU Papers.
\textsuperscript{458} Joan Lark and Lenore Whitman McNeer, “What About the Sex Revolution?,” \textit{The Church Woman} (November 1966), 29.
\textsuperscript{459} CWU has become much more conservative in recent years. In 1996, the organization decided to reverse itself and take no official position on abortion or contraception. However, its new policy of refusing grants or funds to groups that provide contraceptives or abortions appears to represent clear opposition to both contraception and abortion. See Church Women United, http://www.churchwomen.org/newcwu/FAQ/ (Accessed January 2004).
swallowing the little pink pill for twenty-one days every month. Never just another
drug, the Pill triggered heated debates about the social implications and larger
meanings of oral contraception.\textsuperscript{460}

CWU supported both birth control and abortion because it had an imperative
to mobilize church women to “bring an end to the pauperization and marginalization
of women.”\textsuperscript{461} The NCC had a policy of long-standing support for birth control. As a
department of the larger group, CWU also adopted this policy.\textsuperscript{462} After separation, CWU maintained a belief in the benefits of birth control.

However, the presence of women from different denominations, including
Roman Catholics, in the movement complicated the question of choice for CWU at
the national level. Local chapters, often less ecumenical in composition, had the
opportunity to be more activist. The Oxford, Mississippi chapter considered
supporting a Planned Parenthood program for its community in 1969. The idea was
abandoned because organizing a Planned Parenthood clinic required five thousand
dollars, a sum outside the unit’s financial reach. Instead, Oxford CWU encouraged
its members to use word-of-mouth to alert the women of the town to the availability
of the Pill at the Public Health Office. At least half of the Oxford members were

\textsuperscript{460} Andrea Tone, \textit{Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America} (New York: Hill and
Wang, 2001), 233.
\textsuperscript{461} No Author, “Separating Fact From Fiction,” April 1988, box 17, folder 6, CWU Papers.
African American so, while Southern whites often supported birth control as means of eugenics for blacks, this does not appear to be the case with these women. 463

Christian concern prompted CWU to support the right of women to make the final decision about the termination of a pregnancy but, again, ecumenicalism made the decision a difficult one. On 19 March 1970, CWU board members called for the repeal of the ban on abortion. “New medical techniques make abortions safe, but current laws force women into dangerous situations and discriminate particularly against the poor woman,” the church women declared. Unwilling to force a pro-choice position on the rank-and-file, the leaders adopted a resolution asking the upcoming CWU Commission on Women in Today’s World to consider the ethical and theological aspects of abortion so that “women find adequate understanding and support.” Five board members, including Catholic nun Sister Mary Luke Tobin, refused to take a public stand on abortion but agreed with “the objective of reforming inequitable laws which do not recognize the rights of women.” 464

In March 1970, abortion rights advocates were setting up abortion counseling clinics throughout the country; legislatures in places like New York (home of CWU)


464 Resolution on Abortion Adopted by the Board of Managers, Church Women United, St. Louis, Missouri, 19 March 1970, box 54, folder 20; Commission on Women in Today’s World, 5-6 June 1970, box 54, folder 20, CWU Papers.
were debating repeal of their criminal abortion statutes; the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) was preparing a test case in New York to argue that abortion laws were unconstitutional; and pro-choice forces were putting referenda on the ballot in states such as Washington. By the time that the Commission on Women met in June of 1970, oral arguments in *Roe v. Wade*, the case that would result in the legalization of abortion, had already opened in Texas.\(^{465}\) The commission made no decision.\(^{466}\) Apparently deeming the subject too controversial, CWU at the national level never again voiced unqualified support for abortion.

Yet local leaders enjoyed the freedom to be advocates for abortion and did not hesitate to use religion to bolster their positions. Rosa Trigg of Indiana CWU wrote about the split within the CWU of Clark County over the matter of control over a woman’s body. The anti-abortion Clark County CWU members had passed around a petition in 1973 after the *Roe v. Wade* decision stating that “We as Christian women . . . feel the responsibility of safeguarding the moral philosophy of our nation.” The pro-choice Clark County church women took great offense at this wording. Trigg explained, “We do not agree that abortion is an unmitigated evil; sometimes it is the lesser of two evils. We are therefore glad that the Supreme Court has found the anti-abortion legislation to be unconstitutional . . . we regretfully accept abortion as one means to prevent the bringing to existence of unwanted, unloved, pitiful, and


\(^{466}\) Commission on Women in Today’s World, 5-6 June 1970, box 54, folder 20, CWU Papers.
neglected babies.” Trigg closed with a coup de grace reference to the man who would betray Christ, “Jesus once said: “It would be better . . . if he had not been born.” (Mark 14:21)

CWU formed part of the third wing of the women’s movement. Certainly not a radical group, it shared many of the beliefs of the new feminist organizations that formed the liberal wing of the movement, including the National Organization for Women and the Women’s Equity Action League (WEAL). However, CWU did not focus on political objectives. The CWU members saw politics as a means of promoting religious goals. They widened political support for feminist objectives but did not focus on influencing the government.

The CWU national leadership, as evident in the questions it posed, viewed CWU as being a part of the feminist movement. A good number of rank-and-file members, although not surprisingly admitting that a desire for fellowship prompted most of them to join CWU, showed awareness of and concern for feminist goals. In 1974, sixty-eight percent of the women agreed that there was some consciousness among the women of being part of a national women’s movement with fourteen percent believing that a “great deal” of consciousness about sex-based discrimination

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467 The full quote in the Bible at Mark 14:21 is: “And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. And as they were at the table eating, Jesus said, ‘Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.’ they began to be sorrowful, and to say to him one after another, ‘Is it I?’ He said to them, ‘It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the same dish with me.’ For the Son of man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.’” Rosa Trigg to Margaret Shannon, 4 March 1973, box 69, folder 21, CWU Papers.
Sixty-four percent of respondents expressed concern about the ability of women to “fulfill aspirations,” and 77% of those surveyed expected CWU members to “relate to women in transition (welfare, divorced etc.).” 468 In most organizations, a small percentage of the membership constitutes the most active group with many of the participants seeking nothing more than camaraderie while expressing passive support for the organization’s goals. CWU is not an exception to this rule, but most of its members did recognize the feminist direction of the organization and approved of feminist activism. As CWU member Nelle Morton declared in the mid 1970s, “Being Christian means more than community service. It means working through our differences about what it means to be a woman, about ERA [Equal Rights Amendment], the meaning of liberation.” 469

By 1975, CWU’s liberalism and efforts to reform society were made apparent in a public relations statement approved by the leadership. This brochure, distributed widely in the churches, is worth quoting heavily because it is explicitly feminist in its words. Along with a line advocating activism to reduce racial and economic injustices, the pamphlet includes the statement that the CWU movement functioned to “enable women to make more fully their full contribution to society; to develop

468 CWU employed the term “community reconciling agent” instead of “healer” but the goal remained that of reducing tensions in American society. The summary is based upon 49 questionnaires although it is impossible to know how many women participated since contacts were made in different ways using different approaches. One state president, for example, sent questionnaires to 100 women representing different denomination, racial, economic, social, and educational backgrounds as well as a wide age span. See Miriam Phillips, comp. “Committee of 74 – Statistical Summary of Survey,” 1974, box 5, folder 2, CWU Papers.

469. Helen McAllister, Church Women United History, [mid 1970s?], box 54, folder 40, CWU Papers.
among women a sense of their own identity, confidence in their ability to be full participants in society and in today’s liberating movement; to develop a lifestyle appropriate to the faith alive in them; and to venture in new forms of witness and service.”

CWU attracted a broad nationwide base of typical Americans -- the Presbyterian or Methodist or Episcopalian ladies next door. Photos of CWU gatherings reveal middle-aged women, predominantly white, with gloves, hats, and conservative dresses. Many of them look like the minister’s wives that they are in fact. But contrary to appearances, the women of CWU were rabble-rousers because they were passionately motivated by their faith. As one of them stated, “It is profoundly un-Christian to put people in pigeon holes according to sex or race or class. . .” The organization defined its purpose as “encouraging church women to come together in a visible fellowship to witness their faith in Jesus Christ and, enabled by the Holy Spirit, to go out together into every neighborhood and nation as instruments of reconciling love.” By constructing a Christianity-based justification for women’s involvement in the public world, CWU also created a justification for activism on behalf of the oppressed. It advanced the status of women because that was what Jesus would do.

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470 Public Relations Department, “CWU in the USA,” 1975, box 5, folder 9, CWU Papers.
471 Cynthia Wedel, Employed Women and the Church (New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1959), 42.
Working in male-focused arenas, CWU helped advance liberal reforms in an effort to provide women from every racial and class background with the opportunity to direct the course of their own lives. The organization took an early and clear stand in support of civil rights and equality of opportunity for women. Yet in its early years, CWU focused chiefly on matters of race. By challenging the racial status quo, the members gained experience and knowledge that they subsequently applied to the role of women within the churches. While the members challenged the “Christian mystique” some years before Friedan penned The Feminine Mystique, they were still largely content to play a subordinate role in the churches. They had a place in public life, but not a powerful position. Instead of sharing leadership decisions with the NCC, CWU served as a subordinate unit of the male-dominated group. Influenced by the women’s movement, CWU members in the late 1960s stopped being content with their secondary role in the churches. They did not want to be limited to holding bake sales to raise funds for male projects. By the 1970s, CWU had become an independent movement and reflected the feminism of its members.

Hartmann also notes the early and consistent stance that CWU took against racism. See Hartmann, 96-100.
CONCLUSION

A social and political movement that suddenly emerged into the world would not have the strength to transform American society. Yet the second women’s movement did dramatically change the lives of Americans by opening every aspect of life to wider participation by women and by guaranteeing that such women would be treated equally under much of the law. To imagine that feminism crested out of nowhere is to miss the thousands and thousands of women who prepared the ground for its rise. This dissertation examines some of the organized women who did the often-arduous groundwork for the establishment of feminism.

In textbooks, Betty Friedan is generally credited with igniting the women’s movement with the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. Before Friedan sat down at her typewriter, the women in this study had articulated the reasons for their dissatisfaction and had formulated plans to do something about the second class status of women. AAUW pushed women to get an education and to use it. ANA fought to make a university education standard for nurses so that they would be respected and paid accordingly. AKA addressed the basic needs of the black community in order to uplift black women. CWU insisted that women take their place at the side of men, as God had intended, and not behind men. Friedan energized a substantial segment of American women but the fire that she stoked had never gone out. AAUW, ANA, AKA, and CWU had kept the embers burning.
An examination of mainstream women’s organizations in the postwar era challenges many of the accepted views of the second wave. The standard chronology of the women’s movement attributes the rise of feminism in the 1960s to the influence of the civil rights movement and the New Left. Such a simplistic view ignores the tens of thousands of women who had organized long prior to the liberation movements. All of the organizations in this study grappled with civil rights and formed coalitions to advance the concerns of African Americans in the 1940s and 1950s. AAUW and ANA integrated at about the same time with the ANA pushed by its union with NACGN to take action on behalf of blacks. CWU came into being through the efforts of an interracial group and sought to integrate one of the whitest institutions, that of the church. AKA joined other black organizations to push for civil rights and did so early in the twentieth century. Rather than being followers of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, these groups were partners in forming it.

The groups in this study suffered to varying degrees from the red-baiting that was endemic to the postwar era. As liberal organizations that were supportive of civil rights, they were targeted by conservatives who sought to halt liberal activism. The attacks did slow the activities of the AAUW while the little amount of mud thrown at the ANA never attached to it. More committed than the other groups to a wide-ranging program, the AAUW was also more vulnerable to attacks. CWU members
had the security of their Bibles and obvious lack of interest in atheism as protection. AKA members had the support of the black community, including the numerous other black groups categorized as communist-influenced. Nurses remained too linked with the image of angels of mercy to be tarred with a red brush. The history of these groups shows that narrowly focused organizations were better prepared to withstand pro-communist charges during the Cold War.

The AAUW, the ANA, AKA, and CWU sought to advance the position of women in American society by promoting education, job opportunities, reproductive rights, and a re-imagining of traditional gender roles. The AAUW pushed for opportunities for educated women. It encouraged women to be ambitious in the pursuit of an education and it sought places for educated women in public life. It embraced civil rights when it feared that a failure to do so would threaten its status as an educational agency. The ANA, sharing an interest with the AAUW in the betterment of women’s education, fought for women to receive respect in the workplace. It promoted a university education for nurses and the registration of nurses to show the importance of professional nursing. It embraced civil rights because a refusal to do so would jeopardize the status accorded white nurses. AKA, eager to help the black family, pushed women to get an education and to use that education to better the black race. It built coalitions that pursued political change and focused on health care as a means of assisting the black family. It embraced feminism
because the advancement of women was crucial to the advancement of all blacks. CWU members believed that all people were equal in the eyes of the Lord. It conducted anti-racist workshops and withdrew from the NCC because a refusal to embrace civil rights and a reluctance to give women an equal share in the running of the churches threatened their cherished religious beliefs.

The four groups in this study have the potential to expand our understanding of the second wave beyond the story of the activists and heroines to include that of an often invisible corps of feminists. Many of the members of these organizations accepted aspects of feminism but did not necessarily identify as feminists. Nonetheless, they used, developed and passed on feminist ideas. They established the base that the women’s movement needed to flourish in the 1960s and 1970s. Second wave feminism did not have two wings but three. This study shows that it was a broad movement with very deep roots that included the older, devoutly religious, married, women of every race who have often been forgotten in the histories of the second women’s movement.

Unlike later, explicitly feminist organizations, the groups in this study did not stage splashy media events or offer especially media-savvy speakers. They did not focus exclusively on political action. They did not offer a harsh critique of the United States. For these reasons, these groups are often forgotten in narratives of feminism. Yet they did examine the position of women in American society and take steps to
improve the opportunities available to women. For this reason, these organizations are feminist in act. The organizations were not glamorous or entertainingly controversial but they are representative of mainstream America. To understand how the women’s movement managed to achieve so many goals, it is necessary to look at ordinary American women such as those represented by these four feminist precursor groups.
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235
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