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“THE BARRIER BREAKING LOVE OF GOD”: THE MULTIRACIAL ACTIVISM OF  
THE YOUNG WOMEN’S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION, 1940s TO 1970s

by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“The Barrier Breaking Love of God”: The Multiracial Activism of The Young Women’s  
Christian Association, 1940s to 1970s

By ABIGAIL SARA LEWIS

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Steven F. Lawson

This dissertation examines the ways in which the Young Women’s Christian Association (the Y) redefined its race relations work in the post World War II era, and how it used Christian principles and rhetoric to construct a multiracially inclusive organization. For forty years, from its official incorporation in 1906 until its National Convention in 1946, the Y maintained segregated (Black, White, and Asian) branches. While it had tentatively fostered improved Black-White race relations in both its community and its student branches throughout the 1920s and 1930s, it was not until America’s entry into World War II and the subsequent internment of thousands of Japanese Americans that the organization’s racial approach went from “separate but equal” to full inclusion. This change caused members to reconceptualize what constituted *interracial* work and relationships, leading them directly into the civil rights movement and into creating one of the few multiracial spaces within the early women’s movement. From that point on, the organization stayed firmly committed to its ultimate

goal of racial inclusiveness, and used Christian tenets and rhetoric as its principal force in making this goal a reality.

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## Introduction

“It is necessary for a person to be comfortable with herself on the subject of race”: The Movement towards Multiracialism

This dissertation examines the ways in which the Young Women’s Christian Association (the Y) redefined its race relations work in the post World War II era, and how it used Christian principles and rhetoric to construct a multiracially inclusive organization. For forty years, from its official incorporation in 1906 until its National Convention in 1946, the Y maintained segregated (Black, White, and Asian) branches. While it had tentatively fostered improved Black-White race relations in both its community and its student branches throughout the 1920s and 1930s, it was not until America’s entry into World War II and the subsequent internment of thousands of Japanese Americans that the organization’s racial approach went from “separate but equal” to full inclusion. This change caused members to reconceptualize what constituted *interracial* work and relationships, leading them directly into the civil rights movement and into creating one of the few multiracial spaces within the early women’s movement. From that point on, the organization stayed firmly committed to its ultimate goal of racial inclusiveness, and used Christian tenets and rhetoric as its principal force in making this goal a reality.

Deeming itself as an “autonomous Christian woman’s movement,” the Y worked in the postwar era to create a set of social ideals on which democracy could rest. It believed that by forming an inclusive membership, true democracy would be realized. The organization became increasingly political in the 1920s, in both lobbying efforts and

in the education of members, heavily emphasizing the connection between Christianity and social action. The Y hoped that by emphasizing “Christian citizenship,” women and girls would become more engaged in all democratic institutions “ranging from the YWCA clubs to national politics.”<sup>1</sup> Eventually, this “faith in God and in one’s fellow man as the source of courage, the dynamic for action and the guide for decisions in the efforts of the Association to express the Christian conscience in relation to society today”<sup>2</sup> led a core group of National Board leaders and staff to rethink the organization’s interracial practices and to question its political and social adherence to racialized mores.

The events of World War II transformed the views of Y leaders’ about race relations, prompting changes that included the creation of a racially inclusive rhetoric that increasingly fused democratic principles with Christian tenets and a widening definition of interracial relations. It was not until the Y was “jolted by something so immense” as Japanese internment that it realized the depth of American racism and the lengths it would have to go to improve race relations.<sup>3</sup> As internment began, the organization moved quickly into action to help its Japanese members and assigned top leadership to direct efforts both with the community and the federal government. To all involved, it was soon clear the Y’s “Japanese Project” would serve as the cornerstone for its national efforts at bettering race relations during wartime and in the postwar era.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ethel Burton Bird, Mabel Brown Ellis, and Annie Clo Watson, *Nationality and Race Are Important* (New York: The Womans Press, 1941).

<sup>2</sup> Grace Loucks Elliot to Miss Edna Pearce, November 19, 1946, (Excerpt from the 1940 National Convention) National Board of the Young Women’s Christian Association of the U.S.A. Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA, Unprocessed Box 2 (herein afterward referred to as National Board YWCA Papers)

<sup>3</sup> *Public Affairs News Service*, Bulletin No. VI, May 12, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148, 9

<sup>4</sup> “War Time Program: Division of Community YWCA’s,” July 13, 1942. National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

This call to action affected the Y in more ways than one. Prior to the war, the Y defined those non-White/Black constituencies as “cultural” not “racial,” and staff worked on either “colored” issues or “nationality” issues. From the beginning, Annie Clo Watson, the Nationality Secretary who led the early stages of the Japanese Project, spoke out about the similarities that faced all non-White groups in terms of discrimination. In her interview for the position, she decried the neglect of these groups, arguing that “Orientals and Mexicans... have long been a part of the Association constituency all along the Southern border and on the West Coast,” and yet neither were on the Y’s *national* membership radar screen.<sup>5</sup> Shortly after the war started, Watson worked closely with the national race relations committee on issues including the Japanese American internment and Chinese and Filipino citizenship.<sup>6</sup> Soon, the Japanese situation was reframed as a “race problem,” and members and staff were reminded that “in many parts of our country persons with dark or yellow skins cannot get jobs, cannot train for certain kinds of work in the Army or Navy, cannot eat and cannot sleep where white people eat and sleep.”<sup>7</sup>

In 1942, the same year the Japanese were removed from the West Coast, the association began a national study of its internal interracial practices.<sup>8</sup> While the original intent of this study was to focus on Black-White relations, the authors hoped “that the

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<sup>5</sup> Ethel Bird to Mrs. Edward Macy, April 26, 1941, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box #36. For more on the work of Bird and Watson, see Juliet Ober Bell and Helen J. Wilkins, *Interracial Practices in Community Y. W. C. A.'S* (New York: National Board, Y.W.C.A., 1944).

<sup>6</sup> On Chinese and Filipino citizenship, see CP, “Miss Watson: This is an interoffice memo...” April 12, 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box #32. For work between Watson and the Race Relations Committee see “Notes – Minutes – Committee of Nationality Communities – June 1, 1943”, Processed Box 31

<sup>7</sup> Public Affairs News Bulletin, VI, Series 6, May 12, 1941, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box #3, pg. 9

<sup>8</sup> Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

findings of such a study might be used to interpret the relationship between white people and [other] racial minorities within the Association.”<sup>9</sup> This movement to work on race on a larger scale stemmed from the association’s work not only with the Japanese in interment camps but also with relocated Japanese forced to the Midwest and East Coast. As a national organization, the Y had to contend with various regional constituencies that held differing racial and ethnic populations, especially in the aftermath of World War II. The organization believed that it was “necessary for a person to be comfortable with herself on the subject of race” as the first step toward bettering race relations.<sup>10</sup> The war crystallized the importance of working on race for all in the organization. In order to address the concerns of its branches, a national policy was created. By 1944, the National Board agreed that a top priority for the organization was the “further...integration of other minority races into the association” as well as its continued work with the African American community.<sup>11</sup> In March 1946, the Y unanimously voted to desegregate the entire organization.

The integration of minority groups into the Y did not mean their racial assimilation, however. The postwar goal of the organization was to create a Christian fellowship of women and girls, regardless of race. Prior to the war, the Y was not interested in creating a racially homogenous membership.<sup>12</sup> Community branches, in conjunction with Y International Institutes (which were akin to settlement houses), hosted international festivals that showcased the different racial and cultural groups within a

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<sup>9</sup> Proceedings of the Seventeenth National Convention, 1946, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 2, 58

<sup>10</sup> Frances Williams, “A Plan for Interracial Education,” *The Womans Press*, October 1938

<sup>11</sup> “Recommendations” January 5, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Papers, Box #15

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Robertson points out that the organization was more concerned with class homogeneity and encouraged middle class women, regardless of race, to work together. Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46*.

community through food, costume, dance, and other cultural items.<sup>13</sup> Members were asked to represent their own racial/cultural group. A 1939 “Festival of Nations” held in St. Paul, Minnesota featured several European constituencies as well as Black, Jewish, Mexican, Chinese, and Filipino groups. The planners hoped both to highlight the contributions of these groups to “American life” and “to help to preserve the cultural heritage of our diverse peoples; to have a jolly time together without regard for social, economic, educational, religious, racial or political differences so that we may know one another better; to see, speak, smell, taste, hear and feel internationally.”<sup>14</sup> These local festivals were continued during the war, and there was recognition that in addition to celebrating the diverse heritages of members, more effort was needed to become more tolerant toward various cultures.<sup>15</sup> Even during the war, the Y worked to educate members on racial histories not only as a way to be more inclusive, but as a way to alleviate racial tension.<sup>16</sup> Y leaders believed that the diversity of races and cultures found within its membership made it a stronger organization and prided themselves as attracting a “cross-section” of society. It was through the “face to face” contact with different peoples that members’ lives would be enriched and fulfilled. The organization

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<sup>13</sup> For more on the Y sponsored International Institutes, see Julia Talbot Bird, “The International Institutes of the Young Women’s Christian Association and Immigrant Women” (M.A. Thesis, Yale University, 1932), Celeste DeRoche, “How Wide the Circle of We: Cultural Pluralism and American Identity, 1910--1954” (Ph.D., The University of Maine, 2000), Raymond A. Mohl, “Cultural Pluralism in Immigrant Education: The YWCA’s International Institutes, 1910-1940,” in *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*, ed. Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> “Festival of Nations Old World Market,” April 21-23, 1939, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 34

<sup>15</sup> Mrs. Alice L. Sickels, General Secretary for the International Center Branch of the Detroit YWCA, to Margaret Gerard, National Board staff, November 2, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 36

<sup>16</sup> Bertha Eckert, National Secretary Indian Project, to Josephine Little and Grace Stuff, National Board Staff, November 8, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 1. In this letter, Eckert tells of a meeting with a group of Japanese American women held at the Manzanar facility and the discussion had regarding the similarities between them and the Native Americans forced upon reservations.

committed itself to building a world community that permitted “no intolerance of religious groups – Protestant, Catholic, Jewish or any other – of racial groups such as Negro or Oriental; of class groups, such as capital and labor.”<sup>17</sup> Included in this worldview was the belief that each person had to feel empowered within her *own* life and to work to better her *own* community, not to assimilate into the (White) dominant majority.<sup>18</sup>

The work with Japanese internment, and the subsequent reconceptualization of race work, led the organization to re-embrace the use of Christian language in bettering race relations. Throughout the war, the Y relied heavily on the use of “democratic language” in the struggle for civil rights and social justice for racial minorities. This included the fight to end segregation in the United States military, integrating national blood banks, assistance to Japanese Americans during interment, and efforts to gain Chinese Americans the rights of citizenship. While its religious language might have been toned down, for the organization “democracy remained infused with the traditions of Christianity.”<sup>19</sup> At the end of the war, National Board president Mary Ingraham told members, “Man broke the atom, woman must break the pattern - there must be no more war; there must be harmony among men.”<sup>20</sup> The organization envisioned a new world rising from the ashes of war, a world that was based on a Christian social order and which

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<sup>17</sup> “Let Us Show You,” 1941 Annual Report, Young Women’s Christian Association (Seattle) Records, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, WA, Box 1, Folder 17, 3-5 (herein afterward referred to as Seattle YWCA Papers)

<sup>18</sup> Ethel Bird, National Board Staff, to Mrs. Lansing Lewis, Grand Rapids YWCA, March 25, 1941, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 36

<sup>19</sup> Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46*, 173-74. For more on the move from evangelical Christian rhetoric prior to World War II to the use of “democratic language” during World War II, see Robertson’s final chapter, “Struggling Over Segregation,” 153-74.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

supported “a new era in race relationships.”<sup>21</sup> The wartime “democratic language” used to voice concerns on civil rights gave way in the postwar era to the use of Christian rhetoric in prodding Y members to embrace all women and girls, regardless of race. Members who continued to support segregationist policies were called “unchristian”<sup>22</sup> and were firmly told that “there are no second class children of God.”<sup>23</sup>

Though the organization united around its “Christian Purpose,” there were differences in how the National Board, local associations, and student branches implemented this Purpose, especially in terms of race relations. The contradictions among the three divisions help inform the shifting positions in the Y’s race work. These variations led to uneven results and competing intentions in the organization. Local branches that did not fall into line regarding racial tolerance were not cast aside. Instead, the National Board believed that by keeping them in the fold these members would eventually grasp that “true” Christians embraced all races. The organization was fearful that by rejecting less progressive branches, the organization would be seen as less Christian and that abandoned members would only become further entrenched in their racist viewpoints.

Student chapters were more evangelical and vocal toward bettering race relations than the local branches.<sup>24</sup> Student leaders were often in contact with the National Board urging it to be more aggressive on race and in the desegregation of the organization. For

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<sup>21</sup> “Traditional Position of the Young Women’s Christian Association on Race” September 17, 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #93.2; Elsie D. Harper, Public Affairs 1940-1945, November 8, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 20

<sup>22</sup> “Report of the Ad Hoc Word Group re: Implications of the Supreme Court decision for Desegregation in the YWCA,” October 8, 1954, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 170, 2

<sup>23</sup> Grace Loucks Elliot, Untitled Speech, June 1953, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box #226, Grace Elliot Papers Folder, 5

<sup>24</sup> For more on the history of the National Student Y and race see Frances Sanders Taylor, “On the Edge of Tomorrow”: Southern Women, the Student YWCA, and Race, 1920-1944” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1984).

many students, there was “no middle ground for the Christian on the question of racial integration.”<sup>25</sup> Their leadership impressed older staff, with the national general secretary remarking that the students were “a generation that has no choice but to do the impossible” and make the world a more tolerant place.<sup>26</sup> Students were often stuck in a racial quagmire as they had to follow the race policies of their host campuses (in effect, de facto segregated chapters), though they still attempted to promote interracial programs and outreach. These efforts had severe consequences at some schools, with some Student Y chapters banned from campuses, or in the case of Mississippi, becoming the target of a state investigation.<sup>27</sup> Even with the students’ efforts in desegregation, including often serving as the sole sponsor of racially integrated events and putting continual pressure on administrations to repeal segregated practices, the students continued to hold two separate Southern Regional Conferences, one integrated and one all-White until the 1950s in order not to alienate the less racially tolerant campuses.

While the Y moved towards integration at a faster and more certain speed than other large general membership organizations, progress was nevertheless halting. It is difficult to understand the contradictory steps the Y leaders took to rid their organization of racial discrimination without understanding first that they were following their interpretation of Christian practices. Throughout most of the 1950s and 1960s, internal debates existed regarding how best to handle the White branches which resisted the Y’s

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<sup>25</sup> “Seminar Task Group on Christian Social Responsibility in the Field of Integration” July 1956, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box #82, 7

<sup>26</sup> Grace Elliot, Untitled Speech, June 1953, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box #226, Grace Elliot Papers Folder, 8

<sup>27</sup> “Seminar Task Group on Christian Social Responsibility in the Field of Integration” July 1956, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box #82. For more on reactionary measures taken against Christian students involved in academic race relations, see Charles W. Eagles, “The Closing of Mississippi Society: Will Campbell, “The \$64,000 Question,” And Religious Emphasis Week at the University of Mississippi,” *The Journal of Southern History* 67, no. 2 (2001).

progressive racial policies. This struggle became public within the larger civil rights community when the National Board President, Lilace Reid Barnes, pulled the Y out of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights in 1957. Soon after, the National General Secretary, Savilla Simons, resigned.<sup>28</sup> By the early 1960s, with new leadership in place and the civil rights movement in high stride, the Y aggressively took these White branches to task and reasserted itself into the Black freedom struggle. Like many involved in the civil rights movement, the Y used Christianity as the foundation and inspiration for its political actions and policies.<sup>29</sup> With the rise of Christian based civil rights organizations, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the early Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Y now saw its “Christian Purpose” reflected in movement rhetoric and action and therefore considered itself a significant partner in the struggle. While National Board leaders firmly supported the movement, and various local branches also involved themselves in working toward social justice within their communities, it was the student members who became directly involved in the movement. They held race relations campus workshops, led or joined “sit-ins,” and publicly protested discriminatory institutions. Yet, as the dynamics of the civil rights movement shifted toward Black Power in the late 1960s, so did the internal workings of the Y. In a response to the changes, National Board President, Elizabeth Marvel, remarked, “we are being forced (called on) to move” to a more aggressive stand

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<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 3 for further information on this situation.

<sup>29</sup> For more on Christianity and the civil rights movement see James F. Findlay, *Church People in the Struggle : The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), Davis W. Houck and David E. Dixon, *Rhetoric, Religion and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), Rosetta E. Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying : Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

on race.<sup>30</sup> By the end of the decade, the tables had turned. Whereas the previous struggle was focused on White branches that resisted change, there was now a “prevalent feeling” among Black leadership, at both the national and local level “for [Black] self-determination.”<sup>31</sup> In both cases, the Y sought to maintain its goal of creating a Christian fellowship. The organization did not fret over what paths members took on Christian road towards racial inclusiveness, as long as the final destination was the same. Its embrace of liberal Christianity and its call to members to “respond to the barrier-breaking love of God” led the association further into politically leftist causes, including the anti-war movement and the self-determination movements of Blacks, Chicanos, and Native Americans.<sup>32</sup> It also moved members in 1970 to pass the organization’s “One Imperative” which called for “elimination of racism wherever it exists and by any means necessary.”<sup>33</sup> Yet, there was also a growing disconnect between Christianity and the Left by the early 1970s, which forced the Y, once again, to blaze its own progressively liberal Christian path in terms of gender and race.

The work of the Y in race and its use of Christian rhetoric in encouraging empowerment among its members gave the association a unique role in fostering early second wave feminist sentiments. As Susan Hartmann notes in her work on women and religion during the postwar era, “religion played a pivotal role in inspiring and sustaining feminist activism...[and] liberal Protestant women articulated feminist ideas in the early

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<sup>30</sup> Mrs. Archie D. Marvel, Mrs. Robert W. Claytor, and Miss Edith Lerrigo to “Dear Friends,” June 28, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

<sup>31</sup> Committee on Racial Justice, January 29, 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 123

<sup>32</sup> Twenty-fourth National YWCA Convention, April 24-29, 1967, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 5

<sup>33</sup> Dorothy Height, “The YWCA’s One Imperative: Eliminate Racism” 1971 (pamphlet), National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 78, 3

1960s, anticipating the secular feminism that emerged later.”<sup>34</sup> Given its role in the civil rights movement, the association was able to inject a feminist perspective into the struggle, which in turn gave many female civil rights activists a better understanding of the interlocking oppressions of race and gender.<sup>35</sup> Through Christianity, Y members integrated their feminist consciousness into their fight for racial justice, mirroring the observations of black feminists who argued that “racism is fundamentally a feminist issue because it is so inter-connected with sexist oppression.”<sup>36</sup> The Y laid a foundation for the younger women of the civil rights movement to demand equal leadership roles and articulate positions of gender equality. The best example of this occurred in 1964, when two former Y staff members and SNCC activists, Casey Hayden and Mary King, submitted a position paper on gender roles within SNCC. This paper, a cornerstone of the women’s liberation movement, suggests the critical role of the Y as a progenitor of feminism.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the prominence of the organization and the importance of its relationship to the Christian left, civil rights, and the women’s movement, relatively little contemporary research has been done on the Y.<sup>38</sup> At present, only two monographs deal

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<sup>34</sup> Susan M. Hartmann, “Expanding Feminism’s Field and Focus: Activism in the National Council of Churches in the 1960s and 1970s,” in *Women and Twentieth-Century Protestantism*, ed. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth and Virginia Lieson Brereton (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 50.

<sup>35</sup> For more on interlocking oppressions of race, class, and gender, see Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, Perspectives on Gender; V. 2* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984).

<sup>36</sup> hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 51.

<sup>37</sup> The 1964 Position Paper has been hailed as a cornerstone of the feminist movement in Sara M. Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1979), Doug McAdam, “Gender as a Mediator of the Activist Experience: The Case of Freedom Summer,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 97, no. 5 (1992), Mary Aickin Rothschild, “White Women Volunteers in the Freedom Summers: Their Life and Work in a Movement for Social Change,” *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 3 (1979).

<sup>38</sup> Most of the YWCA histories were written in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and/or were commissioned by the YWCA. See Elsie Dorothy Harper, *The Past Is Prelude; Fifty Years of Social Action in the YWCA*

primarily with the organization and its race-work, Nancy Robertson's Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46, and Susan Lynn's Progressive Women in Conservative Times: Racial Justice, Peace and Feminism, 1945 to the 1960s.<sup>39</sup>

Both studies examine racial attitudes within the organization and specifically the relationship between White and Black women. Robertson's work details the evolution of racial ideology and practices of Y leadership, both Black and White. According to Robertson, White women went "from justifying racial segregation as compatible with sisterhood, democracy, and Christianity to a policy, if not a practice, of desegregation."<sup>40</sup>

Her scholarship concludes at roughly the starting point of mine, namely World War II and the passage of the 1946 Interracial Charter. Lynn's work explores the Y and the

([New York,: National Board YWCA, 1963), Mary Sophia Stephens Sims, *The YWCA, an Unfolding Purpose* (New York,: Woman's Press, 1950), Mary Sophia Stevens Sims, *The Natural History of a Social Institution; the Young Women's Christian Association* (New York,: The Woman's press, 1936), Elizabeth Wilson, *Fifty Years of Association Work among Young Women, 1866-1916, Women in American Protestant Religion, 1800-1930* (New York: Garland, 1916; reprint, 1987), Grace Hannah Wilson, *The Religious and Educational Philosophy of the Young Women's Christian Association* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1933). There also have been histories that mention the YWCA in relation to the civil rights movement, but are not specifically focused on the YWCA. See: William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, eds., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), Gretchen Cassel Eick, "'Lift Every Voice': The Civil Rights Movement and America's Heartland, Wichita, Kansas, 1954-1972" (Ph.D., University of Kansas, 1997), Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>39</sup> Susan Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times: Racial Justice, Peace, and Feminism, 1945 to the 1960s* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46*. Also see: Helen Laville, "If the Time Is Not Ripe, Then It Is Your Job to Ripen the Time!" The Transformation of the YWCA in the USA from Segregated Association to Interracial Organization, 1930-1965," *Women's History Review* 15, no. 3 (2006). For an international study see Nancy Boyd, *Emissaries : The Overseas Work of the American YWCA 1895-1970* (New York: The Woman's Press, 1986). For a local studies see Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt, eds., *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), Judith Weisenfeld, *African American Women and Christian Activism : New York's Black YWCA, 1905-1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997). For the work of local branches see Carole Stanford Bucy and YWCA of Nashville and Middle Tennessee (Nashville Tenn.), *Women Helping Women : The YWCA of Nashville, 1898-1998* (Nashville, Tenn.: YWCA of Nashville and Middle Tennessee : Published in cooperation with J.S. Sanders & Co., 1998), Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis, MN ; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), Pamela Faith Wille, "'More Than Classes in Swimming and Making Hats': The YWCA and Social Reform in Houston, Texas, 1907--1977" (Ph.D., Texas Tech University, 2004). For student branches see Taylor, "'On the Edge of Tomorrow'"

<sup>40</sup> Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46*, 3.

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) during the postwar era and how the social policies of these organizations moved from concerns of economic injustice to racial discrimination. The work of the Y and the AFSC eventually led “to more general challenges to discrimination based on race and gender in the U.S. society during the 1960s.”<sup>41</sup> Lynn argues that it was “black and white relationships” that were “the central concern in the YWCA’s ongoing discussion of race relations before 1970.”<sup>42</sup>

My research suggests that during World War II the Y broadened its definition of race and fought to end injustices against Asian Americans, African Americans, and other racial minorities. Lynn states that “often a sense of comradeship developed between black and white women who accepted each other as allies in the struggle against racial injustice, and close friendships developed, linking black and white women into networks that endured for a lifetime.”<sup>43</sup> If one includes other racial-ethnic Y members, it is apparent that the wartime experience of the organization affected it deeply and led it to take particular positions on race during the postwar era. My research thus provides a more complete picture of racial and gender activism and politics in the post-war years by expanding the idea of race beyond Black and White. As Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has argued, “gender identity is inextricably linked to and even determined by racial identity.”<sup>44</sup> The women of the Y received a racial education that could not be found in any other organization during the war and after and that education was both challenging and inclusive.

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<sup>41</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>44</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17, no. 2 (1992): 252.

The examination of the Y during Japanese Internment is important on various levels, most notably, this story has never been told. The organization saw its work with the Japanese American community as equal to, if not more important than, its efforts working with the African American community. Scholars agree that the war was crucial in laying a foundation for the civil rights movement, and by widening the lens used to view the racial aspects of the war, historians and other scholars will see the stirrings of postwar freedom struggles in a new light.<sup>45</sup> For instance, recent scholarship has illuminated the relationship between Jewish and Black groups during World War II, often to the exclusion of others, and how these relations led them to work together in the civil rights movement.<sup>46</sup> The Y however, worked with all racial and religious groups during and after the war in its own effort to alleviate the conditions faced by racial minorities. For the Y, there is a direct link from the Japanese Internment to the civil rights movement. Examination of its wider work in race shows clearly that the association had a different role than other groups and a different type of membership and program in both the postwar era and civil rights movement.

This membership, steeped in the Christian faith, also meant that a particular type of leadership and empowerment among members and staff was produced and implemented across the nation. The racially inclusive policies of the Y were forged by women of all races and were directed specifically to women. The woman-centered space

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<sup>45</sup> For more on the connection between World War II and the civil rights movement see Steven F. Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941, Critical Episodes in American Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991), Steven F. Lawson, ed., *To Secure These Rights: The Report of President Harry S. Truman's Committee on Civil Rights* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004), Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1984).

<sup>46</sup> Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, "Black and Jewish Responses to Japanese Internment," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 14, no. 2 (1995), Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

the association carved out in the middle of all the freedom struggles made it one of the few places where women concerned with race on a broader scale could communicate directly with one another. Since women's empowerment was also at the center of Y policy, members looked at race and gender through a Y lens and were more open to seeing the interlocking character of both forms of oppressions.

These women were also drawn to the Christian fellowship offered by the association. While there are studies of the role of religion in the civil rights movement, most focus on church related organizations or on male-led associations.<sup>47</sup> The Y's use of Christianity ran deeper than addressing race; it was a total way of life. Leaders and members challenged the organization and themselves to be better Christians, which included being politically active, accepting of all races and creeds, and being healthy both physically and mentally. The association's use of Christianity as an organizing tool placed the Y in an interesting position in the postwar era. At a time when not following the status quo left individuals and organizations vulnerable to governmental and social attack, the Y stood firm against race discrimination and the increasing militarization of the Cold War. By emphasizing the philosophical underpinnings of their actions and policies, the organization provided itself an excellent bulwark against accusations of godless communism or even humanism. When women were being pushed out of the political and economic sphere, the Y designed special clubs for married women, claiming their Christian duty demanded that they not recede back into the home but instead stay

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<sup>47</sup> Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America : The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), Findlay, *Church People in the Struggle*, James F. Findlay, "Religion and Politics in the Sixties: The Churches and the Civil Rights Act of 1964," *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 1 (1990). Recent scholarship that examines less church driven or male-led aspects, see Sara M. Evans, *Journeys That Opened up the World : Women, Student Christian Movements, and Social Justice, 1955-1975* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America*

politically active. And yet its adherence to Christianity, which pushed the organization further to the left, eventually caused it to fall from its position as the largest women's organization. As the backlash against the various liberatory movements began in the late 1960s, the Y was caught in the crossfire. Its continued adherence to its "Christian Purpose" eventually led both the newly active religious right and the increasingly secular left to reject the organization. As Christianity became increasingly linked with politically conservative ideas, those conservative Christians were shocked by the Y's embrace of liberal causes, such as its support of Angela Davis, its opposition to the Vietnam War, and its pro-choice views. And yet, because the Y repeatedly argued that its politics were rooted in its Christian beliefs, groups on the left who also viewed religious-based stances as conservative, turned their backs on a truly liberal organization.

In the end, this is a story of an organization filled with women determined to make their community, their nation, and their world a better place. Committed to bettering race relations, Y women embarked on a journey of faith. They pushed each other into honest and critical dialogue when few were willing or strong enough to do so. They pushed their own organization to include all women, and held it together with the principles of Christian sisterhood, forgiveness, and love. It was a unique story then, it is a unique story now.

## Chapter One

### “Jolted by something so immense”: The Japanese Internment and the Beginnings of Multiracial Work

On January 23, 1942, Sally Story, a staff member in the Seattle, Washington's Y, wrote to her friend Eleanor Anderson, a National Board staff member in New York. In her letter, she described the pre-war efforts of the Y to pressure the Boeing Company to hire Blacks and women and how Boeing's new hiring practices had extended to all of Seattle's defense industries. In some cases, she was happy to note, companies were hiring Black women specifically. Story went on to discuss the branch's ongoing commitment to the local Japanese community, which had experienced discrimination at the hands of white southern soldiers stationed in Seattle who frequented the Y's United Service Organization (USO). Embarrassed by the soldiers' racist attitudes, White members of the Y reached out to their Black and Japanese members and scheduled a tea to promote better relations between the groups. The tea was planned for December 7, 1941. Story wrote of that fateful day more in terms of the tremendous success of the tea than about Pearl Harbor: “This was quite an outstanding meeting, for we met a few hours after the news of the war had reached us. The girls were unusually happy that they had been able to do such a thing.” Similar events were held over the next month, and Japanese membership actually increased. By mid-January, relationships were “much better than anything that was ever anticipated.” Story summed up the past few months with respect to race relations: “On the whole I feel that the war is teaching us many

things about living and working together which I am afraid would have taken us many years to have learned.”<sup>48</sup>

Sally Story’s letter is just one example of the transformative impact World War II had on the Y’s racial attitudes and actions. Rather than ignore the domestic issues caused by the war, the organization’s wartime multiracial efforts and coalitions directly addressed these issues and the racialized nature of World War II. Though the Y would take a more vocal and aggressive stance towards Jim Crow during the war, it was the internment of Japanese Americans that served as the catalyst for rethinking the association’s racial policies. At the onset of the war, the organization saw “the relation between the problem of minorities now and in the post-war world [as] clear” and held its work with the Japanese American community as the first step in bettering all future race relations.<sup>49</sup>

The immediate consequences of the relocation and resettlement of Japanese Americans reverberated within the student and local branches, causing almost instantaneous change in racial rhetoric, membership, and leadership at all levels of the organization. Rather than view the removal of the Japanese community from the West Coast as a regional matter, the Association made it a national issue involving all members and staff.<sup>50</sup> Internment was not just the result of “war hysteria”; it was a race problem the Association had to confront.<sup>51</sup> By the end of the war, Y policies and practices reflected a national multiracial stance and attracted a diverse group of leaders intent on bettering

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<sup>48</sup> Letter from Sally Story to Eleanor Copenhaver Anderson, January 23, 1942. National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

<sup>49</sup> Betty Lyle, “Summary Report of the Japanese-American Project (August 1942 – September 1943),” August 27, 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

<sup>50</sup> Mary S. Ingraham and M.B.E. [Mabel Brown Ellis], “West Coast Evacuations and the Y.W.C.A.,” *The Woman’s Press*, April 1942, 180

<sup>51</sup> Elsie Harper, “On the Pacific Coast,” *The Woman’s Press*, May 1942, 256

race relations. The lessons learned in its work in internment would serve as the Association's blueprint in its future endeavors in the civil rights movement.

### Race and the YWCA prior to WWII

In order to understand the movement from a binary view of racial dynamics to a multiracial stance, it is important to first examine the Y's position on race prior to World War II. In the early part of the twentieth century, the National Board had adopted a progressive stance toward the issue of race and civil rights. However, its main focus was not on bettering internal organizational racial practices and policies, but rather on supporting anti-lynching campaigns, making efforts to desegregate housing and education, and ending discrimination in the labor force.<sup>52</sup> In 1907, it created a "Colored Secretary" position on the National Board, and in the ensuing decades, Black women who were hired to work for the National Board were usually relegated to "colored work."<sup>53</sup> The Y justified racial segregation in its branches by stating that it existed only when the community itself already practiced segregation.<sup>54</sup> However, segregated centers and branches existed throughout the nation, not only where there were Jim Crow laws. Then, in the mid 1920s, particular clubs within local branches desegregated, and the National Board got rid of the "Colored Secretary" position, later stating that the staff

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<sup>52</sup> For more on the YWCA's work in the anti-lynching campaigns see: Mary Jane Brown, *Eradicating This Evil : Women in the American Anti-Lynching Movement, 1892-1940, Studies in African American History and Culture* (New York: Garland Pub., 2000), Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry : Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

<sup>53</sup> Black staff was responsible for representing Black members and for outreach support and programs within the Black community.

<sup>54</sup> "WCS Staff Meeting" September 29, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Papers, Box #47

considered themselves “all being related and responsible to the entire constituency.”<sup>55</sup> Even with these changes, there was no justification of, or real acknowledgment of, racial pay differentials. Also, the majority of Black staff continued to be designated as leaders on race issues. In the 1930s, in order to facilitate discussion, the National Board formed a subcommittee on race relations which examined and disseminated information to local branches.<sup>56</sup> As the country headed towards war, its *Public Affairs News Bulletin* often devoted entire issues to detailed discussion of current events, federal legislation, and current campaigns pertaining to race.<sup>57</sup> The Y “pledge[d]...as an interracial organization, to work for equal enforcement of law as it applies to all groups in the population,” and used the *Bulletin* as a way to “clarify some of the major areas” in race relations.<sup>58</sup> The *Bulletin* continually suggested multiple ways for members to get involved, including writing elected officials to support anti-racist legislation; acquainting themselves with civil rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League (NUL); and *studying* “other factors” that lead to racial disparities.<sup>59</sup> These member-directed recommendations regarding race relations and the encouragement of political activism served the Association well once the war started.

Though community branches worked to uphold the policies of the National Board, the differing definitions of race in the Board and branches led to diverse

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<sup>55</sup> “Integration of Minority Groups into the Total Life of the Country” Paper presented by Myra A. Smith, Executive of the Department of Data and Trends, National Board of the Y at the National Social Work Council Meeting, October 6, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Papers, Box #41

<sup>56</sup> “Meeting On Race Relations” June 6, 1933, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Papers, Box #123

<sup>57</sup> The Public Affairs News Service began in 1940 as the YWCA’s part in the United States ‘national preparedness program.’

<sup>58</sup> *Public Affairs News Bulletin*, January 10, 1941, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Papers, Box #3

<sup>59</sup> *Public Affairs News Bulletin*, June 6, 1941, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Papers, Box #3

interpretations of policy and community outreach. At the national level, ‘race work’ usually meant relations with Black women.<sup>60</sup> For local and student branches, race work meant dealing with the community’s population – whatever their race. For instance, the West Coast and Southwestern branches worked and organized within the Asian and Mexican American communities and were vocal about their particular needs to the National Board.<sup>61</sup> It was the effects of the war, however, that eventually broadened the National Board’s idea of race from a binary to a more multiracial one.

Most of the Y’s work with the Japanese American community was centered in four cities: Los Angeles and San Francisco, California; Seattle, Washington; and, Portland, Oregon. The original efforts with first generation Japanese (Issei) and second generation Japanese Americans (Nisei) grew out of the Y-affiliated International Institutes, associations similar to settlement houses.<sup>62</sup> The institutes were based in urban areas, each Institute representing an immigrant group that mirrored that particular city’s population. The Y and the International Institutes used the term “cultural” minorities when discussing any immigrant population. Shortly before the war, local institutes debated whether or not to become independent of the Y. Many chose to merge. In some cities, “cultural” branches were created, like the Japanese Ys in Los Angeles and San Francisco. In others, such as Houston and San Antonio, Texas where there were a number of Mexican American members, staff did not know how to integrate these

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<sup>60</sup> The Y did have a committee appointed to help Native American women and girls, but this was seen as separate from its race work.

<sup>61</sup> Letter from Ethel Bird to Mrs. Edward Macy, April 26, 1941, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Papers, Box #36

<sup>62</sup> For more on the history of the YWCA’s International Institutes see: Mohl, "Cultural Pluralism in Immigrant Education: The YWCA's International Institutes, 1910-1940."

”cultural” minorities.<sup>63</sup> By the late 1930s, the term became more strictly associated with Asian and Mexican Americans. Eventually, the National Board began using the term “racial and cultural minorities” to indicate all non-white constituents.

In 1940, the Y decided to examine its local and national racial practices and policies. Originally seen as a starting point, the “Interracial Practices Study” became a top priority during the war and shaped the course of Y policy and action for the next three decades. There were several reasons to commission an internal review regarding race. These included an increase in articles pertaining to racial issues in the Association’s national magazine, *The Woman’s Press*; agitation from the student branches; and the leadership at national conventions.

Members and staff were kept informed of Association news through the monthly *The Woman’s Press*. Much like the *Public Affairs News Bulletin*, the magazine presented discussions on current events and details on government legislation and policy in addition to suggested books, arts and crafts ideas, happenings at local branches, and topics on Christianity. In a 1939 article, “Negro Women and the Association Idea,” Isobel C. Lawson highlighted the strides Black women had made in the organization, but also commented on how segregation had hurt the Y as in “too many instances the [segregated] branch has been used as a means of exclusion rather than inclusion.”<sup>64</sup> Lawson argued for a detailed examination of the internal racial practices of both the National Board and local branches. Grace Towns Hamilton, the future leader of the Atlanta National Urban League, made the same argument for the National Student Y in *The Woman’s Press* a

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<sup>63</sup> Memo from Ethel Bird to Miss McMulloch and Miss Hiller, Miss Stuff and Miss Moller, et al., July 17, 1941, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Papers, Box #36

<sup>64</sup> Isobel C. Lawson, “Negro Women and the Association Idea,” *The Woman’s Press*, March 1939, pg. 119-120

year later. Hamilton told readers that there needed to be “recognition of the impossibility of racial barriers within a truly Christian fellowship.” The National Student Y planned a three-prong approach to better race relations. Most important was “the need for clarification of the Christian Association’s attitude toward existing segregation laws and practices – and of the relation of biracialism to the building of the Christian World Community.”<sup>65</sup>

The National Student Y had a long history of confronting and examining contemporary race relations. In the 1920s it had started an “Interracial Education Program,” which sought to bring Black student branches, mainly located at Black colleges, into “the mainstream of student YWCA activity.”<sup>66</sup> The encouragement of interracial gatherings and speakers helped students widen their view of race. The triennial national conventions also served as an arena in which students promoted discussion on race relations, and one gathering even requested an Association-wide study of interracial practices at the 15<sup>th</sup> National Convention in 1938.<sup>67</sup>

Thousands of members and staff attended the Y National Conventions; there, they debated and drafted national policy, trying to balance the needs of their local branches with the Association’s national agenda. In the three years leading up to every National, branches discussed and voted on issues put forth by the previous convention. At the conventions, national and local staff worked with national and local Boards of Directors. These meetings were always interracial. In fact, since the 1920s the Y had not held a convention in a legally segregated city. Throughout the 1930s, the conventions included

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<sup>65</sup> Grace Towns Hamilton, “Because We Are Basically Interracial in Membership,” *The Woman’s Press*, May 1940, pg. 220-221

<sup>66</sup> Taylor, ““On the Edge of Tomorrow””, 31.

<sup>67</sup> “Women in Government,” 1938 Convention, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 1, Folder: Convention and National Actions Concerning Public Affairs

discussions of race relations. Coming on the heels of the arguments made by Lawson, Hamilton, and others, the delegates at the 1940 National Convention voted to work actively toward the elimination of segregation both internally and externally.<sup>68</sup> Though this decision related to all racial groups, it was mainly aimed at Black-White relations.

The combination of the Association's national publications, conferences, and edicts helped shape members' opinions and attitudes, even if some of these members felt removed from racial issues. With the creation of the Interracial Practices Study it was clear that the Y's long-range objective, both during and after the war, was to create a national stance that would prompt all local and student branches to examine internal racial practices, as well as outside forces that shaped those positions. Throughout the war surveys and questionnaires were sent to local branches asking for the racial makeup of their membership; the attitudes of the local communities; and any interracial committees and/or work that had been undertaken. The Y was not the only organization to undertake such a study, but it was one of the first. In his important treatise on race relations in America, *Brothers Under the Skin*, Carey McWilliams examined the effects of the war on community organizations, stating that many were spurred to undertake "self-surveys, 'social audits,' and investigations." Since a "community's pattern of race relations illuminates nearly every phase of its civic life," he argued, a "'social audit' on race relations, if properly conducted, cannot fail to point up general problems of housing, health, education, employment, and similar issues."<sup>69</sup> As the Y's study started prior to the

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<sup>68</sup> Though the 15<sup>th</sup> National Convention was held in 1938, the 16<sup>th</sup> National Convention was 1940 owing to the international war situation. The 17<sup>th</sup> Convention would be held in 1946, and from there forward it was back to the original schedule of every three years. Proceedings of the Sixteenth National Convention, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 321, 217

<sup>69</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Brothers under the Skin*, Eighth ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1943; reprint, 1964), 19.

war and continued throughout it, the Association was able not only to gauge its internal practices, but also have a better grasp of, and response to, the evolving racial situation brought on by the conflict.

Race relations were irrevocably altered nationwide by the massive migration of peoples during war mobilization and the war itself. These movements triggered sweeping changes in the social, economic, and political landscapes of America. Over 12 million people joined the armed forces, sending them to new locations for basic training before shipping out overseas; and over 15 million people migrated looking for better economic and social conditions.<sup>70</sup> “Such movement,” one historian commented, “left its mark on people who came in contact with new environments and with strangers.”<sup>71</sup> These migrations also caused changes in the “racial balance” in regions and cities, which led to both violent race riots, especially in 1943, and interracial community organizing.<sup>72</sup> Cities such as Detroit, Michigan; Los Angeles, California; Chicago, Illinois; and Portland, Oregon grew beyond capacity, leading to shortages in housing, education, and other social services. The Y joined with five other organizations in forming the American War-Community Services (AWCS), which worked to help communities ease these strains. The AWCS originally saw itself “as providing consultants and troubleshooters who would enable the community social welfare agencies to maximize existing services

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<sup>70</sup> Gerald D. Nash, *The Great Depression and World War II: Organizing America, 1933-1945*, *St. Martin's Series in Twentieth Century United States History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 145.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> For more on race and migration during the WWII era, see: Kevin Allen Leonard, *The Battle for Los Angeles: Racial Ideology and World War II* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), Carey McWilliams, *Brothers under the Skin*, Eighth ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1964; reprint, 1964), Nash, *The Great Depression and World War II: Organizing America, 1933-1945*, Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, *Mexican Americans & World War II*, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), Quintard Taylor, "A History of Blacks in the Pacific Northwest, 1788-1970" (Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1978).

in established localities.”<sup>73</sup> The Y influenced much of AWCS’s early work with women in booming urban areas as well as focusing on “the mitigation of racial and minority tensions.”<sup>74</sup>

While many migrations were voluntary, Japanese Americans were forced from their homes and resettled in new regions. The evacuation and internment of Japanese Americans not only devastated their communities, but the incarceration of the Japanese population also sent ripples throughout the nation. Communities with little Japanese presence prior to the war were now confronted with a new situation. In addition, the removal of the Japanese from the West Coast affected the Y regional branches keenly, as one member stated:

We are facing the fact that we soon will lose a number of our most active and valuable club members...They are girls, who like ourselves, are workers in offices, stores, and banks, civil service, teaching, nursing, household employment, and the service occupations...They are girls who have worked with us in clubs, council, and conferences; on committees and Boards of Directors. They have helped to build our western coast both economically and culturally.<sup>75</sup>

These forced migrations sent community and student Y branches into a tailspin as programming, outreach and policies had to keep up with the fast-changing populations. Many chapters wrote of these concerns in Interracial Practices questionnaires and in other correspondence with the National Board. It should be noted that even with the drastic changes taking place, the Y’s membership increased, including among Black and Japanese women, who continued to make up the second and third largest groups within the Association. Though the Y had been farsighted in its decision to conduct the

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<sup>73</sup> Gretchen Knapp, "Experimental Social Policymaking During World War II: The United Service Organizations (USO) and American War-Community Services (AWCS)," *Journal of Policy History* 12, no. 3 (2000 ): 330.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> *Public Affairs News Service*, Bulletin No. VI, May 12, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148, 7

Interracial Practices Study, wartime race relations gave a whole new impetus to the internal review. Faced with an increasingly vocal and visible multiracial membership, the Association began to devise a more nationally inclusive view of race, which was to become its cornerstone in future race relations work.

### The YWCA and Internment

The internment of Japanese Americans is a dark chapter in the history of the United States. Following the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States went to war against Germany, Italy, and Japan. In the days that followed the attack, rumors flew around the country that there were spies planning another attack on U.S. soil. The Japanese American community came under close scrutiny, as the government rounded up Japanese business and community leaders and froze many of their bank accounts. Virulent attacks on the community appeared in major newspapers on the West Coast, with the *Los Angeles Times* declaring, “A viper is nonetheless a viper wherever the egg is hatched -- so a Japanese American, born of Japanese parents -- grows up to be a Japanese, not an American.”<sup>76</sup> As anti-Japanese prejudice intensified, the United States government ordered the removal of all Japanese -- citizens as well as immigrants -- from the West Coast.<sup>77</sup> These actions suggested to the rest of the nation that Japanese and Japanese Americans were enemy aliens.

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<sup>76</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II*, First ed. (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2000), 146.

<sup>77</sup> For more on anti-Japanese prejudice prior to WWII, see Roger Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice: The Anti-Japanese Movement in California and the Struggle for Japanese Exclusion* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California, 1962). For more on the connection between anti-Japanese prejudice and the internment decision, see Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, authorizing the Secretary of War to create military areas “with respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War or the appropriate Military Commander may impose in his discretion.”<sup>78</sup> Though the Order did not specifically mention the Japanese, they were the intended target. In fact, in discussions regarding the treatment of Germans and Italians in a similar manner, President Roosevelt stated that those populations could be treated as “primarily a civilian matter” as opposed to “the case of the Japanese mass evacuation on the Pacific Coast.”<sup>79</sup>

Lieutenant General John DeWitt, head of the Western Defense Command, led enforcement of Executive Order 9066 and removed over 110,000 Japanese from the states of California, Oregon, and Washington. While there were Italians affected by this order, the restrictions on that community were eased by the Fall of 1942.<sup>80</sup> The largest concentration of Japanese was in Hawaii, but General Delos Emmons, DeWitt’s counterpart, did not see the need to intern the entire population, much to the annoyance of the federal government.<sup>81</sup> At first, Japanese living in the coastal regions were told they could relocate inland. This caused an uproar from those communities and states.<sup>82</sup> Within weeks however, Japanese were told to report to temporary “assembly centers,”

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<sup>78</sup> Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II*, 148.

<sup>79</sup> For more on German and Italian American internment, see John Christgau, “*Enemies*”: *World War II Alien Internment* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1985), Stephen C. Fox, “General John Dewitt and the Proposed Internment of German and Italian Aliens During World War II,” *Pacific Historical Review* (1988), Stephen C. Fox, *The Unknown Internment: An Oral History of the Relocation of Italian Americans During World War II, Twayne’s Oral History Series; No. 4* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990). Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II*, 148. For more on the racial aspect of 9066, see Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese Americans*.

<sup>80</sup> Fox, *The Unknown Internment*, xiii.

<sup>81</sup> For more on General Emmons decision, see Alice Yang Murray and Roger Daniels, *What Did the Internment of Japanese Americans Mean?*, *Historians at Work* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000), 7-9.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

from which they eventually were moved into more permanent “relocation centers,” also known as internment camps. There were ten War Relocation Authority (WRA) internment camps in all: Manzanar and Tule Lake in California, Gila River and Poston in Arizona; Granada (also known as Amache) in Colorado, Heart Mountain in Wyoming; Minidoka in Idaho, Topaz in Utah, and Rowher and Jerome in Arkansas.

Much has been written on the internment of Japanese Americans, including its psychological effects, economic and educational aspects, gender and familial consequences, and the different responses of internees to the situation.<sup>83</sup> There are also histories written about the individual camps, the functional of religion within the camps, and more recently, the effects of Japanese relocation to the Midwest.<sup>84</sup> Yet with this

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<sup>83</sup> For histories of the internment, see Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*, ed. Thomas J. Archdeacon, *Twayne's Immigrant Heritage of America Series* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II, Berkshire Studies in History* (Hinsdale, IL: The Dryden Press, 1971), Wendy L. Ng, *Japanese American Internment During World War II: A History and Reference Guide* (Westport, Conn. ; London: Greenwood Press, 2002), Gary Y. Okihiro and Joan Myers, *Whispered Silences: Japanese Americans and World War II* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), Jacobus tenBroek, Edwards N. Barnhart, and Floyd W. Matson, *Prejudice, War and the Constitution, Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954), Dorothy Swaine Thomas, *The Salvage, Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1952), Dorothy Swaine and Richard S. Nishimoto Thomas, *The Spoilage, Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1946). For specific histories within internment narratives, see Allan W. Austin, *From Concentration Camp to Campus: Japanese American Students and World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), Thomas James, *Exile Within: The Schooling of Japanese Americans, 1942-1945* (1987), Valerie J. Matsumoto, *Farming the Home Place: A Japanese American Community in California, 1919-1982* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), John Modell, "The Japanese American Family," *Pacific Historical Review* 37 (1968), Gary Y. Okihiro and Leslie A. Ito, *Storied Lives: Japanese American Students and World War II* (Seattle ; London: University of Washington Press, 1999). For personal memoir and oral history, see Arthur A. Hansen, ed., *Japanese American World War II Evacuation Oral History Project, Part I: Internees*, 5 vols., vol. 1, *Japanese American World War II Evacuation Oral History Project* (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1991), Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar; a True Story of Japanese American Experience During and after the World War II Internment* (Boston,: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), Monica Sone, *Nisei Daughter* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979; reprint, 1979), John Tateishi, *And Justice for All: An Oral History of the Japanese American Detention Camps*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1984), Yoshiko Uchida, *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese American Family* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982).

<sup>84</sup> For more see Stephen Fugita and Marilyn Fernandez, "Religion and Japanese Americans' Views of Their World War II Incarceration," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 5, no. 2 (2002), Jacalyn D. Harden, *Double Cross: Japanese Americans in Black and White Chicago* (Minneapolis ; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), Brian Masaru Hayashi, *For the Sake of Our Japanese Brethren: Assimilation,*

plethora of research, little has been done to examine the work of outside agencies in the internment camps or positive interracial interactions during interment. *Storied Lives*, which examines the work of the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council, is one of the few books that addresses both these issues. One of its authors, Gary Okihiro, stated that before he started this research he was originally

skeptical of the entire program of nisei student relocation and of Whites who participated...I knew too well the deeds of other Whites on behalf of their Asian American wards. Their work of charity often carried the added baggage of paternalism or maternalism...that was frequently folded within the envelope of Christian missions and social uplift.<sup>85</sup>

He concludes that while the positive interracial interactions in the Council “goes against the grain of most accounts of the Japanese American experience during the World War II period,” these relationships “must not go unrecognized.”<sup>86</sup> Examining the work of the Y is a step in this direction, as the Association went to great lengths to support the Japanese American community inside and outside the internment camps.

Four days after Pearl Harbor, Mary Shotwell Ingraham, President of the National Board, wrote President Roosevelt in support of the war effort, but cautioned that racial and ethnic prejudices should not be allowed to determine anyone’s patriotism. “Loyalties [would] inevitably be called into question,” she stated, yet “often it takes such a little effort to secure the facts which will prevent so much unnecessary suffering.”<sup>87</sup> Ingraham was worried about the increase of fear and suspicion many Americans had for the

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*Nationalism, and Protestantism among the Japanese of Los Angeles, 1895-1942, Asian America* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995), Murray and Daniels, *What Did the Internment of Japanese Americans Mean?*

<sup>85</sup> Okihiro and Ito, *Storied Lives*, x.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>87</sup> Letter from Mary Ingraham to President Roosevelt, December 11, 1941, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #99

Japanese, German, and Italian American communities.<sup>88</sup> The Y was not the only Christian organization concerned; as the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, and the Home Missions Council of North America also spoke publicly on this issue.<sup>89</sup> One German member praised the Y on this matter, stating, “It is so good to know that there are groups who can think of human beings in terms of human beings and who try to live by a love that includes instead of drawing strength through hatred that excludes.”<sup>90</sup>

Hostility aimed at German and Italian Americans simmered throughout the war, but Japanese American antagonisms stayed at the boiling point. Ingraham led the Association throughout the war before spearheading its postwar foray into better race relations, understood this situation early on. She therefore included two papers in her letter to President Roosevelt: one reviewing the past positive relationship between the United States and Japan, and another listing the Y’s international leadership, hoping to illustrate the organization’s global awareness and presence.<sup>91</sup> Her letter reflected the positions the Association took throughout the war: the Y supported the American war effort and continued its international humanitarian work, while rejecting the domestic racist propaganda that appeared with increasing frequency in the media, in public, and in government. Japanese Y members and staff appreciated Ingraham’s stance; one even commented that those early harried days “brought out so keenly what it means to belong

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<sup>88</sup> Christgau, *"Enemies": World War II Alien Internment*, Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA*, Fox, "General John Dewitt and the Proposed Internment of German and Italian Aliens During World War II.", Fox, *The Unknown Internment*, Timothy J. Holian, *The German-Americans and World War II: An Ethnic Experience* (New York: P. Lang, 1996).

<sup>89</sup> Okihiro and Ito, *Storied Lives*, 22.

<sup>90</sup> “Extracts from Letters Received by Los Angeles YWCA Recently,” January 1942. National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

<sup>91</sup> Mary Ingraham to President Roosevelt, December 11, 1941, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #99

to [the Y],” as “in times like these it means a lot to know your organization still believes in [the] fellowship of women and girls and still practices it.”<sup>92</sup> This attitude strengthened Ingraham’s, and therefore the Association’s, resolve to continue fostering good inter-ethnic and racial relations among its members and in the nation at large.

When news of Executive Order 9066 broke in February 1942, local branches looked to the National Board for guidance. The Los Angeles Y asked if the National Board supported “a protest against such a mass evacuation,” and if the National Board did, the branch hoped “the National Board [would] voice such protest to the proper authorities in Washington.”<sup>93</sup> The San Francisco Y was similarly concerned about the mistreatment of Japanese Americans. Japanese members in that city decided “that there must be the Y wherever they were,” and asked if the Los Angeles and San Francisco Associations could make this possible. The National Board established a policy of full support for the Japanese American community, promising, “Wherever you go the YWCA will be there.”<sup>94</sup> According to one staffer who repeated this phrase to a group of Japanese, the members replied, “We know it will. We are the YWCA.”<sup>95</sup>

In the early spring of 1942, Helen Flack, National Secretary for the Western Region, wrote a proposal for the National Board regarding the role and scope of work the Y might assume in “Relation to Japanese Reception and Resettlement Areas in the Western Defense Command.” The report highlighted the importance of working with the

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<sup>92</sup> “Extracts from Letters Received by Los Angeles YWCA Recently,” January 1942. National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

<sup>93</sup> Letter from Grace Steinbeck to Helen Flack, February 27, 1942. National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

<sup>94</sup> Memo from Helen Flack to Presidents and General Secretaries of Associations in the Western Region, March 27, 1942. National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

<sup>95</sup> “Confidential: Notes on talk by Miss Helen Flack,” August 20, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers. According to rough estimates, there were a couple thousand Japanese Y members on the West Coast prior to World War II.

Japanese American community as well measures the Association could take toward that end. Flack outlined three ideas for maintaining a presence throughout removal and internment:

1. Supervision in a housing unit for single and unattached girls and women providing protection and security which would normally come through a family unit.
2. Counseling, providing trained leadership (speaking the Japanese language) to deal with personal and family problems which are bound to arise.
3. Working with girls and women in a program which they plan and carry out themselves in the realm of arts, family relationships, work problems, religion and health.

Concerning the last recommendation, Flack stated: "We know from experience that this kind of program has a constructive influence in the building of morale, the development of leadership, personal growth and the taking of responsibility as citizens of a community." This indicated the Y's belief in empowerment of women and girls. The report also stated, "Some of our centers have been in existence for over 22 years and many of the Nisei group have literally grown up within the walls of the YWCA. The Association stands with the Japanese American group as a link with the Caucasian community." The Y believed that it was in an important position to help counter the deleterious effects of the evacuation on the Japanese population. Throughout the war, the Association promoted the idea of serving as a bridge between different racial and ethnic communities and various government agencies and social organizations as it petitioned for greater access to these groups and the desire to represent women's voices across racial lines. The Y implemented Flack's proposal, along with other plans, in the summer of 1942, by which time most of the Japanese on the West Coast had been interned.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Helen Flack, "A Proposal for Work which the National Board of the Young Women's Christian Association might assume in Relation to Japanese Reception and Resettlement Areas in the Western Defense Command," March 21, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148. "Study of the

Beyond Flack's proposal, the National Board created the National Board Japanese Evacuee Project, which examined the Association's internal and external policies and practices with respect to evacuation, internment, and resettlement. The lead staffer on the project was Annie Clo Watson, former head of the San Francisco International Institute. The May 1942 edition of *Public Affairs News Bulletin*, entitled "The West Coast Evacuation in Relation to the Struggle for Freedom," asked,

What is the significance of this Japanese exodus -- a social phenomenon unique in national history? ...Has [it]...any relationship to our future concepts of citizenship or to the terms of a future peace? And finally, has the Young Women's Christian Association any responsibility in this situation, and if so what is it?

The authors reserved harsh criticism for anti-Japanese sentiments, declaring those who held these beliefs as "pseudo patriots and...ill-informed people." In addition to these questions and critiques, the *Bulletin* served to further educate members on the usage of Japanese terms, such as Issei and Nisei; the history of Japanese immigration to the United States; and most importantly, the finer points of Executive Order 9066 and what evacuation really entailed. The *Bulletin* also reminded readers that the Association "protests racial discrimination wherever it occurs and we view with the greatest alarm the compulsory evacuation of American citizens, on the basis of racial origin alone, without any pretense of judicial hearings."<sup>97</sup>

After the "Day of Infamy," West Coast Ys were kept very busy dealing with race and gender issues. Before the relocation, Southern California branches immediately responded to reports of increased sexual and physical violence against Issei and Nisei

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Evacuation and Resettlement of Japanese on the West Coast," July 3, 1942. National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

<sup>97</sup> "The West Coast Evacuation in relation to the Struggle for Freedom," *Public Affairs News Bulletin*, No. VI, May 12, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148.

women and children. In order to protect them, branches switched meetings to daytime or in some cases canceled gatherings. The Y's western regional leadership advised the affected branches to combine meetings and "direct more effort to holding interracial activities and [to] establish a more secure feeling in the community."<sup>98</sup> Outreach efforts included providing materials to educate members on the historical and cultural background of the Japanese American community. In Los Angeles, a report was issued to all members confronting anti-Japanese propaganda, stating "the Japanese-American can be assimilated socially whenever his fellow Americans will allow it."<sup>99</sup>

Members were also reminded of the long standing relationship between the organization and the Japanese American community. Clara L. Eckart, the president of Seattle Y's Board of Directors, sent a letter to members urging them not to turn their backs on the Japanese population. The letter quoted U.S. Attorney General Francis Biddle stating that "the defense of our country will be hurt, not helped, by a persecution. If we create the feeling among aliens and other foreign-born that they are not wanted here, we shall endanger our national unity." Eckart pointed out that if the government had no proof of disloyalty then there was no reason to suspect the Japanese of such. She remained positive that Y members would continue their good relations with the Japanese community, economically and socially, "recognizing that in this time of crisis, we need to express to them [Japanese Americans] our faith in their loyalty." The following day, Eckart released a statement to the Japanese members detailing her concern with the

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<sup>98</sup> Letter from Mildred Kaplan to Lilian Sharpley, December 21, 1941, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

<sup>99</sup> "Your Attention Please....," The Los Angeles YWCA, January 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

“situation you are facing and [that we have] an earnest desire to be of help to you,” and enclosed a copy of her prior letter.<sup>100</sup>

In those early days of the war, many of the local branches were trying to balance their concerns about domestic security with their support of the Japanese.<sup>101</sup> While acknowledging there might be “no other satisfactory way to meet the present situation,” one Los Angeles Y staffer wrote that the members of the branch “deeply deplore this treatment being accorded to the fine Japanese-Americans in our city.”<sup>102</sup> Shortly after the promulgation of Executive Order 9066, Elsie Maguire, the Executive Director of the San Francisco Y, wrote to Flack, “We have felt from the start that Japanese nationals would probably be evacuated from the Coast, but most of us expected that citizens would be allowed to remain and carry on their normal lives.” Many national and local staff made the distinction between Japanese nationals and Japanese Americans and believed that the federal government had erroneously lumped them together. It frightened the Association that citizens could be rounded up or demonized simply because of their race and/or ethnicity. The Y routinely made mention of the American citizenry of the Nisei and assured members of the loyalty of the Issei. By the middle of the war, the Y used the internment to promote greater consideration regarding the liberty and citizenship of all non-White Americans. As one staffer wrote in 1943, “86,000 residents in the relocation

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<sup>100</sup> Letter from Mrs. Claude H. Eckart to all YWCA Members, January 27, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149; Statement by Mrs. Claude H. Eckart, Seattle YWCA, January 28, 1942. National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

<sup>101</sup> A local branch came under fire when two young Japanese men were hired in their cafeteria. Patrons insisted that ground glass was being put in the food by the new hires. The branch assured the patrons that the FBI was looking into their claims, but they were not going to remove the young men. See “Confidential: Notes on talk by Miss Helen Flack,” August 20, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers.

<sup>102</sup> Letter from Grace Steinbeck to Helen Flack, February 27, 1942. National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

centers stand as a constant reminder to us that democracy is still an unfinished business in our land.”<sup>103</sup>

Maguire’s letter also expressed disbelief at the magnitude of the proposed removal and how imperative it was to continue the organization’s work with the Japanese American community in conjunction with support for the war effort. Her letter continued,

a Japanese man said to [staff member] Miss Mukaye...that in some way the YWCA would have to help the Japanese people at this time. He said it was the only organization that had seemed to mean business in its racial attitudes and that he hoped it would be able to step in and do something. He didn’t know what any more than she did! None of us knows!<sup>104</sup>

The confusion expressed in Maguire’s letter came to a head once Executive Order 9066 went into effect. The first groups of evacuated Japanese were those who lived on Terminal Island, a community near Long Beach, California. The Terminal Island removal was poorly planned and executed.<sup>105</sup> As one Y staff member remembered, “The evacuation of the Japanese that night in February is something no one can forget. Everyone is ashamed of it.” Residents, who had been told they had a month to pack, had to leave in only two days. Army personnel were unable to give complete and/or direct answers to many questions, including what the evacuees should do with their belongings. The San Pedro Y, along with members of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and the Terminal Island Baptist Mission, were the only volunteers who helped the Japanese.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Betty Lyle, “Summary Report of the Japanese-American Project (August 1942 – September 1943),”

<sup>104</sup> Letter from Elsie Maguire to Helen Flack, February 28, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

<sup>105</sup> For more Terminal Island see Bill Hosokawa, *Nisei : The Quiet Americans*, Rev. ed. (Boulder, Colo.: University Press of Colorado, 2002), 309-11, Okihiro and Ito, *Storied Lives*, 26-27.

<sup>106</sup> Elsie Harper and Helen Flack to Mabel Ellis, March 28, 1942. National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

As the evacuations swept across the West Coast, local branches worked to make the situation less stressful and painful for its Japanese members and the larger community. In Portland, the government's Evacuation Bureau requested the Y's help in transporting people to the assembly centers. The branch complied with the request, and the branch's Associate General Secretary, Mildred Bartholomew, noted, "No one knows why but it was a tremendous opportunity, generative of more good will and of more reliance on Christian friendship than anything that could have happened to us." Afterwards, the Y received notes of gratitude from those they helped, and the White members held these memories close, making those who did not participate "pity themselves." The whole situation strengthened relations among the members, and "it drained off a lot of bitterness against them [Japanese Americans] at the last, to help load up all the possessions of a family and to ride beside a person who asked no sympathy and who carried his end of a conversation on such a fateful trip." Later, the Portland branch secured permission to visit the assembly center and continued its work to prepare those in the center for the next stage of the removal process.<sup>107</sup>

Legal restrictions were placed on Japanese not yet interned. Those who did not comply with the curfews or with reporting to assembly centers faced both jail time and a fine. Three men, from California, Washington, and Oregon, protested these restrictions. All were convicted and eventually had their cases heard by the Supreme Court. The Court "upheld their convictions, declaring that the government's policies were based on

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<sup>107</sup> Mildred Bartholomew to Elsie Harper, May 13, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

military necessity.”<sup>108</sup> Decisions like these worried those committed to the ideas of democratic fair play.<sup>109</sup>

Y branches were not alone in their work with the Japanese community. They cooperated with other members of the Community Chests & Councils, a network of non-profit social organizations in communities developed nationwide.<sup>110</sup> Local chapters of various national organizations received funding and other types of support through the local Community Chests. Several of these organizations also united on the national stage both in support of the war effort and to better social and economic opportunities for minorities. Race relations were of particular interest to many of these groups, which occasionally worked together even in the face of differing organizational agendas and tactics. The NAACP, which tirelessly worked throughout the war fighting for civil rights for African Americans, took time to write U.S. Attorney Biddle about the internment, even while acknowledging this issue did not “come strictly within the scope of the NAACP.”<sup>111</sup> As one NAACP staffer recalled, “the NAACP was in the civil rights business,” not necessarily “a lobby for the exclusive advancement of black Americans.”<sup>112</sup> As some groups broadened the scope of their work by crossing racial

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<sup>108</sup> Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II*, 154. For more on these men, Fred Korematsu, Gordon Hirabayashi, and Minsru Yasui, and their respective Supreme Court cases, see Susan Dudley Gold, *Korematsu V. United States : Japanese-American Internment* (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), Peter Irons, ed., *Justice Delayed: The Record of the Japanese American Internment Cases* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), Tateishi, *And Justice for All : An Oral History of the Japanese American Detention Camps*, 62-93.

<sup>109</sup> Throughout my research, I never found any mention of these cases in the National Board Y’s records, including local branch records in Los Angeles, Seattle, and Portland. Given the Y’s commitment to “fair play,” it is odd. But, there is also a pattern of the Y not addressing issues where women are not involved. For instance, see Chapter 4 and the Y’s reaction and activism on behalf of Angela Davis but not Attica.

<sup>110</sup> M.B.E. [Mabel Brown Ellis], “Public Affairs: The West Coast Evacuations,” *The Woman’s Press*, April 1942

<sup>111</sup> Walter White to Francis Biddle, July 10, 1942, NAACP Papers, Library of Congress, NAACP II, II A325, Folder “Japanese 1942-1945”

<sup>112</sup> Gilbert Jonas, *Freedom’s Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle against Racism in America, 1909-1969* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 341. I do not wish to overstate the NAACP’s role in internment, which was

lines, other organizations created more formal networks by which to help people during the war. The National Social Work Council, which oversaw the Community Chests, formed the American War-Community Services (AWCS), which included the Y, the Family Welfare Association of America, and the National Urban League.<sup>113</sup> The AWCS worked with urban communities in easing racial tensions and providing social services. In many instances, the coalitions formed during the war laid the groundwork for civil rights work in the postwar era.<sup>114</sup>

Beyond working with the Community Chest organizations on internment and other race-related issues, the Y also collaborated with the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). While the JACL played a controversial role during the war, many organizations including the Y, were not aware of the internal strife between the larger Japanese community and the organization. The JACL did little to protest the internment, encouraged distrust of the Issei and informed on Issei behavior to the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI). Yet at the same time, because the JACL “had an established network throughout the Japanese American community prior to the war, the JACL was chosen by the government to serve as a communication link with the West Coast Japanese community.”<sup>115</sup> As the Y worked with the government in a similar regard, it too worked with the JACL. The Y consulted Mike Masaoka, National Secretary of the

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at best peripheral. For more on the NAACP’s response to internment, see Greenberg, “Black and Jewish Responses to Japanese Internment.”

<sup>113</sup> Knapp, “Experimental Social Policymaking During World War II: The United Service Organizations (USO) and American War-Community Services (AWCS).”

<sup>114</sup> Greenberg, “Black and Jewish Responses to Japanese Internment.”, Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II*.

<sup>115</sup> Tateishi, *And Justice for All : An Oral History of the Japanese American Detention Camps*, xxiv. For more on the controversial role of the JACL see Murray and Daniels, *What Did the Internment of Japanese Americans Mean*, Paul R. Spickard, “The Nisei Assume Power: The Japanese Citizens League, 1941-1942,” *Pacific Historical Review* LII, no. 2 (1983), Tateishi, *And Justice for All : An Oral History of the Japanese American Detention Camps*, xxiv-xxv.

JACL, on how best to proceed in the WRA camps and how best the Association could be of service to the JACL. Masaoka told them, "Japanese Americans want [Caucasian] representatives to be present in the Relocation Centers, carrying on a normal program as far as possible."<sup>116</sup> The JACL also asked the Y to help by making and sending Christmas gifts to children in the camps. National and local staff enlisted the help of the "Girl Reserves," who not only made gifts, but started pen pal projects, raised money to purchase nursery and play school equipment, and sent games and "story packets" (books, magazines, etc.) to the camps.<sup>117</sup> The Y worked with the JACL throughout the war, and educated its members and the public on the League's work. The JACL needed support from non-Japanese groups as its opposition to the camps earned the scorn of various government officials and influential members of society.<sup>118</sup>

The Y also joined with the government-sponsored United Service Organization (USO), which included the YMCA, the Salvation Army, and the National Conference of Catholic Charities.<sup>119</sup> Designated Y branches became USO-YWCA centers, serving those in the service, and later, the defense industries. In some cases, these branches

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<sup>116</sup> Annie Clo Watson, "Report of Meeting with Mike Masaoka," July 2, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

<sup>117</sup> "A Very Special Christmas Idea," *The Bookshelf* (the national Girl Reserves monthly publication), November 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #93.2; "Annual Report – 1942 – Reported by Ruth Lee Harrington, Executive, Younger Girls Department," San Francisco YWCA Papers, San Francisco, California. (herein afterward referred to as San Francisco YWCA Papers)

<sup>118</sup> T. Scott Miyakawa to Annie Clo Watson, June 19, 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148. Miyakawa tells Watson of the vicious attacks from the Hearst papers, and of stealing of JACL files by the Dies Committee. Miyakawa also speaks of the absurdity of the Dies Committee, to wit: the Committee argued that the JACL controlled the policies of the War Department, "OWI" and the War Relocation Authority. There are different interpretations of the JACL's work on behalf of the Japanese American community, for more see: Bill Hosokawa, *JACL: In Quest of Justice* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1982), Yuji Ichioka and University of California Los Angeles. Asian American Studies Center., *A Buried Past; an Annotated Bibliography of the Japanese American Research Project Collection* (Berkeley,: University of California Press, 1974), Mike and Bill Hosokawa Masaoka, *They Call Me Moses Masaoka: An American Saga* (New York: William Morrow, 1987), Spickard, "The Nisei Assume Power: The Japanese Citizens League, 1941-1942."

<sup>119</sup> Knapp, "Experimental Social Policymaking During World War II: The United Service Organizations (USO) and American War-Community Services (AWCS)."

hastened integration of local Ys. In Portland soon after the war started, the Black Y branch became a USO for Black servicemen, that branch's administration and programs then moved to the "Central" (White) building.<sup>120</sup> In addition to its USO affiliation, the Association worked independently with the government on race and women's issues. As a major partner in the war effort, the Y felt confident about encouraging federal agencies and officials to become more active in promoting tolerance and democratic principles. The National Board commended the Office of War Information (OWI) for its pamphlet on the accomplishments of African Americans, but hoped it would do the same for Japanese Americans.<sup>121</sup> In its continued efforts on behalf of the Japanese community, the Association had to get approval from the WRA in order to work in the relocation camps and in resettlement. The reputation of the Y was so high among government officials that there were seldom problems gaining access to the camps.<sup>122</sup>

Immediately after Executive Order 9066 went into effect, the Y urged government officials to create loyalty boards instead of removing Japanese from the West Coast. Annie Clo Watson wrote the Tolan Investigating Congressional Committee<sup>123</sup> recommending that "American citizen Japanese be given the privilege of establishing their loyalty before properly constituted hearing boards and that subsequent differentiation in treatment be shown them, thus avoiding movement against a racial bloc

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<sup>120</sup> Portland Board of Directors Meeting, August 14, 1942, Portland YWCA Papers, Lewis & Clark College, Portland, OR, Box 13. After the war, when the Williams Avenue branch ceased being a USO center, there were some issues regarding continued integration, culminating in a 1947 study which supported integration. B.Q. Hansen, "Gleanings from YWCA Board Minutes," n.d. 1970s, Portland YWCA Papers, Box 5. (herein afterward referred to as Portland YWCA Papers)

<sup>121</sup> Betty Lyle, "Summary Report of the Japanese-American Project (August 1942 – September 1943)"

<sup>122</sup> Esther Briesemeister, "Brief Outline of Y.W.C.A. Work in Cooperation with the War Relocation Authority" (Marked "Confidential – Not to Circulated), May 22, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

<sup>123</sup> "A congressional committee under the chairmanship of Congressman John Tolan of California to investigate problems of 'national defense migration.'" Edward Holland Spicer et al., *Impounded People; Japanese-Americans in the Relocation Centers* (Tucson,: University of Arizona Press, 1969), 39.

of American citizens.”<sup>124</sup> The Y wanted these Boards set up immediately, as it believed their establishment would help the Japanese either bypass internment entirely or at least minimize internment time. Members were urged to contact the U.S. Attorney General regarding the creation of the loyalty hearing boards and local Associations also tried to gather support for them in their communities.<sup>125</sup>

In May 1942, the Tolan Committee heard from various social and government agencies regarding the establishment of loyalty boards. Various groups, including the Y, spoke in support, while the Departments of Justice and Army were opposed.<sup>126</sup> No final agreement was reached, and the Y eventually moved away from the matter. The government, however, did not. In 1943, Dillon Myer, the head of the WRA, approved “a Loyalty Registration” questionnaire which sought “to clarify which country [internees] supported and the willingness of U.S. citizens among them to serve in the American armed forces.”<sup>127</sup> The questionnaire was labeled “Application for Leave Clearance,” with the expectation that answering “correctly” would serve to relocate internees at a faster rate.<sup>128</sup> There were two controversial questions on the application. The first, number 27, asked draft age males, “Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?” The second, number 28, asked to everyone, “Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any

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<sup>124</sup> Annie Clo Watson to the Tolan Investigating Committee, March 31, 1942. National YWCA Board Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

<sup>125</sup> Mildred Bartholomew, et al., to President Roosevelt, August 1, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

<sup>126</sup> Mabel Ellis to Mrs. Henry Ingraham and Emma Hirth, May 28, 1942 National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

<sup>127</sup> Brian Masaru Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organizations?”<sup>129</sup> If one answered “yes-yes,” it meant that one was loyal to the United States and willing to join the armed forces. If one answered “no-no,” it led to segregation from the rest of the Japanese community, relocation to the camp at Tule Lake, and eventual deportation to Japan. This questionnaire touched off a wave of anger throughout the camps. Japanese protested that after being labeled as enemy aliens, the American government now wanted them to put their lives on the line to defend the ideals of democracy.<sup>130</sup> The JACL supported answering “yes-yes,” which only further distanced it from many in the Japanese community.<sup>131</sup> Although the Association had approved of loyalty boards at the start of the evacuations, its support had faded and the Y now became vocal in its disapproval of the questionnaire.<sup>132</sup> Concerned that this survey was actually part of a wave of anti-Japanese legislation in both the local and federal arenas, the Y questioned the application’s segregation and deportation consequences.<sup>133</sup> Betty Lyle, national Y Girls Reserves secretary, commented “It is especially difficult for young people who have to choose between family and country, particularly when they have little assurance of what the country will offer.”<sup>134</sup> Even

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<sup>129</sup> Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, *Personal Justice Denied* (Washington D.C., Seattle: Civil Liberties Public Education Fund; University of Washington Press, 1997).

<sup>130</sup> Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment*, 145-47, Sone, *Nisei Daughter*, 198-99.

<sup>131</sup> Tateishi, *And Justice for All : An Oral History of the Japanese American Detention Camps*, xxiv.

<sup>132</sup> There are many books detailing the uproar of the Questionnaire, see Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment*, Edwin M. Nakasone, *The Nisei Soldier : Historical Essays on World War II and the Korean War*, 3rd ed. (White Bear Lake, MN: J-Press Pub., 2007), Ng, *Japanese American Internment During World War II : A History and Reference Guide*. Though most histories discuss the issue of “proving one’s loyalty” in the early months of internment, there is little to none on the issue, suggestion, or establishment of Loyalty Hearing Boards during this time. Though the Y is clear in its support of the Boards, and clear in its disapproval of the Questionnaire, at no point is there any discussion on how and why it viewed these two ideas as different.

<sup>133</sup> Betty Lyle, “Summary Report of the Japanese-American Project (August 1942 – September 1943)”

<sup>134</sup> Betty Lyle, “Summary Report of the Japanese-American Project (August 1942 – September 1943).” The Girl Reserves was Y membership and program for young girls, usually in high school or younger.

though it disapproved of the questionnaire, the Association supported the intent to empty the camps quickly as it saw the camps as detrimental to the health and well being of the internees. In fact, the Y had already begun to meet with government officials in its resettlement efforts.

The Y's cooperation with the government did not blind it to "the evils inherent in the power America now has over 110,000 people."<sup>135</sup> The Association knew there were those in government who saw internment as a first, not a last, action to be taken against the Japanese community. Many public officials and private citizens clamored to strip American citizenship from the Japanese. Shortly after the start of evacuations, Senator Tom Stewart (D-TN) introduced a bill proposing just that.<sup>136</sup> After being contacted by the two main organizations opposing his bill, the Common Council for American Unity and the American Friends Service Committee, the Y joined the opposition.<sup>137</sup> The Association believed that this type of legislation, in addition to anti-Japanese actions and racist rhetoric, were hurting the war effort, specifically in relation to the United States soldiers fighting in the Pacific Theater. It warned its members "America cannot afford to tolerate such [racist] theories or to permit their dissemination. If for no more than selfish reasons it should be clear that the treatment of Americans in the hands of Japanese at this moment may be affected by the treatment given to those of Japanese heritage at the hands of Americans in the United States."<sup>138</sup> The Y soon broadened this argument, stating that any racism "serves to aid the partners in the Axis...[they] are smart enough to seize upon

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<sup>135</sup> Winnifred Wygal, "Report on Manzanar – July 22-27, 1943," National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, "Manzanar" Section, pg. 3

<sup>136</sup> "Plea made for 'Loyal' Aliens: Protests Heard by Congress Agents," *The San Francisco News*, March 13, 1942

<sup>137</sup> Mabel Ellis to the West Coast Consulting Group, June 26, 1942. National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

<sup>138</sup> *Public Affairs News Service*, May 12, 1942, 8

the most vulnerable point in American democracy -- its treatment of its dark minority -- to prove that they will not have it if the side on which America is fighting wins.”<sup>139</sup>

Beyond the international consequences of American racism, the Association saw internment as a way to broach larger domestic racial issues. The Association recognized that “the Japanese evacuee problem is only a small part of the larger minority problem,”<sup>140</sup> but “it is only when we are jolted by something so immense as the evacuation which is taking place on the Pacific Coast that we remember the injustices meted out to many of our citizens every day.”<sup>141</sup> The evacuation was a wake-up call to all members that “in many parts of our country persons with dark or yellow skins cannot get jobs, cannot train for certain kinds of work in the Army or Navy, cannot eat and cannot sleep where White people eat and sleep.”<sup>142</sup> The Y was not the only group to connect different forms of discrimination and put them under the larger banner of racism. The editor of *La Opinion*, a Spanish language newspaper, wrote, “This war experience has ironically fostered a bond between the Mexican-American community and the Japanese-American community. The events of internment and the Zoot-suit riots share a common pattern of racism that we are all subject to.”<sup>143</sup> Using the internment as an entry point into larger discussions of American racial mores, these groups put a multiracial spin on the “Double V” campaign it supported.

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 14

<sup>140</sup> Esther Briesemeister, “Recommendations Regarding Future Work of Japanese Evacuee Project,” October 25, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

<sup>141</sup> *Public Affairs News Service*, May 12, 1942, 9

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II*, 179. The Zoot Suit Riots occurred in larger Los Angeles area in 1943. White United States military personnel committed physical acts of violence against Mexican Americans who were wearing Zoot Suits (flashy fashionable men’s suit) instead of military uniforms. The soldiers claimed that it was unpatriotic for these Zoot Suiters to not serve in the armed forces during a time of war. In reality, many of these soldiers, acting on their racial prejudices, provoked drunken brawls while on leave. For more on the Zoot Suit Riots see Leonard, *The Battle for Los Angeles : Racial Ideology and World War II*, Rivas-Rodriguez, *Mexican Americans & World War II*.

Much of the Y's rhetoric mirrored the "Double V" campaign, the belief that during the war African Americans had to "fight for democracy on two fronts -- at home as well as abroad."<sup>144</sup> It was promoted by the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the NAACP and other civil rights groups, and included media and publicity, merchandise sales, and community outreach. The campaign grew out of the 1941 March on Washington Movement and the subsequent Executive Order 8802, which banned "employment discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin for employers with defense contracts, labor unions, and civilian agencies of the federal government."<sup>145</sup> In order to enforce the Executive Order, President Roosevelt created the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC), which investigated charges of racial discrimination throughout the nation.<sup>146</sup> This development led many African Americans to believe that other policies and actions attached to the war could provide "an excellent opportunity to prick the conscience of white America" and end the era of Jim Crow.<sup>147</sup> The Y was one of many social organizations which endorsed the "Double V" campaign, helping to further its ideas and goals within and beyond the Black community.

In contrast to the "Double V" campaign, racial tensions and the theme of "White America for White Americans" was rising in popularity. The resurgence of racist slurs worried the National Board as these remarks came "dangerously close to the racial

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<sup>144</sup> Richard Dalfiume, "The "Forgotten Years" Of the Negro Revolution," *The Journal of American History* LV, no. 90 (1968): 95.

<sup>145</sup> Andrew Edmund Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War : The FEPC in the Midwest, 1941-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>146</sup> For more on the FEPC see Herbert Garfinkel, *When Negroes March: The March on Washington Movement in the Organization Politics for FEPC* (Glencoe, Ill.,: Free Press, 1959), Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War : The FEPC in the Midwest, 1941-46*, Merl Elwyn Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement : The President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941-1946* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), Louis Ruchames, *Race, Jobs & Politics: The Story of FEPC* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953).

<sup>147</sup> Dalfiume, "The "Forgotten Years" Of the Negro Revolution," 96.

theories advocated in Nazi Germany.”<sup>148</sup> Ruth Benedict, in her wartime treatise on race relations, *The Races of Mankind*, wrote that Americans could only win against Nazi rhetoric by confronting their own racism.<sup>149</sup> The pamphlet was placed throughout USO centers, and the Association recommended the book to staff and members alike. Benedict’s ideas proved to be unpopular in the southern USO branches, and the pamphlet was soon removed.<sup>150</sup>

The removal of Benedict’s pamphlets was an example of the fine line the Y and other social agencies had to tread while they worked to better race relations during the war.<sup>151</sup> There were those who believed that discussing racial issues hurt the nation’s war efforts. For instance, there were complaints that the “Double V” campaign and its supporters were interfering with the war effort, rather than aiding it. Editors at Black newspapers took umbrage at this idea, and leaders of the NAACP and the National Urban League “claimed it was patriotic for Negroes to protest against undemocratic practices, and those who sought to stifle this protest were the unpatriotic ones.”<sup>152</sup> The Y agreed with this assessment, yet it also made efforts to ensure that the association did not appear too defiant. Members believed that if they protested too strongly, they faced the prospect not only of losing whatever advantage they had in working in the internment camps, but also being labeled as traitors.<sup>153</sup> Although the Y believed that working in the camps

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<sup>148</sup> *Public Affairs News Service*, May 12, 1942, 8

<sup>149</sup> Ruth Fulton Benedict and Gene Weltfish, *The Races of Mankind* (New York: Public Affairs Committee, Inc., 1943). This pamphlet was published by the USO.

<sup>150</sup> Knapp, "Experimental Social Policymaking During World War II: The United Service Organizations (USO) and American War-Community Services (AWCS)," 327.

<sup>151</sup> 1943, the year Benedict’s pamphlet was published, was also a year of major race riots -- the Zoot Suit Riots, as well as the Detroit and Harlem riots. For more on 1943 as the turning point of race relations in the war, see McWilliams, *Brothers under the Skin*, 3.

<sup>152</sup> Dalfiume, "The "Forgotten Years" Of the Negro Revolution," 101.

<sup>153</sup> One example of this effort is in an memo from Annie Clo Watson to the Tolson Investigating Committee, March 31, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148. In it, she writes “This report is

served to reinforce its commitment to democratic ideas, the association knew that others questioned its patriotism precisely because of its efforts on behalf of the Japanese. As one National Board staffer commented, “The Y.W.C.A. worker must establish an identification with the evacuees and also at times with the government. To play two roles is difficult but necessary.”<sup>154</sup>

Even with the association’s careful foray into race issues, it was clear and direct in its commitment to its members and their role in creating a “Christian fellowship.” When the Y noticed that public opinion was worsening towards the Japanese, and that the government’s personnel were “stiffening in their attitudes toward allowing Caucasians to visit the assembly centers,” it reached out to other organizations, imploring them to join in contacting President Roosevelt and other government officials for a national effort to promote tolerance.<sup>155</sup> The association firmly believed that by “helping Japanese American citizens and their families,” it was “rendering significant service to this nation in the struggle to preserve the values long cherished as the American way of life.”<sup>156</sup>

### Work in the Camps

The Y knew from earlier organizational experience that in order to best help the Japanese community, it needed to be in the camps. Japanese members also wanted the Y there because its presence helped bring some normalcy to their lives. All involved were

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respectfully submitted with the offer of full cooperation to all government authorities concerned with immigrant groups, and in complete willingness to comply with measures that may be urgently necessary for military protection.”

<sup>154</sup> Esther Briesemeister, “Brief Outline of Y.W.C.A. Work in Cooperation with the War Relocation Authority”

<sup>155</sup> Annie Clo Watson to National Board, (marked “Exceedingly Confidential”), May 1, 1942. National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

<sup>156</sup> “Y.W.C.A. Service for Japanese Evacuees,” May 26, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

aware of the “enormous cultural break” that was occurring due to internment, and there was considerable concern over its effects on the lives of women and girls.<sup>157</sup> In a report to the National Board on its initial camp work, it was noted “family life which [had] been such a stabilizing influence has received a great shock...the results of which are found to show in the lives of girls.”<sup>158</sup> Single women were also affected by this situation. Families with young children were kept together, but adult children were not always placed with their parents. For the first time in their lives, many single adult women were without the supervision and protection of a male relative. This new independence was one of many factors that eventually lead to the erosion of “patriarchal authority” within the Japanese community.<sup>159</sup> Some of these women formed their own groups, like the Poston Women’s Club, which organized in the community and influenced camp policy.

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Most Y staffers were single women, therefore it was no surprise that interned staff immediately formed Y chapters and that the first item in the Association’s work agenda in the camps was for “Supervision in a housing unit for single and unattached girls and women providing protection and security which would normally come through a family unit.”<sup>161</sup> Scattered Y members and staff joined together under the auspices of the

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<sup>157</sup> War Time Program: Division of Community Y.W.C.A.’s, July 13, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148 For more women and families see Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride : Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), Matsumoto, *Farming the Home Place: A Japanese American Community in California, 1919-1982*, Valerie J. Matsumoto, "Japanese American Women During World War II," in *Unequal Sisters: An Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, ed. Ellen Carol DuBois and Vicki L. Ruiz (New York: Routledge, 1990), Modell, "The Japanese American Family."

<sup>158</sup> War Time Program: Division of Community Y.W.C.A.’s, July 13, 1942

<sup>159</sup> Glenn, *Issei, Nisei, War Bride : Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service*, 219.

<sup>160</sup> Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment*, 116-17.

<sup>161</sup> Helen Flack, “A Proposal for Work which the National Board of the Young Women’s Christian Association might assume in Relation to Japanese Reception and Resettlement Areas in the Western Defense Command.” The Y also spoke of their concern about the effects of internment on the lives of

Association. The chapters resembled local branches. There were the same clubs, Girls Reserves were formed, and staff was hired to “make friends, provide some social life, give aid to work problems, counsel on the health and family [issues] which are bound to arise,” and direct most of the planning and programming.<sup>162</sup> It was also decided to hire White staffers to help in moving the Japanese out of the camps into “approved” resettlement areas, and to help the government camp officials on special projects.<sup>163</sup>

The majority of Y members in the camps were Japanese, but some were White. Those women, or their husbands, worked in the camps, and many of them had previous Y connections. At Manzanar, for instance, there were many White former Y staffers, including Varina Merritt, the wife of Manzanar’s Director and a former Board member in the San Francisco Bay Area; Margaret D’Ille, Director of the camp’s Welfare Division and former General Secretary for the Oakland Y; and a Miss Moxley, head of Manzanar’s Health Education Department and a former Y secretary.<sup>164</sup> These women supported, but did not assume, leadership in the camps’ chapters. By mid-1943, when resettlement began in earnest, there were constant changes in membership and staff in the camp branches.<sup>165</sup> In some cases, having former Y White staff and members involved meant a certain amount of stability in keeping the chapter running and productive.

Camp chapters and religious leaders in the camps worked together to ensure that internees were able to worship freely, whether Buddhist, Protestant or Catholic. There

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single women in War Time Program: Division of Community Y.W.C.A.’s, July 13, 1942. Though there was a priority on issues pertaining to single women and young girls, the Y was also concerned about the effects of the internment on young married women and families, see Betty Lyle, “Summary Report of the Japanese-American Project (August 1942 – September 1943)”

<sup>162</sup> Annie Clo Watson to Miss Gerard, etc., January 28, 1943. National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

<sup>163</sup> “War Time Program: Division of Community YWCA’s,” July 13, 1942.

<sup>164</sup> Winnifred Wygal, “Report on Manzanar – July 22 – 27, 1943,”

<sup>165</sup> Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA*, Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment*.

were exceptions, including friction between older clergy and the association. One Y staffer visiting Manzanar noted that older Japanese Protestant ministers seemed the least supportive of the Y, but she believed this stemmed from a mixture of sexism and the Y's emphasis on youth leadership.<sup>166</sup> The Association's egalitarian approach to group work and group discussion also ruffled feathers, since some religious leaders, those with a strict sense of hierarchy, were frequently "uncooperative in interfaith work."<sup>167</sup> Younger clergy had a more positive outlook on interfaith organizations, and some Buddhist leaders commented that "the Buddhist young people would really benefit by the 'Y.'"<sup>168</sup> In fact, at the Topaz Relocation Center, Buddhist women outnumbered Protestants on some Y leadership committees.<sup>169</sup> In order to accommodate all members, some Y religious programs were deemphasized or eliminated.<sup>170</sup> The decision to encourage a more unified course in matters dealing with religion pushed the Association to pursue a national

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<sup>166</sup> Winnifred Wygal, "Report on Manzanar – July 22-27, 1943"

<sup>167</sup> Winona Chambers, Manzanar Relocation Center Visitation Report, May 31 – June 5, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, "Manzanar Relocation Center" Section

<sup>168</sup> Frances Onoda to Esther Briesemeister, March 14, 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, "Gila River Relocation Center" Section; There were also some who were indifferent to the Y, however, they did not either encourage or discourage membership. Winona Chambers, Rowher Relocation Center Visitation Report, May 4-6, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, "Rowher Relocation Center" Section

<sup>169</sup> Esther Briesemeister, Topaz Relocation Center Visitation Report, February 8-15, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, "Topaz Relocation Center" Section. Though this situation was fine with both Briesemeister and some of the Japanese Protestant Y staff and members, there were others who were uncomfortable by this situation. Also at the Tule Lake Relocation Center, two-thirds of those interested in joining the Y were Buddhists. Esther Briesemeister, Tule Lake Relocation Center Visitation Report, August 30 – September 8, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, "Tule Lake Relocation Center" Section

<sup>170</sup> Mrs. Muja Kikuchi to Helen Flack, September 2, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, "Manzanar Relocation Center" Section; Ethlyn Christensen, "Report on Visit to Heart Mountain Relocation Center," October 25 – November 1, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, "Heart Mountain Relocation Center," Section; Frances Onoda to Esther Briesemeister, March 14, 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, "Gila River Relocation Center" Section

“Religious Inclusiveness” campaign following the war, and later spurred internal ecumenical debates.<sup>171</sup>

Although there was great emphasis placed on interfaith work in the camps, many internees were committed to the Y’s Christian ideals and philosophy. Members of the Student Y often discussed how to resolve their Christian faith with the ongoing war as well as the use of Christianity in creating a more democratic society. Student Y Conference coordinators invited a multitude of speakers to address these topics. James Farmer, the race relations secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) and founding member of the Congress of Racial Equality, was a popular speaker. He encouraged many Japanese students to be more “interested in having an outstanding Negro [speaker] come than anyone else.”<sup>172</sup> Farmer had studied for the ministry, but rejected ordination on the grounds that he could not “honestly preach the gospel of Christ in a church that practiced discrimination.”<sup>173</sup> He was a passionate speaker concerning the role of Christianity in bettering race relations and “pioneered in the development of nonviolent direct action against racial injustice.”<sup>174</sup> For students who were committed to creating a tolerant postwar world based on their Christian beliefs, Farmer practiced what he preached.

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<sup>171</sup> Further discussion of the Religious Inclusiveness Campaign and the ecumenical debates will appear in later chapters.

<sup>172</sup> Esther Briesemeister, “Topaz Community Youth Conference, February 11-12-13, 1944, Sponsored by the N.I.C.C.” February 25, 1944, YWCA, Microfilm Reel #149, “Topaz Relocation Center” Section. Farmer was invited to attend a 1943 conference (last minute was unable to attend), and was Conference faculty at the Estes Annual Intercollegiate Student Faculty Conference in the summer of 1944. 1944 Annual Intercollegiate Student Faculty Conference, Estes, YWCA, Unprocessed Box 39. Farmer makes no mention of his role in the Japanese American internment in his memoirs. James Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Arbor House, 1985).

<sup>173</sup> Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1980* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 98.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

Japanese students regularly attended conferences underwritten by the Student Y and the Student Christian Movement. Many of these events were regional and were held jointly with the YMCA. A few were held in internment camps. In 1943, the Y coordinated one specifically for Japanese students, the “Nisei Conference,” in Denver, Colorado.<sup>175</sup> At all the seminars, much of the discussion focused on the war and the postwar world and emphasized the need for better race relations. Past conferences had had an academic approach; with the war raging however, students looked to make a more personal connection with their peers. One staffer commented, that “there is something very practical about finding ways of implementing that faith in social action when one’s friends and fellow students have been uprooted from their homes and there is talk about taking their citizenship from them, or when Negroes are Jim-crowded even as they fight for freedom and democracy.”<sup>176</sup>

The Y was especially concerned about the long term consequences of the internment on education. One report stated that “school girls and college students are a special concern in wartime because these adolescents and young adults are future citizens and leaders of tremendous value to the nation.”<sup>177</sup> In appealing to the government for the students’ best interests, the president of the National Board, Mary Ingraham, insisted that it was important “for them as individuals but also for our country now and in the post-war years” to continue their studies. These concerns were not limited to Japanese American students; the Association’s position was that the nation “cannot afford to isolate the

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<sup>175</sup> “1943 Nisei Conference,” National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 39

<sup>176</sup> Jimmie Woodward, “Student Summer Conferences,” *The Woman’s Press*, October 1943, pg. 423

<sup>177</sup> War time Program: Division of Student Y.W.C.A.’s, July 27, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

young leadership of any minority group among its citizens, even in time of war.”<sup>178</sup> Early in the war, the Y created a program called Student Field Workers for Freedom, which hoped to enroll 50,000 young women “who have convictions about the basic issues in winning the war and the peace, who feel a ‘vocation’ for freedom, have resources for meeting war’s personal problems and are willing to accept community responsibility.” It believed that this program would instill “a tradition that democracy is the way to work, a conviction that the highest service is in furthering those conditions which make men free to become sons of God, an interracial membership and a strong intercollegiate and national organization.”<sup>179</sup> This program evolved throughout the postwar era, culminating in the early 1960s as the Human Relations Project, which was on the front lines of the civil rights movement.<sup>180</sup>

Nationwide, Japanese American students faced an uncertain future due to the evacuations on the West Coast. For example, a student from Chicago attending UC-Berkeley had the option of moving back to Chicago, whereas a student from an “unsafe” area of California attending the same school faced internment. In answer to this, the American Friends Service Committee organized the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council with support from the Student Ys, other student groups, and the heads

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<sup>178</sup> Mrs. Henry Ingraham to Secretary Henry Stimson, July 28, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

<sup>179</sup> War time Program: Division of Student Y.W.C.A.’s, July 27, 1942. The GR also took part in this program, and over 300,000 girls were mobilized. This was not the first such program by the National Student Y. In 1940, Grace Towns Hamilton, the National Student Secretary to the National Board, outlined an “Interracial Program Exchange,” which encouraged college branches to promote racial inclusiveness. Grace Towns Hamilton to Thurgood Marshall, March 10, 1941, NAACP Papers, NAACP II 11A676 YWCA

<sup>180</sup> The Human Relations Project will be discussed in Chapter 3

of various universities.<sup>181</sup> One of the Council's proposals was that all Japanese students be allowed to transfer to colleges outside the West Coast for the duration of the war. The federal authorities agreed. Many students quickly took advantage of this; by the fall of 1942 over three hundred students had been transferred to other universities and over fifteen hundred were in the process of relocating.<sup>182</sup> Local Y branches appealed to their local colleges to take in as many Japanese students as possible.<sup>183</sup>

Students waiting for transfer approval attended Y led workshops. Concerning race relations, students were told that "the race situation for Japanese is better than for Negroes. Mexicans are in worse situation than the Japanese," but there are still "white people [who] aren't adjusting themselves to [any of] the minority groups."<sup>184</sup> Workshop leaders also discussed the pressure on students to conduct themselves in a particular manner, as "the Japanese people who are living outside" must set examples for all those who relocate, mainly by calming any anti-Japanese hysteria.<sup>185</sup> The Student Relocation Council also encouraged assimilation on campus. Students were told not to congregate in Japanese-only groups as it was believed that the only way to combat racism was a "demonstration by Nisei of their assimilability, excellence, and worth."<sup>186</sup> Though this

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<sup>181</sup> Annie Clo Watson, "From Evacuation to Resettlement" May 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148. For more on the National Student Relocation Council see Austin, *From Concentration Camp to Campus*, Okihiro and Ito, *Storied Lives*.

<sup>182</sup> University of Washington - Seattle Board Minutes, November 23, 1942, Young Women's Christian Association (University of Washington) Records, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, WA, Box 1, Folder "History, University of Washington, YWCA", 3 (herein afterward referred to as University of Washington YWCA Papers)

<sup>183</sup> "Annual Descriptive Report for the Year 1942 - Public Affairs," Minneapolis YWCA Papers, Social Welfare Library, University of Minnesota, Box 2, Folder "Full Annual Report to National Board, 1942"

<sup>184</sup> Lillian Fujihira, "College Group Meeting: November 5, 1942 - 7:00pm," National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, "Minidoka Relocation Center" Section. Esther Briesemeister addressed the students. (herein afterward referred to as Minneapolis YWCA Papers)

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. Also see Austin, *From Concentration Camp to Campus*, Okihiro and Ito, *Storied Lives*.

<sup>186</sup> Okihiro and Ito, *Storied Lives*, xiii.

situation proved stressful for the students, it was balanced by the freedom they had outside the internment camps.<sup>187</sup>

For those girls who were not yet-college bound, the Y offered its Girl Reserves (GR) program, which had the largest membership in all of the camps. The GR was run by Japanese staff, but advisors to the different clubs were both Japanese and White (usually teachers who taught in the camps). There were junior high and high school divisions containing various clubs. Some were based on clubs from former Y branches. At the Amache Relocation Center, there were the Junioresettes, Wee Teeners, the Patricians, Silverines, Las Ninas, and the Tri Delts, among others.<sup>188</sup> The clubs hosted social gatherings, discussion groups, theatrical and musical numbers, dances and games.

The Y believed that the earlier racial tolerance was taught, the sooner prejudices could be averted. Therefore, the National Board strongly encouraged interracial dialogue among all its young members. Betty Lyle, the National Secretary of the GR, wrote several pieces in *The Bookshelf*, a monthly “bulletin for Girl Reserves Advisors,” detailing her trips to the relocation camps as well as updates on the activities in the camps. In the fall of 1943, *The Bookshelf* began a fictional series about a young Japanese American girl named Fuji Mae, who did not live in the camps.<sup>189</sup> The three vignettes, “Fuji Mae Wants to Know,” “Alice Visits Fuji Mae,” and “Fuji Mae Tries to Understand,” were written by Kimi Tagawa, a clerical staff member for the National Board. In the stories, Fuji Mae learns about food, education, dating, and family relationships in Japan and the United States. The series also covered a history of

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<sup>187</sup> Austin, *From Concentration Camp to Campus*, Okihiro and Ito, *Storied Lives*.

<sup>188</sup> Hana Uno, “Report of G.R. Activities – Jan. – March 1943, Amache Young Women’s Christian Association, Amache, Colorado,” National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 93.2

<sup>189</sup> “Fuji Mae Wants to Know,” October 1943, “Alice Visits Fuji Mae,” November 1943, “Fuji Mae Tries to Understand,” May 1944, *The Bookshelf*, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #93.2

Japanese immigration, anti-Japanese legislation, and internment. In the last installment, a newly-resettled Japanese American boy gives a presentation about camp life at Fuji Mae's school. These plot points also occurred in real life, as the Y sponsored Japanese American speakers to relate their own experiences.<sup>190</sup> Mrs. Tagawa also visited local GR clubs to discuss her stories and raise the subject of racial tolerance.<sup>191</sup>

In addition to the Fuji Mae stories, other pieces were directly written to discuss race relations. "Girl Reserves All" examined racial prejudices by non-Japanese members and their resettlement concerns. Many girls performed acts of kindness for their fellow interned GRs, but were uncomfortable with including resettled Japanese into their clubs. Using that as a jumping off point, the characters then confront their parents' prejudices. By the end of the play, the girls welcomed the interned girl to their club. Members were asked to look out for three more skits "for use in club discussions," including "the significance for our 'good neighbor' policy of our attitudes toward Mexican girls and families in the United States; new problems of Indian girls as they and their families leave reservations in increasing number to work in war industries; and the implications in [the] possible repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act for attitudes in this country and abroad."<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Flyer "Come and Bring Your Friends! To Interesting Program on Japanese-Americans" Newark, NJ, YWCA, July 19, 1944, Event sponsored by the N.J. Citizens Committee on Japanese-American Resettlement, National Council of Jewish Women and the Nationality Committee of the Y.W.C.A., National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

<sup>191</sup> "Excerpts from letter to Bernice Bridges by Florence M. Cross, G.R. sec., New Britain, Conn., 1.13.43," National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 93.2

<sup>192</sup> Mildred Owen, "Girls Reserves All," *The Bookshelf*, December 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #93.2. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States. Those Chinese born in American did have citizenship, and there were still a trickling in of Chinese immigrants. When the United States went to war against Japan, there was a movement to grant non-Japanese Asian immigrants, especially Chinese, citizenship. The Chinese Exclusion Act was finally repealed in 1943. For more on the Chinese Exclusion Act and its repeal, see Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), Peter Kwong, *Chinese America: The Untold Story of America's Oldest New Community* (New

The National Board supported these efforts by the GR and encouraged similar interactions throughout the organization. The Y believed there should be as much contact between the races as possible, a position supported by the War Relocation Authority (WRA) which was “eager to have the girls and women go out to conferences or to other occasions that bring them in contact with other people.”<sup>193</sup> The Association strongly endorsed visits to internment camps, and both White and Black National Board staff made routine work-related trips to their Japanese colleagues.<sup>194</sup> Winona Chambers and Esther Briesemeister, co-leaders of the National Japanese Evacuee Project, were frequent visitors to the camps. A routine visit began with National staff interviews with WRA officials, but the bulk of time was spent with camp chapter members -- leading discussion groups, attending social teas or dances, or merely listening to how internees were dealing with their current situation. Staff often commented on the policy of removal and resettlement, which ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous. As one staffer dryly noted after a visit to a camp nursery, “Few people realize that the great states of California, Oregon and Washington needed to be protected also from the orphans of Japanese-American heritage who were in various orphan asylums [prior to the war].”<sup>195</sup>

Many local and student branches also regularly visited the camps. Beyond offering friendship, they were welcomed by the internees as a positive connection to life outside the camps. One woman wrote

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York: New Press : Distributed by W.W. Norton, 2005), Fred Warren Riggs, *Pressures on Congress; a Study of the Repeal of Chinese Exclusion* (New York,: King's Crown Press, 1950), Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>193</sup> Annie Clo Watson to Miss Gerard, Frizzell, Russ, et al., January 28, 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149. Mr. Marks, WRA Community Service Division, expressed this thought.

<sup>194</sup> For example, between August 1942 and September 1943, 61 visits were made to Relocation Centers. “Y.W.C.A. Service for Japanese Evacuees,” May 26, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

<sup>195</sup> Winnifred Wygal, “Report on Manzanar – July 22-27, 1943,” 4

Since the outbreak of the war...the future had looked so dim and the eager urge to grasp some sort of security that seem just on the other side of the fence was about to seem hopeless until we find that we have friends on that side trying to push that security to us.<sup>196</sup>

The Association was confident that these trips would improve race relations between its members, which proved to be the case. By 1944, the National Board reported that “this interchange has proved an enriching experience to both parties,” and that “special projects to promote friendship and understanding between girls inside and outside the centers have been tried with success.”<sup>197</sup> The impact of these visits went beyond the western states. Though relocation centers were mainly in the western region, two were located in Arkansas. The Little Rock Y branch as well as other local southern branches routinely met with their fellow Japanese members in the camps.<sup>198</sup>

The Y promoted interracial dialogues in other aspects of its programs. In one instance, the Association brought members from the Amache Relocation Center and the Pueblo Y branch to a two-week agricultural work camp in Vineland, Colorado, with “an emphasis on inter-cultural and inter-racial living.”<sup>199</sup> Events like these were rare; more common were short conferences or workshops held outside the camps that Japanese members attended with Y assistance.<sup>200</sup> Participants reported “the experience was valuable to them, in strengthening their faith, hope and courage and their sense of personal dignity and worth.”<sup>201</sup> Many of these meetings were included in annual regional

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<sup>196</sup> Amy Nose to Esther Briesemeister, February 16, 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, “Heart Mountain Relocation Center” Section

<sup>197</sup> “Y.W.C.A. Service for Japanese Evacuees,” May 26, 1944

<sup>198</sup> Betty Lyle, “Summary Report of the Japanese-American Project (August 1942 – September 1943)”. Though there were local Black branches that visited the camps in the West, it is unclear if there were any Black-Japanese meetings in the South. For information on the West, see Amy Nose to Esther Briesemeister, February 16, 1943.

<sup>199</sup> Betty Lyle, “Summary Report of the Japanese-American Project (August 1942 – September 1943)”

<sup>200</sup> “Y.W.C.A. Service for Japanese Evacuees,” May 26, 1944

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

conferences for Y members. For Japanese, attending a ‘normal’ conference helped in maintaining hope for a future normal life.

The situation facing Japanese internees was difficult; the mood of the community was somber, and at times, hopeless. At some camps the prisoners resorted to rebellious acts not only to protest their conditions but also to reaffirm their self independence.<sup>202</sup> Internment did more than imprison people physically; it imprisoned minds, hopes, and dreams.<sup>203</sup> Many of the young Japanese felt disconnected from society, wondering why they should stay in school or take active roles in their community. Concerned about its members and staff, the Y had many discussions on how to best “select leaders from among those who have been least harmed by the experience of evacuation.”<sup>204</sup> Leadership development was seen as one way to “minimize hardship and maladjustment resulting from the strain of war conditions.”<sup>205</sup> The Y also employed mental health professionals, in addition to its Japanese staff, to talk to those in the Japanese American community and the association and to better understand the needs of the community.

The work for Japanese staff was intense, and it was noted that these women “undertook work which would have challenged even the most experienced professional worker.”<sup>206</sup> Occasionally this led to devastating results. Maki Ichiyasu, former Executive Secretary of the Los Angeles Japanese Y, apparently had a nervous breakdown

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<sup>202</sup> Some of these protests centered around the Loyalty Questionnaire. For more see John Okada, *No-No Boy, a Novel* (Tokyo: Rutland, 1957), Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin, 1989), 398-99, Tateishi, *And Justice for All : An Oral History of the Japanese American Detention Camps*.

<sup>203</sup> For more on the psychological effects of the Japanese American community during Internment, see Harry H. L. Kitano, *Japanese Americans: The Evolution of a Subculture*, ed. Milton M. Gordon, *Ethnic Groups in American Life Series* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), Okihiro and Myers, *Whispered Silences : Japanese Americans and World War II*, Thomas, *The Salvage*, Thomas, *The Spoilage*.

<sup>204</sup> Esther Briesemeister, “Brief Outline of Y.W.C.A. Work in Cooperation with the War Relocation Authority”

<sup>205</sup> Clara W. Alcroft, “A Course for Japanese-American Leaders,” *The Woman’s Press*, May 1942, pg. 254.

<sup>206</sup> “Y.W.C.A. Service for Japanese Evacuees,” May 26, 1944

shortly after being interned. She wrote a colleague, “[there] was something that within [me] that revolted and [I] just couldn’t take it.” She could “see that [all camp internees] are going through difficulties,” and she was going to try to “be more intelligent and objective about the whole thing and much more.” She appeared most upset about her role as leader of the Poston Y chapter, continuing

I’ve done such a poor job on the Y.W.C.A. here, not because I’ve not wanted the Y here for more than anything else I wanted one here. You can’t have lived most of your life within the walls of the Y and not want to see the organization where you go...Because I’ve felt so much that I’ve failed the people in the Y who have done so much for me that I’ve been so unhappy, too.

She said she needed a break from the whole situation.<sup>207</sup> Worried about their friend and colleague, Y staffers worked to get Ichiyasu out of Poston. After her release, she went to Pendle Hill, a Quaker facility in Pennsylvania, and limited her contact with the Y.<sup>208</sup> In 1944, she returned as the Milwaukee GR Secretary and continued as staff in various locations for more than twenty years.

Others involved in the relocation centers were also dismayed by the psychological toll of internment. Theodore Waller, Community Activities Supervisor at Tule Lake, wrote to one Y staffer, “As I go along, I become more and more convinced that in the interest of sound national policy, of the survival of the Americans of Japanese ancestry and of every other genuine social interest in this situation, it is indispensable to get as many Niseis out of the Project as fast as possible.”<sup>209</sup> The staff continued to work hard on resettlement efforts and on helping members become better equipped to face the outside world. Grace Sumida who was resettled to Cincinnati, wrote “if it wasn’t for the

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<sup>207</sup> Maki Ichiyasu to Miss [Helen] Flack, November 13, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, “Poston Relocation Center” Section

<sup>208</sup> Betty Lyle, “Summary Report of the Japanese-American Project (August 1942 – September 1943)”

<sup>209</sup> Theodore Waller to Annie Clo Watson, October 19, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, “Tule Lake” Section

moral support given me, I am sure I would have given up a long time ago...My life in the Center has been abundant, as in doing YWCA work, I really felt I was living, not merely existing. Each day was filled with things to do, which took me out of the realm of a narrow existence.”<sup>210</sup>

The Y believed the best way to aid the community was to have members attend its leadership workshops and conferences. These workshops not only helped Japanese American women recognize their own potential, but also to continue the fight against their internment. As one woman reported after attending one of these workshops, “You can well imagine the glorious feeling...of being *free* once again...We arrived at a stronger realization of the need for freedom of all. Our room at the Y was so symbolic of that natural and homelike atmosphere that we are missing....”<sup>211</sup>

The overarching theme at many of these seminars was citizenry and leadership development, with discussion topics ranging from Christianity and democratic ideals to the role of women in the postwar era. The workshops provided “opportunities for individuals to share in the planning and the development of their own program, and responsibility for carrying it out.”<sup>212</sup> Through encouraging and nurturing civic leadership, the Y hoped to groom these young women to become leaders within their own communities.

Although the Y had good intentions, there were those who were wary of its involvement in the camps. Annie Clo Watson reported that a number of Nisei she had spoken to expressed a desire for autonomy from predominately Caucasian groups. They

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<sup>210</sup> Grace Sumida to Esther Briesemeister, February 28, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, “Rowher Relocation Center” Section

<sup>211</sup> Amy Murayama, “To Build a Fellowship” *The Womans Press*, July-August 1943, pg. 309

<sup>212</sup> Betty Lyle, “Summary Report of the Japanese-American Project (August 1942 – September 1943)”

understood there was to be self-government in the camps and “wanted to make use of the opportunity in getting experience in leadership, in actually carrying on processes of government, in having a position no longer inferior to their elders, and in a way to the Caucasians.” But they also wanted “a chance to work out community life on a fresh new plan,” and eventually asked that the Y, International Institutes, YMCAs, Boy Scouts, etc., not participate in camp life.<sup>213</sup>

The Y agreed in principal, responding “Our contribution to the cause should be to leave nothing undone to see that such an opportunity is provided,”<sup>214</sup> but did not leave the camps. As much as the Y wished to be sensitive to the desires of this group, it insisted that it was equally important to support its members and former staff both in the camps and later through resettlement.

As resettlement efforts increased, many of those who had attended the leadership development workshops and conferences throughout the country left the camps. When possible, the Association recruited these women for Y positions elsewhere in the country. A few exceptional women, usually former staff, were given financial assistance to attend school.<sup>215</sup> Dorothy Takechi, the GR Secretary at the Los Angeles Japanese Y and a lifelong staffer, wrote her master’s thesis on the “Resettlement of Japanese in the Denver Area” at Fisk University, an historic Black university, with financial aid from the Y.

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<sup>213</sup> Annie Clo Watson, “Informal Report on Japanese Situation. Confidential,” April 26, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Dorothy Takechi, a graduate of University of California, Berkeley, took some additional college classes at George Williams College and then went to Fisk University for her Master’s degree. In addition, Maki Ichiyasu attended Pendle Hill, Mari Okasaki attended the New York School of Social Work, Elaine Ishikawa to Milwaukee Downer College and Miss [Amy?] Murayama to the Summer School for Office Workers. Betty Lyle, “Summary Report of the Japanese-American Project (August 1942 – September 1943)”

Yet despite the Y's activism, many problems remained. In the summer of 1944, the WRA convened a meeting with social work agencies, including the Y, the Boy Scouts, and the Children's Bureau, and they decided to "join forces in a leadership training project." Ideas discussed included pooling of the agencies' staff and financial resources, longer camp stays by staffers, a public relations campaign, and "an experiment in one or two centers might be tried." The WRA would lead the inter-agency team, though without "forgetting that the cooperation and contribution of the Japanese-American leaders is most important."<sup>216</sup>

The one camp that concerned everyone was Tule Lake Relocation Center in California. Those who had answered "no-no" on the 1943 Loyalty Questionnaire were sent to the "segregation center" at Tule Lake.<sup>217</sup> Those who answered "yes-yes" were moved from Tule Lake to other camps. This decision, as historian Roger Daniels points out, "predictably" made Tule Lake "a trouble spot and was turned over to the Army for a time and placed under martial law."<sup>218</sup> Harry Mayeda, the Supervisor for Community Activities, wrote to one Y member, "The Tule Lake which we knew so well has faded into the past. There is another Tule Lake...appearing on the horizon and it is not cheerful at all...It is my hope that the WRA will study the facts and will endeavor to maintain above all a humane and understanding treatment of these evacuees. Surely, in a democracy such as ours there is room for such thoughts. So much for this."<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Esther Briesemeister and Winona Chambers, "War Relocation Authority Visit," July 6-7, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

<sup>217</sup> For more on Tule Lake see Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA*, 114-17, Leonard, *The Battle for Los Angeles : Racial Ideology and World War II*, 221-26, Murray and Daniels, *What Did the Internment of Japanese Americans Mean?*, Gary Okihiro's chapter "Tule Lake Under Martial Law".

<sup>218</sup> Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA*, 116.

<sup>219</sup> Harry K. Mayeda to Mrs. Marian Brown Reith, September 10, 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149 "Tule Lake" section

The National Board disapproved of the Loyalty Questionnaire, but camp chapters took great effort to appear neutral.<sup>220</sup> The worsening situation at Tule Lake did not deter the Y, and, in fact, it was the only organization to continue its work at Tule Lake throughout the war.<sup>221</sup> Initially, the biggest issue the Y had was that the WRA Community Activities Director did not want “women cluttering up his work.”<sup>222</sup> He eventually was won over. In the meantime, the Y reviewed its programming and decided to add more staff and increase GR membership. Because many at Tule Lake expected to be repatriated, “it is important to keep in touch with the [Y’s] Foreign Division and to give our work there an international flavor.”<sup>223</sup> Japanese language classes and social etiquette workshops were started for the internees under camp direction.

As the war continued, Tule Lake inmates did not know if or when they would leave for Japan. Morale was low, and there were increasing tensions between Issei and Nisei, since some children were not interested in leaving the place of their birth. Mitzi Rakano, the head of the Tule Lake Y, wrote the National Board about her intention to reevaluate the Y’s programs. She wanted to assemble a group of advisors to review the types of services needed for the internees, and she wanted this group to consist only of Japanese members. She explained,

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<sup>220</sup> There were two main reasons for this position. One, they did not want to upset WRA officials and appear unpatriotic. Two, they did not want to cause tension between those who answered ‘yes-yes’ and those who did not. At Manzanar, the camp chapter worked “quietly” with individuals and small groups on this issue. The National Board was also informed by Varina Merritt, that “Most of the J.A.C.L. leaders who had been too aggressive in their pro-America stand were marked as “Dogs” and had to be sent to Death Valley for their own protection.” She was adamant that “This can not happen to the Y.W. But they are ready to take a Christian stand and want to help.” Varina M. Merritt to Helen Flack, March 2, 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, “Manzanar Relocation Center” Section

<sup>221</sup> [Missing Title Page – Handwritten on top right corner “Report 1945-1946”] Final Report on Japanese Evacuee Project, 1945-1946, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148, 34

<sup>222</sup> Esther Briesemeister, Tule Lake Center Visitation Report, February 15-21, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, “Tule Lake” Section

<sup>223</sup> Esther Briesemeister, “Recommendations Regarding Future Work of Japanese Evacuee Project,” October 25, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

The reason I say this is – as you probably understand very well – the people feeling and thinking are very different from other centers here and since it [is] hard for the Nesei [sic] to understand I feel it will be doubly so for Miss Roudabush [WRA employee]... I spoke to [outside Y staff] and they also felt we can best solve the problem with those who really understand the problems...I think it will be impossible for anyone to understand unless you actually live in the midst of it – but Miss Roudabush is rather old fashioned in her thinking too.<sup>224</sup>

Rakano's plan was approved, and though Tule Lake was mired in controversy concerning loyalty, national security, and patriotism, the Y never wavered from the idea that all members, whether American or Japanese, deserved all leadership opportunities afforded to them.

As time went on, the camp chapter also tried to serve as a safe space for women and girls who felt the brunt of the Tule Lake situation in gendered terms. There were occurrences of sexual assault at the camp. GR members, along with other girls, reported molestation incidents, which were attributed to a rise of juvenile delinquency among boys.<sup>225</sup> Also, for some women and girls, their incarceration at Tule Lake had nothing to do with their answers on the Loyalty Questionnaire. Husbands and fathers were still considered to be the head of the household, meaning that if the man of the house had answered “no-no” his entire family was sent to Tule Lake. During a visit in February 1945, Esther Briesemeister investigated the effects of this situation on women and children. She was informed that some Nisei women were resisting their husbands (usually Issei), getting divorces and resettling, rather than repatriating to Japan. Briesemeister remarked on the “courage” of these women, and how the Y had become an “underground movement” at the Center. There were second chances at Tule Lake:

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<sup>224</sup> Mitzi Rakano to Esther Briesemeister, January 2, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, “Tule Lake” Section

<sup>225</sup> Esther Briesemeister, Tule Lake Center Visitation Report, August 30 - September 8, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, “Tule Lake” Section

internees had to be re-interviewed for resettlement options. The Y took great care not to encourage the re-interview process, but Briesemeister did advocate the use of “subtle propaganda” during Y meetings.<sup>226</sup> Sometimes the Y was so committed to racial empowerment, not wanting to be seen as a White organization “doing for” the Japanese community, it took lukewarm stances on particular issues.

Tule Lake was the last camp to close in 1946, with the other WRA camps closing the previous year. Starting in 1944, Japanese were allowed back to the West Coast, though not all returned. For some, recreating a life for a second or third time in a span of a few years was too much to bear. Through all the camp closings, the Y continued its work with members of the Japanese community, preparing them for their final departure from camps and reaching out to local and student branches for help in postwar resettlement. The Association hoped that its endeavors throughout internment, including its leadership conferences, tailored programs, educational efforts and numerous visits of staff and members, lessened the repercussion of internment on the Japanese American community.

#### The Y and the Japanese American Community at the End of the War

The efforts of the Y on behalf of the Japanese community cannot be understated, nor can the impact of the internment on the Y be overlooked. In the National Japanese Evacuee Project’s final report, its authors admitted that the organization meant well when it tried to appease all of its members on various issues, but these efforts ended up with the association not really speaking for anyone. However, the authors continued,

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<sup>226</sup> Esther Briesemeister, Tule Lake Center Visitation Report, February 15-21, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149, “Tule Lake” Section

the efforts made in behalf of a people forced to leave house and property under a cloud because of wartime rulings have been stirring...It has been a time of education for Associations heretofore completely oblivious of a small section of the national population. It has meant the facing of opposition and obstacles on the part of many. It has brought us face to face with concrete examples of things we have said and written beautifully. It has made us wonder if we can ever blithely just write words again.<sup>227</sup>

They were very impressed how “the local Associations were more than ready to accept this quite different group of people, as we have to keep in mind that most of the Relocation Centers were located in parts of the country where there were few, if any Japanese.”<sup>228</sup> It was proud that the “local Associations near the center and Associations helping with resettlement have set a high standard” of true fellowship among all women and girls.<sup>229</sup>

The internment had affected almost every branch, local and student, in the nation. For the first time, the National Board was able to unite its membership around the importance of bettering race relations as a testament to democracy and Christianity. The association believed that a new chapter was about to be written with respect to its membership, there was now a “warm sympathy that had been but academic before,” between the races.<sup>230</sup> Its successes only indicated that the Y had “a real part to play in creating the world of the future.”<sup>231</sup>

Given the fact that the war had stirred up race and gender relations, returning to life as before was unthinkable for many. The Y had been on the front lines throughout, and it grappled with the wartime lessons it had learned. Internment allowed the

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<sup>227</sup> [Missing Title Page – Handwritten on top right corner “Report 1945-1946”] Final Report on Japanese Evacuee Project, 1945-1946, 53

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., pg. 25

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., pg. 53

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., pg. 25

Association to discuss and confront war hysteria, anti-Japanese legislation, and wartime racial prejudice. More importantly, the Y's effort on behalf of the Japanese community proved that it was possible to move the nation toward its real democratic ideals of "liberty and justice for all." The Y saw its work in the evacuation, relocation camps, and resettlement as a concrete example of how it could undo the racial wrongs of the past. It built on its wartime efforts and experiences in the upcoming fight for civil rights.

## Chapter Two

### “There are no second-class children of God”: Race and Religion Inclusiveness in the Postwar Era

In an attempt to explain to its members how race relations were going to differ in the postwar era, the Y National Board quoted an overseas African American soldier: “A different American is coming home.”<sup>232</sup> Thousands who had just returned from the 1946 National Convention were already aware of this “different American.” Leadership had let it be known that bettering race relations was a top priority, and the attendees had responded by unanimously voting to racially desegregate the entire organization.<sup>233</sup> To keep up the momentum, the National Public Affairs Committee subsequently released a newsletter reviewing Convention discussions as well as outlining new organizational policy and plans for the future. The newsletter made clear that a heightened racial consciousness was not only central to the association’s conception of the “different American,” but that the wartime experiences of racial minorities contributed to the newly democratized sensibility of the organization.

The construction of the “different American” was based on three events: the “new experiences in democratic living in the unions of the war industries” for “millions of Negroes and other minorities;” the service of “colored Americans” in the armed forces “where they have witnessed both the possibilities and the inconsistencies of the democracy they were fighting to defend;” and the relocation and resettlement of Japanese Americans. Recognizing that race relations had altered considerably during the war, to

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<sup>232</sup> Public Affairs Post Convention Newsletter, March 29, 1946, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box #3, 8

<sup>233</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 49.

meet “the demands of this crucial hour,” the Y charted a course to create a more racially inclusive membership aimed at creating a more tolerant American society.<sup>234</sup>

The “different American” was coming home to a racially changed landscape. Wartime domestic migrations had upset existing racial “balances.”<sup>235</sup> Most African Americans had moved for employment opportunities, some for more racially hospitable areas.<sup>236</sup> Significant also was the forced resettlement of Japanese from the West Coast. While these demographic shifts tested Y policies, practices, and attitudes, the association’s work in Japanese American resettlement served as the cornerstone to its national efforts at bettering race relations internally and externally in the postwar era.<sup>237</sup> In many cases, Japanese Americans served as a buffer between Blacks and Whites as their resettlement throughout the country helped spur discussion of racial mores in local and student branches. As local branches determined policies to support and embrace the relocated Japanese -- opening their doors rather than establishing culturally or racially separate branches as had been the pre-war norm --- it was a logical extension to begin dismantling other similarly segregated branches. The association did not waver in its commitment to a Christian fellowship for all women and girls and this dedication, coupled with demographic shifts, meant new members, staff, programs, and outreach. The Y planned to be proactive surveyors in this racially changed national terrain.

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<sup>234</sup> Public Affairs Post Convention Newsletter, March 29, 1946, YWCA National Board Papers, 8

<sup>235</sup> McWilliams, *Brothers under the Skin*, 7.

<sup>236</sup> For more on WWII migration see: Lawrence Brooks De Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Seattle: University of Seattle Press, 2001), Barbara A. Driscoll, *The Tracks North: The Railroad Bracero Program of World War II*, 1st ed. (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas, 1999), Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed : The Impact of the Second World War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), Sides, *L.A. City Limits : African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, Taylor, "A History of Blacks in the Pacific Northwest, 1788-1970".

<sup>237</sup> “War Time Program: Division of Community YWCA’s,” July 13, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

Throughout the war, the association believed a harmonious postwar Christian social order was possible.<sup>238</sup> As the racial, sexual, gender tolerance borne of wartime exigencies began to end with the restoration of peacetime “normalcy,” some Americans, both in the Y and beyond, began to organize to reclaim these freedoms.<sup>239</sup> As the United States’ largest postwar multiracial and interfaith women’s organization, the Y represented a constituency that reflected all these issues.<sup>240</sup> In the ensuing years it created two inclusiveness campaigns based on race and religion, while continuing to promote women’s leadership in political and social areas. Postwar concerns would lead to nationwide freedom struggles in the 1950s and 1960s, when thousands demanded an America in which democratic ideals become reality. A different American was indeed coming home. A different organization was coming home too.

### The Effects of Japanese Resettlement

During the war, for a short time after the issuance of Executive Order 9066, approximately three thousand Japanese resettled inland,<sup>241</sup> just beyond the “prohibited

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<sup>238</sup> Elsie D. Harper, “Public Affairs, 1940-1945,” November 8, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 20

<sup>239</sup> For more on these freedom struggles see Allan Bérubé, *Coming out under Fire : The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990), John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities : The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Miriam Frank, Marilyn Ziebarth, and Connie Field, *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter : The Story of Three Million Working Women During World War II*, Educator’s ed. (Emeryville, Calif.: Clarity Educational Productions, 1982), Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond : American Women in the 1940s, American Women in the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941*, Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, Leila J. Rupp and Verta A. Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums : The American Women’s Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990).

<sup>240</sup> By the end of World War II, the Y had over 3 million participants. Mrs. Arthur Forest Anderson to Senator Alexander Wiley, Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee, February 5, 1948, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 15

<sup>241</sup> Murray and Daniels, *What Did the Internment of Japanese Americans Mean? ,* 8-9. Scholars have recently begun to widen the scope of the internment narrative to include how resettlement affected

zone.”<sup>242</sup> Within a month, however, inland western states moved to restrict them, asking: “If [the Japanese] were too dangerous to roam freely in California, why weren't they too dangerous to let loose in Idaho and Wyoming?”<sup>243</sup> The Governor of Utah declared that Japanese were no longer welcome unless they were under the protection of the federal government,<sup>244</sup> and the Governor of Wyoming announced if any more Japanese moved to his state, “I promise they will be hanging from every tree.”<sup>245</sup> Colorado was the exception. Governor Ralph Carr courageously defended the loyalty of Japanese Americans and welcomed them to his state.<sup>246</sup> The federal government soon set up a program to resettle internees throughout the United States. War Relocation Authority (WRA) sponsored centers were established in cities like Denver, Colorado; Chicago, Illinois; Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota; and Salt Lake City, Utah. Social agencies and church groups also helped, often sponsoring Japanese out of the camps with the promise of housing and jobs.

The Y led its own resettlement project and also worked closely with federal and local governments as well as other social agencies. It used these networks to help smooth the transition of the Japanese into their new communities. There was some initial resistance from the WRA to the Y's plan “to bring together the Spanish-speaking, Negro and Japanese for a discussion” on interracial living and labor situations, but within a short

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communities nationwide. See: Charlotte Brooks, "In the Twilight Zone between Black and White: Japanese American Resettlement and Community in Chicago, 1942-1945," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 4 (2000), Bill Hosokawa, *Colorado's Japanese Americans : From 1886 to the Present* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2005).

<sup>242</sup> Hosokawa, *Colorado's Japanese Americans : From 1886 to the Present*, 86. The prohibited zone included, the “western half of California (later extended to include the entire state), the southern half of Arizona, the western halves of Oregon and Washington, and all of Alaska.”

<sup>243</sup> Murray and Daniels, *What Did the Internment of Japanese Americans Mean?* , 8.

<sup>244</sup> Annie Clo Watson, “Informal Report on Japanese Situation. Confidential,” April 26, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

<sup>245</sup> Hosokawa, *Colorado's Japanese Americans : From 1886 to the Present*, 90.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 87. Governor Carr was running for the U.S. Senate during this time and lost. His loss has been attributed to the stance he took on this issue.

time everyone was on the same page.<sup>247</sup> In fact, at a national interagency meeting, government officials made special mention of the Y as a key agency in resettlement efforts and encouraged any interagency work to mirror the Y's current endeavors.<sup>248</sup>

The multiracial community that the Y planned to create in the postwar era was rooted in its resettlement work. In its agenda for moving the Japanese to other parts of the country, the National Board also saw an opportunity to strengthen its overall race relations work. Included were the building of "constructive community attitudes regarding the Japanese and other minorities," with an emphasis on Japanese community leadership and continued connection between those still in the camps and those already resettled. The Y hoped that the "lessons learned in this project were to be thought of as tools to help in problems relating to other minorities."<sup>249</sup>

National staff went to both rural and urban areas to help support branches experiencing varying degrees of anti-Japanese tension. They reported back on common issues facing the Japanese, including "housing and employment problems, difficulties between the resident and newcomer populations, no show of welcome from Whites, possible labor trouble in farming districts, family relationship problems, great homesickness and feelings of insecurity and discouragement."<sup>250</sup> Staffers also worked with the Japanese community, trying to help ease the transition. The association became a trusted resource for the Japanese community throughout the entire relocation process. Esther Briesemeister, a lead staffer in the Japanese Project noted,

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<sup>247</sup> Esther Briesemeister to Elise D. Harper, April 20, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 48

<sup>248</sup> "Report of Meeting called by the National Family Welfare Association," October 26, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Papers, Box #33

<sup>249</sup> "War Time Program: Division of Community YWCA's," July 13, 1942

<sup>250</sup> Annie Clo Watson, "Informal Report on Japanese Situation. Confidential."

the Y.W.C.A. serves as a thread in the individual's life. A person may have had contact with the Y.W.C.A. before evacuation. She identifies with the organization in the relocation center and then looks to the Association in the local community as she resettles. We have had a high degree of carry-over from the relocation centers to community organizations and the people from the centers have looked to our organization for a great many different types of services. Many who have not actively identified with the Y.W.C.A. in centers know about our work and seek the organization when they resettle.<sup>251</sup>

Community branches quickly used the issues surrounding resettlement as a way to start discussions and actions to decrease racial tensions in their areas. In Chicago, it was noted that "staff members have all been alert to ways in which prejudices can be detected and broken down, have seized opportunities to make communities interracial (and this includes Japanese Americans as well as Negroes), and have taken the initiative to create opportunities for girls of different races to know one another."<sup>252</sup> There and in other destination cities for relocated Japanese Americans, the Ys collaborated with local War Relocation Committees, in housing and labor situations and sponsored interracial gatherings.<sup>253</sup> The Minneapolis branch worked hard to welcome the burgeoning Japanese American community, including bringing Japanese-American leaders from other branches into their fold. As in Chicago, the Minneapolis branch pushed for greater tolerance, as "it has been possible for the club members to become acquainted with young women of Japanese-American ancestry. This has contributed toward the understanding of people of other races."<sup>254</sup> The increase in interracial dialogue encouraged members to become more inclusive in other ways. One of the Business

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<sup>251</sup> Esther Briesemeister, "Brief Outline of Y.W.C.A. Work in Cooperation with the War Relocation Authority" (Marked "Confidential – Not to be Circulated), May 22, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

<sup>252</sup> "Memo Data and Trends," 1943 Interracial Practices Study, June 25, 1943, Chicago YWCA Papers, Special Collections, University of Illinois-Chicago Library, Chicago, IL, Box 33, Folder 17, 3 (herein afterward referred to as Chicago YWCA Papers)

<sup>253</sup> Some of these meetings did not go over successfully, as in the case of an August 1943 gathering where Whites and Japanese refused to mingle. Brooks, "In the Twilight Zone," 1679.

<sup>254</sup> "Annual Descriptive Report of the Year 1942" Minneapolis YWCA Papers, Box 2

Clubs at the Minneapolis branch had Black, Japanese, and Jewish members. The club also planned a joint program with a similar business club at the Emanuel Cohen Center, which “proved to be an interesting experience.”<sup>255</sup>

Some localities were less enthusiastic. Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia of New York City hoped to dissuade Washington officials from allowing the “relocation of Japanese-Americans citizens in New York City ‘or in any of the states on the eastern seaboard.’”<sup>256</sup> The Y joined with the NAACP and other civil rights organizations in protesting to the Mayor and was successful in securing a meeting with the Police Commissioner, Lewis J. Valentine, to discuss the matter.<sup>257</sup> Even in inhospitable communities, local staffs were often supportive of resettlement and the association’s race relations goals. Lucie G. Ford, the General Secretary of the El Paso, Texas branch was happy to help, writing a colleague who had referred a Japanese woman to her, “I am so glad and was proud to know that you knew I would welcome a Japanese girl. I am fighting the cause with several such girls...Texas, you know is not always tolerant to groups other than the 100 per centers & pure white!!”<sup>258</sup>

Some staff racial attitudes were directly challenged by the larger implications of resettlement. The White branch in Washington, D.C., was willing to hire Japanese women in clerical and food service jobs and was also interested in widening “the scope of the branch’s Interracial Committee.” However, they had concerns that if the bathrooms

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<sup>255</sup> “Annual Descriptive Report for the Year 1942 – Business and Professional,” Minneapolis YWCA Papers, Box 2, Folder “Full Annual Report to National Board, 1942.” The Cohen Center was a Jewish Center.

<sup>256</sup> Roy Wilkins, Press Release, April 27, 1944, NAACP Papers, IIA325, JA 42-45. For more see “Ickes Hits Mayor on Loyal Japanese,” *New York Times*, April 28 1944.

<sup>257</sup> National Board Public Affairs Committee Meeting, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 9

<sup>258</sup> Lucie G. Ford to Mrs. Sickels, April 26, 1943, International Institute of Minnesota Papers, Immigration History Research Center, Special Collections, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, Box 13, FF 204

were desegregated to accommodate these Japanese hires then Black women might want the same access.<sup>259</sup>

Resettlement not only spurred discussions concerning community racial mores, but also challenged the association's unspoken racial policies. Prior to the war, local branches did not have integrated staffs, and a White staff person might be in charge of a non-White group. The National Board used its work for the Japanese community to change the organization's hiring practices. It sent letters to over one hundred branch summer camp programs "suggesting that they consider including a Japanese-American counselor on their camp staff."<sup>260</sup> Soon, Nisei women joined the professional ranks within local branches, including Cleveland, Ohio; Chicago and Peoria, Illinois; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Kansas City, Kansas; and Buffalo, New York.<sup>261</sup> Black women also benefited from this change, though not as widely until after the 1946 desegregation decision.<sup>262</sup> Historian Susan Lynn has written, "Often a sense of comradeship developed between [Black and White women], who accepted each other as allies in the struggle against racial injustice, and close friendships developed, linking Black and White women into networks that endured for a lifetime."<sup>263</sup> Many young Japanese, Blacks, and Whites stayed with the organization for decades. The impact of the wartime increase in multiracial staff settings would stay with these women, even as they moved around the

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<sup>259</sup> Esther Briesemeister and Winona Chambers, War Relocation Authority Visit, October 3-5, 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

<sup>260</sup> Betty Lyle, "Summary Report of the Japanese-American Project (August 1942 – September 1943)," August 27, 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

<sup>261</sup> Esther Briesemeister to Ann Elizabeth Neely, May 9, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 48

<sup>262</sup> "Race Relations Subcommittee," May 9, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 123. Examples of Black staff leadership, see "17th YWCA Convention Unmarred by 'Incidents'," *The Chicago Defender*, March 16 1946. For an example of one local branch discussing hiring a Black staff worker, see Program Planning Report (to San Francisco YWCA Board of Directors), by Llewellyn Toland McMahon, October 23, 1944, San Francisco YWCA Papers

<sup>263</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 53.

association to other branches. In some cases, the new job opportunity might not be in a multiracial milieu, but this did not deter these women from working on interracial issues. In fact, when Virginia Carrier, the (White) Executive Director of the Atlanta, Georgia Y, retired in 1971, she said the “most interesting experience was working closely with Japanese evacuees” while working at the Seattle Y during World War II.<sup>264</sup> Carrier joined the Atlanta Y to oversee and lead its desegregation in 1965. As the postwar years gave way to the civil rights era, it was clear that these wartime relationships had a direct impact on the actions taken by the Y during the various freedom struggles.

Resettlement affected the West Coast differently since local staff had to respond to the absence of Japanese, a sizable constituency in many branches. Many took the stance that “while [the Japanese] are away they will be considered absentee members of the YWCA.”<sup>265</sup> They hoped that by preserving the idea of a Japanese presence, there would be continued interracial member relationships.<sup>266</sup> Maintaining positive interactions was important as staff were concerned by the increase in anti-Japanese hostility and believed they needed to “prepare public opinion in the interval between the time Japanese go away and the time they return.”<sup>267</sup>

Massive migrations of southern Whites and Blacks to the West deeply affected these coastal cities, which were already reeling from the Japanese evacuations. Former Japanese American neighborhoods were transformed by the new populations, causing staff to balance its work with the exiled Japanese community with tending to new groups

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<sup>264</sup> "Virginia Carrier Retires as YWCA Executive Director," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 1 1971.

<sup>265</sup> "The Work of the YWCA, Fiscal Year 1941-1942," Booklet, Seattle YWCA Papers, Box 1, Folder 18

<sup>266</sup> "Annual Report of Girl Reserves Department, Portland YWCA, for 1942," Portland YWCA Papers, Box 20, Folder – YWCA Programs – Girl Reserves

<sup>267</sup> Elsie Harper and Helen Flack to Mabel Ellis, March 28, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #148

through directed programs and outreach strategies. The increase of African Americans to the West Coast led to stronger, and at times new, partnerships for branches. In order to be more helpful to the multitudes of Blacks moving to the Bay Area of California, the Y financed a study on this issue by Dr. Charles S. Johnson, professor of Social Sciences at Fisk University. Bay Area associations recruited “a number of the agencies, churches, social groups and interested lay people” to carry out “the plans laid out by Dr. Johnson and his staff.” His work, the ‘Study of Migrant War Workers to the Bay Area,’ was known at the Y branches as the “The Interracial Study,” and members and staff alike planned “to put our shoulders to wheel to see that through these findings the adjustment of the rural Negro to urban life can be made easier.”<sup>268</sup> This type of action served to cement the Y’s relationships with Black-led organizations. Already working closely with the National Urban League (NUL) under the American War-Community Services, the association anticipated continuing this work through “definite joint activities on the West Coast” in the postwar era.<sup>269</sup>

Just as local branches were getting more responsive to the new populations, Japanese were allowed to resettle back to the West Coast after the war. This caused some concern for local staff who worried about Black-Japanese relations and the reintegration of Japanese into branch life. Returning Japanese found their communities dramatically reconstituted by many Black migrants settling in their neighborhoods.<sup>270</sup> National Board

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<sup>268</sup> “Report of President Mrs. George V. Kulcher – Annual Meeting, 1944” San Francisco YWCA Papers

<sup>269</sup> “AWCS Minutes, January 25, 1944,” National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 47. For more on the African Americans in San Francisco during World War II, see Scott Tang, “Pushing at the Golden Gate: Race Relations and Racial Politics in San Francisco, 1940-1955” (Diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2002). For more on the YWCA and NUL in the AWCS see Knapp, “Experimental Social Policymaking During World War II: The United Service Organizations (USO) and American War-Community Services (AWCS).”

<sup>270</sup> For more on the effects of resettlement in West Coast neighborhoods, see Thelma Thurston Gorham, “Negroes and Japanese Evacuees,” *The Crisis*, November 1945, Scott Kurashige, “The Many Facets of

staff viewed these areas as “special tension spots” and worked to minimize friction.<sup>271</sup> Two national staff members, Dorothy Height and Dorothy Takechi, were dispatched to Los Angeles to hold a meeting with a “select group of Negro women” and talked with them concerning “interracial residents and the need of intra group understanding” between Blacks and Japanese.<sup>272</sup> The National Board also gave a scholarship to Takechi to work with the Los Angeles association in its postwar resettlement work.<sup>273</sup> These tensions quickly dissipated as evidenced in an *Ebony* magazine article entitled, “The Race War That Flopped,” which reported there was now a “heartfelt kinship” between the two groups.<sup>274</sup>

However, prejudices were still apparent even where there were the best of intentions. For instance, in Portland, the Board agreed to go on record in favor of aiding only “loyal” returning Japanese.<sup>275</sup> These women made it clear that they still questioned the loyalty of the Japanese community and that, for them, the term loyalty was fraught with ideas about citizenship and patriotism. In addition, the fact that some returning

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Brown: Integration in a Multiracial Society," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (2004), McWilliams, *Brothers under the Skin*, 166, Sides, *L.A. City Limits : African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, 36-56, Taylor, "A History of Blacks in the Pacific Northwest, 1788-1970", 224-25.

<sup>271</sup> E. Monroe, “Statement Concerning the Need for a YWCA Worker on Interracial Matters with Special Emphasis on the Negro Situation” November 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 41

<sup>272</sup> Dorothy Takechi, “Meeting of the Metropolitan Los Angeles Group of the National Negro Woman’s Council” August 10, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #149

<sup>273</sup> Race Relations Subcommittee, May 9, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box #123; Los Angeles Board of Directors Meeting, March 22, 1945, YWCA of Greater Los Angeles Papers, Urban Archives and Special Collections, California State University at Northridge, Box 6. (herein afterward referred to as Los Angeles YWCA Papers)

<sup>274</sup> "The Race War That Flopped: Little Tokyo and Bronzeville Upset Predictions of Negro-Nisei Battle," *Ebony*, July 1946, 3. For more on this situation see, Gorham, "Negroes and Japanese Evacuees.", Kurashige, "The Many Facets of Brown: Integration in a Multiracial Society."

<sup>275</sup> Portland Board of Directors Meeting, December 12, 1944, Portland YWCA Papers, Box 13. The adopted resolution stressed their trust in the federal government in allowing only loyal Japanese to move back to the West Coast. The resolution was published in the local papers, Portland Board of Directors Meeting, January 16, 1945, Portland YWCA Papers, Box 13. Esther Briesemeister in a visit to Portland also commented that she discerned a prejudicial attitude towards Japanese and Blacks, but the Board seemed committed to changing these attitudes; Esther Briesemeister, Portland Visitation Report, March 6-7, 1944, YWCA National Board Papers, Microfilm #207

Japanese looked to the Y for employment sparked discussion at local branches not only on hiring policy but also on the extent and direction of interracial practices.<sup>276</sup> As was the case in other parts of the country, hiring Japanese women on the West Coast led to further racial integration of the Y staff. The General Secretary of the Spokane, Washington branch saw a direct correlation between its resettlement work and the decision to employ “a Japanese Secretary in our front office, a Negro Secretary in the office of our Health Education Department, and one Japanese and one Negro woman on our board of directors.”<sup>277</sup>

Nationwide, the different stages of resettlement led branches into discussions concerning multiracial integration efforts. By the end of the war, many looked to the National Board for help in defining what was meant by “interracial.”<sup>278</sup> The question would challenge the organization throughout the postwar era. Much of the discussion centered on whether integration meant opening the mainstream (i.e. White) to minorities, while allowing minorities to form or continue in racially exclusively groups or insisting on absolute integration across the board. Desegregation and how to enforce integration was different from branch to branch at the end of the war. There were members who supported the “opening” of an association’s facilities to all races, yet resisted the integration of activities and programs at the club and council level. Some branches eliminated mono-race clubs, but this caused a drop in membership from all the races. In

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<sup>276</sup> Seattle Board of Directors Meeting, November 14, 1944, and December 12, 1944, Seattle YWCA Papers, Box 17, Folder 22.

<sup>277</sup> “Excerpts from Letters to Mrs. Henry A. Ingraham: October 1, 1944 to March 1, 1945,” (Western Region) March 19, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 42A

<sup>278</sup> Esther Briesemeister, Portland Visitation Report, February 21-23, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #207

some cases, the public embrace of racial integration led to an increased membership of women of color with a subsequent decrease of White women members.<sup>279</sup>

The way the Los Angeles Y handled the challenges it faced at the end of the war are illustrative of how many branches coped with the impact of integration. By mid-1945, the Los Angeles Y prepared to incorporate more inclusive interracial practices throughout its branches and set to work immediately on the issue. The association's Board of Directors enthusiastically endorsed the re-opening of the Japanese Branch and its Residence Hall for Women (which was closed during the war), giving financial backing and lending staff to the effort. It also decreed that both the branch and Residence Hall were to be interracial. The center was renamed the East Third Street branch with the residences to be known as the Magnolia Residence Hall.<sup>280</sup> This decision reverberated negatively within the returning Japanese community; none of the former leaders were consulted on this matter and many balked at the decision to integrate the branch and hall. A group of Issei members, with the aid of a Japanese minister, threatened a lawsuit demanding the building remain all-Japanese.<sup>281</sup> The Board of Directors relented, though it "stipulated" that if the buildings were to remain affiliated with the Y, the administration had to be interracial. In a National Board report, Laura Ault noted that "It was a difficult decision and one which was unpopular with many people in the YWCA, but I am inclined to think it was the only decision they could make. The demand of the Issei group is only another example of the regression of the Japanese back into a strong

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<sup>279</sup> "Teenage Department Report, 1944-1946," Portland YWCA Papers, Box 20, Folder – YWCA Programs – Girl Reserves

<sup>280</sup> See Los Angeles Board of Directors Minutes, September 28, 1944 [Folder 1]; February 22, 1945; April 12, 1945; May 10, 1945 [Folder 2]; September 13, 1945, October 25, 1945 [Folder 3], Los Angeles YWCA Papers, Box 6

<sup>281</sup> The group "produced a statement in the original deed which said the building was given for the use of the Japanese people." Laura Ault, Los Angeles Visitation report, November 14, 1946, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #163

nationality sentiment which is an expression of their insecurity.”<sup>282</sup> This did not stop the Los Angeles association’s campaign for branch integration, and eventually the Japanese leadership recommended the integration of both the branch and the hall.<sup>283</sup>

Ault’s remark about the plight and insecurity of returning Japanese took note of the stressful effects on them of avacuation and internment. However, the Los Angeles association seemed oblivious to all this, and its insensitive actions went beyond the integration of the East Third Street branch. In preparation for resettlement, the Board created a Japanese Relocation Plan which included a Committee on Reorientation of Japanese Membership, set up to help educate returning Japanese on interracial practices. It was also requested that the returning leaders of the branch meet with the Y’s “Interracial Committee so that they may understand the new plan of operation.”<sup>284</sup> The Board considered these steps necessary to create a more integrated association. The White leadership believed its actions to be antiracist, yet as historian Gary Okihiro has pointed out, though antiracism seeks inclusion, that desire “may be fundamentally racist if it means the forced absorption or assimilation of a group.”<sup>285</sup> In this case, the Y was not necessarily working to have the Japanese community assimilated into the White mainstream, but it did want to force its ideas of race relations upon them. Postwar White America was certainly not a bastion of multiracial inclusiveness; so in fact, the Y was forcing its own ideal community upon its members. The White staff’s initial insensitivity

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Helen Flack, Los Angeles Visitation report, January 26, 1947, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #163; Helen Flack, Los Angeles Visitation report, October 10, 1947, YWCA National Board papers, Microfilm Reel #163. An 1952 article marveled at the interracial living arrangements, and gave the impression that everyone involved was supportive of the integration of Magnolia Hall from the start. “Magnolia Residence: YWCA's Interracial Home No Problem,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 27 1952.

<sup>284</sup> Los Angeles Board of Directors Minutes, November 15, 1945, Los Angeles YWCA Papers, Box 6, Folder 3

<sup>285</sup> Okihiro and Ito, *Storied Lives*, xiii.

to the reactions of former Japanese members made their antiracist work on behalf of the entire association not an “unmixed good.”<sup>286</sup> It is interesting to note, that even with this situation, the Los Angeles Y was commended by governmental and social work agencies for its efforts in alleviating the psychological effects of internment.<sup>287</sup>

Nevertheless, some Japanese women supported the new interracial plans, including Dorothy Takechi, who served both the National Board and the Los Angeles association in helping the relocation of Japanese to Los Angeles.<sup>288</sup> In a personal letter, Esther Briesemeister wrote of the potential issues facing Takechi, including the desire of the Issei members to have a “special place for them to meet.” Takechi was already working to create such a place within the East Third Street center, though in a way that would not disrupt the integration goals of the Los Angeles association. Briesemeister continued: Takechi “has had quite a struggle on the interracial aspects...as the Japanese are willing to live with anyone but the Negroes. However, there are some very fine Negro and Japanese women on the committee working on this and they are doing a good job of interpretation.”<sup>289</sup> Briesemeister later visited the branch in December 1945, to help Takechi and to report on the branches’ interracial effort to the National Board. Beyond the Black-Japanese issue, the association was making a concerted effort to recruit more Latinas.<sup>290</sup>

While the association’s board made decisions that directly affected the Japanese community, it did not take the same hard-line stance within the White community.

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>287</sup> Esther Briesemeister, Los Angeles Visitation report, December 15, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm #163

<sup>288</sup> See Los Angeles Board of Director Minutes, March 22, 1945 [Folder 2], October 25, 1945 [Folder 3], Los Angeles YWCA Papers, Box 6

<sup>289</sup> Esther Briesemeister to “Nona,” October 30, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 48

<sup>290</sup> Esther Briesemeister to Grace Stuff, February 2, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 48; Esther Briesemeister, Los Angeles Visitation Report, December 15, 1945

Briesemeister reported on the controversy surrounding Los Angeles' Clark Residence, which served White women. Clark continued its segregation policies after the war, which Briesemeister called a constant "embarrassment to the total Association." She supported the recommendation for the Y to "sever its connections" from Clark, rather than enforce integration.<sup>291</sup> This is an interesting comparison to the reaction of the Los Angeles Board in its work in integrating the East Third Street branch. White staff felt more comfortable dictating the terms of integration within the non-White community than within its own. Yet its push for greater racial inclusiveness, coupled with the emphasis on better race relations by the National Board, pushed the Los Angeles White leadership to be more aware of the racism within its ranks. A 1948 Program Report noted that some of its branches rely on "token" racial participation, and "the inclusion...of one Japanese girl or woman, or one Negro does not warrant our saying we are interracial or intercultural." The report continued, "if we have examined these [prejudices], then we as board members, volunteers, and chairman must not stand by and see weaknesses and know they exist without realizing that we, too, are involved in them."<sup>292</sup> Members and staff alike were informed that by joining or working for the association, they were implicitly agreeing to the larger philosophy and purpose of the National association, which included racial tolerance.

These issues were not unique to Los Angeles, as the immediate postwar era saw many local and student branches facing and confronting various forms of prejudice, both internally and externally. Letters from several southern branches to the National Board

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<sup>291</sup> Esther Briesemeister, Los Angeles Visitation Report, December 15, 1945. The Clark Residence was not disaffiliated, though it remains unclear when and if it desegregated.

<sup>292</sup> Mrs. Edward B. Jamison, "Program Planning Progress Report" Metropolitan YWCA Board Meeting, June 17, 1948, Los Angeles YWCA Papers, Box 9, Folder 37, 2-4

applauded the Y's move toward interracial sisterhood, but there was also fear of community reprisals.<sup>293</sup> One southern branch executive director stated that even if she did not agree with integration, "the principle is superlatively Christian!"<sup>294</sup> With reservations, most of the southern branches made attempts of bettering race relations throughout the war. The only exceptions were the two Mississippi associations, which observed "unfortunately, interracial relations between Negroes and whites...worsened during the past three years in this community." Still, the branches were "determined to restore and better these relations."<sup>295</sup> In southern branches, post-war race relations continued to straddle the Black-White binary, while in the rest of the country, membership reflected a new multiracial population.

As the National Board continued to push for a multiracial agenda in local and student associations, it was clear to all concerned that there was unevenness in the enforcement of racial policy and practice. Throughout the war, the Y had championed the idea of a Christian social order and encouraged members and staff to envision and lead a world that supported true democratic ideals. The National Board declared that the "major emphases of the YWCA's of the United States – the Christian faith, democracy, and building a world community – with the deep implications these ideals have for the equality of peoples, give tremendous impetus toward a new era in race relationships."<sup>296</sup> The events of the war had altered how local branches viewed race relations, as "working on the Japanese question has served as an impetus to associations to view more critically

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<sup>293</sup> "Excerpts from Letters to Mrs. Henry A. Ingraham: October 1, 1944 to March 1, 1945," (Southern Region) March 19, 1945 National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 42A

<sup>294</sup> "From Report of Findings From Nation-wide Discussion Issues of YWCA March-May 1945, Presented to N.B. 5/23/45" National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 15

<sup>295</sup> "Excerpts from Letters to Mrs. Henry A. Ingraham: October 1, 1944 to March 1, 1945," (Southern Region)

<sup>296</sup> "Traditional Position of the Young Women's Christian Association on Race" September 17, 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm #93.2

their work with Negroes and Mexicans.” Members “discovered it was not possible to deal with one segment of the population without becoming aware of other groups with identical problems such as housing and jobs.”<sup>297</sup> Local branches were ready to discuss how best the association could work on these new ideas at the 1946 National Convention.

### The 1946 National Convention and Postwar America

The postwar world proved a chaotic time in race relations. Throughout the war, various individuals and groups worked to create a national identity, regardless of race, in order to present a united front. Yet, after peace was declared in August 1945, this identity was severely tested as disagreements surfaced on how fast the nation was willing to grant civil and political rights to all citizens. For most, those first few months after armistice served as a time of reflection on the massive destruction that had taken place, but also of self-congratulation on the Allies’ victory. Both of these emotions fueled much of the social planning and action taking place, as many hoped to create a more inclusive nation and world. For the Y, this was a chance to establish “a more Christian social order which would be based on law that would promote the common welfare, secure justice and freedom for all peoples and banish war from the earth.”<sup>298</sup>

The association was eager for its first convention in six years, as the triennial national meetings had been suspended during the war. The agenda focused on taking stock of lessons learned during the war, especially on race. In preparation, the National Board began collecting information from branches across the country on their interracial practices. Local branches had also received a copy of the *Interracial Practices in*

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<sup>297</sup> Esther Briesemeister, Los Angeles Visitation report, December 15, 1945.

<sup>298</sup> Elsie D. Harper, “Public Affairs 1940-1945,” November 8, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 20

*Community YWCAs*, published in 1944, which analyzed all the surveys and questionnaires collected during the war. The report, which “confirmed that community YWCAs remained largely segregated, and...recommended complete racial integration,” was “slated for consideration by the 1946 national convention.”<sup>299</sup> It was clear the National Board wanted to create an official policy that could help branches in race relations efforts to “make clear that inclusiveness involves the joint sharing of common concerns rather than the independent activity of separate groups.”<sup>300</sup>

Convention delegates were expected to vote on the Interracial Charter, based upon the recommendations of the 1944 study, written by Helen J. Wilkins, the Secretary for the Race Relations Committee, and Dr. Juliette Bell.<sup>301</sup> The authors suggested,

[that] Community YWCAs in strictly segregated communities...plan interclub and intergroup activities to facilitate communication between segregated groups. In those communities where segregation was less extensive, the study urged community associations to launch integrated programs immediately. Associations with black branches were exhorted to reorganize these branches on an integrated basis. The study counseled community YWCAs to move as quickly as possible to open facilities, including residences, cafeterias, camps, and health education departments to all participants.<sup>302</sup>

The study and its recommendations were aimed at Black-White relationships. Dr. Bell noted, “It is a Negro-white study because Negroes are the largest minority in this country, 10 per cent of the total population, the largest minority in the YWCA.”<sup>303</sup> Yet “it was hoped...that the findings of such a study might be used to interpret the relationship between white people and [other] racial minorities within the Association.”<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 46.

<sup>300</sup> "Racial Equality in Y.W.C.A. Urged," *New York Times*, March 6 1946.

<sup>301</sup> Bell and Wilkins, *Interracial Practices in Community Y. W. C. A. 'S.*

<sup>302</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 47.

<sup>303</sup> Proceedings of the Seventeenth National Convention, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 2, 79

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 58

Staff and members had worked together in expanding racial categories. In 1943, Annie Clo Watson, the head of Nationality work, wrote a memo to the National Board that stated “with exception of general recognition of the Negro-white problem, there is not well developed and active interest in national headquarters leadership in ‘cultural minority’ problems and program.” The work for the Japanese community was stellar, but Watson was concerned that the lessons learned from this “special project” would not benefit other racial and ethnic groups; the association needed to be more responsive to the needs of the Chinese, Filipinos, and Mexicans, among others.<sup>305</sup> Shortly thereafter, the National Board became increasingly vocal about the importance of citizenship rights for these other ethnic groups, and Wilkins began to work more closely with Watson in bridging the Nationality Committee’s work to that of the Race Relations Committee.<sup>306</sup> Watson’s critique was used time and again to remind the association of the “growing realization of the similarity of problems of all of people who face barriers of race or nationality.” As the National Board prepared for the 1946 National Convention, staff members were encouraged to review Watson’s 1943 memo and think about the importance of the Y as an intercultural and interracial organization.<sup>307</sup> Both Wilkins and Bell concurred with the assessment that the scope of the Y’s race work should be broadened and believed their published study could “be applied to any other group

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<sup>305</sup> Annie Clo Watson, “A Confidential Report...Organized Nationality Work in the YWCA,” January 26, 1943. National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 31

<sup>306</sup> On Chinese and Filipino citizenship, see CP, “Miss Watson: This is an interoffice memo...” April 12, 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 32. For work between Watson and Wilkins see “Notes – Minutes – Committee of Nationality Communities – June 1, 1943”, National YWCA Board Papers, Processed Box 31

<sup>307</sup> Margaret B. Gerard, “To: International institutes and Foreign community departments,” January 5, 1945, National YWCA Board Papers, Processed Papers, Box 36

relationships in the YWCA, Japanese-white nationality groups or minority religious groups.”<sup>308</sup>

After the publication of the study, Dorothy Height, the Secretary for the Committee on Interracial Education, traveled around the country to facilitate discussion of it in local branches.<sup>309</sup> She reported on her findings about the varying views on segregation, immigration, and federal versus state power to the National Board. During Height’s visit to Memphis, the local Board stated, “we accept the fact that the denial of the benefits of democracy is morally and religiously wrong. Therefore, we pledge ourselves to work without rest to secure the benefits of democracy to every American citizen.”<sup>310</sup> Her visits to the South did not always run smoothly; her mere presence as a Black woman evoked heated emotions at certain branches.<sup>311</sup> Height also worked on multiracial issues with branches outside the South. For instance, Denver asked for assistance on “inter-minority relations,” while in Duluth, Minnesota, “they needed more help on the question of Japanese Americans,” and in Delaware, on the subject of “the American Indian.”<sup>312</sup>

The war and resettlement work had changed the initial bifurcated understanding of race relations, and had broadened definitions of race and race work for the association. At the 1940 National Convention, a proposed amendment to the Public Affairs Program to use the term “all racial minorities” instead of just using the term “Negro” with respect to the Y’s race work failed.<sup>313</sup> Yet six years later without any discussion, the Public

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<sup>308</sup> Proceedings of the Seventeenth National Convention, 79

<sup>309</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 48.

<sup>310</sup> “Race Relations Subcommittee,” May 9, 1945, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 123

<sup>311</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 48.

<sup>312</sup> “Race Relations Subcommittee,” May 9, 1945.

<sup>313</sup> Public Affairs Program, 1940 National Convention, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 15

Affairs Program began instituting the term ‘minority groups’ when referring to race work. This term was defined as including “Negro, Japanese American, Oriental, Mexican and Latin American, Foreign Born, [and] American Indian.”<sup>314</sup> In addition, during the debate on implementing the recommendations of the Interracial Study, while some branch leaders spoke only of Black-White relations, others included and equated Asian and Mexican Americans with African Americans in their speeches.<sup>315</sup> A representative from Salt Lake City even asked, “if this report is on racial minorities, should not the Japanese be included?”<sup>316</sup> It was assured that all racial groups were to be included in the Y’s future efforts in race relations.

Though the association was committed to a multiracial postwar society, desegregation and integration efforts of the Y within Black and White communities before, during, and after the war cannot be understated.<sup>317</sup> Throughout the war, the association labored for civil rights and promoted greater access to its social services for Black members and the larger community.<sup>318</sup> The Y saw itself not as “an organization of white women considering the situation of those of another race,” but rather as a “Negro-white organization considering a problem that belongs to all of us.”<sup>319</sup> Concerned about availability of war-related economic prospects, the National Board’s Public Affairs Committee wrote the “appropriate authorities in Washington urging more training opportunities for women, both Negro and white, for defense industries,” and reminded national and local staff that “we shall need to be vigilant to see that Negro girls and

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<sup>314</sup> Proceedings of the Seventeenth National Convention, xii-xiii

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 72-74

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 78

<sup>317</sup> For more on the Y’s work with the Black community prior to World War II see Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46*, Taylor, “On the Edge of Tomorrow”.

<sup>318</sup> “To Secure for Negroes their Basic Civil Rights,” *The Womans Press*, December 1942

<sup>319</sup> Myra Smith, “The Concern and Activities of the YWCA,” October 6, 1944, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 41

women have equal opportunities.”<sup>320</sup> At the 1946 Convention, the Y was clear in making its work with the Black community a priority since “The Negro represents the largest ethnic minority in the United States and the group for which racial tensions are most acute. Our program will, therefore, put special emphasis on this group.”<sup>321</sup>

When not spearheading actions on its own, the Y often joined forces with other organizations, namely the NAACP and the NUL, to fight for the desegregation of the armed forces, agricultural reform, and the creation of a permanent Fair Employment Practice Committee.<sup>322</sup> Representatives of both organizations had been regular attendees of past Y National Conventions and participated in 1946. Their support extended beyond simple attendance. Staff members worked with these groups in preparing participants for the racial climate of Atlantic City, New Jersey where the gathering was held. The National Board put together an informational card which listed New Jersey’s race equality statutes and told attendees to carry this card with them to show to proprietors in case they were not served at public establishments.<sup>323</sup> In addition, as members headed off

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<sup>320</sup> Memo from Rose Terlin to Elise Harper, March 3, 1942, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 8

<sup>321</sup> Adopted Public Affairs Program, March 1946, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 15

<sup>322</sup> For more on the Y’s efforts see Jessie Vogt, “Report on the Council on National Defense Committee on Discrimination in Employment,” July 23, 1941 YWCA National Board Papers, Processed Papers, Folder 8, Box #33; “Material Prepared for National Board Meeting Oct. 6, 1943 - Compulsory Registration of Women,” YWCA National Board Papers, Processed Papers, Box #8 ; Letter from Mabel T. Everett to Walter White, March 11, 1940, NAACP Papers, NAACP II, 11A676 YWCA; Letters from Elizabeth B. Herring to Walter White, April 17; May 20; and June 26, 1941, NAACP Papers, NAACP II 11A676 YWCA; Letter from Helen J. Wilkins to Roy Wilkins, September 18, 1940, NAACP Papers, NAACP II 11A676 YWCA, and Knapp, “Experimental Social Policymaking During World War II: The United Service Organizations (USO) and American War-Community Services (AWCS).” For more on WWII and Blacks see Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, “Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement,” *Journal of American History* 75 (1988), Leonard, *The Battle for Los Angeles : Racial Ideology and World War II*, McWilliams, *Brothers under the Skin*, Bruce Nelson, “Organized Labor and the Struggle for Black Equality in Mobile During World War II,” *Journal of American History* 80 (1993), Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement : The President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941-1946*.

<sup>323</sup> New Jersey Race Equality Statutes, 1946, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 8; Venice T. Spraggs, “YWCA Delegates Find Welcome at Atlantic City’s Swank Hotels,” *The Chicago Defender*, March 16 1946.

to the national meeting, they had already received their March edition of the Y's monthly magazine, *The Womans Press*, which included an article on the need for civil rights for all Americans. Roy Wilkins, the editor of the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine had written the article.<sup>324</sup> These groups were deeply interested in the outcome of the convention and hoped that if the largest women's organization in the United States took race relations seriously, then a real possibility existed for greater national action on this issue.<sup>325</sup>

Though the Y had successfully kept up a steady dialogue on the issue of bettering race relations prior to and during the war, there were still members and staff who were hesitant to take the final step of desegregating the association. Mary Shotwell Ingraham, President of the National Board, understood that the passage of the Interracial Charter was dependent on appealing to participants' religious beliefs and hoped that these beliefs would trump ingrained social and regional mores. As a Christian organization, the Y often linked observance of religious tenets to the taking of particular positions on a variety of issues, such as the struggle to improve women's access to education, the fight for economic justice, and the movement for the creation of "a more peaceful world order."<sup>326</sup> Members were encouraged to be politically active in their faith, as the "refusal to accept the way of the Cross for oneself and for one's group is to miss the chance to live."<sup>327</sup> Thus, in the postwar era submission to God was viewed under the rubric of the Y's interpretations of Christian teachings as synonymous with the battle for civil rights.

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<sup>324</sup> Roy Wilkins, "What Every American Wants," *The Womans Press*, March 1946

<sup>325</sup> Venice T. Spraggs, "Protestants, YWCA Drop Race Segregation Policy," *The Chicago Defender*, March 16 1946.

<sup>326</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 5.

<sup>327</sup> Annie Clo Watson, "Report of (1) the March Meeting in New York (2) work of the follow-up committees (2) recent happenings around headquarters," July 9, 1943, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 31

At the convention, Ingraham appealed to members to examine their personal faith in making the momentous decision to desegregate the entire organization, saying “all that we can ask of one another is that each shall open her heart and mind to God, and follow the light He gives her.”<sup>328</sup> By doing so, Ingraham was expressing the opinion that ‘true’ followers of Christianity naturally believed in racial tolerance and were willing to fight for it. A belief that personal faith was the foundation for one’s commitment to progressive racial interaction dictated Y policy for the next two decades.<sup>329</sup>

Other convention leaders also connected Christianity to the fight for racial justice, including Benjamin Mays, the President of Morehouse College and Vice-President of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. He told the women that “the future of democracy in the United States is with those who take the high road,” and that they had to imagine themselves as “crusaders for social justice” in the upcoming vote on the Interracial Charter.<sup>330</sup> Y leaders also hoped that this ‘crusade for social justice’ would not be confined to the organization. Mrs. Legrand Tucker, the Chairwoman of the Commission to Study Interracial Practices, told delegates: “If you attack segregation at any point, the whole wall crumbles a little,” therefore they should “transfer our learnings from the Association to the world outside.”<sup>331</sup> The charter was soon unanimously approved, though “a few southern white delegates left early to avoid the vote, and a few other [local] associations withdrew shortly afterward.”<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Proceedings of the Seventeenth National Convention, 69

<sup>329</sup> Doug Rossinow, Sara Evans, and Susan Lynn have written on the connection between the use of Christianity in the Y as a way to foster racial tolerance. Evans, *Personal Politics*, Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America*

<sup>330</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 49.

<sup>331</sup> Proceedings of the Seventeenth National Convention, 64

<sup>332</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 49.

Participants understood that by choosing integration, they waged an uphill battle internally and externally.<sup>333</sup> Some southern delegates argued that resistance to the charter would not come from members, but rather the men who sat on local community chest boards and controlled branch funding.<sup>334</sup> The same women acknowledged that “we women have moved further forward than men have in our thinking along these lines,” and indicated they would continue to support the Charter.<sup>335</sup> Relieving some of the tension, it was agreed that where laws made it impossible to desegregate, then intergroup activities were to be planned.<sup>336</sup>

Many progressive organizations, including the NAACP, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, and the National Association of Colored Women quickly applauded the Y for the Interracial Charter. Walter White, the head of the NAACP, stated that the Y had “implemented more effectively than any other religious organization the tenets of true Christianity.”<sup>337</sup> There were some groups who, while praising the Y, expressed concern about the heavy emphasis on Black-White relations. A representative from the American Council of Race Relations, sought and received confirmation that the Y was still committed to race issues outside of Black-White relations, especially with the Japanese community.<sup>338</sup>

Personal congratulatory messages were also received from A. Philip Randolph, the driving force behind the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC), and Mary

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<sup>333</sup> "Racial Equality in Y.W.C.A. Urged."

<sup>334</sup> Ibid, Spraggs, "Protestants, YWCA Drop Race Segregation Policy," 1, Irene Steyskal, "Racial Equality Policy Is Voted by Y. W. C. A.," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 6 1946.

<sup>335</sup> Steyskal, "Racial Equality Policy Is Voted by Y. W. C. A."

<sup>336</sup> "Racial Equality in Y.W.C.A. Urged."

<sup>337</sup> Spraggs, "Protestants, YWCA Drop Race Segregation Policy," 8.

<sup>338</sup> Proceedings of the Seventeenth National Convention, 171

McLeod Bethune, the head of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW).<sup>339</sup> Bethune was a close ally of Mary Ingraham's and commended her personally on the Charter. Ingraham responded, "Whenever you and I have occasion to express ourselves on the intrinsic worth of human personality and the fatherhood of God, I find we use almost the same words. Our hearts and minds are very much attuned."<sup>340</sup> Their relationship help solidify the affiliation between the Y and the NCNW. It would deepen further during the civil rights movement when Dorothy Height, a key Y staffer, served as the president of the NCNW.

The Y's passage of the 1946 Interracial Charter was one of the first of many race related events in the nation. Noted scholar Carey McWilliams characterized this time as a period when "more has happened in the field of race relations in this country - - more interest has been aroused; more has been said and written; more proposed and accomplished - - than in the entire span of years from the end of the Civil War to 1940. Of this there can be no doubt."<sup>341</sup> The immediate postwar era led many to believe that real progress was being made in race relations and that first-class citizenship would soon be a reality for all Americans. Some looked to the integration of the national pastime, when Jackie Robinson took the field as a Brooklyn Dodger in April 1947, with the Cleveland Indians and St. Louis Browns following suit by the summer, for a sign that the country was becoming more racially tolerant.<sup>342</sup> That same year, Pepsi Cola Company

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<sup>339</sup> Proceedings of the Seventeenth National Convention, Folder 4 "Convention Proceedings"

<sup>340</sup> Mary Shotwell Ingraham to Mary McLeod Bethune, March 15, 1946, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 41, Folder I-N-NCNW

<sup>341</sup> McWilliams, *Brothers under the Skin*, 4.

<sup>342</sup> For more on Jackie Robinson, the integration of baseball, and its impact on postwar era race relations, see Neil J. Sullivan, "Baseball and Race: The Limits of Competition," *The Journal of Negro History* 83, no. 3 (1998), Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment : Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*, Expanded ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), Jules Tygiel, *Extra Bases: Reflections on Jackie Robinson, Race, and Baseball History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

shook up the corporate world when it chose to promote positive racial images in its advertising and, within a few years, integrated its sales force.<sup>343</sup> Postwar America also saw the first real challenge to the infamous “one-drop” blood rule, which defined one racially as African-American as long as there was “one-drop” of ‘Black’ blood in one’s veins.<sup>344</sup> In 1947, the Red Cross stopped segregating its blood supply, though it would be another three years before it stopped designating the race of donors on the blood bags.<sup>345</sup>

The federal government finally took positive steps end Jim Crow. President Harry S. Truman created the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, which issued its report *To Secure These Rights*, in 1947.<sup>346</sup> The Committee was formed in large part to help quell the extensive and violent White backlash toward those non-Whites demanding civil rights and social equality.<sup>347</sup> This report, hailed as a blueprint for the modern civil rights movement, argued for the “establishment of a permanent civil rights division of the Justice Department, the creation of a Commission on Civil Rights, enactment of anti-lynching legislation, abolition of the poll tax,...desegregation of the Armed

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<sup>343</sup> Stephanie Capparell, *The Real Pepsi Challenge* (Detroit: Free Press, 2007), Douglas Martin, "Edward Boyd, 92, Marketer to Blacks, Dies," *New York Times*, May 6 2007.

<sup>344</sup> For more on the issue of race and blood, see Spencie Love, *One Blood : The Death and Resurrection of Charles R. Drew* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), Keith Wailoo, *Dying in the City of Blues* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2001), Keith Wailoo, "Stigma, Race, and Disease in 20th Century America," *The Lancet* 367, no. 9509 (2006).

<sup>345</sup> "Red Cross Lauded for View on Blood," *New York Times*, June 11 1947, "Red Cross to Omit Race Tag on Blood," *New York Times*, November 20 1950. While these events are significant, so was the backlash that occurred as demands for civil, political, economic, and social rights increased. For more on the backlash of the immediate postwar years, see Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University, 1995), 144-56.

<sup>346</sup> Lawson, ed., *To Secure These Rights*.

<sup>347</sup> For more on the early postwar backlash, see Kari A. Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), Steven F. Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 1999), Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941*, Lawson, ed., *To Secure These Rights*, Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

Forces...[and] enactment of a permanent FEPC," among other issues.<sup>348</sup> Truman supported many of the suggestions and in 1948 signed Executive Order 9981, instituting the desegregation of the Armed Forces.<sup>349</sup> The Supreme Court also began to reverse itself, chipping away at legally sanctioned racial segregation in cases involving restrictive housing covenants, interstate transportation, and education.<sup>350</sup>

While many of these advances dealt directly with the rights of African-Americans, there was also progress for other racial minorities. In 1948, the Supreme Court overturned California's Alien Land Law, in which non-citizen Asians were not allowed to own property.<sup>351</sup> It ruled that the Alien Land Law violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In a concurring opinion, Justice Frank Murphy wrote of the inherent racial discrimination within the law; that it was not only an "embarrassment" to the ideals of the United States Constitution but was also an affront to "respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all."<sup>352</sup> Lower courts also invoked the Fourteenth Amendment in cases involving the unlawful segregation of Mexican Americans in education.<sup>353</sup> In 1948, Congress passed the

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<sup>348</sup> William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: American since World War II* (New York: Oxford, 1986), 90. For more on its significance to the civil rights movement see Lawson, ed., *To Secure These Rights*.

<sup>349</sup> For more on the desegregation of the Armed Forces, see Gail Lumet Buckley, *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 2001), Bernard C. Nalty, *Strength for the Fight: A History of Black Americans in the Military* (Detroit: The Free Press, 1986).

<sup>350</sup> Whittington B. Johnson, "The Vinson Court and Racial Segregation, 1946-1953," *The Journal of Negro History* 63, no. 3 (1978), August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, "The First Freedom Ride," *Phylon* 30, no. 3 (1969). There was also white backlash to these events, including the formation of the Dixiecrat Party in 1948. See Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968*.

<sup>351</sup> For more on the Law and similar actions against Asian immigrants, see Daniels, *The Politics of Prejudice*.

<sup>352</sup> "Oyama V. State of California," *The American Journal of International Law* 42, no. 2 (1948): 476-77.

<sup>353</sup> In the late 1940s, both the Ninth District Court in California and the United States District Court, Western Texas District, ruled that "the placing of students of Mexican ancestry in different buildings was arbitrary, discriminatory, and illegal." For on these cases, see Frederick P. Aguirre, "Mendez V. Westminster School District: How It Affected Brown V. Board of Education," *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 4 (2005), Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., "The Struggle against Separate and Unequal Schools:

Japanese American Claims Act, which compensated some of the former internment camp prisoners for their property losses.<sup>354</sup> Congress also passed the 1952 McCarran-Walter Immigration Act, which repealed any lingering Asian exclusion laws, and allowed Japanese immigrants to become naturalized American citizens (the final immigrant group to gain such rights).<sup>355</sup> As one scholar stated at the time, “This is a revolutionary era, one in which vast social changes are taking place at a speed which is terrifying to many, particularly to those who see that special privilege for the few is under attack on all sides as it has scarcely been since the 1840’s.”<sup>356</sup>

The Y’s Interracial Charter was more than just one small act in the postwar transformation. It was significant not only as a precursor to the race relations events of the time, but also projected the association as a leader among other social and civil rights organizations. In order to assess the role of the Y as a trusted colleague and inspiration to many civil rights organizations throughout the freedom struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, it is important to examine the uniqueness of the Charter in light of other religious and social organizations.

In the fall of 1945, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) conducted a survey examining the racial practices of 141 “leading professional, scientific, and cultural organizations” in the nation. There were more organizations reporting zero Black

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Middle Class Mexican Americans and the Desegregation Campaign in Texas, 1929-1957," *History of Education Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (1983): 50.

<sup>354</sup> Greenberg, "Black and Jewish Responses to Japanese Internment," 19.

<sup>355</sup> Prior to 1952, both Filipinos and Chinese were allowed to migrate to the United States, though in incredibly small numbers. For more on Asian immigration laws and the 1952 Act, see Donna R. Gabaccia, *Immigration and American Diversity: A Social and Cultural History, Problems in American History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), Bill Ong Hing, *Defining America through Immigration Policy, Mapping Racisms* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), Bill Ong Hing, *Making and Remaking Asian America through Immigration Policy, 1850-1990, Asian America* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993).

<sup>356</sup> H. H. Giles, "The Present Status and Programs of Private Intergroup Relations Agencies," *The Journal of Negro Education* 20, no. 3 (1951): 408.

members than there were those who had over 100 Black members (twelve to nine). The national organizations were broken into four categories: those that were interracial nationally “but yield to local customs in excluding or segregating Negroes;” those that discriminated both nationally and locally; those that “segregate Negroes and refuse them admission as members of the national organization;” and those that excluded Blacks altogether. In the first category, the biggest included the Y, the Boy and Girl Scouts, the American Red Cross, and the National Women’s Christian Temperance Union. The American Bar Association and the American Veterinary Medical Association were included in the second grouping; and the National Council of the YMCA and the Veterans of Foreign Wars were in the third group. Only the General Federation of Women’s Clubs and the Association of Professional Ball Players of America maintained a “White-only” policy.<sup>357</sup>

Within six weeks of publication of the ACLU survey, the Y along with the Federal Council of Churches (FCC) moved to desegregate, integrate, and denounce Jim Crow.<sup>358</sup> While the Y passed its Interracial Charter, the FCC released a statement renouncing “the pattern of segregation in race relations as unnecessary and undesirable and a violation of the Gospel of love and human brotherhood.”<sup>359</sup> The news of the Y’s decision was broadcast nationally, and it was “believed [the Charter] will set the tone for other organizations which presently follow a policy of racial segregation, if not down right racial exclusion.”<sup>360</sup> By the end of the year, the Congregationalists and the United

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<sup>357</sup> "Survey Bares Professional Bias," *The Chicago Defender*, January 12 1946.

<sup>358</sup> "Biggest Church Body in America Rips Jim Crow," *The Chicago Defender*, March 16 1946, Spraggs, "Protestants, YWCA Drop Race Segregation Policy."

<sup>359</sup> J. Oscar Lee, "The Status of Racial Integration in Religious Institutions," *The Journal of Negro Education* 23, no. 3 (1954): 232.

<sup>360</sup> "Racial Equality in Y.W.C.A. Urged.", Spraggs, "Protestants, YWCA Drop Race Segregation Policy.", Steyskal, "Racial Equality Policy Is Voted by Y. W. C. A."

Council of Church Women joined the discussion on racial equality.<sup>361</sup> Within a few years, other denominations adopted the FCC's policy, including the largest Protestant sect, the Methodists.<sup>362</sup>

The Y was in agreement with the FCC that "unless Christian churches open their doors to all races they 'should cease to proclaim the doctrine of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.'"<sup>363</sup> As a hierarchical organization, the Y was in a position to enforce its Interracial Charter throughout all branches, though originally it agreed not to do so fully in areas where Jim Crow ruled. The constant reference to bettering race relations though, spurred those in hostile regions into action. Staff at the Jackson, Mississippi branch cited both the 1944 Interracial Study and the Charter as the initial steps they needed in "achieving the goal" of trying "to learn each other."<sup>364</sup> For many in the Black community, the fact that the Interracial Charter was already making waves in Mississippi gave hope that Jim Crow would soon be dead.<sup>365</sup>

In addition to these hopeful racial signs, there were Black-led organizations that took equally bold steps. In 1946, the oldest African American sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, opened its doors to all women regardless of race.<sup>366</sup> A few years later, the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses, the largest group of African American

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<sup>361</sup> "Congregationalists Ask Racial Equality," *New York Times*, October 30 1946, "Women Probe Race Issue," *The Chicago Defender*, December 14 1946. For more on the racial work on the United Council of Church Women see Cherisse Renee Jones, "'How Shall I Sing the Lord's Song?'" United Church Women Confront Racial Issues in South Carolina, 1940s-1960s," in *Throwing Off the Cloak of Privilege: White Southern Woman Activists in the Civil Rights Era*, ed. Gail S. Murray (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2004).

<sup>362</sup> "Five Denominations Oppose Segregation," *New York Times*, January 31 1948, "Methodists Rap Past Bigotry, Urge Brotherhood, Give Negro Top Post," *The Chicago Defender*, May 15 1948.

<sup>363</sup> "Open-Door Church Asked: Negro Leaders Challenge Whites on Segregation Issue," *New York Times*, December 16 1944.

<sup>364</sup> Venice T. Spraggs, "Miss. Bigots May Topple," *The Chicago Defender*, March 23 1946.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>366</sup> "AKA Extends Membership to Women of All Races," *The Chicago Defender* 1946.

nurses, decided to disband because it believed that such strides had been made toward integration in the nursing field, the association was no longer necessary.<sup>367</sup>

Many national social organizations supported and encouraged racial tolerance and equality, but this did not mean they forced their local groups to desegregate or integrate. A review of their race related efforts reveals little mention of desegregation as a goal or when or if it even took place. While in 1946 YMCA leaders resolved to encourage local associations to eliminate racial discrimination and dissolved its national Colored Work Department, the movement towards true desegregation was slow at best.<sup>368</sup> Both the Boy and Girl Scouts led efforts to increase Black membership and supported racial tolerance, but there was little encouragement to integrate its local troops.<sup>369</sup> Similarly, the American Association of University Women supported interracial efforts, but found it had little power to enforce local compliance.<sup>370</sup> These weak efforts are important in understanding

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<sup>367</sup> "Negro Nurses' Group Disbands near Goal of 42-Year Effort to Attain Integration," *New York Times*, January 27 1951. For more on Black nurses, please see Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in White : Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

<sup>368</sup> Even into the early 1950s none of its White Southeastern or Southwestern branches desegregated. See Charles Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. In North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951), Nina Mjagkij, *Light in the Darkness: African Americans and the YMCA, 1852-1946* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 127, "Race Bias Fight Voted by Y.M.C.A.," *New York Times*, May 18 1946, "Top Y.M.C.A. Unit Asks Full Negro Equality," *New York Times*, May 21 1950. As well, even with similar efforts in 1946, other scholars did not treat the YMCA as on equal footing as the YWCA in terms of its race efforts. See Lee, "The Status of Racial Integration in Religious Institutions."

<sup>369</sup> "Negro Girl Scouts Grow in Number," *The Chicago Defender*, July 16 1949, "Racial Harmony, World Food Aid Backed at Girl Scout Convention," *New York Times*, November 5 1947, "Start Nation-Wide Drive for Negro Boy Scouts; Want 900,000," *The Chicago Defender*, May 17 1945.

<sup>370</sup> The Washington DC branch refused to admit Mary Church Terrell, a Black member of the National AAUW. When the National told the branch to integrate or be dissolved, DC sued and won. After losing its appeal, the National passed new bylaws at its 1949 Convention, which said that local branches had to comply with integration efforts. And though the bylaws were overwhelmingly passed, unlike the Y, the vote was not unanimous. For more see "AAUW Branch Seeks Writ in Race Bias Row," *The Washington Post* April 17 1948, "AAUW Gets Membership Ultimatum," *The Washington Post*, April 7 1948, "AAUW Takes Stand against Segregation," *Los Angeles Times*, June 23 1949, "Court Upholds AAUW Branch on Racial Membership Issue," *The Washington Post*, July 17 1948, "D.C. Court Upheld in AAUW Decision," *The Washington Post*, June 14 1949, "Racial Test Barred by University Women," *New York Times*, June 23 1949, "University Women Here Told to Admit Negro or Quit Group," *The Washington Post*, April 11 1948. For more on this incident, see Laville, "If the Time Is Not Ripe, Then It Is Your Job to Ripen the

the struggle taking place in many groups during the postwar era as they attempted to create a racially tolerant environment.

The Y stood apart from its associates in leading the way. As one scholar noted, “In adopting a progressive policy the Y.W.C.A. was not unique – many philanthropic and religious bodies have also done so. What was unique was its determination to establish machinery within the organization to guarantee its fulfillment.”<sup>371</sup> The Y continued to review its interracial practices after the Charter, publishing numerous studies and reports on race relations that were deemed to be very “helpful” to other organizations.<sup>372</sup> Within a short time, the Y had become “a pioneer in the inter-racial field and...[was] known throughout the country for its efforts toward full integration of minority groups in Association life.”<sup>373</sup>

The Y also differentiated itself from its peers through its commitment to work with all racial and ethnic groups. Its multiracial foundation, laid prior to and during the war, served as a springboard for its postwar activism. In her 1946 book, *Step by Step With Interracial Groups*, Dorothy Height explained how the association had redefined the term ‘interracial’ work. She wrote:

The word “interracial” has come to mean, for many, the relationship between Negro and white people. We must remember that our country has a number of racial minorities. Although many of the most difficult problems are in Negro-white relations because Negroes are the largest racial minority in the United

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Time!" The Transformation of the YWCA in the USA from Segregated Association to Interracial Organization, 1930-1965."

<sup>371</sup> Horace R. Cayton, "A Study of Race Relations," *New York Times*, April 17 1949.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid. Postwar Y publications include: Dorothy I. Height, *Step by Step with Interracial Groups* (New York: The Woman's Press, 1946), Dorothy Sabiston and Margaret Hiller, *Toward Better Race Relations* (New York,: Women's Press, 1949), Yolanda Barnett Wilkerson, *Interracial Programs of Student YWCA's; an Inquiry under Auspices of the National Student Young Women's Christian Association* (New York,: Woman's Press, 1948).

<sup>373</sup> Elizabeth Bradley, "Modern Women and Community Organization," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 23, no. 3 (1949): 164, Lee, "The Status of Racial Integration in Religious Institutions.", Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 64-66.

States, *difficult problems face all minorities*. It has been agreed that progress in the solution of the problems in Negro-white relations is essential to a real assurance that we have genuine knowledge of how to tackle, in any aspect, the problems of the minority. We shall be helped toward greater understanding and competence if we realize that solutions are related not to the kinds of *people* involved but to the kinds of *problems*.<sup>374</sup> [original emphasis]

Other organizations and leaders also gave support to multiracial efforts in the fight for civil rights. Dr. Charles S. Johnson, who established the Fisk University Race Relations Institute in 1944, argued that the Black community “should lend its conspicuous support to the campaigns against the manifestations and growth of anti-Semitism and against the undemocratic treatment of Japanese American citizens. This would not only win new friends and allies, but it would help preserve in our national tradition the American spirit of fair play.”<sup>375</sup> The FCC also encouraged congregations to be alert to how the “champions of white supremacy” were “organizing to deny freedom to Negroes and to persons of Japanese ancestry.”<sup>376</sup> However, as Cheryl Greenberg points out, “most Black and Jewish groups did little on behalf of interned Japanese Americans.”<sup>377</sup> These groups “generally paid more attention to each other than to other minority communities,” which laid the groundwork for “sustained black-Jewish cooperation” in the civil rights movement.<sup>378</sup> Leadership then fell to those, like the Y, which believed in, and practiced, multiracial work before the postwar era.<sup>379</sup> By the early

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<sup>374</sup> Height, *Step by Step with Interracial Groups*.

<sup>375</sup> Charles S. Johnson, “The Next Decade in Race Relations,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 13, no. 3 (1944): 444. For more on the Fisk Race Relations Institute see Katrina M. Sanders, *Intelligent and Effective Direction: The Fisk University Race Relations Institute and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1944-1969* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

<sup>376</sup> “Federal Council Scores Racial Bias: Calls for Renunciation of Segregation in Proclaiming Race Relations Sunday,” *New York Times*, February 6 1947.

<sup>377</sup> Greenberg, “Black and Jewish Responses to Japanese Internment,” Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century*.

<sup>378</sup> Greenberg, “Black and Jewish Responses to Japanese Internment,” 8.

<sup>379</sup> There were local multiracial coalitions led by Black and Jewish groups and individuals, most notably in Los Angeles. As one scholar argued, it was “the uniqueness” of Los Angeles, as a truly multiracial and multiethnic city, that “demanded...an impetus for aligning the fight for black empowerment with that of

1950s, the association was cited as the only multiracial organization effectively fighting for civil rights.<sup>380</sup>

With the passage of the 1946 Charter, the Y began to work immediately in creating its ideal Christian social order. In the forefront were the Student Ys, which had a history of pushing the progressive agenda of the national organization.<sup>381</sup> In many cases, student associations faced backlash on campuses and in the larger community as they pressed forward on integration. At the University of Oklahoma, student and administration leaders cancelled a joint Student Y-Girl Reserves planned religious week event because of an invited Black speaker.<sup>382</sup> Problems also arose at interracial student conferences. Since the 1920s, regional and national Student Y conferences had been interracial in membership and leadership, except for those held in the South. Adopting the Charter changed this. For example, in the summer of 1946, an interracial conference was held in Hendersonville, North Carolina throwing the community into an uproar, with

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other groups." Regina Freer, "L.A. Race Woman: Charlotta Bass and the Complexities of Black Political Development in Los Angeles," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2004): 624. One could argue that Los Angeles and the Y were similar in the fact both represented multiracial populations before, during, and after the war. For more on multiracial efforts in Los Angeles, see De Graaf, Mulroy, and Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado*, David J. Leonard, "'The Little Fuehrer Invades Los Angeles': The Emergence of a Black-Jewish Coalition after World War II," *American Jewish History* 92, no. 1 (2005), Leonard, *The Battle for Los Angeles: Racial Ideology and World War II*, George J. Sanchez, "'What's Good for Boyle Heights Is Good for the Jews': Creating Multiculturalism on the Eastside During the 1950s," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2004). For more on postwar coalitions in a broader context, see Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II*.

<sup>380</sup> Giles, "The Present Status and Programs of Private Intergroup Relations Agencies," 412. In a survey on effective civil rights organizations, the top organizations listed (in order) were the NAACP, the NUL, the Y, the National Council of Jewish Women, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), and the JACL. All these groups are either race or religious based. Like the Y, the AFSC was a White-majority Christian organization but it did not and could not boast the same multiracial membership as the Y. Going into the early 1950s, the Y had over 3 million participants, including over 600,000 members. Within the membership, 83,000 were Black, 10,000 were white ethnic immigrants, 5,000 were Asian American, and 400 were Native American. Mrs. Arthur Forest Anderson to Senator Alexander Wiley, Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee, February 5, 1948, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 15. For more on the AFSC, see Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*.

<sup>381</sup> Taylor, "'On the Edge of Tomorrow'", Wilkerson, *Interracial Programs of Student YWCA's; an Inquiry under Auspices of the National Student Young Women's Christian Association*.

<sup>382</sup> Public Affairs Committee Meeting Minutes, April 17, 1946, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 8

threats of violence ensuing. In a letter to the editor of the local *Times News*, one person wrote, “such meetings are not welcome in this community. Ample facilities are available in other sections of the country, outside the south, for the accommodation of the interracial conferences.”<sup>383</sup> National Board staffers were immediately dispatched to the town, and though assured that the students were safe, the Hendersonville Sheriff “warned us emphatically that should we attempt to have another interracial conference, there ‘would be a killing.’”<sup>384</sup>

Students were also involved in protesting the escalating violence against Black veterans and servicemen. After the 1946 lynching of veteran George Dorsey, his wife, sister, and friend, in Monroe, Georgia the co-chairs of the Student YW-YMCAs immediately wrote to Georgia’s Governor Ellis Arnall, urging that the “perpetrators of this crime be brought to justice.”<sup>385</sup> The students alerted the National Board, prompting it to get involved, and letters were written to both President Truman and Arnall.<sup>386</sup> The Governor quickly replied he was doing everything within his power to investigate.<sup>387</sup> The Monroe lynching, as well as other cases of violence, led a variety of organizations to

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<sup>383</sup> P.S. Finn, Jr., Letter to the Editor, June 17, 1946, *The Times News*, Hendersonville, North Carolina, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 42B, Folder – IN – the South, 1942-1947

<sup>384</sup> Genevieve Lowry and Mary Sims to Helen Sheley, August 13, 1946, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 42B, Folder – IN – the South, 1942-1947. The Y was not the only organization to be faced with this type of situation. In 1948, one hundred Ku Klux Klansmen raided a Girls Scouts camp in Alabama because it was interracial. See "Klan Raids Girl Scouts Camp," *The Chicago Defender*, June 19 1948, "Scouts Ask U.S. Probe of Raid on Dixie Camp," *The Chicago Defender*, June 26 1948.

<sup>385</sup> Dorothy Powell and Robert Schumpert to Governor Arnall, July 28, 1946. Telegram attached to letter to Elsie Harper, July 28, 1946, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 15

<sup>386</sup> Mrs. Arthur Forest Anderson to President Truman and Governor Arnall, July 31, 1946, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 15

<sup>387</sup> Governor Ellis Arnall to Eleanor Anderson, August 2, 1946, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 15. For more on the 1946 Monroe Lynching see Laura Wexler, *Fire in a Canebrake : The Last Mass Lynching in America* (New York: Scribner, 2003).

form the National Emergency Committee Against Mob Violence.<sup>388</sup> The NAACP led the Committee and asked the National Y to represent the different women's groups.<sup>389</sup>

Beyond cooperating with other civil rights organizations, the National Board and community branches continued the work set out by the Charter. The Julius Rosenwald Fund sponsored the Y to "employ a secretary for one year to work on a follow-up of the Interracial Study."<sup>390</sup> Some southern branches, including those in Miami, Florida; Austin, Texas; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and, Richmond, Virginia reported progress on integration efforts.<sup>391</sup> Out west, the Seattle branch protested both labor discrimination against Japanese Americans and the lack of access to public establishments for Blacks.<sup>392</sup> However, some other branches resisted this new emphasis on race relations. Shortly after the convention, the Louisville, Kentucky, branch reported that it had ceased all integration efforts.<sup>393</sup> A few years later, the Mobile, Alabama Board of Directors sent a letter to all branches "expressing dissatisfaction with the Public Affairs Committee of the National YWCA, particularly those sections dealing with minority groups."<sup>394</sup> Still, a 1947 article in *Ebony* magazine, detailing the internal resistance to the 1946 Charter, reported that the Y "having come this far...[had] no intention of turning back."<sup>395</sup> Throughout the postwar years, local branches would continue to navigate among

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<sup>388</sup> Lawson, ed., *To Secure These Rights*, 9.

<sup>389</sup> Marjorie Mudge to Arthur Spigarn, August 14, 1946, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 15

<sup>390</sup> Rosenwald Fund, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 34, Folder "1946-1947"

<sup>391</sup> Myra Smith, "Dear Executive Director," April 4, 1946, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 42A

<sup>392</sup> Seattle Public Affairs Committee Meeting Minutes, May 21, 1946, Seattle YWCA Papers, Box 23, Folder "Public Affairs Committee – Meetings, 1946-1947"

<sup>393</sup> Myra Smith, "Dear Executive Director," April 4, 1946

<sup>394</sup> Board of Directors Meeting, Portland YWCA, October 26, 1948, Portland YWCA Papers, Box 13.

<sup>395</sup> "YWCA Pioneers in Democracy," *Ebony* 1947.

community support or resistance, orders from the National Board, and internal power struggles regarding the implementation of the Charter.

### The Inclusiveness Campaigns

In the 1950s, the Y embarked on two ambitious projects, the Religion and the Racial Inclusiveness Campaigns. Throughout the war and after, members and staff had debated what it meant to be “included” in association life. With respect to race, conversations centered on the desegregation and integration of both branch programs and outreach. As for religion, the focus was on the tension between ecumenicalism and allegiance to the “Christian Purpose” of the Y. The National Board decided to create these campaigns not only to further debates on race and religion, but also to move the association toward a more progressive stance on these issues. The campaigns were closely related and reinforced one another. The association defined ecumenicity as “Christian faith embracing all races...” and also believed that the organization was “inclusive because we are Christian.”<sup>396</sup> The effort to promote a more “inclusive fellowship” was a constant battle as members and staff not only had to contend with changes within their branches, but also with the onset of the Cold War and later, civil rights movement.

There was an increased interest in religion during the 1950s, deeply affecting policy and social mores as well as helping construct American values. Protestantism was

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<sup>396</sup> Winnifred Wygal, “The Student Christian Association Movement as a Lay Movement: Its Expression of Social Theology and its Program Possibilities for the Next Ten Years – an Occasional Paper Having No Official Status” n.d. 1950, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #247.7, 2; Grace Loucks Elliot, “Inclusiveness and the Christian Purpose,” July 1953, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 82

the dominant religion and its leaders believed it to be America's religion.<sup>397</sup> This increased religiosity was tied to the Cold War, with governmental and religious leaders positing religion as the antidote to communism. Evangelical minister Billy Graham, who rose to prominence during this period, frequently tied Christianity to anticommunism.<sup>398</sup> Graham preached that communism was a movement "against God, against Christ, against the Bible, and against all religion. Communism is not only an economic interpretation of life -- Communism is a religion that is inspired, directed, and motivated by the Devil himself who has declared war against Almighty God," and by extension, the United States as well.<sup>399</sup> President Dwight D. Eisenhower frequently rallied against "godless Communism" and stated "the most basic expression of Americanism" was the belief in God.<sup>400</sup> In 1954, the connection between Christianity and ideas of democracy led Congress to pass a resolution inserting the term "under God" into the Pledge of Allegiance.<sup>401</sup> By the middle of the 1950s, there also existed an interfaith effort among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews – as the fight against communism now encompassed all who believed in God, not just the Protestants.<sup>402</sup>

The atomic threat that underlined the Cold War also increased religious anxiety. Some believed the ushering in of the Atomic Age signaled the apocalypse.<sup>403</sup> For others, religious faith soothed these fears since "only a world community...would counter the dangers of that happening....[and] one Christianity could create a humane 'world

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<sup>397</sup> Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion*, vol. 3: Under God, Indivisible, 1941-1960 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 131.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-54, Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s*, 159.

<sup>399</sup> Marty, *Modern American Religion*, 152.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>403</sup> Rowland A. Sherrill, *Religion and the Life of the Nation : American Recoveries* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 128-51, Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s*, 159.

community, a universal *modus vivendi*.”<sup>404</sup> This idea of “one world” was championed mainly by ecumenical Protestant groups, like the Y, which were also likely to support the United Nations (UN) as a way to keep the global peace.<sup>405</sup> This “one world” concept was at times in direct conflict with those who championed America as the Christian leader for global democracy. Therefore, it was not uncommon for ecumenical groups to be “red baited” during the postwar years.<sup>406</sup>

As Christianity began to dominate the construction of postwar social and political values, there were those who critiqued this supposed religious upsurge. Journalist William Lee Miller wrote in 1954, “the press says that the United States is having a religious revival now, but one wonders whether those are quite the words to describe what is going on...there is an increase in religious behavior, but it is not clear that this quantitative increase represents any qualitative change in the nation's religious life.”<sup>407</sup> It seemed to some that the postwar religious revival involved “not so much religious belief as belief in the *value* of religion.”<sup>408</sup> Miller opined that the postwar piety’s “faith is not in God but in faith; we worship our own worshipping.”<sup>409</sup> For some like Miller, this show of religion was a way to prove one’s nationalism, not one’s faith. Others saw a connection between the materialism of the decade and the consumption of religious attitudes. The historian William Chafe has connected this idea of religious consumerism

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<sup>404</sup> Marty, *Modern American Religion*, 145.

<sup>405</sup> For more on the Y as a liberal internationalist organization see Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 102-06.

<sup>406</sup> Joseph P. Kamp, *Behind the Lace Curtains of the YWCA: A Report on the Extent and Nature of Infiltration by Communist, Socialist and Other Left Wing Elements, and the Resultant Red Complexion of Propaganda Disseminated in, by and through the Young Women's Christian Association* (New York: Constitutional Education League, 1948), Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 95, Marty, *Modern American Religion*.

<sup>407</sup> Marty, *Modern American Religion*, 304.

<sup>408</sup> Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s*, 159.

<sup>409</sup> Marty, *Modern American Religion*, 303.

to the creation of the suburban church. Millions of people, mainly White and middle class, moved to the suburbs during this period. These new suburbanites created institutions they believed reflected their belief systems, which often were intertwined with ideas of Christianity, nationalism, and prosperity. Chafe argues that the “suburban church preached the gospel of comfort and security,” rather than “creating a community based on faith in God.”<sup>410</sup>

The Y, like many Christian organizations, was also concerned that Christianity “had lost its core” and behaved more like a “corporate organization,” than a sanctuary.<sup>411</sup> The association worried that people were not properly utilizing their faith to shape the postwar world. Some leaders voiced fears that during the war the organization had moved away from its Christian identity and become more strictly a social work agency.<sup>412</sup> They believed that in this new Atomic Age there was a real chance to “deepen the Christian roots of the YWCA.”<sup>413</sup> The basis of the “Christian Purpose” was:

To build a fellowship of women and girls devoted to the task of realizing in our common life those ideals of personal and social living to which we are committed by our faith as Christians. In this endeavor we seek to understand Jesus, to share His love for all people, and to grow in the knowledge and love of God.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey*, 121. For more see Dan W. Dodson, "Religion in Suburbia," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 32, no. 8 (1959), George W. Edwards, "'How Is't with Thy Religion?'" *The Journal of Higher Education* 24, no. 9 (1953), Seymour M. Lipset, "Religion in America: What Religious Revival?," *Review of Religious Research* 1, no. 1 (1959), Martin E. Marty, *The New Shape of American Religion* (New York,: Harper, 1959), Jane C. Zahn and California. University. University Extension., *Religion and the Face of America : Papers of the Conference, Presented at Asilomar, Pacific Grove, California, November 28, 29, and 30, 1958* (Berkeley: University Extension, University of California, 1959).

<sup>411</sup> Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey*, 121.

<sup>412</sup> Grace Elliot, "Ten-Year Report of the General Secretary to the National Board," September 30, 1952, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 226, Grace Elliot Papers Folder

<sup>413</sup> Leila Anderson, "Our Religious Emphasis," September 22, 1950, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 226, 1

<sup>414</sup> "Young Women's Christian Association...Inclusiveness and the Christian Purpose," n.d. 1950s, Jacksonville YWCA Papers

This became the prism through which all programs, action, and outreach were viewed. Members and staff were asked to fuse their Christian faith with their social and political work. It was argued that a committed Christian “is as deeply responsible to God when worshipping in church or praying at his bedside as when he is voting at the polls or fighting for human rights in the Senate, and vice-versa.” “Sound Christian theology” demanded an interest in “social problems.”<sup>415</sup>

The Y defined itself as a Christian lay movement, independent of organized churches.<sup>416</sup> It valued its independence, which kept it safe from “needless and fruitless differences over theology.”<sup>417</sup> The main tenet of the Y was “the faith or belief of the YWCA.”<sup>418</sup> It also saw itself as a movement rather than as an institution, in the fact that members subscribed to a “commitment to action,” not “a belief.”<sup>419</sup> As a lay movement, the Y believed itself to be ecumenical, including people not only of all Protestant sects, but of other Christian and non-Christian beliefs. Grace Loucks Elliot, the General Secretary of the National Board, stated that “the Association’s religious life is enriched by those members of other faiths who choose to belong to its fellowship.”<sup>420</sup> For some this embrace of all religions was questionable. One staff member asked, “Have we lost the “Christian” purpose or gained, by using broader meaning of ‘Christian?’”<sup>421</sup> The effects of ecumenicalism on the Christian organization was addressed by the National

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<sup>415</sup> Winnifred Wygal, “The Student Christian Association Movement as a Lay Movement: Its Expression of Social Theology and its Program Possibilities for the Next Ten Years – an Occasional Paper Having No Official Status,” 5. For more on the use of Christianity as a basis of progressive political action see Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America*

<sup>416</sup> Winnifred Wygal, “The Student Christian Association Movement as a Lay Movement: Its Expression of Social Theology and its Program Possibilities for the Next Ten Years – an Occasional Paper Having No Official Status,” 1.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., 2-3

<sup>418</sup> Grace Loucks Elliot, “Inclusiveness and the Christian Purpose”

<sup>419</sup> Grace Loucks Elliot, “Ten-Year Report of the General Secretary to the National Board,” 2-3.

<sup>420</sup> Grace Loucks Elliot, “Inclusiveness and the Christian Purpose.”

<sup>421</sup> Citywide Staff Meeting, June 15, 1959, Chicago YWCA Papers, Box 24, Folder 6

Board, which declared “that inclusiveness cannot be considered an end in itself, and that the nature of our basic Christian conviction does not hinder our creative sharing of our experiences and values with those who choose to associate themselves with us.”<sup>422</sup>

The Y used its ecumenical stance to educate members and staff on religious issues. The national conventions, corresponding workbooks, and printed convention proceedings were important in helping local associations in planning and generating ideas on how to push for “inclusive fellowship.”<sup>423</sup> At the 1952 National Convention delegates were asked to create programs that “develop...spiritual values, religious ‘awareness’ and responsibility in those who may be irresponsible.”<sup>424</sup> One such program, a discussion on comparative religions, was developed by the Houston Y that winter. The association invited three speakers representing the “Jewish, Christian, and Moslem faiths” to “explain the history and beliefs of their religions and to find the common threads that bind their faiths together.” The talk was so popular, that Houston decided to hold it annually.<sup>425</sup> The National Y hoped that through these “direct educational activities,” there would “develop intergroup understanding and mutual respect across religious, racial, cultural and economic lines.”<sup>426</sup>

Beyond programs, the association sought to be “an instrument through which God” worked.<sup>427</sup> As a Christian organization, it promoted racial equality, religious freedom, and economic parity because these struggles “cannot be disregarded, they

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<sup>422</sup> Grace Louck Elliot, “Ten-Year Report of the General Secretary to the National Board,” 3

<sup>423</sup> Seattle Board of Directors Meeting, May 13, 1952, and June 10, 1952, Seattle YWCA Papers, Box 23, Folder 1

<sup>424</sup> Workbook Preparation for the Nineteenth National Convention, 1952, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 2, 15

<sup>425</sup> Charlotte Holzkamper, “Where Our Roots Lie: Religious and Social Action in the Houston YWCA,” *The YWCA Magazine*, December 1952, 18. *The Womans Press* was renamed *The YWCA Magazine* after WWII.

<sup>426</sup> Workbook Preparation for the Nineteenth National Convention, 14-16

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, 14

cannot be denied, without denying God.”<sup>428</sup> The Christian Purpose served to unite the membership, and through its implementation the association would move “toward greater inclusiveness.”<sup>429</sup> As Grace Elliot stated,

To those outside the YWCA, it must be very puzzling that we can talk of diversity as a united stand; but it is a matter of record that we do face such differences and keep moving steadily ahead. The secret lies in this; we are all pledged to move in the same direction and the direction is set for us by one basic agreement: that we believe that all, minority and majority alike, are children of one God and Father.<sup>430</sup>

When, in 1953, the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles Y entitled one of their meetings, “God Creating an Inclusive Human Community: Our Interracial Program,” it reflected the National Y’s success in emphasizing the importance of positive race relations as a tenet of Christianity.<sup>431</sup>

### The Y in the 1950s

By the 1950s, the association had made significant headway on racial inclusiveness. At the start of the decade, the Public Affairs Committee decided to dissolve its Race Relations Subcommittee of seventeen years because it believed its work was being “interwoven into the warp and woof of Association life.”<sup>432</sup> No longer a side venture, striving toward better race relations became the central goal of the organization. By melding Christian ecumenicalism with race, the association had a powerful message

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<sup>428</sup> Grace Loucks Elliot, “Report of the General Secretary to the National Board,” May 4, 1948, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 226, 2

<sup>429</sup> Dorothy Takechi, “Inclusiveness and the YWCA,” 1954, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 15, 5

<sup>430</sup> Grace Elliot, Untitled Speech, February 28, 1949, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 228, Mary Ingraham Papers, 3

<sup>431</sup> Los Angeles Board of Directors Meeting, February 19, 1953, Los Angeles YWCA Papers, Box 7, Folder 1

<sup>432</sup> “National Board Report: Progress Toward Racial Inclusiveness: 1946-1958,” March 1958, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171, 3; New committees were formed throughout the decade, including the Committee on Racial Inclusiveness and the Interdepartmental Committee to Coordinate Work on Racial Integration.

of love and tolerance for its constituents. Though it was acknowledged that no one was exempted from working towards this goal, there was a 'Christian' understanding of those who had not fully worked out racial bias. There was faith that as long as there was persistent activity on this issue, "God will make known to our hearts the final answers to those questions on which we are now confused or uncertain or divided."<sup>433</sup> Acceptance of the inclusive fellowship was an individual religious experience, and for the Y, it could not be forced or else it was not authentic. Personal accounts of this process were published. On the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Interracial Charter, the *YWCA Magazine* printed excerpts from local associations on the obstacles faced and advancements made on desegregation and integration. The Executive Director of the Little Rock, Arkansas Y wrote "The fact that intelligent and, in many cases, really kind people have built up prejudices, jealousies, and hates seems almost incredible, but there it is. What a job! Maybe I'd better begin with me."<sup>434</sup> Comments like this signaled not only encouragement to those who were still not ready, but at times sustained members who had accepted the Christian Purpose and wanted to take further action.

The Y was distinctive in that it fostered both an interracial and ecumenical community. For many it was the only place to have such an experience. Many members and staff were participants in other social/religious organizations, but none of these groups could offer the Y's diverse population. Women from the National Council for Negro Women (NCNW), the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), and Japanese

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<sup>433</sup> Grace Elliot, Untitled Speech, February 28, 1949, 3

<sup>434</sup> "Forum: Without Barrier of Race," *The YWCA Magazine*, February 1951, 19

American Citizens League (JACL) all joined the Y.<sup>435</sup> Many of these groups had similar agendas and often collaborated with the association, but women congregated at the Y because of the confluence of gender, race, and religion, which was not often found in other organizations of the time. Sociologist Belinda Robnett has argued that Black women “addressed issues of gender and race simultaneously. [However] when forced to choose, Black women’s identities...were strongly anchored to their Blackness.”<sup>436</sup> This does not seem to hold true for many of the Black women who were highly active in the Y as members or staff. The Y shared more members with the NCNW than with any other organization, Black-led or otherwise. While many Y members and staff were active in other single-sex organizations, the Y was the place to meet other women of all races who were committed to civil rights and racial tolerance. The Christian Purpose united these women into an inclusive fellowship that superseded racial, ethnic, religious, and class boundaries. As the Executive Director of the Seattle Y once explained, the uniqueness of the Y was “due to a number of factors – partly because it is an organization by and for women, partly because it is an organization which both thinks and acts, partly because it crosses all lines and contains some of all kinds of people...There is no dogma, but an odd sustaining unity among the groups making up the YWCA which holds it together.”<sup>437</sup>

Thus local branches of the Y became a place to forge multiracial and ecumenical ties to other like-minded women. In Seattle, a member who was the wife of a Buddhist minister knew that the Y was the place to organize a club for Japanese War Brides, as these women “represented all faiths and did not want to affiliate with any church

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<sup>435</sup> It was also common for many to be members of non-race and non-religious organizations, like the American Association of University Women and the League of Women Voters. But once again, these groups did not offer the same diversity as the Y.

<sup>436</sup> Robnett, *How Long? How Long?*, 45.

<sup>437</sup> Seattle Board of Directors Meeting, October 14, 1952, Seattle YWCA Papers, Box 23, Folder 1

group.”<sup>438</sup> The club soon grew to include Australian and German war brides, furthering its amalgamation of different races and religions.<sup>439</sup> In 1954 in Aiken, South Carolina, Black and White women looked to the Y for help in establishing an interracial branch, making it the first such southern branch to be founded as interracial.<sup>440</sup> Some members, limited in their contact with other races, “coming from...friends and communities that have not yet freed their souls,” were able to interact at regional conferences. One woman marveled at the chance to meet with women of different races, stating “the YWCA is...the calm center of the whirlpool of our lives...a rock of Gibraltar, unmoved, amidst the tides of the ocean – an ocean of doubts, fears, hatreds, misunderstandings – that beset our world today. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear – but of power, through love.”<sup>441</sup>

National Board leadership believed that the Interracial Charter and the inclusiveness campaigns had led to “a new day” at the community and student branches.<sup>442</sup> While initially inclusive fellowship had emphasized Black-White relations, the Y used the early postwar years to extend its fight against injustice to include “religion [and] national origin.”<sup>443</sup> There were several accounts of local groups working towards becoming “one Association,” though there were just as many who were thwarted by either state segregation laws or internal division.<sup>444</sup> The New Orleans Y looked to the National Board for help when the Louisiana state legislature sought to reinforce Jim

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<sup>438</sup> Seattle Program Planning Committee, “Basic Standards, Program and Services,” May 28, 1951, Seattle YWCA Papers, Box 23, Folder 1

<sup>439</sup> 1955 Info Sheet, Seattle YWCA Papers, Box 23, Folder 2

<sup>440</sup> Lois Gratz to Savilla Simons, December 9, 1954, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 30

<sup>441</sup> Mary Jane Willet, “Report of the Ad Hoc Work Group re: Implications of the Supreme Court decision for Desegregation in the YWCA,” October 8, 1954, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 170, 5-6

<sup>442</sup> Grace Loucks Elliot, “Ten-Year Report of the General Secretary to the National Board,” 5

<sup>443</sup> Grace Loucks Elliot, Untitled Speech, February 28, 1949, 9

<sup>444</sup> Grace Loucks Elliot, “Ten-Year Report of the General Secretary to the National Board,” 5

Crow laws in the 1950s, writing “we know that these laws violate our YWCA basic Christian philosophy, yet we recognize them as our state laws.” After a brief flirtation with the idea of using the branch as a test case on the constitutionality of state laws, it was decided to send Mary Jane Willet, a White southern pro-integrationist national staffer, to assist the branch.<sup>445</sup>

One way of nudging local associations to embrace a more tolerant racial stance was by hiring staff who were “really interested in promoting integration; those who want to make a better world through helping to provide a more abundant life for all people.” Young women who were “completely unprejudiced in regard to race,” were recruited to work at both the national and local level.<sup>446</sup> First priority for staffing usually fell to enlisting members of Student Ys into the organization. Maggie Kuhn, social activist and founder of the Gray Panthers, remembered her first job as a Y secretary as being “like running a union and community center, a church and a social action organization all at once.”<sup>447</sup>

Concern for the rights of “American Indian, Japanese, Chinese, and Mexican, as well as Negro minorities” led the organization to take action on two political issues of the 1950s: housing and education.<sup>448</sup> The postwar transformation of urban and suburban areas posed new challenges to entrenched residential segregation patterns. The Y

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<sup>445</sup> Mrs. Malcolm William to Lilace Reed Barnes, September 24, 1956, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm #261, Section: New Orleans Branch. Willet was the executive director of the White branch from 1957-1961. For more on the White women activists in New Orleans during this time, see Shannon L. Frystak, “Elite White Female Activism and Civil Rights in New Orleans,” in *Throwing Off the Cloak of Privilege: White Southern Woman Activists in the Civil Rights Era*, ed. Gail S. Murray (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2004).

<sup>446</sup> Emilie Tavel, “YW Calls Bias-Free Girls,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 11 1956.

<sup>447</sup> Maggie Kuhn, Christina Long, and Laura Quinn, *No Stone Unturned: The Life and Times of Maggie Kuhn* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 56. The Gray Panthers which fought against age discriminatory practices.

<sup>448</sup> *Public Affairs Newsletter*, January-February 1956, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 8

frequently spoke out for fair access to housing seeing the situation as a civil rights issue. Shortly after the war, the national Race Relations Subcommittee started an ongoing “study project” on “interracial aspects” of housing.<sup>449</sup> The topic was covered at the National Conventions, where members discussed and debated the issues of public housing and access to private home ownership.<sup>450</sup> In 1956, the Y submitted proposals to both the Democratic and Republican Parties concerning the “realization of a program of adequate housing, public and private...open to all without discrimination.”<sup>451</sup>

Branches were encouraged to get more involved in promoting fair housing in their communities. Staff members often attended urban planning conferences and city sponsored housing meetings. They also worked with other groups combating racial discrimination in housing. One report from Seattle noted that “Japanese and Chinese families don’t seem to have the difficulties or feel as discriminated against as the Negro population. The Jewish community has had some difficulties, but to no great extent presently....Progress is being made, but that the Negro group needs the most help.”<sup>452</sup> Access to housing also directly affected Y programs and outreach. It was apparent that there was a connection between residential segregation and the de facto segregation of branches. Portland, Oregon was one such city. After years of promoting an interracial program, there was little success of it at the former “Colored” Williams Avenue Branch.

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<sup>449</sup> “National Board Report: Progress Toward Racial Inclusiveness, 1946-1958”

<sup>450</sup> Workbook Preparation for the Nineteenth National Convention, 49; Proceedings of the Twenty-First National Convention, 1958, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 2, 153

<sup>451</sup> “Planks Proposed for Inclusion in the Platforms of the Political Parties in the Coming Election,” July 1956, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 175. While both parties addressed both civil rights and housing in their Convention Platforms, neither addressed the issue of housing discrimination. See John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, “Political Party Platforms: Parties Receiving Electoral Votes: 1840-2004: Democratic Party Platform of 1956, August 13th, 1956,” (The American Presidency Project, Santa Barbara, CA: University of California, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29601>, 1999-2007), John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, “Political Party Platforms: Parties Receiving Electoral Votes: 1840-2004: Republican Party Platform of 1956, August 20th, 1956,” (The American Presidency Project, Santa Barbara, CA: University of California, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25838>, 1999-2007).

<sup>452</sup> PAC Meeting, April 25, 1955, Seattle YWCA Papers, Box 23, Folder “PAC – Meetings, 1954-1955”

This was partly due to limited staffing and money, but it was also hard to institute solid interracial relations at a neighborhood branch “in a community so largely occupied by Negroes.”<sup>453</sup> Portland officials were unsure of how to balance its community service work with the Y’s larger inclusiveness goals. In order to best serve the community’s needs, some argued that racial integration could not remain the priority in programs and outreach. Staff feared there was the strong possibility that the Williams Avenue Branch would revert back into “a segregated branch situation.”<sup>454</sup> After consultation with other local civil rights organizations, the Portland association decided to collaborate with these groups in its community work while continuing its inclusiveness campaigns.<sup>455</sup>

There was also a direct connection between residential and educational segregation. With the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Y became heavily involved with the issue of race and education.<sup>456</sup> The ruling played a major role in Y inclusiveness campaigns. When the Supreme Court overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* by declaring “separate is inherently unequal,” the Y believed this was the legal argument it needed in desegregating its southern branches. The National Board President and General Secretary, Edith Macy and Savilla Simons, sent a letter to all association presidents, executive directors, and other leaders stating the following:

We must...give thought to the implications of the Supreme Court decisions of our own policies and practices in the YWCA. This momentous decision will undoubtedly initiate a new era in race relations in this country. The variations in customs and laws in communities where there are YWCAs will require faith, keen insight and skill in determining wisely the next steps that should be taken by

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<sup>453</sup> Ray H. Glassely to R.E. Vester, Letter introducing the “Williams Avenue YWCA Study,” June 19, 1956, National Urban League Papers, NUL I D 122 “1956, P410”, 6

<sup>454</sup> Minutes of the Executive Committee, June 28, 1955, Portland YWCA Papers, Box 14

<sup>455</sup> Ray H. Glassely to R.E. Vester, June 19, 1956, 6

<sup>456</sup> For more on the *Brown* decision see Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice : The History of Brown V. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), Peter F. Lau, *From the Grassroots to the Supreme Court : Brown V. Board of Education and American Democracy, Constitutional Conflicts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

local Associations. We shall need to reappraise Association activities in terms of policies, leadership and practices.<sup>457</sup>

*Brown* also had a significant impact on the Y's student membership in both the Y-Teens and the National Student Y, not to mention the reaction of the thousands of Y members who were mothers of school age children. An "Ad Hoc Work Group" on the impact of *Brown* on the Y was formed, and soon the National Y was sponsoring regional/local conferences for both its student and adult membership to discuss the decision.<sup>458</sup>

The Y placed the *Brown* decision within its own Interracial Charter, Christian Purpose, and Inclusiveness Campaigns.<sup>459</sup> In doing so, the association hoped to reinforce a Christian context for desegregation and thereby give staff the tools to help ease community tensions. National leaders believe that "local Associations will need to rely upon a firm and profound understanding of the Christian basis for their action, including, but going beyond, the simple assertion that all men are brothers as children of God."<sup>460</sup>

Within the first year of *Brown* several southern "border" states, including Kentucky, Oklahoma and West Virginia, and non-southern yet segregationist states, including Arizona and Wyoming, complied completely and effortlessly to the Court's order. But in the heart of Dixie, backlash was swift and violent. State governments passed resolutions "nullifying" *Brown* as well as "manifestos denouncing the landmark judicial opinion as unconstitutional and pledging to seek to reverse it."<sup>461</sup> Whites throughout the region threatened, and in some cases followed through on economic and

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<sup>457</sup> Edith Macy and Savilla Simons to all Presidents, Executive Directors, Chairman of Committees of Management, and Branch Executive Directors, 1954, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 30

<sup>458</sup> "Ad Hoc Work Group re: Implications of the Supreme Court Decision for the YWCA", 1954, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 30

<sup>459</sup> Memo from Jean Willet, December 10, 1954, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 30

<sup>460</sup> Mrs. Janet Harbison, "Report of the Ad Hoc Work Group re: Implications of the Supreme Court decision for Desegregation in the YWCA," October 8, 1954, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 170, 5

<sup>461</sup> Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941*, 45.

physical violence. In Mississippi, a local paper, the *Yazoo City Herald*, “printed the names, addresses, and phone numbers” of Blacks who petitioned the local government to enforce *Brown*. This information was then used by employers to fire workers and by members of the White Citizen’s Council to harass and intimidate Blacks.<sup>462</sup>

In order to counteract the *Brown* backlash, the Y made a special point of working with and training southern regional staff. The National Board’s Ad Hoc group on *Brown* held a meeting on desegregation at Atlanta University, an historic Black college, in the winter of 1954. The choice of location was significant since the majority of participants were national staff from New York. The national office reached out to southern members and staff, and made sure that its best trained and committed staffers on race were on hand during any discussion with southern members. The women discussed their anxiety over southern resistance and acknowledged that “some YWCA members will slow up because of pressures put on them.” Some voiced concerns that “resentment against the decision may be transferred to the YWCA as we work toward integration.”<sup>463</sup> Southern branches used this argument to frustrate the national goal of an “inclusive fellowship.” Frustration was also expressed by national staff at the “volunteer leaders and staff who do not wish to move ahead in an inclusive manner.” Regardless, participants agreed that the association:

must move toward desegregation in ways that won’t lose members in Branches but will increase the membership in the Association through the Branches and all their departments and groups, and at the same time increase the opportunities of all group members for participation in all parts of Association life. Members with fears and prejudices will need understanding and help in assuming their role in an inclusive organization.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Villard Books, 1993), 430. For more on the violent backlash unleashed by the *Brown* decision, see Kluger, *Simple Justice : The History of Brown V. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality*, Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941*, 46-48, Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1980*, 26-29.

<sup>463</sup> “Meeting on Desegregation, Atlanta University, Atlanta Georgia,” December 15-18, 1954, YWCA National Board Papers, Unprocessed Box 30, 2-3

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

*The YWCA Magazine* also covered the effect of *Brown* on the Y by publishing branch accounts of discussions and actions. The excerpts showed that even though it had been eight years since the Interracial Charter, *Brown* spurred further interracial efforts. The York, Pennsylvania, branch decided to desegregate its pool after the decision, while in Asheville, North Carolina, staff used the ruling as a launch pad to discuss racial integration in a larger community setting. Although there were those who reported that *Brown* simply reinforced their efforts, no branch sat on its laurels. Portland, Oregon raised the point that “Interracial groups are not necessarily integrated ones, nor do they of themselves guarantee creative relationships, but they do open the door to richer experiences and fuller personal development – to real integration.” And while the Tucson, Arizona Y highlighted its multiracial efforts, noting its membership included “Chinese, Hawaiian, Spanish-American, [and] Indian,” in addition to Blacks, they wanted to increase efforts to get a more “varied” membership.<sup>465</sup>

The issue of multiracialism was never far from the Y’s agenda, even in the face of *Brown* and other matters that highlighted Black-White relations. One of the main reasons for this was the presence and work of Japanese American staffer Dorothy Takechi. She started her Y career prior to World War II in San Francisco, California and the National Board was quick to note her leadership and intelligence. After successfully getting her released from the internment camps, the Y furnished her with scholarships for both college and graduate school during the war. Immediately after the war, she worked for the National Board alleviating racial tensions in Los Angeles. She soon moved back East and became the Associate Director for the Mount Vernon Y in New York. In 1950, she

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<sup>465</sup> “How the Supreme Court Decision is Affecting YWCA Program,” *The YWCA Magazine*, February 1955

was promoted to Executive Director, becoming the first non-White executive director of a main branch in the whole association.<sup>466</sup> Within a couple of years, she was back at the National Board working in the Leadership Services department, directing a major portion of the inclusiveness campaigns.<sup>467</sup> Leading up to the *Brown* decision, Takechi worked with the Southern Region Correlator in putting together positive materials on school desegregation for local and national staff.<sup>468</sup> She served on various race related committees, including ad hoc groups on *Brown* and desegregation.<sup>469</sup> Her memos during this time did not include terms such as “Negro” or “White.” Rather, Takechi used “race,” “culture,” and “all groups.”<sup>470</sup> This was not accidental; Takechi sought to broaden out racial categories since she did not fit into traditional bi-racial groupings. As the only non-Black and non-White woman at many Y conferences and meetings, her mere presence signaled to others that they too needed to think beyond the Black/White paradigm.<sup>471</sup> Her presence also reinforced the Y’s stature as a multiracial organization,

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<sup>466</sup> Jessamine Fenner, “Fuller Inclusiveness for Professional Staff,” *The YWCA Magazine*, February 1956; 1949-1950 Narrative Report to National Board, Mount Vernon, NY Papers, Box 10, Folder 102, 10. Dorothy Takechi served as the Executive Director of the Mount Vernon Y from 1950 to 1952. Prior to Takechi, the highest ranking non-White branch staffer at a Central Y was Marjorie Humber Jackson. Jackson, an African-American, served as the Associate Executive Director at the Portland YWCA, 1946-1949. The first non-White woman voted President of a local Board of a main branch was Helen J. Wilkins Claytor, at the Grand Rapids, Michigan branch in 1949. Claytor would later become the first Black President of the National Board in 1967.

<sup>467</sup> Dorothy Takechi, “Inclusiveness and the YWCA,” 1954, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 15

<sup>468</sup> Dorothy Takechi to Jean Willett, March 4, 1955, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 30

<sup>469</sup> “Ad Hoc Work Group re: Implications of the Supreme Court Decision for the YWCA, 1954”; Amelia Wagner to Savilla Simons, January 3, 1955, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 30

<sup>470</sup> See Dorothy Takechi, “Inclusiveness and the YWCA,” 1954, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 15; “Meeting on Desegregation, Atlanta University, Atlanta Georgia.”; Katherine Beppler, Personnel Services to Dorothy Takechi, October 1, 1954, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 30

<sup>471</sup> Takechi was not the only Japanese American woman on the National staff at the time, but she was the most prominent and the highest ranking. By the time Takechi retired in 1978, her leadership and presence was no long an anomaly; it was common for women of all races to serve in leadership positions at both the local and national level. For more on discussions regarding either active or absent presence of Japanese Americans, and the subsequent impact of such presence on racial constructions in the Cold War, see Caroline Chung Simpson, *An Absent Presence : Japanese Americans in Postwar American Culture, 1945-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

as she was one of the chief liaisons with other civil rights organizations with respect to programs, materials, and collaboration.<sup>472</sup>

Prior to *Brown*, the Y understood that many of the southern branches were unable to embrace inclusive fellowship due to legal impediments. Once the Supreme Court had spoken, the Y had high hopes of finally implementing its Christian Purpose. Janet Harbison, a White woman and chair of the Leadership Services Committee, warned the association that the ruling did not mean smooth sailing ahead,

It may be rather painful to take a look in the mirror and find the mental image we have held of ourselves was prettier than the actual face we see. The recent advances in desegregation, and the Supreme Court decision on the schools have caused a backwash of resistance to the breaking down of barriers which may make this period a particularly difficult one for us. A voluntary organization, for its existence, has to have a special fund of courage to take steps of which everyone may not approve.<sup>473</sup>

With the advent of *Brown*, southern branches that had hidden behind state segregation laws, now confronted the Y's insistence on an inclusive fellowship. The Y went from encouraging Christian toleration to demanding "that segregation is evil, in its effects upon the majority as well as the minority, and *un-Christian* as it denies the equality of all persons before God."<sup>474</sup> (emphasis added) This demand proved threatening to southern branches and led to resistance.

Several southern leaders chafed at the constant bombardment by the National Y urging them to create inclusive programs. During a visit to the South, one national staffer reported that "'national' has come to mean 'integration' and [the] 'interracial charter.'"<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> Dorothy Takechi to Roy Wilkins, June 25, 1954, NAACP II Papers, II A 76 YWCA.

<sup>473</sup> Proceedings of the Twentieth National Convention, 1955, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 2, 52

<sup>474</sup> "Report of the Ad Hoc Word Group re: Implications of the Supreme Court decision for Desegregation in the YWCA," October 8, 1954, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 170, 2

<sup>475</sup> Hattie Droll, Jacksonville Visitation Report, November 29-30, 1956, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm #256, Section: Jacksonville 1951-1960

It was common for southern members and staff to insist to colleagues outside the region that “they were kinder to Negroes than in the North” and pursuing the Y’s interracial policy would upset this arrangement.<sup>476</sup> White women preferred “doing for Negroes rather than with,” and therefore creating interracial committees or holding integrated board meetings was impossible. It was also common to blame the lack of progress on outside community pressure.<sup>477</sup> The association did its best to explain that it “was not urging that they do something completely contrary to the community pattern; that YWCAs, however, in many places had, because of their real Christian commitment, been able to take a few steps ahead of the community and then, in turn, to help bring other community organizations, as well as community thinking, along with them.” Often this argument fell on deaf ears.<sup>478</sup>

There were some branches that seemed more open to the idea of inclusiveness, though little action was taken. Some (White) branches, as in Atlanta and Jackson, reported frequently to the National of future, but not immediate, plans to be taken towards bettering race relations. The executive directors at both branches discussed concrete plans to add board members that supported the Christian Purpose and who were “willing to move positively toward integration and toward putting into practice the policies of the YWCA.”<sup>479</sup> Of course, these future board members were White. In Atlanta, the Central and ‘Colored’ branches worked together as partners in the Atlanta

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<sup>476</sup> Eunice Brunson, Hattiesburg Visitation Report, October 15, 1959, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm #263 Section: Mississippi Branches

<sup>477</sup> Hattie Droll, Charleston Visitation Report, October 8-11, 1956, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm #273, Section: Charleston, SC Branch

<sup>478</sup> Eunice Brunson, Hattiesburg Visitation Report, October 15, 1959

<sup>479</sup> Florence Harris, Jackson Visitation Report, March 22, 1955, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm #263, Section: Mississippi Branches; Minutes Nominating Committee, June 12, 1957, YWCA of Greater Records, Manuscript Archives, and Rare Book Library, Robert Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA, Box 53, Folder 3 (herein afterward referred to as Atlanta YWCA Papers)

association, “although activities are held in different buildings or in various areas of the community, toward achieving the purpose of the YWCA to build a Christian fellowship.”<sup>480</sup> The National Y hoped that this positive relationship between the branches would eventually lead to ‘one’ association. In fact, at an ‘Executive Director’s Roundtable’ in 1958, it was suggested that if more branches could get to the same level as Atlanta then total integration would not be far behind. Sujette Crank, director of Atlanta’s Phyllis Wheatley Branch, objected to this, pointing out that total integration had not happened yet in Atlanta.<sup>481</sup> Still the Y wanted to believe that even if progress was slow, it was still being made. Not until the early 1960s, when the Y understood that it needed to be more vigilant in forcing the issue, would it speed up desegregation efforts in the South.<sup>482</sup>

The National Board made efforts to ensure that recalcitrant southern branches did not disaffiliate, partly because of its belief that once these women saw the light they would immediately be inclusive. If the branches left, then who would help them find the righteous path to God? When the Y stated “there are no second-class children of God; neither are there any only children of God,” it was asserting not just that racial segregation was against Christian beliefs, it was also trying to keep the southern resisters part of the association.<sup>483</sup> Y leaders found hope despite the great odds they faced. After a somewhat contentious 1958 National Convention, where there was spirited discussion

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<sup>480</sup> “Twenty Questions of the YWCA,” April 20, 1956, Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 33, Folder 1, 3

<sup>481</sup> Cecile Willis and Florence Harris to Hattie Droll, Mary Jane Willett, Virginia Prouty, and Sue Crank, October 20, 1958, Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 113, Folder 4

<sup>482</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 145.

<sup>483</sup> Grace Elliot, Untitled Speech, June 1953, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box #226, Grace Elliot Papers Folder, 5

on the lack of inclusiveness in the South, the Executive Director of Jackson's White Y, wrote to the association's national General Secretary,

With no exception, we came away from St. Louis with a real feeling of warmth and love for the understanding and tolerance that those who occupy the places of leadership showed for the YWCAs in the South. We felt that though our way is shaky, and that though we tread slowly and maybe too softly, we do have a renewed faith and closeness to the YWCA. We appreciate the work, the thought, and the prayer that went into this convention and we are grateful to you for your sincere, Christian leadership.<sup>484</sup>

The Y wanted to believe the changes were happening in the South; one just had to have faith.

Many in the organization, Black and White, expressed their frustration with southern resistance. Some placed blame on the National Board for not being forceful enough and for relying to heavily on Christianity as the solution to change the South.<sup>485</sup>

At all three National Conventions during the 1950s, it was common for members to voice outrage that segregated (White) branches continued to be recognized by the association. Delegates demanded to know why any branch that refused to live by the Christian Purpose should be a part of the Y. A member from St. Louis asked, "Why don't the YWCAs of the Southern states take the first step? Is there some reason why they can't?" This question caused many southern delegates to become defensive, responding that strides had been made and that it was unfair for others to point fingers at them. Continued attempts were made to quell the discontent by assuring participants that efforts

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<sup>484</sup> Jamie Turnage to Savilla Simons, March 25, 1958, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 305. While Turnage wrote to Simons, Simons had left the organization the year prior. The Interim General Secretary was Mildred Esgar.

<sup>485</sup> "Meeting on Desegregation, Atlanta University, Atlanta Georgia," 9

to desegregate were occurring and that the association needed to look beyond the South and focus on race relations as a national, not a regional issue.<sup>486</sup>

The Y tried to placate both sides by adding two national staffers in the South to further encourage discussions on desegregation and integration, in the late 1950s.<sup>487</sup> The National Board also produced a paper specifically for the South on “Christian Responsibility” toward racial integration. Authored by Maxine Thornton and evangelical in tone, the essay argued that only by confessing one’s complicity in racial intolerance could one receive God’s forgiveness and love. Furthermore, members should not deem one another either bad or good on this issue, but rather, focus on whether they followed God’s path or could not relate to God. All the Y asked was that “we treat others as equals, as persons sacred in the sight of God and therefore in our sight too. We accord all others equal dignity and relate to them with openness and freedom.” It was then possible to create a community “whose center is Jesus, the Christ.”<sup>488</sup> This paper was significant in that it reflected the seriousness of the Y belief in the power of God to lead members towards progressive racial action.

It is tempting to dismiss the Y’s desegregation efforts in the postwar years because it did not to push southern branches harder on the issue. Yet, for the Y, the authenticity of Christian beliefs was the most important factor in its inclusive fellowship. The association’s dependence on Christianity as a catalyst for racial tolerance did cause the Y to be complicit in the continuance of segregation, but that did not mean the Y was

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<sup>486</sup> Proceedings of the Twentieth National Convention, 1955, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 2, 237-239

<sup>487</sup> “Report of the 1959 Y-Teen Summer Conferences and Supportive Adult Training in the Southern Region,” November 1959, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 238, 5

<sup>488</sup> Maxine Thornton, “Leadership Papers on Christian Responsibility – An Approach to – Racial Integration,” January 13, 1956, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box #82, 2-3

not committed to ending Jim Crow. It was, but the power of Christian love often worked slowly.

### The Y and the Changing Postwar Racial Scene

The postwar challenge for the Y was how to best balance national multiracial activism and awareness with the reality of an increasingly biracial civil rights struggle. This dual commitment led to amusing confrontations. The total number of non-Whites throughout local branches outside of the South increased. Urban migration might have slowed after the war, but the cities themselves were forever changed due to both the influx of non-Whites and the movement of Whites to the suburbs. In 1951, the Chicago branch broke down its membership into “Foreign and Mixed Parentage; Foreign Born; and Negro,” and also counted “Roman Catholic, Hebrew, and Greek Orthodox” women among its majority Protestant membership.<sup>489</sup> By the mid 1950s, the categories were reformatted, and the branch spoke of increased membership of Japanese, Chinese, Mexican, and Puerto Ricans on top of its already large Black membership.<sup>490</sup> Similar changes occurred in other cities. Los Angeles, Seattle, and Minneapolis chapters wrote to the National Board concerning the increasing populations of Native Americans in their cities, each detailing concerted outreach efforts and programs.<sup>491</sup>

Even when the civil rights movement was in its nascent stages, the organization took steps to remind members and staff of its multiracial stance. In its national publication, the *YWCA Magazine*, the Seattle Y explained “by interracial, we mean

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<sup>489</sup> Report to National Board Committee on Basic Standards, September 1951, Chicago YWCA Papers, Box 2, Folder 6

<sup>490</sup> Executive Staff Meeting, January 4, 1956, Chicago YWCA Papers, Box 17, Folder 4

<sup>491</sup> Executive Director’s Report, April 30, 1956, Los Angeles YWCA Papers, Box 1, Folder 22; PAC Meeting, January 27, 1958, Seattle YWCA Papers, Box 23, Folder “PAC – Meetings, 1958-1959”; Ruth Marshall, Associate Executive Director to Senator Edward Thys, April 14, 1947, Minneapolis YWCA Papers, Box 9, “Indians – misc. to 1955”

Negro, Caucasian, and Oriental.”<sup>492</sup> As well, the cover of the June 1955 issue, which recapped the National Convention, clearly showed White, Black, and Asian delegates working together. At this Convention delegates were told that, in order to promote greater inclusiveness, they should go back to their communities and ask,

Who are the people in my community and the areas round it, or on my campus? Are there Negroes among my fellow-townpeople? Are there Americans of Spanish-speaking background? Or Americans of Japanese or Chinese descent? Are there American Indians? If members of these groups or of other minorities which sometimes may be discriminated against live in our town, do they take part in the life of our YWCA? Do they feel welcome there?<sup>493</sup>

This type of questioning not only encouraged members and staff to review community racial practices, but indicated that branches needed to look beyond the Black-White category of race.

The Black freedom struggle soon grabbed both the nation’s and the association’s attention. Even then, however, the Y did not forget that many of its branches outside of the South had multiracial memberships. At the 1958 National Convention, one delegate from Los Angeles stated that much “mention has been made [of] integration only of Negroes, and we have in California, as you know, many, many representatives and many members of races other than Negro, and we would hope that in giving this consideration our good Spanish-American members, and particularly our Oriental members are also included.”<sup>494</sup> Comments like these reflected the association’s contention that civil rights and integration were a national issues, not just “a sectional problem.”<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> Myra A. Smith, “Progress Toward Integration,” *The YWCA Magazine*, March 1952, 13

<sup>493</sup> Proceedings of the Twentieth National Convention, 50

<sup>494</sup> Proceedings of the Twenty-First National Convention, 1958, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 2, 151

<sup>495</sup> “Talk Given by Savilla Simons at the Washington Workshop on Civil Rights,” March 22, 1957, Savilla Simons Papers, Social Welfare History Archives, Elmer Anderson Library, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, Box 1, Folder 5, 3; Proceedings of the Twenty-First National Convention, 201 (herein afterward referred to as Savilla Simons Papers)

By the end of the 1950s, the Y could report significant progress in its goal of inclusive fellowship. In a 1955 study of 226 associations across the nation, 40 percent reported full integration in all aspects of “volunteer leadership, staff, special activities, institutional facilities, and regular programs.”<sup>496</sup> More than 80 percent could report on the use of their building “by outside groups for interracial meetings,” that their branches held “integrated special events...[and] have some clubs and classes that are interracial.”<sup>497</sup> Even if some in the South resisted full implementation of the Christian Purpose, changes were happening. Sixty-four percent of southern branches could report partial integration of staff, programs, and facilities.<sup>498</sup> At the final Convention of the decade, delegates overwhelmingly reaffirmed their commitment to the Interracial Charter, which was seen as more important than ever in light of the events occurring in the civil rights movement.<sup>499</sup>

The Y’s inclusiveness campaigns were an anomaly in the postwar era. For many, the attempts at multiracial coalition building in the late 1940s changed by the late 1950s to an increasingly Black/White struggle. As the Y blazed its own path, members and staff found strength in their shared Christian faith as they worked to create a more inclusive fellowship. When the Houston Y was disparaged by segregationists for promoting interracial practices, its response reflected the success of the 1950s Racial and Religious Inclusiveness Campaigns. The branch told its critics, simply, “The YWCA is a Christian organization. We can do nothing less than this.”<sup>500</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 55.

<sup>497</sup> Proceedings of the Twenty-First National Convention, 144

<sup>498</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 55.

<sup>499</sup> Proceedings of the Twenty-First National Convention, 250-251

<sup>500</sup> Charlotte Holzkamper, “Where Our Roots Lie: Religious and Social Action in the Houston YWCA,” 18

### Chapter Three

#### “No middle ground for the Christian on the question of racial integration”: The Student Y, the Southern Freedom Struggle, and Women’s Liberation

At the 1961 National Convention, Y General Secretary Edith Lerrigo charted the association’s course for the upcoming decade by declaring it, first and foremost, “a woman’s movement.” On staff since the 1930s, Lerrigo’s future designs for the Y stemmed largely from her experience as the Executive for the College and University Division (the National Student Y) during the 1950s. Participants were reminded of the importance of the Christian Purpose in fostering inclusiveness and in providing “women with a ground on which to stand.” In order to continue to be a “great woman’s movement,” the Y had to “help women learn not to shrink from taking responsibility in the nation and world,” and “to assume leadership as citizens.” Members and staff were implored to “retool our thinking and planning drastically” so that all women, regardless of their race or class, could be included in the association. Lerrigo deemed “the hand of the Lord is upon” the Y, and therefore delegates had a “responsibility” to seize this “moment in history.”<sup>501</sup>

Yet, racial equality played a key role in her thinking. Working closely with young students during the early stages of the direct action, civil rights movement, she wanted the Y to move progressively on issues relating to race, sex, and class. Lerrigo did not shy away from some of the more controversial topics affecting the Y, like the proposed merger with the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) or the seemingly

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<sup>501</sup> Edith Lerrigo, “Report of the National General Secretary to the 22<sup>nd</sup> National Convention of the YWCA of the USA,” May 9, 1961, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 195, 1-3, 7-8

stalled integration of the Y's southern branches. She told the convention her "major nightmare" was that the association "may not move fast enough in making our interracial charter a reality and that one day we may wake up to find that patience has been exhausted and time run out," leaving "behind a poverty stricken all white movement."<sup>502</sup>

Lerrigo's convention address was prophetic in terms of what the Y, and the rest of the nation, grappled with throughout the turbulent decade of the 1960s. Women's roles in and outside of the home were changing and, with the advent of the student movement, these changes signaled to many that ideas regarding race, gender, and class were not only about to evolve or be defined anew, but in some cases, completely combust.<sup>503</sup> The previous decade's civil rights efforts had been successful in overturning the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, which opened the door to effectively ending legal segregation.<sup>504</sup> As educational advances, public accommodations, and housing opportunities for minorities began to open up, there was an inevitable backlash. Even so, these successes helped fuel the belief for African-Americans, as well as many of their fellow citizens, that true social, political, and economic equality was not only attainable, but also close at hand. The influx of thousands of college students into the civil rights movement altered the struggle considerably, and sped up demands for "equality now." The National Student Y

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<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

<sup>503</sup> For more on the change of women's roles see Stuart A. Kallen, *Women of the 1960s* (San Diego: Lucent Books, 2003), Blanche Linden-Ward and Carol Hurd Green, *American Women in the 1960s: Changing the Future* (New York: Twayne, 1993), Abigail J. Stewart, Isis H. Settles, and Nicholas J. G. Winter, "Women and the Social Movements of the 1960s: Activists, Engaged Observers, and Nonparticipants," *Political Psychology* 19, no. 1 (1998), Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993), 224. For more on the advent of the Student Movement see Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), Jim Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), Francesca Polletta, "'It Was Like a Fever ...' Narrative and Identity in Social Protest," *Social Problems* 45, no. 2 (1998).

<sup>504</sup> For more on the over turning of *Plessy* see Johnson, "The Vinson Court and Racial Segregation, 1946-1953.", Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown V. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality*, Lau, *From the Grassroots to the Supreme Court: Brown V. Board of Education and American Democracy*.

seamlessly joined, and at times led, the protests and demonstrations occurring at campuses and their respective communities across the nation.

For many women involved in the larger civil rights movement, the fight to break down racial barriers led to the questioning of women's "place" in society.<sup>505</sup> There were other issues that also led to the growth of the women's liberation movement during the latter half of the 1960s, including the increasing numbers of women in the labor force and in college, the introduction of the birth control pill, the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, and legislation like the 1963 Equal Pay Act and Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.<sup>506</sup> The Y was heavily involved in many of these matters, reflecting over a century's worth of leadership for women by women. The organization had asserted itself early in the decade as an 'autonomous' women's movement through its adamant rejection of a merger with the YMCA. This decision reverberated throughout the decade, as members and staff continually reviewed and discussed the implications of what it meant to be a women's movement.

As a multiracial and female-led organization, the Y was in a unique position to confront the issues of the 1960s. Since World War II, the Y had promoted racial and gender equality as one interlocking issue, and strove to create an empowering environment for all members, regardless of race and class. Its work in race and gender

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<sup>505</sup> For more on the connection between the civil rights movement and the women's liberation movement, see Evans, *Personal Politics*, Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter : The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, 1st ed. (New York: W. Morrow, 1984), Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism : Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Becky W. Thompson, *A Promise and a Way of Life : White Antiracist Activism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

<sup>506</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York,: Norton, 1963), Susan M. Hartmann, *From Margin to Mainstream : American Women and Politics since 1960*, 1st ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), Linden-Ward and Green, *American Women in the 1960s : Changing the Future*, Elizabeth Siegel Watkins, *On the Pill : A Social History of Oral Contraceptives, 1950-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

leadership attracted a particular type of young women, many of whom were among the first to demand greater equality when faced with gendered obstacles. Under Lerrigo's guidance, the association overwhelmingly supported its student members during the civil rights movement as well as leading workshops and seminars for all members on the changing roles of women in the 1960s. The students boldly took the Y's messages of racial and religious inclusiveness onto their campuses, their local communities, and eventually, the streets.

### The Y as a women's organization

The gendered work of the Y during the postwar era was distinctive, especially as its fostering of female leadership ran counter to prevalent norms of the day. While there is little dispute of the heavy emphasis on motherhood and domesticity during the Cold War, women's history scholars over the last two decades have challenged "historical accounts [that] stress the postwar domestic ideal, the reassertion of a traditional sexual division of labor, and the formal and informal barriers that prevented women from fully participating in the public realm."<sup>507</sup> Recent scholarship examining postwar female labor trends, co-educational opportunities, and women's political activism have made it clear that the postwar years were a more nuanced era in terms of gender dynamics.<sup>508</sup>

One particular area that highlighted the gender complications of the day was the emphasis on the "homemaker ideal," which contrasted to the reality of multitudes of

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<sup>507</sup> Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver*, 3. On scholarship that focuses on female domesticity, including how female domesticity was emphasized, see Susan M. Hartmann, "Prescriptions for Penelope," *Women's Studies* 5, no. 3 (1978), Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), Jessamyn Neuhaus, "The Way to a Man's Heart: Gender Roles, Domestic Ideology, and Cookbooks in the 1950s," *Journal of Social History* 32, no. 3 (1999).

<sup>508</sup> For more on this scholarship, see Crawford, Rouse, and Woods, eds., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement*, Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver*.

women in the labor force. After World War II, through various media, women were heavily encouraged “to be sensitive and responsive, to adjust their interests, needs and desires to those of their men.”<sup>509</sup> The goal for women was to return to the home and happily take their place as wife and mother, and for the most part, this situation was achieved as reflected in the marriage and birth rate explosion of the post war years.<sup>510</sup> Yet by the mid-1950s “rates of women’s employment matched the artificially high levels attained during World War II...the rising numbers of married women seeking employment did not reflect dire economic need; employment rates rose fastest among middle-class women.”<sup>511</sup> As these contradictions about women’s “proper” place became more apparent, a certain belief formed: single women were (grudgingly) welcomed in the labor force as long as they were single, but it was not entirely accepted for mothers, and to a lesser extent, childless married women, to work outside the home.

As with many social constructions of the Cold War era, femininity was embedded with notions of patriotism, citizenship, and national security. “Good” women were mothers, who taught their children democratic civic values and to fight against communism. Many believed that if women did not adhere to this role, it led to the “weaken[ing of] the country’s moral fiber.”<sup>512</sup> This type of fear aided “the anticommunist crusade” in its efforts to discredit female activists and “induced caution among women leaders and organizations.”<sup>513</sup> For the Y, which was red-baited briefly in the early 1950s, this meant (subtly) resisting the bombardment of domesticity propaganda while

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<sup>509</sup> Hartmann, "Prescriptions for Penelope," 224, 27.

<sup>510</sup> May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, xxv.

<sup>511</sup> Susan M. Hartmann, "Women's Employment and the Domestic Ideal in the Early Cold War Years," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 86.

<sup>512</sup> May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 103.

<sup>513</sup> Hartmann, "Not June Cleaver," 85.

maintaining an emphasis on female empowerment. Even while denouncing sex discrimination in the labor force, the association would also declare, “we hold the family as basic to our culture and to the future of our way of life” and claim that a woman’s primary place was in the home.<sup>514</sup> Yet the organization also believed that once children were in school, women should return to the labor force, or at the very least do volunteer work.<sup>515</sup> The Y was savvy in couching the rights of women in the labor force in terms of morality, which served to deflect hints of “godless communism” at the Christian organization.<sup>516</sup>

While the association publicly appeared non-threatening to this “dominant domestic ideology,” it was actually quite subversive.<sup>517</sup> To be a single woman in the 1950s was to be “doomed to an unfulfilled and miserable existence,” with the only cure being marriage.<sup>518</sup> Yet both nationally and locally, the Y mainly sought single women for employment, and many single women chose their Y career over the prospect of marriage.<sup>519</sup> The organization was vocal concerning “the limitations imposed on [women] by still prevalent social attitudes” and believed itself to be more “sensitive” to the needs of women. It purposely hoped to attract the type of woman who was open to

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<sup>514</sup> Esther Cole Franklin, “Public Affairs Page – Can We Achieve “Equal Rights for Women?” *The YWCA Magazine*, February 1955; Grace Loucks Elliot, “Report of the General Secretary to the National Board,” May 4, 1948, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 226, 3; also see Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 117-19.

<sup>515</sup> The Y was not alone in simultaneously upholding the domestic ideal while encouraging women to work. See Hartmann, “Not June Cleaver.”

<sup>516</sup> Esther Cole Franklin, “Public Affairs Page – Can We Achieve “Equal Rights for Women?”

<sup>517</sup> Hartmann, “Not June Cleaver,” 89.

<sup>518</sup> May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 22.

<sup>519</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 119, Tavel, “YW Calls Bias-Free Girls.”

leadership opportunities and to “expanding [her] usefulness to the community, the nation and the world.”<sup>520</sup>

It is interesting to note that in most cases staff members were single women, while most board members were married. Local and national staff were usually vetted by the National Board, and it was common for local staffers to move around the country from one Y job to another. The majority of staff, of all races, stayed with the organization for decades. This commitment meant that there was constant movement of ideas between branches and the National Board, while at the same time, a honing of such ideas as programs and outreach was accomplished across the nation. Board members were voted in by local membership and often had little contact with National Board staff or leadership. On the one hand, the differences among these women often led to varying program commitments and leadership, especially on race issues, with staff usually more progressive than board members. On the other hand, married women, often related to prominent local men, were able to deflect some criticisms aimed at staff decisions, simply because they could cloak the branch with respectability by virtue of their marital status.

As a Christian social work organization, it was, and is, easy to miss the “rebellion” taking place through the Y.<sup>521</sup> Since its women consciously objected to

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<sup>520</sup> “Our Task Today and Tomorrow: Work Book Preparation for the 20<sup>th</sup> Convention, April 21-27, 1955,” National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 305, 11-13

<sup>521</sup> Wini Breines argues that many White middle-class young women did not conform to the gender roles of the 1950s and were part of a “barely visible cultural rebellion.” While Breines focuses on those young women who were a part of Beat culture, her analysis extends to the Y as the root of many of these women’s ‘rebellion’ lay in their ambivalence to the notion that fulfillment was only possible through marriage and motherhood. Wini Breines, “The ‘Other’ Fifties: Beats and Bad Girls,” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994). In terms of this ambivalence and the Y, marriage was a “dilemma,” as many wondered “how to combine devotion to family with some degree of independence and autonomy.” See: Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 118-19.

societal gender norms, it is not a giant leap to see that they would also reject other social attitudes regarding race and class.<sup>522</sup> Young women of all races who were “completely unprejudiced in regard to race [and] really interested in promoting integration,” knew the Y was one of the few organizations to promote such ideas in its work force.<sup>523</sup> By hiring young women with this type of progressive thinking, the Y was able to ensure that its leadership was committed to liberal stances on matters of race, gender, and religion. As one scholar has noted, the questioning of social mores by these women is significant as,

they were laying the groundwork for rebellion in the years ahead. In many cases, early nonconformists pioneered the social movements of the 1960s - civil rights workers, campus activists, and youthful founders of the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s.<sup>524</sup>

Throughout the postwar era, young educated women of all races saw the Y as a haven from societal pressures and a place where they could safely challenge those demands.

There had been several suggestions that the YWCA and the YMCA should merge for financial reasons, facility use, and programming priorities. The Y was concerned that women's access to leadership and other empowerment measures would be lost through this union.<sup>525</sup> This worry led the National Board to oppose unanimously a merger in 1954, and yet the matter continued to linger for the remainder of the decade.<sup>526</sup> In the late 1950s, the issue of YW-YM merger was revisited by Dr. Dan Dodson of the Center for Human Relations at New York University. Dodson published his report in 1960, emphatically arguing for continued YW autonomy as it was a “unique place” that offered solutions to the “problems which women face today.” He believed that the religious

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<sup>522</sup> In similar respects, Doug Rossinow has addressed how much of the New Left felt an alienation from society, which led to a questioning of the “conservative trend of the 1950s” in terms of race, class, and sex. See Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* 6.

<sup>523</sup> Tavel, “YW Calls Bias-Free Girls.”

<sup>524</sup> Breines, “Not June Cleaver,” 383.

<sup>525</sup> Grace Loucks Elliot, “Report of the General Secretary to the National Board,” 3

<sup>526</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 115-16.

commitment was crucial in the Y's success in working "for a greater measure of freedom for women," and its "supportive climate" for social change served as a "testing ground" for future activists.<sup>527</sup> Clearly to Dodson, the Y was on the forefront of a social movement agitating for women's liberation.

The Y's reputation as an "aggressive social action program" attracted women of all backgrounds. Women who were adamant about their independence could look to the Y as a refuge from a male dominated world. Dodson made note of the different gendered leadership styles, as "women tend to be deeply *concerned with intergroup relations*," and therefore tended to be more "community orientated" than "agency orientated" like the YMCA. Women had a different style of organizing, "prefer[ing] to *work through committees and administer through committee decisions*," rather than through hierarchical leadership.<sup>528</sup> Contemporary scholarship has labeled this style of organizing as feminist or woman-centered since "feminism is associated with values of horizontal decision making and nonviolence."<sup>529</sup> While the Y did not classify itself as a feminist organization during this era, it is important to understand its gendered leadership and organization as well as how it influenced staff and members.<sup>530</sup> The Y developed leadership skills and gave members a woman-only space to reflect on the obstacles they faced in the outside world. Historian Susan Lynn has stated, "women in mixed-sex organizations had fewer sources of support for developing or articulating an analysis of discrimination based on gender." Women were able to use their experiences in the Y to

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<sup>527</sup> Dan W. Dodson, *The Role of the YWCA in a Changing Era* (New York: National Board of the YWCA of the U.S.A., 1960), 83-84.

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-87.

<sup>529</sup> Staughton Lynd, "Feminism for Men," *Journal of Men's Studies* 7, no. 2 (1999): 1.

<sup>530</sup> Until the latter half of the 1960s, the term feminism was synonymous with support of the Equal Rights Amendment. The Y would not support the ERA until the 1970s.

help express their gendered views, which was important when “there was no widespread feminist movement, [and] the temptation was either to ignore the effect of sexism or to attempt to overcome it on an individual basis.”<sup>531</sup>

At the 1961 National Convention, the prospect of merging with the YMCA was again put before the delegates. Edith Lerrigo, the Y’s general secretary, hailed Dodson’s report as proof of the necessity for the association to continue autonomously as one of the preeminent women’s organizations. The Y was a “Movement” that “provided women with a ground on which to stand – a climate conducive to learning new roles.” Furthermore, it was “a movement that works for social change in the community because its own members are involved or discriminated against and because it has a passionate concern for justice for every man.” Paraphrasing the report, Lerrigo implored the convention delegates,

Don’t lose it – either by merging, or by submitting to community pressures for over-expansion that might lead to mediocrity, or by stifling your voice on issues of public concern, or by drifting into being a great middle class country club or service agency. What you have at your best is too important to the community to lose – so you must continue as you are to be a great woman’s movement centered around a Christian purpose. – But, You must actually BE this more fully than you are or have been.<sup>532</sup>

Needless to say, the delegates rejected the merger.<sup>533</sup>

The YMCA sent a representative to the convention to report on how the YW framed the merger and to respond to Dodson’s paper. Dodson’s review had noted the

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<sup>531</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 125. This idea and subsequent ideas regarding the gendered influence of the Y in the civil rights movement, specifically in its relationship with SNCC, were previously touched on in my Master’s Thesis, Abigail Sara Lewis, “The Role of the Young Women’s Christian Association in Shaping the Gender Consciousness of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, 1960-1965” (M.A. Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1999). They have since been reworked and expanded on for this chapter.

<sup>532</sup> Edith Lerrigo, “Report of the National General Secretary to the 22<sup>nd</sup> National Convention of the YWCA of the USA,” May 9, 1961, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 195, 1-2

<sup>533</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 116.

YW's reasons against the merger, including its concern about the availability of leadership opportunities for women; possible dismantling of the racial inclusiveness campaigns and other "liberal" Y Public Affairs policies; and, a weakening of "the democratic processes now operative within the YWCA." The representative acknowledged that it was up to the YMCA to disabuse these fears, and he also recognized that some of the YW's concerns were on the mark. The YMCA, he noted, might want to take "fresh appraisals of our Public Affairs position" and "take a more searching look at our 'democratic' processes."<sup>534</sup> Even with the resounding dismissal of the merger by the YW, the YMCA continued to take issue with the decision "to continue to be a movement of women" that would "not merge at any level with the YMCA."<sup>535</sup> In many ways, it was this type of male disbelief that fueled the YW's desire for independence and led to its subsequent role in the women's liberation movement.

In addition to working to maintain the Y's autonomy, Lerrigo led the organization in navigating its course for most of the civil rights movement. Her unwavering faith in the Christian Purpose gave comfort to both progressive and conservative members; she was going to take the steps needed to keep the association united, while also pursuing the inclusiveness goals of the organization. In her first published piece as General Secretary, Lerrigo told the readers of the *YWCA Magazine*,

the color of my skin, my education, my economic condition, the family I grew up in, my national and cultural setting, the job I have, all determine and limit my

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<sup>534</sup> Orlin L. Donhow, Jr., Associate Secretary YMCA, to Herbert P. Lansdale, Jr., General Secretary of the National Council of YMCAs, May 22, 1961, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 25

<sup>535</sup> Elizabeth Marvel, Helen Claytor, and Edith Lerrigo, "Impressions Gained during Consultations with Presidents and Executives: May – December 1962," February 27, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 170, 15

view. My sight needs the corrective sight of others; the bit of understanding which I can grasp needs to be connected to the bits which others bring.<sup>536</sup>

With these words, Lerrigo simultaneously reached out to members who felt isolated by the Y's civil rights agenda, as well as assuring others that the broadening of the Y's view was inevitable. Her diplomatic skills and leadership made her well-respected among her peers and with the students she led throughout most of the 1950s in the National Student Y.

Lerrigo's background with the National Student Y gave her unique insight in handling both increased civil rights and gender activism. Working with and listening to students' hopes for a different world provided Lerrigo with a keen understanding of the role students could play in the freedom struggles. She forged ahead in supporting student activists, and was successful in rallying many to their cause. As well, her experiences with young women strengthened her belief in female empowerment and towards the breaking down of patriarchal barriers in education, labor, and other institutions. Lerrigo's emphatic support for the Y to remain independent foreshadowed the choices and decisions women faced as their societal roles evolved throughout the decade.

### The Y and the modern civil rights movement

The seeds of the modern civil rights movement were planted in World War II. Wartime legislation creating the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC), opening up of industrial jobs for Blacks, and the overseas experiences of African American

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<sup>536</sup> Edith Lerrigo, "From Where We Sit: A Message from the General Secretary," *The YWCA Magazine*, January 1960

soldiers, infused the postwar era with a belief in social change.<sup>537</sup> The successful legal and economic actions of the 1950s propelled the movement into the national spotlight. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) led the legal fight to end Jim Crow, and was triumphant in May 1954 when the Supreme Court unanimously decreed that racial segregation was “inherently unequal.” A little over a year later, the Montgomery Bus Boycott challenged segregation on local public transportation. The boycott made the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. a household name, and gave rise to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which would become a major civil rights group through the next couple of decades. Small and large civil rights organizations began organizing in earnest, increasing membership rolls, planning conferences, and pressing for progressive civil rights legislation.<sup>538</sup>

Many of these groups formed coalitions, which not only lent a greater, and therefore louder, voice to particular issues, but also helped pool scarce resources. The Y not only had a successful track record working with other groups during and after World War II, but consensus building was a central organizing tenet of the association.<sup>539</sup> It continued to involve itself in coalition work throughout the civil rights era. While the association pursued and promoted a progressive civil rights agenda, it also faced disapproval from some its own constituents. By seeking out collaborative work, the

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<sup>537</sup> For more the connection between World War II and the civil rights movement see John Dittmer, *Local People : The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi, Blacks in the New World* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941*, Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement : The President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941-1946*.

<sup>538</sup> For more on the civil rights movement see Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America : The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, Kluger, *Simple Justice : The History of Brown V. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality*, Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941*, Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*.

<sup>539</sup> In World War II the Y worked with both the United Service Organization (USO) and the American War Community Services (AWCS), and during the postwar era in both the National Emergency Committee Against Mob Violence (NECAMV) and United Community Defense Services (UCDS).

organization did not always have to stand out in taking the lead on certain issues. This balancing act during the civil rights movement is most representative in its intermittent relationship with the Leadership Conference for Civil Rights (LCCR).

Created in late 1950, the LCCR was an outgrowth of the National Council for a Permanent Fair Employment Practice Committee, which had been founded by A. Philip Randolph in 1943.<sup>540</sup> While Randolph led the fight to create the FEPC and was one of the original founders of the LCCR, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP quickly took leadership of the newly formed coalition.<sup>541</sup> Arnold Aronson of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council was appointed secretary and soon became Wilkins's "most trusted ally."<sup>542</sup> Scholars have noted that the cooperation between Jewish and Black organizations in World War II spurred postwar collaboration.<sup>543</sup> Beyond Black-Jewish involvement, the LCCR could also count the Japanese American Citizens' Committee, the Catholic Interracial Council, American Civil Liberties Union, the United Auto Workers, and the AFL-CIO, among its fifty-plus member institutions.<sup>544</sup> LCCR leadership believed its strength lay with these different types of participating organizations, stating,

The fact that more than 50 national organizations of diverse interest and viewpoints were united in a demand for civil rights was in itself of inestimable value in impressing upon legislators and the public generally that the expansion of

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<sup>540</sup> For more on the FEPC, see Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement : The President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941-1946*.

<sup>541</sup> August Meier and John H. Bracey, Jr., "The NAACP as a Reform Movement, 1909-1965: "To Reach the Conscience of America", *The Journal of Southern History* 59, no. 1 (1993): 21-22, 24.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*: 24.

<sup>543</sup> Greenberg, "Black and Jewish Responses to Japanese Internment.", Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century*, Meier and Bracey, "The NAACP as a Reform Movement, 1909-1965: "To Reach the Conscience of America", 24. For pre World War II Black-Jewish cooperation see David Levering Lewis, "Parallels and Divergences: Assimilationist Strategies of Afro-American and Jewish Elites from 1910 to the Early 1930s," *The Journal of American History* 71, no. 3 (1984).

<sup>544</sup> Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969*, 145, 385 n22.

civil rights was the concern not only minority groups but of the community at large.<sup>545</sup>

This cross racial/religious alliance appealed to the Y since it constantly pursued a multiracial and interfaith agenda around civil rights. The association looked to these coalitions as one way to reach out to all communities.<sup>546</sup>

The Y's involvement in the LCCR not only furthered its reputation as a leading civil rights organization, but also its relationship with the NAACP and its future national executive secretary, Roy Wilkins. Wilkins knew that the Y was a trusted supporter, and this knowledge extended beyond previous inter-organizational collaboration. Helen Wilkins Claytor, the co-author of the seminal Y text, *Interracial Practices in Community Y.W.C.A.'s* (which served as the basis for the 1946 Interracial Charter), was the widow of Roy Wilkins's brother, Earl.<sup>547</sup> Claytor, who remarried during World War II, served as a gateway to communication between Wilkins and the Y. Professional correspondence between the two was common, and Wilkins spoke to the National Board on a regular basis. When Claytor moved to Michigan, Wilkins was left with a number of contacts at the Y who continued the organizations' cordial relationship.<sup>548</sup>

In 1956, the Y expanded its role at the LCCR by joining the coalition's subcommittee on local community organization.<sup>549</sup> Savilla Simons, the General

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<sup>545</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>546</sup> While the Y's involvement with the LCCR was erratic, it did consistently collaborate throughout the movement with three all-female organizations, the National Council for Negro Women (NCNW), the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), and the National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW). There was never a formal name to this collaboration, and while the most common coalition was with all four organizations, sometimes only two or three would work on a particular issue together.

<sup>547</sup> Bell and Wilkins, *Interracial Practices in Community Y. W. C. A.'s*. Earl Wilkins died in 1940.

<sup>548</sup> Claytor would continue to work with the Y, serving in various leadership roles in Michigan, the larger region, and the National Board. She was elected President of the National Board in 1967. See Chapter 4 for more on Claytor.

<sup>549</sup> Arnold Aronson to George Mitchell, Southern Regional Council, October 19, 1956, NAACP Papers, A 205 LCCR May-Dec 1956.

Secretary of the National Board, believed that a larger role at the LCCR could help the Y “implement its long standing national policy against discrimination.” Simons attended subcommittee strategy meetings and addressed other members on the integration and desegregation status of the Y’s local branches. She assured her colleagues that the integration of the Y was being given the “highest priority during the year,” and that the National Board agreed to employ “three additional field workers” to work in desegregating southern branches. She also spoke of the threatened funding cuts from various southern Community Chests facing “the YWCA and many other organizations...because of their pro-integration position.” Simons hoped that the “close cooperation and coordination” among LCCR members “would make it easier for each to stand up and be counted.” Most local Ys depended heavily on Community Chests for funding, which often left branches vulnerable to regional politics and mores. While most Black and White affiliates of any organization were Chest funded, the southern Chests preferred that affiliate work as well as the affiliates themselves remain segregated. This situation was particularly hard on local Ys as many promoted interracial programming and outreach. Representatives from the NUL and the NCNW confirmed Simons’s assessment of the Community Chest funding situation to the other LCCR members, and also hoped the coalition members would stand together against the Chests.<sup>550</sup>

For Simons, the Y’s leadership role in the LCCR was crucial in establishing the association as an important civil rights organization. But the President of the National Board, Lilace Reid Barnes, did not support such public involvement and identification with the coalition. While Barnes spoke supportively of the goals of the LCCR, she simultaneously commented that she was unsure of fully committing the Y to the

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<sup>550</sup> Arnold Aronson to Roy Wilkins, September 11, 1956, NAACP Papers, A 205 LCCR May-Dec 1956

coalition. Barnes stated that she herself “lacked the authority” to affiliate with the LCCR and made it clear to the Y Committee on Cooperation, which did have the power that she was not looking to formalize relations between the two.<sup>551</sup> The Committee acquiesced to Barnes, and the association completely broke with the LCCR in January 1957.<sup>552</sup>

The LCCR episode illustrates the complicated role the Y took during this period, and how its actions affected the organization for decades. The Y did not know how best to balance its civil rights role with the apparent lack of intra-organizational unity towards its goal of racial and religious inclusiveness. The majority of Y women did commit to the Christian Purpose of a multiracial membership, but many wavered when it came to direct action and support of the movement. While Barnes firmly believed that as a good Christian woman she had to support the larger goal of civil rights, she also had to maintain the membership numbers of the Y. It is understandable, though lamentable, that Barnes thought this was the best course of action. The association was obviously well connected and well regarded by the civil rights leadership and continued to earn their respect throughout the movement. However, by purposely removing itself from the coalition, the Y lost its voice among the public as a leading civil rights organization. The Y never fully recovered from its self imposed exile, and many non-Y people had little knowledge of the deep commitment of the Y towards racial tolerance.<sup>553</sup>

The Y lost momentum during the late 1950s affected the civil rights movement by the removal of its women centered ideas. The Y was not only one of the larger organizations to support the goals of the movement, it was the largest multiracial

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<sup>551</sup> Ibid

<sup>552</sup> Savilla Simons to Roy Wilkins, January 7, 1957, NAACP Papers, NAACP III A205 LCCR 1957

<sup>553</sup> The National Board continued to quietly support much of the national civil rights agenda, it wasn't until early 1960 that it would put back on the mantle of public leadership. Much of this lack of knowledge will be addressed in Chapter 4.

women's organization to do so. The association had over three million members across the nation, who were encouraged to take a more visible role in their communities and nation. The Christian Purpose was the central tenet of their leadership training, which included the beliefs of racial and religious inclusiveness, civil rights, and the empowerment of all women. By removing itself from civil rights leadership at a key moment, it silenced its prominent women's voice at the civil rights table. The mid to late 1950s in general saw the disappearance of many prominent women's organizations in the upper echelons of civil rights leadership.<sup>554</sup> Some women's groups were pressured to merge or cede power to brother organizations; others were unable to maintain membership as women joined mixed-sex civil rights organizations. For the Y, it was able to keep its membership steady and stave off a merger with the YMCA only through its formal separation from the movement and by tending to its internal problems. While there were many women involved in the movement, as individuals or in local organizations, the absence of a national women organizations during this time led to a male-dominated national civil rights leadership.<sup>555</sup> Many of these male leaders would privilege "race over gender,"<sup>556</sup> which would chafe both older and younger women as the movement continued and led many younger Y women towards the inevitable demand for gender equality by the mid 1960s.

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<sup>554</sup> Deborah G. White, *Too Heavy a Load : Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 183-84.

<sup>555</sup> For more on women's involvement in the civil rights movement, as individuals or in local organizations, see Bernice McNair Barnett, "Invisible Southern Black Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: The Triple Constraints of Gender, Race, and Class," *Gender and Society* 7, no. 2 (1993), Crawford, Rouse, and Woods, eds., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement*, Aprele Elliott, "Ella Baker: Free Agent in the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 5 (1996), Russell Freedman, *Freedom Walkers : The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott*, 1st ed. (New York: Holiday House, 2006), Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement : A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill ; London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), Jo Ann Gibson Robinson and David J. Garrow, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It : The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987).

<sup>556</sup> White, *Too Heavy a Load : Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, 180-81.

The Y's internal fight over the LCCR made it clear that while there were many within the leadership who wanted to broaden the Y's horizons, there was also a willingness to sacrifice this desire in order to hold the organization together. This decision would have serious consequences. Barnes's action caused a rapid deterioration in her relationship with Simons, who resigned within the year. Many of those who hoped for more aggressive action by the Y were upset by Simons's departure, though few alluded to Barnes's actions as a reason for Simons's exit. There were some, however, who were more direct, like Lester Granger, the leader of the NUL. He congratulated Simons in her new role at the National Traveler's Aid, adding, "It's good to know that you are so well backed in your new post by a president whose dependability can be taken for granted."<sup>557</sup> Those Y leaders who were committed to taking more forceful steps soon let it be known that "we may need to go against advice of some who we admire greatly in order to live a Christian way of life."<sup>558</sup> Barnes would step down as president in the spring of 1961 and shortly thereafter the Y finalized plans to ramp up its southern desegregation efforts. As for the LCCR, the Y would rejoin the organization in the mid 1960s.<sup>559</sup>

Even though the Y chose a less public civil rights role in the late 1950s, it still held a commitment to the Christian Purpose of building "fellowship of women and girls" regardless of race.<sup>560</sup> The National Board continued to press branches to be more inclusive, and both nationally and locally it sought out women committed to racial

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<sup>557</sup> Lester B. Granger to Savilla Simons, May 27, 1958, Savilla Simons Papers, Box 3, Folder 10

<sup>558</sup> National Board Committee on Racial Inclusiveness, December 4, 1958, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

<sup>559</sup> Helen Southard to Muriel Glickman, August 9, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 124

<sup>560</sup> "Young Women's Christian Association...Inclusiveness and the Christian Purpose," n.d. 1950s, Jacksonville YWCA Papers, Community Connections Jacksonville, Florida. (herein afterward referred to Jacksonville YWCA Papers)

tolerance for leadership roles, both as members and staff. The association also used non-confrontational language in broaching the subject of race relations, especially the terms “human relations” and/or “intergroup relations.” Beginning in World War II, it was common for many White-led organizations to use these words when promoting race dialogues.<sup>561</sup> The terms gave cover to staff and members to discuss an increasingly controversial topic. Dorothy Height, of the Leadership Services department of the National Board, explained the Y’s use of these terms at the 1960 Institute for Leadership on Intergroup Relations,

Major problems of social change face every individual and group. Race is an added factor. To work on the basic problems of people is to find that there is a dimension in which we cannot escape dealing with the racial factor. When we speak of racial inclusiveness we cannot separate ‘Race’ as it is a thing in itself. We are always dealing with the racial aspects of human relations.<sup>562</sup>

The Y sponsored the institute with the hope to build consensus among various organizations and also to encourage professional connections between Y staff and their guests. Participants included Dr. J. Oscar Lee, National Council of Churches; Roger Shaw, National Conference on Christian and Jews; Nelson Jackson, NUL; Constance B. Motley, NAACP; Jean Fairfax, American Friends Service Committee (AFSC); and, Ann G. Wolfe, American Jewish Committee.<sup>563</sup>

There were two other important reasons to use the terms “human relations” and “intergroup relations.” One was that some higher education institutions had created centers and/or disciplines whose main focus was the study of these types of relations. Often, these centers were affiliated with social work, education, or sociology

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<sup>561</sup> For more see McWilliams, *Brothers under the Skin*, 19-20.

<sup>562</sup> Dorothy Height, “Racial Inclusiveness – A Conscious Goal: Notes from Institute for Leadership in Intergroup Relations,” February 1-5, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171, 6

<sup>563</sup> Institute For Leadership and Intergroup Relations, February 1-5, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

departments. In fact, shortly after World War II, New York University created a Center for Human Relations, which offered advanced degrees in the subject.<sup>564</sup> The academic legitimization of these terms gave the Y greater license not only to discuss them in a more authoritative manner, but also allowed the organization to coordinate conferences at colleges and universities, whether the campuses were desegregated or not.

Secondly, these terms were helpful for the Y and its goals of (multi) racial inclusiveness because they did not imply race to be a binary concept. While the Y tended to focus mainly on Black-White relations, especially during the civil rights era, the use of these terms was a subtle reminder to acknowledge all of its members. By not confining the history of its racial work or the current racial situation only to “those found in the North or South,” the Y implicitly recognized its multiracial memberships frequently found in the West.<sup>565</sup> San Francisco still reported problems in fostering greater tolerance between its Black and Japanese members. Branch leadership was working with the local NAACP chapter and “Japanese American community leaders,” scheduling meetings “intended to increase understanding” between the groups.<sup>566</sup> The Berkeley Y wrote an article in the national *YWCA Magazine* on its community education program, entitled “A New Look at the Problems of Minority Groups in Berkeley.” Speakers for the workshops included “Negroes, Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans and other Spanish-speaking peoples, Jews, and Indians.”<sup>567</sup> Of course, there were branches outside of the West that were multiracial. At a 1961 National Board Seminar on Intergroup Relations, an East Coast

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<sup>564</sup> H. H. Giles, “A Center for Human Relations Studies Aspects of a Social Concept at Work,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 24, no. 6 (1951).

<sup>565</sup> Minutes of the Committee of Racial Inclusiveness, February 27, 1961, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

<sup>566</sup> San Francisco Program Planning Committee Meeting, March 13 and April 10, 1961, San Francisco YWCA Papers, Box “Planning Committee Meetings”

<sup>567</sup> Marion C. Fuller, “Adventures in Community Education,” *The YWCA Magazine*, January 1961

staffer spoke on “how to effectively include the Puerto Rican community in a variety of YWCA program[s] – and not a representative or token basis.”<sup>568</sup>

One way Y leaders sought to encourage multiracial dialogue was through the use of non-hierarchical approaches to community organizing and leadership. Many in non-White communities believed the Y offered “one of the few opportunities to be involved ‘with’ rather than just served ‘by’ organizations and agencies.” By working across racial lines, the Y gave participants the feeling “that what they say and do counts; that it is their organization; that whatever is accomplished has been in part because the group ‘together’ made the decisions.”<sup>569</sup> Dan Dodson wrote that “in some of the Southern communities, representatives of the Negro community... have no channel of communication with the white community except the YWCA.”<sup>570</sup> Of course, he also noted that “there were some instances where...the agency had been penalized in its community support because of the insistence it placed on inclusion of minority groups.”<sup>571</sup>

There were many staff and student leaders who would replicate this “woman-centered” (non-hierarchical) approach in various aspects of the burgeoning civil rights movement. Two important architects of the movement, Septima Clark and Ella Baker, were both involved with the Y during this era and were both proponents of non-hierarchical decision making.<sup>572</sup> Clark, who is best known for creating the 1950s ‘Citizenship Schools’, which taught Black Americans basic literacy skills and encouraged

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<sup>568</sup> Suggested Questions and Areas of Concerns, Seminar on Intergroup Relations, July 3 – 14, 1961, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 124

<sup>569</sup> Dodson, *The Role of the YWCA in a Changing Era*, 87-88.

<sup>570</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.

<sup>572</sup> For more on the influence of Clark and Baker in the civil rights movement, see Wesley C. Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart : SNCC's Dream for a New America*, 1st ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement : A Radical Democratic Vision*.

them to register to vote, was a board member of both the White and Black branch of the Charleston, South Carolina, Y. She was also closely involved with the Highlander Folk School (HFS), a training ground for many labor and civil rights activists.<sup>573</sup> She first learned about HFS through the local Y, after Charleston's (Black) executive secretary returned from a Highlander workshop and began offering similar programs at the branch. Clark was soon attending workshops at HFS and bringing other members of the community to the school. In the summer of 1955, she traveled throughout the South on behalf of the National Y recruiting white and black teachers to attend a HFS workshop on the desegregation of public schools.<sup>574</sup> Clark later said that her work in the movement helped empower women "to realize their worth in society," which led to their fight for equal rights as women.<sup>575</sup>

Ella Baker, a fellow HFS alum, worked for the National Y in the early 1960s. She was no stranger to the organization; as she joined the Harlem Y in the late 1920s when she moved to New York after graduating from college.<sup>576</sup> Her disdain for hierarchy combined with a commitment to grass roots organizing led to a leadership concept she called "group centered," which dovetailed with the organizing tenets of the Y.<sup>577</sup> After working for both the NAACP and SCLC, Baker purposefully moved away from these

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<sup>573</sup> For more on the HFS, see Myles Horton and Dale Jacobs, *The Myles Horton Reader : Education for Social Change*, 1st ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), C. Alvin Hughes, "A New Agenda for the South: The Role and Influence of the Highlander Folk School, 1953-1961," *Phylon* 46, no. 3 (1985).

<sup>574</sup> Septima Poinsette Clark and LeGette Blythe, *Echo in My Soul*, [1st ed. (New York,: Dutton, 1962), 145.

<sup>575</sup> Grace Jordan McFadden, "Septima P. Clark and the Struggle for Human Rights," in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement : Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, ed. Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 94.

<sup>576</sup> Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 24, Mary King, *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement*, 1st ed. (New York: Morrow, 1987), 42.

<sup>577</sup> Carol Mueller, "Ella Baker and the Origins Of "Participatory Democracy"," in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement : Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, ed. Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 61.

male-dominant hierarchical leadership organizations, deciding “to make a stand against the subservient role women had in social movements and to focus her energies on developing local leadership among women in the community.”<sup>578</sup> She was soon working for the National Y and advising the fledging student group, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Clark and Baker served as mentors for many young Y women agitating for race and gender empowerment in the early stages of the civil rights movement.

### The Student Movement and the Y

Many of the older members believed that by tapping the potential of the younger generation, a more socially tolerant postwar world was possible. Staff constantly reminded themselves and others of the “young” women in the organizational title, and encouraged their participation in all aspects of association life. Grace Elliot, General Secretary in the early 1950s, spoke highly of the young women forging ahead in the Y, on their campuses, and in the nation. In a speech considering the issues facing the youth of the day, including anxiety about the atomic age and social conformity, she called on her colleagues to help fortify young women’s beliefs and spirits. She used the biblical story of the parting of the Red Sea as a call to action,

The old Hebrew story says that only when they were in the water up to their necks did the water part. The significant part of the story is that when we cannot go back, when we cannot go around, and when we have to go through whatever it is that has to be gone through, the waters of the Red Sea do part. If we lived, we know this is true. This is the testimony that we must give to a generation that has no choice but to do the impossible.<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> LaVerne Gyant, "Passing the Torch: African American Women in the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 5 (1996): 643. Also see Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*.

<sup>579</sup> Grace Elliot, Untitled Speech, June 1953, 8

The “impossible” meant the challenges faced by Y leadership to create a more harmonious Christian social order in light of increasing hostility towards those who questioned the 1950s social structure. Elliot recognized the road ahead for the young activists was daunting without guidance from the older generation or a strong commitment to their Christian faith.<sup>580</sup>

Many young women embraced the various leadership opportunities offered through the Y during their high school, college and immediate post-collegiate years. Some simply participated in local school/campus chapters and occasionally broadened their programming and outreach to include the larger community. Others were involved at the regional or national level, meeting students from other schools, colleges, and universities, and coordinating with them on various social justice strategies and actions. While many of these women did not become life-long activists, the experiences of leadership and empowerment led many to question social and labor gendered mores as they entered adulthood and careers, whether it was in politics, academia, or community service.

Young women attended the various Y-Teen, Student Y, and Student YW-YM Conferences held throughout the year. Race was always a popular topic of discussion, and since these meetings were integrated, conference reports often highlighted the impact of interracial activity, living, and dialogue on the students.<sup>581</sup> Many of the conferences were financially underwritten by the Field Foundation, and the Y solicited independent

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<sup>580</sup> For more see Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America*

<sup>581</sup> There was only one Y-Teen Conference that was not integrated, the mid-South Conference, which included the state of Mississippi, and certain areas of Louisiana, Alabama, and Arkansas. Mid-South Y-Teen Conference, June 16, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

consultants to write up reports of its work to the Foundation.<sup>582</sup> One such report on Southern Y-Teen Conferences was written by Alex Rosen of the Center for Human Relations, New York University in 1959. He mainly focused on the students' questions and concerns about school desegregation. Many of these students lived in tightly segregated communities, and the conferences served as one of the few integrated opportunities for them. One Y-Teen officer wrote in her journal, "The conference has really set me straight on race relations. I always knew what was right deep down but sometimes I'm ashamed to say, I would go along with the crowd. Wish, God being my guide, may I henceforth have the courage to stand up for what is right. I can't tell what's all in my heart, but I thank God for this experience."<sup>583</sup> Rosen concluded that the conferences were "islands for freedom of discussion about the most pressing sociological problems of our time."<sup>584</sup>

A major reason for the conferences success was the intense training of adult conference leaders.<sup>585</sup> The National Board undertook "special efforts" to make adult staff become more in tune with its younger members, and therefore it provided "high caliber staff development and training events each year."<sup>586</sup> At times, big names were brought in, like Thurgood Marshall, Kenneth Clark, and Harold Fleming of the Southern Regional Council.<sup>587</sup> The Y rarely brought in non-Y female speakers, but considering that it

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<sup>582</sup> The Field Foundation was founded by Marshall Field III in 1940. Field considered himself a "passionate integrationist," and funded organizations committed to bettering race relations. For more on the Foundation, please see <http://www.fieldfoundation.org/history.html>, date accessed December 30, 2007.

<sup>583</sup> "Report of the 1959 Y-Teen Summer Conferences and Supportive Adult Training in the Southern Region," November 1959, YWCA National Board Papers, Unprocessed Box 238, 32

<sup>584</sup> Ibid, 33

<sup>585</sup> Ibid, 33

<sup>586</sup> 1960 Packet for Southern and Southwestern Regional Conferences, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 1, 3

<sup>587</sup> National Student Y Administrative Council Meeting, May 9, 1959, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 155

counted Constance Baker Motley, Dorothy Kenyon, Dr. Jeanne Noble, and Grace Towns Hamilton among its members, the organization was not at a loss for big-name female speakers.<sup>588</sup> By modeling quality leadership, the Y was able to promote a particular type of informed leadership among the students as well as encourage these young women to take on future leadership roles.

Like the National Y, the Student Y saw itself as a Christian lay movement, and it made racial inclusiveness its top priority. The interracial interactions at the conferences reinforced these ideas, as “students who return to segregated campuses, after having broken bread together, are never quite the same again. Hundreds of them have learned that God does not distinguish among his children or varying races, and that as Christians they must work to eradicate segregation and discrimination.”<sup>589</sup> As there was “no middle ground for the Christian on the question of racial integration,” students started programs and outreach to bring this message to their campuses and communities.<sup>590</sup> Student-led “interracial relation” regional committees were formed, “with hopes of finding solutions

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<sup>588</sup> Judge Constance Baker Motley was a lawyer for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and in 1966 was appointed to the U.S. District Court Southern District of New York. During the 1960s she consulted for the National Student Y. Dorothy Kenyon worked for the ACLU, and from 1948 to 1961 she served on the Y’s National Board. Grace Towns Hamilton ran the Atlanta National Urban League and also worked for the Southern Regional Council. In 1965, Hamilton became the first Black woman elected to the Georgia State Assembly since Reconstruction. She worked for the Y both nationally and locally, on and off, between the 1920s to the 1960s. Dr. Jeanne Noble was an associate professor at New York University before becoming the first Black woman appointed to President Johnson’s War on Poverty initiative. She consulted for the National Student Y from the mid 1950s to the mid 1960s. For more on these women, see Susan M. Hartmann, *The Other Feminists: Activists in the Liberal Establishment* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), Constance Baker Motley, *Equal Justice under Law : An Autobiography*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998), Jeanne L. Noble, *Beautiful, Also, Are the Souls of My Black Sisters : A History of the Black Woman in America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978), Lorraine Nelson Spritzer and Jean B. Bergmark, *Grace Towns Hamilton and the Politics of Southern Change* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997).

<sup>589</sup> “Seminar Task Group on Christian Social Responsibility in the Field of Integration” July 1956, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 82, 2. Interracial dining experiences have often been a springboard for young students in terms of fighting for racial justice. White civil rights activists, Virginia Durr and Anne Braden, both point to eating with Black students in college as start of their activist careers. See Gail S. Murray, ed., *Throwing Off the Cloak of Privilege: White Southern Woman Activists in the Civil Rights Era* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2004), 10-11.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid*, 7

to problems relative to admissions of minority groups into colleges and universities and their integration into the campus community.” Collaboration was also sought with the Anti-Defamation League, NAACP, American Council on Education, and AFSC as well as other “organizations working in the area of interracial and intercultural relations, on the national, regional and local level.”<sup>591</sup>

As the students pressed ahead on matters concerning race and campus diversity, there was a desire “to move in and occupy conspicuously new positions in racial relations” with respect to “Negro-white, Japanese-Caucasian, Jewish-Gentile, Mexican-American,” among others.<sup>592</sup> Questionnaires were sent to the student chapters regarding “campus behavior towards minority groups.” While all chapters were asked about work with “white, Negro, Asian, other” students,<sup>593</sup> colleges in the Midwest and Southwest were asked specifically about relations with “Negro, American Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Spanish-American, Jewish, Other.”<sup>594</sup> Topics included interracial dating, friendships, roommates, etc.; student chapters were also asked “which groups are working for or against integration on campus? Also, is your chapter hindering integration progress?”<sup>595</sup> Student associations were concerned about racial discrimination in “admission procedures, selection of faculty, assignment of housing...fraternities and sororities...off

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<sup>591</sup> Report Committee on Desegregation NSCY, 1955, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 247.1

<sup>592</sup> Winnifred Wygal, “The Student Christian Association Movement as a Lay Movement: Its Expression of Social Theology and its Program Possibilities for the Next Ten Years – an Occasional Paper Having No Official Status” n.d. 1950s, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #247.7, 8

<sup>593</sup> Student Association Inquiry on Racial Inclusiveness, 1950s, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 82

<sup>594</sup> Rocky Mountain Regional Council YWCA and the West Central Area Student YMCA, “Interracial Study Questionnaire,” November 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 81

<sup>595</sup> Ibid.

campus stores and services.”<sup>596</sup> Even with these concerns and studies, students found in examining their own chapters, top leadership tended not to be inclusive, and while some staffing was interracial, it was always White and another racial group, never two non-White leaders/groups in charge.<sup>597</sup>

Beyond campus work and Y conferences, students were also offered off-campus educational and leadership opportunities. In 1957, students from fifty-five colleges across the nation traveled to attend a United Nations Seminar focused on the Bill of Human Rights. Chartered buses allowed for interracial travel. Undergraduates interested in pursuing a teaching career were encouraged to travel to Washington, D.C., and partake of a seminar focusing “on the role of the teacher in desegregating schools.”<sup>598</sup> Weekend conferences, as well as summer projects, were constantly offered to students on a local, regional, and national level. Summer projects usually involved living within a particular community and performing social service, and at times, grassroots organizing. Students worked with migrant farmers as well as with Native American and Japanese American communities.<sup>599</sup>

The successful engagement of these students on issues that challenged social norms did not go unnoticed by academic administrators or alumni.<sup>600</sup> College Y Leaders took note of the “many forces making working on intercultural relations more difficult

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<sup>596</sup> National Student Councils YMCA-YWCA, “Our Concern, Our Faith,” September 1955, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 50

<sup>597</sup> “Report on Racial Inclusiveness Study: National Student Councils of the YMCA and YWCA,” August 24, 1959, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 81

<sup>598</sup> “1957 Annual Report,” YWCA National Board Papers, Processed Box 1, Folder 11

<sup>599</sup> 1953 Pacific Northwest Annual Report, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 245.7, Region Pacific Northwest; National Student Y Administrative Council Meeting, March 29, 1958, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 155

<sup>600</sup> For more on reactionary measures taken against Christian students involved in academic race relations, see Eagles, “The Closing of Mississippi Society.”

and more costly,” but it did not stop their fight for “real brotherhood.”<sup>601</sup> Many southern Student Ys “paid a price for their decision to open their intercollegiate program to all members without segregation.” Some schools barred interracial gatherings, with a handful banning “the [Student] YMCA and YWCA from their campuses because of their interracial policy.”<sup>602</sup> As student activists became more involved in the civil rights movement, academic probationary measures soon gave way to more serious legal entanglements.

During the 1959-1960 academic year, the National Student Y led a series of campus visits and programs between colleges in Texas and Mississippi that focused on interracial dialogue.<sup>603</sup> While both White and Black colleges were selected, White campuses with the strongest resistance to desegregation were the primary targets. One sponsored visit was between the University of Texas at Austin (UT) and Tougaloo College, a historic Black college in Mississippi. Millsaps College, a White Mississippi institution, was to be included in this program, but its participation was cancelled after an “attack by the state legislature.” The purpose was for students to engage in interracial dialogue, with UT students visiting Tougaloo first, and with a Tougaloo visit to UT later in the school year. Vivian Franklin, a sophomore at UT, wrote about the first visit, “It seems ironic, though, that we went to Mississippi to help those students, and we (or at least I) came back feeling that they had given so much more than we had given to them. All in all, this was the most valuable experiences I have ever had the opportunity to

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<sup>601</sup> “1957 Annual Report”

<sup>602</sup> “Seminar Task Group on Christian Social Responsibility in the Field of Integration”

<sup>603</sup> Ruth Hughes, “A Report Prepared for The Jacob R. Schiff Charitable Trust – 1959-1960,” National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 247.1. For more on the Student Y, Christian Students, and student activism in Texas during this period, see Doug Rossinow, ““The Break-through to New Life”: Christianity and the Emergence of the New Left in Austin, Texas, 1956-1964,” *American Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1994), Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America*

participate in.”<sup>604</sup> The success of this trip led to similar planned events. One such workshop was to be held at Bishop College, a historic Black college in Texas, but with event scheduled for April 1960, Student Y leaders and staff got more than they bargained for.

In February 1960, four North Carolina A&T students held a “sit-in” at their local Woolworth’s lunch counter, thereby launching the student direct action movement. Within two months, fifty thousand college students took part in the sit-in movement, demanding racial integration in public establishments.<sup>605</sup> Student Y members, individually and collectively, joined the sit-ins.<sup>606</sup> In March 1960, the Bishop College Y chapter in Marshall, Texas led its own sit-ins, spearheaded by Mae Coates King, the chapter President and National Student Y Chairman. Wiley College, the other Black college in town, also participated.<sup>607</sup> Eighteen students out of eighty were arrested, including King, the Student YMCA chapter president, and Bishop College’s student body president.<sup>608</sup> The National Board was immediately contacted, and the Student Y Pacific Southwest Regional Council placed a call to King “expressing concern and asking for clarification of the situation.”<sup>609</sup> Margaret E. Norton, the head of the National Student Y, visited the campus and the students on the day of the arrests. During her visit, Norton

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<sup>604</sup> Ruth Hughes, “A Report Prepared for The Jacob R. Schiff Charitable Trust – 1959-1960,” “Texas-Tougaloo Project Section,” 3. Franklin’s first name is spelled Vivian within the Report, but her first name is actually spelled Vivien. For more on Franklin, see Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* 104-05.

<sup>605</sup> For more on the sit-in movement, see Carson, *In Struggle*, Aldon D. Morris, “Black Southern Student Sit-in Movement: An Analysis of Internal Organization,” *American Sociological Review* 46, no. 6 (1981), Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, Martin Oppenheimer, *The Sit-in Movement of 1960* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Pub., 1989), Polletta, “It Was Like a Fever ...” Narrative and Identity in Social Protest.”

<sup>606</sup> National Student Councils of the YMCA and YWCA, “Report of Association Action Regarding Demonstrations for Racial Equality,” April 4, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 27

<sup>607</sup> “Demonstration in Texas,” *New York Times*, March 27 1960.

<sup>608</sup> “Sitdown Inquiry Is Begun in Texas,” *New York Times*, April 5 1960.

<sup>609</sup> Minutes of the Annual Meeting Regional Student Council, April 1-3, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Reel 245.9, Region Pacific Southwest

made daily reports to the National Board.<sup>610</sup> One National Board member from the Southwest “secured two women daily to be present at the trials of the Marshall students and...also offered her personal assistance to the chairman of the Capital Funds Campaign of Bishop.”<sup>611</sup>

Even though “most of the planning committee for the workshop was in jail,” the April 1960 Y event between various Texan and Mississippi universities at Bishop College took place. Slight program changes were made so the students could discuss the sit-ins. Those released from jail spoke to the event participants, leading one student to remark, “The strength of their courage and faith was revealed as they shared their fears, their acceptance of the hostility of others, and their commitment to the method of non-violence.” Many of students repeatedly told staff, “I’ll never be quite the same after this experience.”<sup>612</sup>

While the arrest of the National Student Y Chairman certainly jolted National, the Y was already in full support of the sit-in movement.<sup>613</sup> In mid March, all student chapters were sent packets containing a brief synopsis of the sit-ins, a statement of support by the National Student Christian Federation, and “suggestions for study, worship, and action on the part of individual students and Christian associations.”<sup>614</sup>

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<sup>610</sup> “A Situation Involving Our Student YWCA Leaders...There May Be Others,” April 6, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 27

<sup>611</sup> Frances Helen Mains and Celestine Smith to National Staff, June 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 27

<sup>612</sup> Ruth Hughes, “A Report Prepared for The Jacob R. Schiff Charitable Trust – 1959-1960,” “Bishop Workshop Section.” According to Rossinow, a “black woman from Bishop also came to the UT [Austin]-Y and gave personal testimony on the events in Marshall.” Attendees believed her words to be “inspiring.” I would hazard a guess that this woman was probably Mae King. It should also be noted that at no point does Rossinow acknowledge the Bishop Y chapter’s role in the Marshall sit-ins. Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* 122.

<sup>613</sup> “Flash YW Board Backs Students,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 29 1960. This headline was in red and above the masthead.

<sup>614</sup> National Student YW-YM Council to all Staff at Student YW-YM, March 14, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 27

Shortly thereafter, National Board employees put out a call to action to help the sit-in participants by “Giving Time (stuffing envelopes, etc)...Writing....Giving Money.”<sup>615</sup> The association created the “Dignity for Dollars” campaign, which raised funds from members and staff for the “sit-inners.”<sup>616</sup> By late 1961, the fundraising campaign was renamed “Project Tomorrow,” and included aid for Freedom Riders and others involved in direct action.<sup>617</sup>

The President of the National Board, Lilace Barnes, wrote to all branch Presidents and Executive Directors on April 7, 1960 about her “concern for the students involved in the recent demonstrations and for the cause of racial justice they serve.” She enclosed the Board-adopted ‘message of concern,’ as well as an ‘Information Sheet and Guides for Action.’ Barnes hoped “that local Associations, too, are at work on the issues,” and reminded them that one of its own “family” members, Mae King, was “on the firing line.” A similar letter was sent to all student branches.<sup>618</sup> The ‘Information Sheet and Guides for Action’ spoke of the sit-in movement as “something new emerged in American life.” Highlighting the non-violent direct action taken first by “determined...Negro Christian students,” the Y hoped to defuse any fears and educate its membership regarding the students’ demands. Readers were told how students attempting to “secure racial justice...long denied” were subject to “threats, intimidation by police, arrest, court action and expulsion from college but still they continue their peaceful demonstrations.” Since these “events happen so rapidly,” branches were encouraged “to

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<sup>615</sup> “Action by National Board YWCA Employees in Support of Student Demonstrators for Human Rights,” April 1, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 27

<sup>616</sup> Mamie Davis to Celestine Smith, April 26, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 27

<sup>617</sup> Project Tomorrow, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 311; For more on the Freedom Rides, see Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1980*.

<sup>618</sup> Lilace Barnes to Various “President and Executive Directors,” April 7, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 27; “Student Association Leader,” April 7, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 27

note general sources of information daily.” Members were asked to donate money, write letters to F.W. Woolworth’s and S.H. Kress & Company, and to help “students find new colleges if expelled.” Staff were directed to “use these incidents as a way to further examine internal practices, and dismantle segregation practices in residential halls, cafeterias, buildings, programs, etc.” And most importantly, to any and all of the actions, was “prayer and dedication to the purposes of the protest. Spiritual discipline is a vital part of the new movement and sympathizers need to share this same dimension in their support. The YWCA has special reason to understand this.”<sup>619</sup>

Some southern branches were unhappy with the Board’s decision concerning the students. The Montgomery, Alabama branch threatened to disaffiliate, while the Mobile branch declared the Y’s call to action “entirely unacceptable to us.” Mobile leadership feared that any connection to the civil rights movement would jeopardize its funding and status within the community. They wrote to Barnes, “We in the Mobile YWCA are working for better race relations and for better opportunities for minority groups, but it must be in our own way and along lines acceptable to the community.”<sup>620</sup> Other southern leaders and branches agreed with the National Board’s support of the sit-ins. A member from Hot Springs, Arkansas, wrote “how thoroughly” she believed “in the statement made by the National Board and its public support of the objectives and methods used by the students.”<sup>621</sup> After Barnes’ letter was read at the New Orleans Y Board Meeting, there was “a good spontaneous discussion,” in which members conferred how best to

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<sup>619</sup> “Information Sheet and Guides for Action related to Student Demonstrations for Racial Justice,” April 6, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 27

<sup>620</sup> Mrs. Hugh North, Mobile, Alabama Y, to Lilace Barnes, April 14, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 27

<sup>621</sup> Mrs. Eugene Sparling to Lilace Barnes, April 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 27. The Hot Springs branch was segregated. Mrs. Sparling, while a national board member, was definitely not representative of her fellow White local members.

apply some of National's suggested actions to their local struggle to keep primary and secondary schools open during attacks from the Louisiana state legislature.<sup>622</sup>

The National Board also sent its statement of support to selected Black college presidents, telling them that all local and student branches were contacted on this issue. These colleges were an important part of the sit-in movement as the majority of participants were students. Barnes wrote the presidents, "We are aware that the present situation puts upon you many heavy responsibilities. We are holding you in our thoughts and prayers." Many appreciated the Y's message, with Benjamin Mays, President of Morehouse College, responding, "I am very happy to know that the National Board is taking this position. It is the kind of position which you have taken all along and which most of us would expect you to take on matters that are definitely in keeping with your past and in keeping with the Christian faith."<sup>623</sup>

Many of the adults in the Y who did not physically participate in the sit-ins joined in a letter writing campaign, launched by local branches and the National Board, to S.H. Kress & Company and F. W. Woolworth's, the "five and dime" stores where most of the sit-ins were taking place. Branches from Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, Omaha, Cleveland, Los Angeles, San Diego, Seattle, and others, wrote to the company asking for immediate desegregation of their lunch counters.<sup>624</sup> Further action and collaboration on

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<sup>622</sup> Mary Jane Willet to Lilace Barnes, June 9, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 27. The New Orleans branch had taken steps to desegregate in the 1950s, but with newly strengthened segregation laws passed by the State legislature, decided to not take the matter further for several more years. For more on 1960 New Orleans school desegregation crisis, see Frystak, "Elite White Female Activism and Civil Rights in New Orleans." For more on the movement in Louisiana see Adam Fairclough, *Race & Democracy : The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995).

<sup>623</sup> Lilace Barnes to various Presidents of "Negro Colleges," April 20, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 27

<sup>624</sup> Various Branch Letters to Woolworth's and Kress, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 27

the sit-ins was sought at both the local and national levels with other organizations, including United Church Women, the Council of the Racial Congress (of Los Angeles), Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the NAACP.<sup>625</sup> After being inundated with letters from various Ys, the companies responded to the call for desegregation. Karl Helfrich, Vice President of the Kress Company, asked to meet with Y leadership about the sit-ins. At a meeting with Mildred Jones, Vice President of the National Board, and Briseis Teall, national staff, Helfrich “told us about his interest in the successful process of integration, but his belief is that they must follow the lead of the community in these situations. He believes, however, community groups like ours should form groups of representatives of community organizations and business to help create the climate for successful integration. He gave us assurance of cooperation in the instances where we may be involved.”<sup>626</sup>

Woolworth’s took a different tack. In a letter that was sent to the all of the responding local associations and the National Board, E. F. Harrigan, the Vice President of Woolworth’s, defended its segregation practices as it “has existed in the South for generations” and therefore had permeated “the entire social structure and exists even in the great majority of churches.” In fact, it was Harrigan’s “understanding [that] the YWCA operates on the same basis in the area in question.”<sup>627</sup> He was right; in 1960, there were fewer than a dozen integrated branches in the southern region. Several local branches responded to Woolworth’s in various ways. The Evanston, Illinois, branch

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<sup>625</sup> Los Angeles Board of Directors Meeting, April 21, 1960, Los Angeles YWCA Papers, Box 7, Folder 18; National Board Public Affairs Committee Meeting, April 19, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 11; Florence C. Harris to Edith Lerrigo and Mildred Savacool, September 27, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 27

<sup>626</sup> Mildred Jones to Edith Lerrigo, et al, May 11, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 27

<sup>627</sup> E.F. Harrigan, Vice President of Woolworth’s, to Mrs. Clements, Board President, Philadelphia Y, June 20, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 27

expressed disbelief at Harrigan's claim and stated he must have confused the YW with the YM. But they did admit that even with the Y's stance on integration, they didn't have "personal knowledge" if southern branches were desegregated.<sup>628</sup> The Los Angeles association fully acknowledged the state of the southern branches, but hoped "that your company, along with our YWCAs in the South, may move forward together to the solving of this problem which not only involves our country's positions in the eyes of the world but which involves our conscience as individual Christians and as citizens of a country which we call Christian."<sup>629</sup>

Some local leaders demanded answers from the National Board concerning the segregation of the southern branches. Lydia Adolph, a local Executive Director, wrote to Mamie E. Davis, the Correlator for the Eastern Region and one of the highest ranking African Americans on national staff, about the continued segregation within southern branches. Adolph felt ashamed to even ask if some of the sit-ins were held at Y cafeterias. She wanted to know,

How long do we dare to go on professing a belief in non-discrimination and urging others to practice it when we are afraid to move on it ourselves?...it seems to me we have been too slow. It's not a simple matter, I'm all too aware, and to do this thing that would save our 'YWCA soul' would demand great courage and love. What is the reaction of southern associations to the whole situation? This we need to know – are they feeling guilty or caught or just plain afraid? How do we – or can we (of the north) help them? Or should we?<sup>630</sup>

Adolph spoke for many regarding the sit-ins and the Y's southern situation. In a memo to the entire National Board staff, White and Black staffers, Frances Mains and Dr.

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<sup>628</sup> Lucy Witherspoon, Evanston, IL, Y, to Woolworth's, May 26, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 27

<sup>629</sup> Mrs. Paul Barnard, Board President Los Angeles Y, to E.F. Harrigan, Woolworth's, June 22, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 27

<sup>630</sup> Mamie Davis to Mrs. Henry Ingraham, June 21, 1960 [within memo the letter from Lydia Adolph to Davis, June 16, 1960, was re-typed], National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 27

Celestine Smith, asked their coworkers “have we faced what we are prepared to do if there should be a sit-in demonstration in a YWCA cafeteria?”<sup>631</sup> This line of inquiry led some to question Y leadership during this time. Davis forwarded Adolph’s letter to Mary Ingraham, the former National Board President, not the current head, Lilace Barnes. Ingraham had guided the organization through World War II, had led its efforts in the Japanese American community and in the creation of the Interracial Charter. After the War, she served as chair of the National Board’s Committee on Racial Inclusiveness for the next fifteen plus years. Davis was also on the committee. While Barnes clearly supported the students and the sit-ins, she had a lukewarm track record as a strong leader on race related issues. In Barnes’s response to Woolworth’s, she stressed National’s stance on integration while also stating that local associations were autonomous and therefore could not be forced to integrate. Unlike the Los Angeles’ branch suggestion that Woolworth’s and the Y work together in desegregation measures, Barnes thought that Woolworth’s should take the lead in creating “a climate in which voluntary agencies can cooperate to achieve good human relations.”<sup>632</sup> As the Y became more entrenched in its support of the civil rights movement, it was clear the organization needed different leadership in order to move forward.

While the actions of many in the Y were commendable, few wanted to face the fact that most of the southern branches still operated on some level – programs, facilities, residence halls, cafeterias – in a segregated fashion. The National Board sent out congratulatory messages to community and student branches on the success of the letter

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<sup>631</sup> Frances Helen Mains and Celestine Smith to National Staff, June 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 27

<sup>632</sup> Lilace Reid Barnes to Mr. E.F. Harrigan, July 8, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 27

writing campaign, as it “helped toward the integration of eating places in 93 communities of 11 Southern states since February 1, 1960.” The letter continued, “May we always be in the forefront of the struggle of human rights!”<sup>633</sup> Yet, it took little action to further desegregation efforts in the branches. The Executive Director of the (White) Roanoke Y reported to the National Board that neither Blacks nor Whites in the community supported the sit-ins or the Y’s involvement in them.<sup>634</sup> The (White) Norfolk, Virginia, branch asked the (Black) Phyllis Wheatley branch “for help in discouraging Negro patronage” in its cafeteria. When the Phyllis Wheatley branch refused, the White branch shut down its cafeteria.<sup>635</sup> However, it reopened, desegregated, by the end of that year.<sup>636</sup>

Finally, in autumn of 1960 the movement arrived on the (White) Atlanta Y’s cafeteria doorstep, and the Christian Purpose and the hopes of an inclusive fellowship were put to the test. The Atlanta sit-ins had started earlier in the spring, and sent the local leadership scrambling for a way “to meet the emergency.” A Board Meeting was held and the President of the Board told members to ask themselves: “(1) Do we really believe in the YWCA and its way of work? (2) Are we honestly committed to its plan, philosophy, and belief in the dignity of every human being? (3) Is the decision to be based primarily upon the fact of public acceptance or upon our Christian beliefs?” After much discussion, the Board decided “to treat student guests, should they appear, as the YWCA would treat other guests,” and all agreed that the emergency measure was “the

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<sup>633</sup>Mrs. Cernoria [sic] D. Johnson to Community and College and University Associations, October 19, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 27

<sup>634</sup> Anne Cecile Willis, Executive Director Roanoke Y, to Florence Harris, National Board, April 27, 1960, National Board Papers, Unprocessed Box 27. Attached to the letter was a news-clipping which stated “The National Board of the YWCA has endorsed objectives of the southern sit-in strikes, a stand which won’t be particularly helpful to the organization outside New York.” *Roanoke World News*, April 20, 1960

<sup>635</sup> *The Virginian-Pilot*, October 26, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 27

<sup>636</sup> Cenoria D. Johnson, Frances Helen Mains, and Celestine Smith, “Moving Ahead in the Struggle for Equality,” January 1961, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 124, 3

only one the YWCA could make and be true to the purpose for which the organization was founded.”<sup>637</sup> But neither the students nor the sit-ins appeared during the spring or summer as a temporary city-wide truce was agreed upon and sit-ins were halted.<sup>638</sup>

The (White) Atlanta’s Executive Director’s retirement in September gave a new impetus to make the “emergency” measure permanent, and the National Board was called in for guidance. This meeting was set to happen the same day the sit-in truce lifted, and department stores were targeted. Just in case, Y cafeteria staff were reminded of the “emergency” decision. One cafeteria staff member quit. On October 24, 1960, the White Atlanta branch agreed to an official policy “that courteous service to Negroes be a continuous practice in the Atlanta YWCA.” It released a statement to the press,

The Young Woman’s Christian Association first of all is committed to the principals of Jesus Christ and seeks to see all people as children of God. We constantly try to act in ways that are in line with this belief. We have recognized that being human, on occasion, we have tended to follow customs rather than these Christian principals, but we rejoice that in this instance we have been able to base our practice on our principals.<sup>639</sup>

And still, the students and the sit-ins did not arrive. Another sit-in truce was declared, though short lived as it was lifted in late November. On the fifth day of the November sit-ins, five Black students and clergy appeared at the Y cafeteria and they were served.<sup>640</sup>

One newspaper reported, “The cafeteria continued business as usual, and white diners accepted the event without incident.”<sup>641</sup> One white woman wrote to the Y, “I was eating lunch in the cafeteria today while the negro students were there, & I want to tell you how

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<sup>637</sup> “The Atlanta YWCA Cafeteria Story,” 1961, Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 1, Folder 9, 1

<sup>638</sup> For more on the civil rights movement in Atlanta, see David Andrew Harmon, *Beneath the Image of the Civil Rights Movement and Race Relations : Atlanta, Georgia, 1946-1981* (New York: Garland Pub., 1996).

<sup>639</sup> Ibid, 2

<sup>640</sup> “5 Negroes Served in Atlanta Y.W.C.A.,” *New York Times*, December 1 1960, “Downtown YWCA Drops Cafeteria Race Restriction,” *Atlanta Daily World*, December 1 1960, “Five Negroes Eat at YWCA in Atlanta,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 1 1960.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid, 2-3

delighted I was with the way it was handled. I am extremely proud of my membership in the Y in view of the stand you have taken for equality, & doubly delighted that the first move in this city was taken for moral & religious reasons rather than economic ones.”<sup>642</sup>

The local TV news also carried the story, with one broadcast declaring “The YWCA had broken the racial barriers in Atlanta.”<sup>643</sup> The next day, Atlanta’s Chief of Police, Herbert T. Jenkins, Sr., called the branch “to offer congratulations and to notify the YWCA that it was to have full protection.” The Ku Klux Klan immediately began harassing the (White) Branch’s Executive Director. Jenkins helped to clear up that situation.<sup>644</sup> A few days after the Y cafeteria became the first public dining establishment in Atlanta to desegregate, a sit-in occurred at the Atlanta YMCA coffee shop. The sit-in participants were refused service.<sup>645</sup>

While the (White) Atlanta YW was not the first cafeteria to desegregate due to the sit-ins, it served as a call to action to other southern branches to rethink their segregation policies.<sup>646</sup> The (White) Greensboro, North Carolina Y was duly impressed by Atlanta’s cafeteria policy and hoped that if and when the time came, “we shall be ready to witness for human dignity and right with similar courage and promptness.” For them, Atlanta’s stance “has strengthened us and we hope your leadership has influenced others in your community to agree with your position which expresses in deed our professed purpose –

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<sup>642</sup> Sarah Miller (Mrs. Timothy) to Director, YWCA, Wednesday (November 30, 1960), Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 1, Folder 9

<sup>643</sup> Florence C. Harris to Mildred Savacool, et al, December 2, 1960, Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 1, Folder 9

<sup>644</sup> “The Atlanta YWCA Cafeteria Story,” 1961, Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 1, Folder 9, 3

<sup>645</sup> Committee on Segregation, “Bulletin,” December 10, 1960, Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 1, Folder 9

<sup>646</sup> Florence Harris to National Board Southern Members, November 2, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 27; Margaret W. Wheelock, President of the Metropolitan YWCA of Baltimore, to (Atlanta) Madam President, December 2, 1960, Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 1, Folder 9; Various congratulatory messages 1960-1961, Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 1, Folder 9. It is not mentioned which Y cafeterias desegregated prior to Atlanta; it is noted that Atlanta was not the first, but it received the most press.

‘To realize in our common life those ideals of personal living to which we are committed by our faith.’”<sup>647</sup> The Baltimore, Maryland Y, which desegregated prior to Atlanta, and had taken a leadership role in working to desegregate other city institutions, warned Atlanta that the struggle for civil rights was a continued battle in terms of education and dialogue.<sup>648</sup> The Atlanta Y was also inundated with congratulatory messages from other branches, local churches, social organizations, National Board staff, and various individuals.<sup>649</sup> All disapproving letters were from men, who usually not only referred to the all-female Board as “gentlemen,” but some also alluded to a communist influence within the Branch.<sup>650</sup>

The Atlanta Y story was soon published in the national organization’s monthly publication, *The YWCA Magazine*. In a piece that examined the racial inclusiveness of various branches, Atlanta’s desegregation of its cafeteria was featured comparably with the desegregation of the Indianapolis branch, and the new Black executive director of the central Buffalo, New York branch.<sup>651</sup> The desegregation of Atlanta’s cafeteria was significant, but so is the fact that the Atlanta association did not fully desegregate until 1965. Yet, even with the importance of the events of 1960, at no point in all the press and self-congratulatory narratives by the (White) Atlanta branch was there any mention of any role the (Black) Phyllis Wheatley Atlanta branch played during this time. A group of White and Black staffers wrote after the desegregation of the cafeterias of Norfolk and Atlanta, “the unevenness of our action – sometimes vigorous and aggressive here and

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<sup>647</sup> Mrs. Lloyd Caster (Frances) and Mrs. J.H. Hook (Elizabeth), Greensboro YWCA to (Atlanta) YWCA Board of Directors, January 12, 1961, Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 1, Folder 9

<sup>648</sup> Margaret W. Wheelock, President of the Metropolitan YWCA of Baltimore, to (Atlanta) Madam President, December 2, 1960, Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 1, Folder 9

<sup>649</sup> Various congratulatory messages 1960-1961, Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 1, Folder 9

<sup>650</sup> Anti-YWCA letters 1960-1961, Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 1, Folder 9

<sup>651</sup> “The Flow of YWCA History Toward Racial Inclusiveness,” *The YWCA Magazine*, October 1961

slow and plodding there – challenges the Y to continue, consciously and creatively, to be on top of the changing situations, work with other groups, organize with the understanding that many Americans have no firm convictions about race and will respond to enlightened leadership,” and foster better community relations.<sup>652</sup> There might have been some movement towards desegregation, but there was obviously a long road ahead toward the goal of being “one association.”

The Student Y and its involvement in the sit-ins definitely affected National Board’s policies and programs as well as deepening the role of the association in the civil rights movement. The National Board looked to the students as a way to be more involved in civil rights work, as it was “the position of college and university members who have so often inspired us to take courageous leadership.”<sup>653</sup> When the students became further engaged in the civil rights movement, the National Student Y created newer, and at times bolder, projects that reflected the students’ social justice demands.

#### The National Student Y’s Special Project on Human Relations

Since World War II, different groups within the National Board and the National Student Y had bandied about an idea for a program that would send student/staff teams to different colleges to discuss “Human Relations.”<sup>654</sup> Ideally the team would be interracial. This program was first called an “Interracial Program Exchange,” and as it was revised

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<sup>652</sup> Cenoria D. Johnson, Frances Helen Mains, and Celestine Smith, “Moving Ahead in the Struggle for Equality,” January 1961, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 124, 3

<sup>653</sup> Lilace Barnes to Local Associations, November 30, 1959, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

<sup>654</sup> Grace Towns Hamilton to Thurgood Marshall, March 10, 1941, NAACP Papers, Library of Congress, NAACP II 11A676 YWCA; War time Program: Division of Student Y.W.C.A.’s, July 27, 1942, YWCA, Microfilm Reel #148; Minutes of Annual Meeting, Southwest Council, Student YWCA, June 6, 1951, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 247.1; Minutes of the National Student YWCA Administrative Committee, May 11, 1956, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 155, 3-4; Edith Lerrigo, “Material for Annual Report: College and University Division,” April 11, 1957, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 247.7

throughout the years, it evolved into the “Special Project” on Human Relations. One of the leaders in the original Project, Grace Towns Hamilton, an African American leader from Atlanta, believed its implementation would “help strengthen faculty and student leadership for increased effectiveness in working for integration.” Other components of the Project included scholarships for students and staff to participate in events held by the Fisk Institute on Race Relations and the Y Leadership Services division, among others, as well as the creation of various guides and other publications that could help student chapters toward campus desegregation.<sup>655</sup>

The Southwest Regional Student Y began its own “Integration Project” in 1956, with funding from the Field Foundation. It consisted of visiting ten selected campuses, and included a regional conference training program and intercollegiate workshops “devoted to specific problems of desegregation and integration as they arise on the campuses concerned.” A White woman, Edna “Tommie” Anderson, the former head of the Austin Y with close ties to the UT Austin Y chapter, was chosen to direct the project.<sup>656</sup> In a report to the Field Foundation, Anderson wrote that students throughout the Southwest “have to depend almost solely on the student YMCA and YWCA and the

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<sup>655</sup> Grace T. Hamilton to Edith Lerrigo, “Summary and Report of Project Responsibilities – 1956-1957,” August 28, 1957, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 155; For on Hamilton’s role in the civil rights movement, see Spritzer and Bergmark, *Grace Towns Hamilton and the Politics of Southern Change*. For more on the Fisk Institute on Race Relations see Sanders, *“Intelligent and Effective Direction:” The Fisk University Race Relations Institute and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1944-1969*.

<sup>656</sup> “Interregional News Bulletin,” Committee on Interracial-Intercultural Relations of the National Student Councils YMCA-YWCA, 1956, YWCA National Board Papers, Unprocessed Box 82; Minutes of the National Student YWCA Administrative Committee, May 11, 1956, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 155, 3-4

state student organizations of their churches for the opportunity to work together on problems and concerns of young people, regardless of race.”<sup>657</sup>

Edith Lerrigo, the head of the National Student Y in the 1950s, was duly impressed with the Southwestern Regional’s Integration Project. Beyond the leadership development and scholarships granted, Lerrigo believed the “most important” aspect of the Project “has been the continual witness made in actual experiences of interracial living at intercollegiate conferences, for many students their first experience of living with members of other races in a Christian community.”<sup>658</sup> The success in the Southwest led to an expanded program, renamed the “Special Project on Human Relations.” Additional funds were granted through the Jacob R. Schiff Foundation “to work in the area of human relations in the three regions – Southwest, Rocky Mountain and Southern.” Dr. Celestine Smith, a Black woman, directed the project from the National Board in New York, while Ruth Hughes, a White woman, traveled around to the different campuses.<sup>659</sup> Anderson continued to coordinate various Human Relations workshops throughout the Southwest. As the project continued, Dr. Smith hoped to get the latest “knowledge and effective techniques in human relations” to campus Ys as soon as possible.<sup>660</sup>

Many of the students involved in the direct action movement joined or affiliated with the new student group, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee

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<sup>657</sup> Edna T. Anderson and Ella J. Baker, “Report to the Field Foundation on the Special Project in Human Relations,” September 1, 1960 – August 31, 1961, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 246.5, 12

<sup>658</sup> Edith Lerrigo, “Material for Annual Report: College and University Division,” April 11, 1957, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 247.7

<sup>659</sup> “Summary of YWCA Human Relations Project in Southwest Region – 1956-1959” National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 247.1

<sup>660</sup> “A Report Prepared for The Jacob R. Schiff Charitable Trust” August 1, 1959, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 247.1, 3

(SNCC).<sup>661</sup> In response to the sit-ins sweeping across the South, Ella Baker, who at the time worked for SCLC, called for a student conference in April 1960. She believed that in order to sustain the sit-in movement the students needed to meet and share tactics. The students had to decide whether they wanted to be an autonomous group or a wing of the SCLC. Baker urged them to choose autonomy and fought for their independence during a closed-door meeting of SCLC. She was asked to be an advisor to the new independent group, officially established in October 1960 as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Various Y staff and students attended that October meeting, including Tommie Anderson; Rosetta Gardner, Executive Director of the Student Y Southern Region; Casey Hayden, a UT Austin Y member; Jimmie Woodward, National Student Y staff; Dr. Celestine Smith; Elizabeth Jackson, Executive Director, University of Washington-Seattle Y; and Lois Greenwood, University of Oregon Y. The National Student Y sent two official observers, Jane Meredith and Bonnie Cox, to report on the meeting. They wrote to the National Board that,

The Student YWCA can certainly find creative ways to relate to this new movement. We need to establish and maintain communications with this movement and need to exchange information, ideas and resources. Further, we have a real role to play in attempting to interpret this movement and its activities to our own movement. This is certainly an area in which we can offer real moral support to fellow students who are actively participating in a struggle in which we are all involved.<sup>662</sup>

The young women were excited by the meeting and the emphasis on being a “strictly student movement...It is student-created, student-led and student determined.”<sup>663</sup>

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<sup>661</sup> For more on SNCC see Carson, *In Struggle*, Greenberg, *A Circle of Trust*, Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart : SNCC's Dream for a New America*, Emily Stoper, "The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: Rise and Fall of a Redemptive Organization," *Journal of Black Studies* 8, no. 1 (1977), Howard Zinn, *SNCC, the New Abolitionists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

<sup>662</sup> Report of Fall Conference of the Student Non-Violent Movement Held at Atlanta Georgia, October 14-16, 1960, National YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 245

<sup>663</sup> Ibid.

Ella Baker served as the main bridge between SNCC and the Student Y. In September 1960, Baker joined the Special Project on Human Relations for the Southern Regional Student Y; her co-leader in the Project was Anderson, who oversaw the Southwestern Regional's efforts. The Field Foundation agreed to underwrite the Project, and was "quite elated with our choice of Ella for this particular job."<sup>664</sup> The interracial team of Baker and Anderson visited colleges in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Texas. Both women agreed that "the majority of Negro or white students will not be found on the picket line. They must be reached through other personal contact, group and intergroup meetings and discussions, direct and indirect approaches. Herein lies the task of the YWCA's human relations program."<sup>665</sup> With the increasing danger of open discussion of race relations in the South and Southwest, the National Student Y relied even more heavily on the terms 'human relations' and 'academic freedom' to covertly discuss race relations and racial integration on campuses.

While White violence against those demanding civil rights was not a new phenomenon in the South, it had escalated alarmingly since the start of the modern civil rights movement in the mid 1950s.<sup>666</sup> Once the student direct action phase of the movement began with the sit-ins in February 1960, violence was increasingly inflicted at all civil rights activists, Black and White. Sit-inners were trained not to fight back against "White hecklers," who were known to burn civil rights participants with lighted

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<sup>664</sup> Mrs. Margaret Edmunson Norton, Executive Secretary National Student Y, to Rosetta Gardner, September 26, 1960, National YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 245

<sup>665</sup> Edna T. Anderson and Ella J. Baker, "Report to the Field Foundation on the Special Project in Human Relations," September 1, 1960 – August 31, 1961, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 246.5, 3

<sup>666</sup> For violence related to the civil rights movement in the 1950s see: Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta : The Story of Emmett Till* (New York: Free Press, 1988).

cigarettes and hot liquid, as well as throw food and other debris in their face.<sup>667</sup> When the 1961 Freedom Rides occurred, activists were faced with even more serious beatings and some of the buses were fire-bombed. The aim of the Freedom Rides was to desegregate interstate bus terminal facilities, with riders refusing to ride in segregated sections. With the hope of minimizing future blood spill, the federal government was eventually forced to provide protection for the riders.<sup>668</sup> Student involved in the civil rights movement were aware of these dangers and worked to balance these dangers with their passion to change the world.

Both mature women, Baker and Anderson imparted safety precautions to the students. They traveled extensively throughout their regions, working with students who were often on the brink of becoming or already engaged in local protests. Anderson secured an assistant, Lenice Larkin, a White woman, to focus solely on Mississippi. Larkin brought students from (White) Millsaps College together with Tougaloo College. This was the first time the students had visited each other since 1958, when the Mississippi's State Legislature investigated that meeting.<sup>669</sup> The UT Austin-Tougaloo program had continued successfully under Anderson's direction since the late 1950s, and eventually led to "the first non-violent protest in the state of Mississippi" in March 1961. Nine Tougaloo students held a "'read in' at the white public library in Jackson. They were arrested, released on bond, tried, fined \$100 each and given a 30-day suspended jail sentence. Several of these 'read in' students had participated in the University of Texas-

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<sup>667</sup> Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1980*, 75.

<sup>668</sup> Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941*, 77.

<sup>669</sup> Edna T. Anderson and Ella J. Baker, "Report to the Field Foundation on the Special Project in Human Relations," 44

Tougaloo visitation project.”<sup>670</sup> Baker worked closely with both the Tuskegee campus in Alabama, and Spelman College in Atlanta. Students at Tuskegee were “somewhat frustrated in their 1960 attempts to engage in direct action demonstrations. This left a psychological need for a meaningful action project.” Baker worked with the College’s “YWCA-YMCA cabinets [in hosting] a statewide Workshop on Responsible Citizenship – which gave to students and faculty a sense of real achievement.”<sup>671</sup> Spelman undergraduates, in contrast, were not frustrated by a lack of involvement. A ‘star-studded’ event planned by Baker, the campus Y, and NAACP, was delayed by three months when “the president of the Spelman ‘Y’ became deeply involved with direct action and was jailed with other Atlanta students.”<sup>672</sup>

Both Baker and Anderson attended a “special” Human Relations Workshop for National Student YWCA Staff at the National Convention held in Denver, Colorado in May 1961. Baker led a “discussion on The Direct Action Movement as a factor in Social Change, and acted as a resource consultant on current developments in the desegregation-integration crisis in the South.” A “coffee-hour” was planned with students from “Denver University” to discuss the civil rights movement.<sup>673</sup> There was a “penetrating” conversation, with some White students expressing their initial fear concerning “the speed with which Negroes were trying to achieve integration.” Baker concluded, “There is real need for interpreting the direct action movement to students outside of the South.”<sup>674</sup>

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<sup>670</sup> Ibid, 45

<sup>671</sup> Ibid, 48

<sup>672</sup> Ibid, 53

<sup>673</sup> In the report, ‘Denver University’ is used, but there is no Denver University. More likely, students from the University of Denver attended the coffee hour.

<sup>674</sup> Ibid, 54

Within a year, the Special Project expanded both regionally and in personnel. Two additional staffers went on campus visits in the Midwest and the Middle Atlantic regions, but their roles were secondary compared to the work in the South and Southwest. In all the multiple discussions over the years concerning the evolution of the Special Project, Y leaders all wished to see an interracial team running the campus visits and discussions, but it had not happened due to safety and other issues. Baker revisited this idea when after traveling throughout the South, she saw a need for a White assistant, as “she [a White student] could visit Associations that had not been recently visited because of staff limitations and because Negro staff members were not yet accepted,” and thereby “would increase the coverage of campuses in the region.” Sandra “Casey” Hayden, a graduate of UT Austin and a member of the Student Y, whom Baker called “a young woman of rare talents and insights,” was hired for the 1961-1962 academic year.<sup>675</sup> Gladys Calkins, a White southerner and the United States Y representative to the World Y during World War II, also joined as a volunteer “campus traveler” in the fall of 1961.<sup>676</sup>

In addition to the Special Project, the National Student Y collaborated with CORE to open up segregated campuses. CORE also worked with the National Board to help desegregate local Y branches. In other efforts to promote interracial living and dialogue, the Student Y recruited White college freshman to attend Black colleges for their

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<sup>675</sup> Ibid, 34

<sup>676</sup> National Student Y Administrative Council Meeting, September 29, 1961, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 155. Calkins, a White woman, joined the team after receiving her Master’s Thesis at the age of 63. Gladys Gilkey Calkins, “The Negro in the Young Women’s Christian Association: A Study of the Development of YWCA Interracial Policies and Practices in Their Historical Setting ” (Master’s Thesis, George Washington University, 1960).

sophomore year.<sup>677</sup> Letters were also sent to the National Pan-Hellenic Council requesting the removal of “discriminatory clauses from national charters” from fraternities and sororities.<sup>678</sup> Student leadership created Project Tomorrow, a “program centered fund-raising project to aid student Freedom Riders and other students engaged in direct action.” The National Board strongly supported the Project and aligned it with its “Dollars for Dignity” campaign. Within the first year, Project Tomorrow funds went to “the NAACP for appeal bonds for Mississippi Freedom Riders,” student Y members requesting travel monies to attend a SNCC meeting, and to “Miss Java Mae Thompson, our former YWCA Southern Regional Student Chairman, Miss Mary L. Cephus and other students (expelled from Southern University) engaged in direct action in Baton Rouge.”<sup>679</sup>

Java Mae Thompson was a key leader in the Baton Rouge, Louisiana movement, which included involvement in voter registration, sit-ins, and polling public establishments on their racial policies. On December 14, 1961, she was arrested for picketing a store with CORE volunteers. Based on her arrest, the administration at Southern expelled her. Thompson called Rosetta Gardner at the Student Y to let her know of her arrest, expulsion, and that “she might not be able to carry out her chairmanship responsibilities at the Regional Assembly to be held at Gatlinburg, Tennessee, February 16-18, as the date of her trial was in doubt.” Gardner went to Baton

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<sup>677</sup> Minutes, National student YWCA, Advisory Group on our Interracial Concerns, October 24, 1961, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 296. James Farmer became the head of CORE in February 1961 and was very close ally of the Y. It is possible that this CORE-Y partnership was forged by Farmer’s new leadership role.

<sup>678</sup> Olga Seastrom, National Student Y Council Chairman, to Mrs. Mary Burt Nash, Chairman National Pan-Hellenic Council, October 16, 1962, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 155

<sup>679</sup> National Student YWCA, “Our Interracial Concerns: Report for the Program Year 1961-1962,” National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 296, 1-2

Rouge to meet with Thompson and let her know of the moral and financial assistance offered by both the National Board and Student Y.<sup>680</sup>

The conference at Gatlinburg was attended by both Baker and Hayden, who also gave a talk entitled “Being a Christian Woman in Today’s South, Today’s Nation and Today’s World.” While at the gathering, Baker remarked that there were only a few “faint” signs that “more ‘Y’ student leaders in the Southeastern Region are seeking ways of engaging in effective human relations.” However, this was overly pessimistic as evidenced not only by Thompson and her fellow Southern University Y members, but the multitude of student Y members involved in other direct action projects.<sup>681</sup> In fact, Thompson herself stated that it was her attendance at “one of those big YWCA meetings” that “filled [her] with ideas about the sit-in movement” and moved her to act.<sup>682</sup>

Like Baker, Anderson had her hands full with jailed students who participated in sit-ins. Y members at Texas Southern University were arrested in Houston “after they participated in theater integration demonstrations.” In addition to handling arrested students, Anderson supervised the expansion of the Southwestern Regional Project to include the Latin American community. As there were few Latinas on campuses, the Project expanded its efforts to improve relations with the larger community. Anderson started an on-going summer project, the Texas Coastal Bend Migrant Project, in which “students work with migrants of Latin American descent, helping to improve their living

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<sup>680</sup> Rosetta Gardner to Dr. Celestine Smith, “Re: The arrest of Java Mae Thompson...,” February 20, 1962, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 311

<sup>681</sup> YWCA Regional Assembly, Gatlinburg, TN, February 16-18, 1962, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 311

<sup>682</sup> 1962-1963 Report (Southeastern) Discussion of College Visits, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 311

quarters and conducting educational and recreational programs with migrants and their families.”<sup>683</sup>

While the successes of the Project in the South and Southwest led leaders to recommend it be expanded north, both Baker and Hayden thought more work could be done within the Southern Region.<sup>684</sup> After visiting several colleges in North Carolina, Hayden stated that many White colleges “seem to be doing less programming in race relations than the climate would allow.”<sup>685</sup> In a report to the National Student Y Administrative Committee in 1962, Baker argued that “with few exceptions, the image which the YWCA in the South presents to the young students in the South is not the kind of image which would stimulate them to move ahead in new and creative ways.” Given the visibility of student Y members in much of the direct action movement, her critique probably centered on the continued segregation in community Y branches. Baker wanted the Y to have a more “cutting edge” and to get more involved in the various voter registration drives occurring throughout the South.<sup>686</sup> She was correct to point this out, as it seemed that the National Student Y was content with limiting its activities to campus visits to discuss Human Relations. Beyond sit-in participants, those students who wanted to get more involved were usually encouraged to locate a “CORE [and/or] NAACP action throughout the nation and then take suitable action on a local level.”<sup>687</sup>

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<sup>683</sup> Celestine Smith, “Our Interracial Concerns: Some Highlights of Regional Human Relations Activities for the Program Year 1961-1962,” October 23, 1962, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 155

<sup>684</sup> Minutes of the National Student Council YWCA, College Camp, Williams Bay, Wisconsin, August 27 – September 4, 1962, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 191, 16

<sup>685</sup> Sandra Casey Hayden, “Report on Visits in North Carolina,” February 26-March 6, 1962, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 246

<sup>686</sup> Minutes of the National Student YWCA Administrative Committee, June 1, 1962, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 155

<sup>687</sup> Minutes of the Annual Meeting Regional Student Council, April 1-3, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Reel 245.9, Region Pacific Southwest

Rosetta Gardner, who ran the Southern Regional Student Y, agreed with Baker about increasing the Student Y involvement in voter registration drives. She supported the efforts of current and former student Y members to lead and/or join drives in Raleigh, North Carolina; Nashville, Tennessee; Louisville, Kentucky; and Jackson, Mississippi among other southern cities. One of Gardner's former charges from the UT Austin Y, Dorothy Dawson (later Burlage) led a voter registration drive in North Carolina under the auspices of the National Student Association (NSA). Her original NSA placement was in Atlanta, in the same building as the Southern Region Y. Burlage attended UT Austin with Hayden, and their friendship continued in Atlanta. Her main advisor in organizing the voter registration drive was Baker, and she credited Baker and her Y experience for her decision to demand gender equality in leadership and labor in the registration event.<sup>688</sup> As more students became involved in voter registration drives, many realized "that there is more to voter registration/education than the numbers registered," and became more involved in the struggle for racial and economic justice.<sup>689</sup>

The leading civil rights organizations had banded together in promoting voter registration drives throughout the South, under the auspices of the Voter Education Project (VEP). The Southern Regional Council took coordinating control of VEP in 1961, and it was "prepared to devote full-time attention to painstaking planning needed to organize voter-registration drives on the precinct and county levels."<sup>690</sup> Some SNCC leaders were concerned that a massive suffrage drive would deflect much needed monies in other aspects of the direct action campaign, but quickly "realized with white liberals

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<sup>688</sup> Burlage. Personal Correspondence with author. 04/04/00

<sup>689</sup> Minutes of the National Student YWCA Administrative Committee, April 3, 1964, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 155

<sup>690</sup> Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969*, 262.

paying the bills, [SNCC] finances usually reserved for suffrage drives could be diverted into mass protest.”<sup>691</sup> Within a few years, voter registration drives were a central focus of SNCC and other student civil rights activists.

Gardner did have concerns about student safety in the voter registration drives. Violence was escalating throughout the South, especially towards students. She stated, “We must realize that if we go into these areas, there will be great tension, perhaps vilification, physical violence, etc. Should the National Student YWCA sponsor a project in these areas under these circumstances?” It was clear to Gardner that many of the students were going to act, with or without the protection of the Student Y, and she therefore began strategizing with other groups in the undertaking voter drives, including raising funds for bail and hospitalization.<sup>692</sup>

Reports from the Southwest Project were encouraging, as Anderson saw a direct correlation between those involved in the project and student leadership. A participant from Oklahoma State University was elected chairman of the Y Southwest Regional Council, and the president of the Bishop College chapter (post-Mae King) went on to become the North Texas Y sectional chairman for 1962-1963.<sup>693</sup> The leadership opportunities offered to these young women expanded their ideas and notions of gender roles and norms. As early as 1962, Dr. Celestine Smith began to map out ways to expand the Special Project on Human Relations from a race-based emphasis to include more gendered aspects. Students were encouraged to foster relationships “with other youth organizations such as CORE, SNCC, NSA, etc.,” while maintaining their “self-identity”

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<sup>691</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>692</sup> Minutes of the National Student YWCA Administrative Committee, November 3, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 155

<sup>693</sup> Edna T. Anderson, Field Foundation Report, 1961-1962 – Southwest, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 311, 27-28

as women “within a Christian movement.”<sup>694</sup> So while student Y members became more invested in both the Project and civil rights movement, they were also in turn sowing and reaping the seeds of the burgeoning women’s liberation movement.

There were staff changes for the 1962-1963 academic year, as Hayden moved on to work with SNCC full time. Mary King, a White student from Ohio Wesleyan University, and Roberta Yancy, a Black student at Barnard College, New York, joined the Southern Project. King became interested with the Special Project through Hayden, whom she had met on a Student Y sponsored trip to the South to examine the developing student direct action movement.<sup>695</sup> Yancy, who had already attended several civil rights meetings in Atlanta, credited Dorothy Dawson Burlage as the person who helped her get involved with the Y project.<sup>696</sup> Like Hayden, when their tenure was over with the Y, they both moved on to work for SNCC. King went to the SNCC Atlanta office and Yancy became the coordinator of SNCC campus programs, a position similar to her Y role.<sup>697</sup>

With two assistants, Baker was able to organize and lead several conferences throughout the Southern Region. In Fall 1962, members of SNCC, the Southern Regional Council, and the American Friends Service Committee, along with leading academics, like Vincent Harding and Howard Zinn, took part in a Student Y Special Project workshop in Atlanta.<sup>698</sup> A similar seminar was held at Memphis State University soon thereafter. A large Y-SNCC workshop was held in February 1963 at Maryville College in Tennessee, entitled the “Take Over Generation.” King and Yancy presented

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<sup>694</sup> Dr. Celestine Smith, A Report prepared for the Jacob R. Schiff Charitable Trust, “Developing Leader in Human Relations among College Women Students In Years of Crisis, 1958-1962” December 1962, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 311, 10

<sup>695</sup> King, *Freedom Song*.

<sup>696</sup> Yancy. Interview by author, May 26, 1999.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid.

<sup>698</sup> Program Human Relations Committee Meeting, National Student YWCA – Southern Region, November 16-18, 1962, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 311

papers on “Socioeconomic Factors and Human Relations” and “The Christian Layman and Human Relations,” respectively. In addition to Baker, SNCC leaders John Lewis, Marion Barry, and Bob Zellner gave speeches and led discussion groups.<sup>699</sup>

Other organizations and individuals also participated in Y sponsored conferences. CORE helped lead the National Race Relations Workshop held in August 1963. Barbara Jordan, the future Texas State Senator and first Black Southern Congresswoman, was one of twenty-five women leaders showcased at the event. Jordan would also attend other Y conferences, including serving as the keynote speaker at the 1965 Human Relations Conference for Women.<sup>700</sup> The Southwestern Project worked with the NAACP Youth Council to organize a January 1964 conference at Rust College in Mississippi. The three day conference was interracial, attracting “students from the University of Mississippi and Mississippi Industrial College,” a dangerous feat considering the time and place. The purpose of the conference was “to provide information to students on the status of civil rights in the South with particular emphasis on Mississippi and to stimulate student involvement in both civil rights and YWCA summer service projects.”<sup>701</sup>

Summer conferences, service projects, and ‘College Camps’ were popular with student Y members. At one summer conference, sixteen colleges were represented. The women were broken up into several teams in order to discuss “Housing in Slums, Urban

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<sup>699</sup> Edna T. Anderson and Ella J. Baker, “Report to the Field Foundation on the Special Project in Human Relations,” September 1, 1962 – August 31, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 246; East Tennessee Weekend Workshop on “The Take-Over Generation,” February 8-10, 1963, Maryville College, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 311

<sup>700</sup> National Student Y National Race Relations Workshop, Williams Bay, WI, August 24-28, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 311; Report of the Second Annual Campus-Community Dialogue – A Human Relations Conference for Women, April 23-25, 1965 – Southern Methodist University, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 311. For more on Barbara Jordan, see James Mendelsohn, *Barbara Jordan : Getting Things Done* (Brookfield, Conn.: Twenty-First Century Books, 2000), Max R. Sherman, ed., *Barbara Jordan : Speaking the Truth with Eloquent Thunder* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).

<sup>701</sup> “Report on YWCAs at Negro Colleges at Work on Civil Rights” 1963-1964, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 311

Renewal, Voter Registration, Community Work with Youth, Employment trends, [and] Human Relations Campaigns in a small town.”<sup>702</sup> Without the constraints of academic classes, students were also able to travel more widely and for longer periods of time in the summer. Therefore, summer events were more multiracial and more nationally represented than in the fall or spring. For some students, this was the first time they would have the chance to meet Asian American or Latina American students, or fellow members from places like Hawaii or Oregon (or New York or Georgia, for that matter). These types of interaction also encouraged young college women interested in interracial living, either for the summer or post-graduate life, to seek out Y residences in college towns. In Terra Haute, Indiana, the home of Indiana State University, the Y Residence Hall director wrote in the *YWCA Magazine* of the spirit of “true sisterhood.”<sup>703</sup> Readers were told that at the residence, “we have the Oriental, Negro, and Caucasian races. We have girls of the Catholic, Protestant, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Moslem, and Buddhist faiths. These girls all live under the same roof...they eat their meals together...where else can anyone find these races and religions living together and treating one another as members of their YWCA family?”<sup>704</sup> At the end of the article, an editor’s note informed readers that situations like this exist at Ys throughout the country.

Regional multiracial and interfaith action projects were discussed, reviewed, and organized at various College Camps and Y conferences throughout the 1963-1964 academic year. In the Southwest Region, year-round work with the Mexican American

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<sup>702</sup> Report on Summer Conference Project, Atlanta, “The City: Dialogue and Encounter” June 3-13, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 311

<sup>703</sup> Jean Lehman, “At a YWCA Residence: Living in the Spirit of True Brotherhood,” *The YWCA Magazine*, December 1963. “True sisterhood” is semi-paraphrased, as Lehman wrote, the “true meaning of brotherhood (or should I say sisterhood?)”

<sup>704</sup> Jean Lehman, “At a YWCA Residence: Living in the Spirit of True Brotherhood,” *The YWCA Magazine*, December 1963

community took place; and in a multi-year summer project in the Rocky Mountain area, student Y members worked with “Spanish, Negro, Indian and Caucasian children.” The New England Region reported collaboration with student Catholic groups in a project in Roxbury, a predominately Black neighborhood in Boston.<sup>705</sup>

While many of these efforts were led by regional leadership, the National Student Y in conjunction with the Southern Regional began strategizing in the fall of 1963 for a voter registration drive for the following summer in Mississippi.<sup>706</sup> The Y was one of many civil rights organizations planning a large-scale project for the summer of 1964. CORE designed a voter drive for Louisiana, and the National Council of Churches (NCC) also decided to hold events in the deep South through its Delta Ministry.<sup>707</sup> The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) ran “Freedom Summer,” a campaign that “brought hundreds of primarily white, northern college students to Mississippi for the summer to help staff freedom schools, register black voters, and dramatize the continued denial of civil rights to blacks throughout the South.”<sup>708</sup> COFO was an umbrella organization, consisting of SNCC, the NAACP, SCLC, and CORE.

Freedom Summer and the other 1964 summer projects transfixed the nation and world, as the efforts of the activists were met with increasing violence, including the murder of three Freedom Summer participants shortly after the launch of the project. By

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<sup>705</sup> Minutes of the National Student Council YWCA, College Camp, Williams Bay, Wisconsin, August 30 – September 2, 1964, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 191, 2

<sup>706</sup> Minutes of the National Student YWCA Administrative Committee, November 3, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 155, 7-9

<sup>707</sup> Carson, *In Struggle*, 99, Henry J. Pratt, "The Growth of Political Activism in the National Council of Churches," *The Review of Politics* 34, no. 3 (1972): 336, Rothschild, "White Women Volunteers in the Freedom Summers: Their Life and Work in a Movement for Social Change," 469.

<sup>708</sup> Roberto M. Fernandez and Doug McAdam, "Social Networks and Social Movements: Multiorganizational Fields and Recruitment to Mississippi Freedom Summer," *Sociological Forum* 3, no. 3 (1988): 359. For more on Freedom Summer see Carson, *In Struggle*, McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*.

the end of the summer, four others were “shot and wounded, fifty-two beaten, and 250 arrested in connection with the project.”<sup>709</sup> While leaders of COFO deplored the violence, they also believed that “national sentiment would not tolerate assaults against white students, especially those from leading colleges and prominent families,” and would result in greater interest and action in opening up Mississippi to civil rights.<sup>710</sup> The Y had also feared the violent retaliation and started a campaign to raise funds in the fall of 1963 for the possible “hospitalization” of its students during its own 1964 Summer Project.<sup>711</sup>

While the Y was not technically a member of COFO’s Freedom Summer, it collaborated with SNCC and other “already established organizations” for its own 1964 summer voter project by organizing students and placing volunteers.<sup>712</sup> Kicking off in the Spring 1964 and running through the summer, over six hundred student Y members led the “Every Woman is a Registered Voter” campaign in eight cities: St. Louis, Missouri; Berkeley, California; Raleigh and Greensboro, North Carolina; Birmingham, Alabama; Atlanta, Georgia; Louisville, Kentucky; and Richmond, Virginia.<sup>713</sup> In training the students for the drives, the Y shared many of the same strategies used by SNCC, the screening of participant applicants, teaching nonviolent philosophies, and the training of the would-be activists.

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<sup>709</sup> R. Edward Nordhaus, "S. N. C. C. And the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi, 1963-64: A Time of Change," *The History Teacher* 17, no. 1 (1983): 97.

<sup>710</sup> Carson, *In Struggle*, 98.

<sup>711</sup> Minutes of the National Student YWCA Administrative Committee, November 3, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 155

<sup>712</sup> Minutes of the National Student YWCA Administrative Committee, November 3, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 155, 7-9

<sup>713</sup> "600 Students in 8 Cities to Aid Voter Registration," *New York Times* March 22 1964, "College Students to Push Vote Registration," *Atlanta Daily World* March 22 1964.

### The Movement toward Women's Liberation

The summer of 1964 also transformed the gender dynamics of the country. Women had been at the forefront of the movement since its early days, though never in particularly public leadership positions.<sup>714</sup> With the influx of thousands of young women to the South in the summer of 1964, women with varying degrees of movement and/or activist experience and from different generations and regions were able to meet for the first time. Many volunteered and worked together under the auspices of SNCC, as it was the organization that spearheaded the Freedom Summer project. SNCC “celebrated the dignity and the fundamental decision-making ability of each individual, translating these themes into calls for self-determination and participatory democracy for all peoples.” This proved empowering for many of these women. As sociologist Doug McAdam has noted, the egalitarian “ideology of Freedom Summer...reinforced the positive personal messages most of the female volunteers took from the summer.”<sup>715</sup> Yet, the ideals of equality were “not always realized in practice...female volunteers were exposed to forms of discrimination that, in the face of the project's more egalitarian rhetoric, began to produce in them an experimental awareness of sexism.”<sup>716</sup> McAdam also argues that many of the female summer volunteers were unable to fully “name” and identify the discrimination experienced, because they lacked the “perspective and the language” that would be created in the upcoming feminist movement.<sup>717</sup> Historian Susan Lynn has also proposed that “women in mixed-sex organizations had fewer sources of support for

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<sup>714</sup> Crawford, Rouse, and Woods, eds., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement*.

<sup>715</sup> McAdam, "Gender as a Mediator of the Activist Experience: The Case of Freedom Summer," 1224.

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid.*: 1225.

<sup>717</sup> *Ibid.*: 1228.

developing or articulating an analysis of discrimination based on gender.”<sup>718</sup> The women of the Y, however, already had the foundation that helped express their gendered views and some did so immediately.

After the Freedom Summer of 1964, a retreat for SNCC staff was proposed to air grievances and to re-examine organizational structure. Members were asked to submit papers that dealt with the restructuring of SNCC. Mary King and Casey Hayden anonymously submitted a position paper on the role of women in society and in SNCC. King later admitted she was afraid the paper would be ridiculed.<sup>719</sup> The paper criticized the fact that men dominated committees and leadership. It also highlighted the demeaning tasks that were expected of women in SNCC, “no matter what her position or experience,” including the taking of “minutes in a meeting when she and other women were outnumbered by men.”<sup>720</sup> After listing the various instances where sex discrimination was apparent, the authors analyzed the role of women in SNCC and in the larger society. They compared the roles of Blacks in a White society to women in a man’s world. They argued that sexism was hurting SNCC because so “much talent and experience are being wasted by this movement, when women are not given jobs commensurate with their abilities.”<sup>721</sup>

This position paper reflected what King and Hayden had originally learned at the Y, first as student members and then as staff. After joining SNCC, Mary King noticed a similarity between it and the Y. She stated that the committee structure, the consultative

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<sup>718</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 125.

<sup>719</sup> King, *Freedom Song*.

<sup>720</sup> *Ibid.*, 568.

<sup>721</sup> *Ibid.*, 569.

nature, and the need for consensus were common to both organizations.<sup>722</sup> These young women, as well as the scores of other Y participants in the movement “had had already transcended traditional gender expectations to a considerable degree,” making them in some cases more “radical” than their male activist counterparts.<sup>723</sup> Y members were fortunate that their prior activist involvement allowed them some freedom to volunteer placement and other jobs. SNCC leaders were more likely to accept female applicants if they were already a member of another social justice organization; this was not case for male applicants. It has been hypothesized that prior activist experience for women translated into a deeper commitment to civil rights issues, as at the time it was still considered against the norm for women to be involved in the ‘non-traditional’ role of organizing. McAdam argues that this sense of a “greater commitment” to civil rights, enabled “female volunteers to overcome the severe opposition they encountered” as women in a male dominated organization.<sup>724</sup> As Y members fanned across the movement into different groups and projects, they took with them this sense of “greater commitment,” as well as their leadership training from the Y. It is no surprise then that the 1964 Position Paper, one of the cornerstones of the burgeoning women’s movement, came from two Y women active in the civil rights movement.<sup>725</sup>

By the end of 1964, many SNCC volunteers, including most of the northern White participants, returned to their college campuses and communities. The events of

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<sup>722</sup> King. Interview with author. April 1999.

<sup>723</sup> McAdam, "Gender as a Mediator of the Activist Experience: The Case of Freedom Summer," 1235, Rothschild, "White Women Volunteers in the Freedom Summers: Their Life and Work in a Movement for Social Change," 476.

<sup>724</sup> McAdam, "Gender as a Mediator of the Activist Experience: The Case of Freedom Summer," 1222-23.

<sup>725</sup> The 1964 Position Paper has been hailed as a cornerstone of the feminist movement in Evans, *Personal Politics*, McAdam, "Gender as a Mediator of the Activist Experience: The Case of Freedom Summer.", Rothschild, "White Women Volunteers in the Freedom Summers: Their Life and Work in a Movement for Social Change."

Freedom Summer led to fractures in the movement along race, class, and gender lines. While some stayed behind to continue their social justice work, others joined new freedom struggles focusing on self-determination (Black Power) and the anti-war movement. Many women began moving towards the women's liberation movement. McAdam has shown that for female volunteers there was a correlation indicating "the number of their political affiliations prior to the summer that bears the strongest relationship to the political course of their lives since Freedom Summer."<sup>726</sup> For King and Hayden, their participation in the movement grew into a larger call for race and gender equality. In 1965, they wrote another paper, this one directed at women in various peace and justice organizations.<sup>727</sup> Specifically aimed "to black women – longtime friends and comrades-in-nonviolent arms," King and Hayden intended to develop a dialogue that recognized the interlocking nature of race and gender.<sup>728</sup> They cited issues that had been raised by the civil rights movement, including work-related problems and personal relations, and concluded that a space needed to be created so those topics could be discussed without reprisal.<sup>729</sup> The paper was published in *Liberation Magazine* in 1966 and touched a nerve with many women across the country.<sup>730</sup> The women's liberation movement had begun within the civil rights movement.<sup>731</sup>

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<sup>726</sup> McAdam, "Gender as a Mediator of the Activist Experience: The Case of Freedom Summer," 1235-36.

<sup>727</sup> King, *Freedom Song*, 571.

<sup>728</sup> Evans, *Personal Politics*, 100.

<sup>729</sup> King, *Freedom Song*, 573.

<sup>730</sup> Evans, *Personal Politics*, 100.

<sup>731</sup> There were other events that took place in the early 1960s that encouraged women to take a more vocal stand on women's rights. One of the more known events was the publication of Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* in 1963. Mary King has stated in her autobiography that many of the SNCC women read this book with as much passion as they did Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (considered a classic by many civil rights activists). The Position Paper by King and Hayden differs from Friedan, as this paper was not widely circulated outside of their activist circle, unlike Friedan who had mass appeal. Yet, I argue that the Paper had a more of an impact within the activist circle as it was written by two of their own. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1965), Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, King, *Freedom Song*.

### Women's Liberation outside of the Civil Rights Movement

In the years since the Y refused to merge with the YMCA and committed itself to being an 'autonomous women's movement,' huge changes had swept the country. While the association had always stressed female leadership and empowerment, it became more vocal on this matter during the 1960s. Its investment in the civil rights movement certainly propelled members and staff towards a more radical stance on gender equality. For the Y, "to be a women's organization in the sixties means to meet head on the perplexities that face individual women and to struggle constantly to disentangle stereotypes."<sup>732</sup> The National Board created a "Work Tool" for Campus Ys, entitled, "Being Me – a Woman – in the 1960's" which covered topics such as premarital sex and education goals. In broaching these discussions, at no point were staff or others to "fall into the trap of moralizing." The plan was to create "relevant programming in Christian faith" for future women leaders in the Y, the community, and the nation.<sup>733</sup> In 1964 the National Board created the "Every Women is a Registered Voter" campaign, and enlisted hundreds of Y student members from over 100 colleges to lead it.<sup>734</sup> The association knew that this action would only further cross generational discussions of female empowerment.

Even with the socially constructed 'domestic ideal,' the Y served as a safe haven for single non-conformist women, as well as encouraging young married women to join

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<sup>732</sup> Helen F. Southard, "To Be a Woman..." *The YWCA Magazine*, February 1962

<sup>733</sup> Jean Whittet, "Being Me – a Woman – in the 1960's: A Work Tool for use with Campus YWCAs" January 1962, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 30

<sup>734</sup> "600 Students in 8 Cities to Aid Voter Registration.", "College Students to Push Vote Registration."

its newly created Y-Wives.<sup>735</sup> The same year Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* was published in 1963, the *YWCA Magazine* published an article that echoed Friedan's arguments about bored educated housewives.<sup>736</sup> The article's author, Sheila Martinsen wrote how happy she had been in her career, even while she was married with a child – and how miserable she was once had to give up her career to follow her husband to his new job in California. She soon grew “to hate the word ‘support,’ to hate housekeeping...I came to know housekeeping as a long agony of goalless drudgery, motherhood as a perpetual drain upon my rapidly diminishing resources, and wifehood as a relationship in which love is not enough.” She then “learned of the YWCA's program for young wives.” There, she “had the companionship of those who had problems similar to mine, but who also had personalities and backgrounds and capabilities different from mine.”<sup>737</sup> Martinsen concluded by strongly encouraging other young married women to get involved in community organizing and to become politically involved at the local and national level. At the same time, the National Y held a meeting on how to convince college women to stay and earn their degree, rather than drop out to get married and have children. Women were to be told of their “choices” in life, and that they alone had to make them. One married participant felt “that the YWCA could do a real service in this field, showing women the areas of choice,” and that women had the power to make conscious decisions for themselves.<sup>738</sup>

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<sup>735</sup> This was a program created in the 1950s throughout local branches geared towards housewives. Since controlled by local branches, no two Y-Wives programs were the same, but most of the programs attempted to keep housewives involved in political activities.

<sup>736</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*. Sheila. Martinsen, “The Untrapped Housewife,” *The YWCA Magazine*, October-November 1963

<sup>737</sup> Sheila. Martinsen, “The Untrapped Housewife,” *The YWCA Magazine*, October-November 1963

<sup>738</sup> Minutes of the National Student YWCA Administrative Committee, April 3, 1964, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 155

The National Board soon embraced the idea of conscious power in women's lives as they planned events featuring Esther Peterson, the Assistance U.S. Secretary of Labor, to discuss the "Status of Women," and Betty Friedan for two talks on "The Open Mind: The Emancipated Women" and "Professional Opportunities for Women."<sup>739</sup> During a 1964 national membership drive, Mamie Davis, one of the highest ranking African American women on the National Board, gave a stump speech entitled "A Woman's Place Is?" to women in the western region. Davis told listeners that a woman's place was in politics, the church, world affairs, and in the community. She also stated that, "It is essential that the YWCA provides educational and training opportunities for women and girls in order that they may: a) gain confidence and competence to act with a clear sense of direction, b) develop a critical mind and constructive attitudes c) be alert to the possibilities of mass media as well as to the dangers they present."<sup>740</sup>

As the country around the Y changed due to the civil rights movement, the escalation of the Vietnam War, and the assassination of the President John F. Kennedy, among other events, the Y never changed in its fight for a more tolerant world. It never forgot its commitment to racial and religious inclusiveness as it forged ahead as an "autonomous women's movement." At a National Student Y conference in the Spring of 1965, students, staff, and faculty, agreed that communication "between women of different ages and racial groups," was its top priority. As this conference was attended by leaders of United Church Women, the National Council of Catholic Women, the Girls

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<sup>739</sup> "Public Affairs Suggestions, 1964" San Francisco YWCA Papers, Box "Planning Committee Meetings"

<sup>740</sup> "YWCA Membership Meeting – Thursday, February 6, 1964" San Francisco YWCA Papers, Box "Planning Committee Meetings"

Scouts, and the League of Women Voters, the Y was signaling its steadfastness to a “triple revolution” of racial, gender, and class equality.<sup>741</sup>

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<sup>741</sup> Report of the Second Annual Campus-Community Dialogue – A Human Relations Conference for Women, April 23-25, 1965 – Southern Methodist University, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 311

## Chapter 4

### “We are being forced (called on) to move”: Direct Action, Self Determination, and the One Imperative of the YWCA

Helen Jackson Wilkins Claytor, a well known and respected figure in the Y for nearly forty years, was elected the National Board President at the 1967 national convention. Joining the organization in 1928, she had served as a staff and board member at both the local and national levels. In 1944 she co-authored the seminal Y text, *Interracial Practices in Community Y.W.C.A.'s*, which served as the foundation for the 1946 Interracial Charter.<sup>742</sup> Shortly afterwards, she became the first Black woman in the entire organization to be elected as a local Board President at a majority White branch in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In the twenty years leading up to her 1967 election, Claytor was routinely appointed to the National Board as a representative of the Central Region and served as the Vice President at Large for the National Board in the early 1960s. Her career trajectory led her directly to the Presidency, and there was little surprise internally about her achievement.<sup>743</sup> In contrast, media coverage of the election framed Claytor's ascendancy as a Black woman in the Y as historic, and portrayed the Y as a staid organization which, with this election, was finally catching up to the times.<sup>744</sup>

Andrea Block, a Vice Chairman of the Student Y, wrote the head of the National Student Y, Margaret Norton, describing both her excitement and frustration at the outcome of the convention. She was happy with the election, considering Claytor “an

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<sup>742</sup> Bell and Wilkins, *Interracial Practices in Community Y. W. C. A. 'S*.

<sup>743</sup> Roger W. Wilkins, *A Man's Life: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 232.

<sup>744</sup> "A First," *The Washington Post*, April 30 1967, "National YWCA Elects First Negro President," *The Chicago Defender*, May 6 1967, "National YWCA Picks Negro as President," *Los Angeles Times*, April 30 1967, "Y. W. C. A. Elects Its First Negro Chief," *Chicago Tribune*, April 30 1967, "Y.W.C.A. Elects First Negro Head," *New York Times*, April 30 1967.

outstanding woman who can guide our movement with skillful leadership and grace as it continues and expands its existence in the real world.”<sup>745</sup> Yet she was dismayed not only by the media coverage claiming the Y’s “unprecedented action” in electing Claytor, but also by the Y’s silence on this matter. Block emphatically wrote Norton, “Mrs. Claytor was elected because she is a human being...not because she is a Negro woman.” She was appalled by the public’s ignorance of both Claytor’s career and the Y’s progressive race history. She felt that by the media highlighting Claytor’s race, they spoke to the “deep racism” within the country and brought unwanted “attention to the very separateness which [the Y is] striving to abolish.” Yet it also seemed that Y leaders were happy to emphasize Claytor’s race in order to promote the progressive reputation of the organization. She concluded her letter with the retelling of a recent “painful confrontation” with a friend who applauded the recent election and said “that the YWCA was really ‘in’ because it had just elected a Negro President.” This made Block “literally...sick inside” and “brought before [her the] razor-sharpness [of] the depth of racism in our society.”<sup>746</sup>

Norton responded immediately. She echoed the same “sense of sickness” caused by the “acclamations to being ‘in.’” Norton also wished that the newspaper articles would have shared more of Claytor’s “qualifications as a person rather than any history-making aspects.” She wrote of her own uneasiness with the situation and wanted to think more about this turn of events for the organization, in terms of leadership and future

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<sup>745</sup> Andrea Block, Vice Chairman National Student Y, to Margaret Norton, Executive Director National Student Y, May 4, 1967, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 191

<sup>746</sup> Ibid.

direction.<sup>747</sup> This emphasis on racial identity, instead of racial inclusiveness, concerned both women deeply.

The 1967 convention should have been a time of self-congratulation for the organization. It had successfully concluded its aggressive desegregation of southern branches and updated its Christian Purpose. Members were now asked to respond to the “barrier-breaking love of God.” Yet public and media surprise at Claytor’s election showed that all the race work undertaken by the Y since World War II, not to mention its activism just during the 1960s, had been scarcely noticed or remembered. Civil rights continued to be a pressing matter for the country, but emerging social justice movements, from anti-war and women’s liberation to self-determination movements among Chicanos, Native Americans, and Blacks were now competing for center stage.<sup>748</sup> While the Y supported these movements, and at times led aspects of them, the organization was getting lost in the shuffle. Also, its continued insistence on fighting for race and gender empowerment simultaneously when most organizations were concentrating on a single

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<sup>747</sup> Margaret Norton to Andrea Block, May 8, 1967, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 191

<sup>748</sup> For more on these movements see Steven Bender, *One Night in America : Robert Kennedy, Cesar Chavez, and the Dream of Dignity* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines, *"Takin' It to the Streets" : A Sixties Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (London,: Cape, 1968), George Pierre Castile, *Taking Charge : Native American Self-Determination and Federal Indian Policy, 1975-1993* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006), George Pierre Castile, *To Show Heart : Native American Self-Determination and Federal Indian Policy, 1960-1975* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), Gerard J. De Groot, *Student Protest : The Sixties and After* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998), Evans, *Personal Politics*, Marc Jason Gilbert, *The Vietnam War on Campus : Other Voices, More Distant Drums* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001), George Mariscal, *Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun : Lessons from the Chicano Movement, 1965-1975* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), August Meier, John H. Bracey, and Elliott M. Rudwick, *Black Protest in the Sixties*, 1st Markus Wiener Pub., Inc. ed. (New York: M. Wiener Pub., 1991), Miguel Melendez, *We Took the Streets : Fighting for Latino Rights with the Young Lords*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003), Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets : From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*, Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism : Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave*.

cause, as well as the commitment to its Christian Purpose, made it an anomaly in the increasingly secular identity politics of the left.<sup>749</sup>

The end of the 1960s is remembered for its major social and political upheavals, leading to the reactive “silent majority” clamping down on social movements agitating for peace, justice, and equality.<sup>750</sup> The seeds for these upheavals were planted in the early half of that decade when thousands of young students began demanding more of their country and community. Their activism, coupled with the work of older organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League (NUL), and newer groups, such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), pressured the federal government to pass major civil rights legislation in 1964 and 1965. Yet, the civil rights movement was soon in disarray as fissures along racial, gender, class, regional, and generational lines widened. The southern Black freedom struggle had opened up doors all over the country for many who were previously excluded from political, economic, and social institutions. As they laid claim to these opportunities there was a significant shift in leadership and tone in the fight for civil rights. The older leaders and organizations that had shepherded the movement were being displaced by younger ones, many of whom were new to the

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<sup>749</sup> Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* Rossinow examines the New Left’s quest for “authenticity” from its original base in Christianity to secularism via “self liberation.” For more on rise of the conservative evangelicalism (as the left moved away from Christianity), see E. J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 209-41.

<sup>750</sup> For more the silent majority see Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich : Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994, The Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), David R. Farber and Jeff Roche, *The Conservative Sixties* (New York: P. Lang, 2003), Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority : Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm : Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland : The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008).

national scene and were adamant about taking the struggle for social justice in disparate directions. The old guard attempted to adapt to the changes taking place, especially as they saw their membership decrease. No longer did people have to join a national organization to have their voices heard since there was now a proliferation of grassroots groups catering to specific local community needs.

The Y went through a tremendous transformation during this decade. Going into the 1960s, the greatest threat to its Christian fellowship of women and girls, regardless of race, was southern White pro-segregationist branches. Less than ten years later, it was Black separatist groups. Clearly, the Y was not immune to the rapid changes affecting older organizations, the civil rights movement, and the nation. Y leaders of all ages and races scrambled to redefine the organization, with hopes of staying relevant in fast changing times. While it made valiant efforts to adapt to the changing politics and demands in its continued fight to improve race relations, it also continued along the trajectory it had begun in World War II, trying to build that Christian fellowship. This dual effort led the Y to create new policies and programs, but it faced increasing disenchantment among outsiders. As it had most for most of its history, the organization was forced to continue its singular path toward racial and gender empowerment.

### The Direct Action Program

In preparation for the 1961 national convention, members of the National Board voted to recommend that all convention delegates “reaffirm our desire to be ONE ASSOCIATION with ONE MEMBERSHIP and ONE PURPOSE.” The events of the preceding year, namely the student direct action movement (the sit-ins), demanded a

“reassessment of YWCA policy and purpose,” and gave the Y a “new urgency for concerted action” toward becoming “a truly inclusive fellowship of women and girls.” National Board members also recommended for discussion at the convention the need to initiate “new efforts and [move] ahead steadily to open YWCA residences and all other facilities to persons of all races,” and to strengthen relations with “other agencies, institutions, churches, religious and civic groups to further the acceptance of all races in changing neighborhoods.” The Board expected the organization to continue its support of the “non-violent movement in human relations” by “creating a climate conducive” to civil rights.<sup>751</sup>

Convention delegates approved the Board’s recommendations, and Elizabeth Marvel, the newly elected National Board President, committed to making these recommendations a reality. Marvel worked closely with the national executive secretary, Edith Lerrigo, to address the unevenness of the Y’s “inclusive membership movement.”<sup>752</sup> In 1962 and 1963, the two leaders, along with Helen Claytor, undertook a national listening tour focused on local commitment to race related programs, outreach, and leadership. It became clear to the women “with an ever-increasing unease at the evidence that the [dearth of women of color in the] president and executive director categories do not reflect our deep concern to be inclusive.” While they were unable to go to every branch, they did visit many, and by the end of their trip, had met with only two Black board presidents and two Black executive directors. In addition, they met with “no women of other racial minority backgrounds in either category.” The lack of integration

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<sup>751</sup> Lilace Reid Barnes to Headquarters-based Members of the National Board, December 21, 1960, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

<sup>752</sup> “Statement in Respect to Certain Interracial Practices in the 1960’s,” February 28, 1961, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 124

at the local leadership level, as well as an ambivalence in many local branches to “facing the urgent human relations issues of our day was revealed to us as a part of the reason more topflight Negro women are not attracted to and/or held by the YWCA. We seem, in some places, to have lost our pioneer role in this area and to be sustaining ourselves with pride in our outstanding past.”<sup>753</sup> The women believed there were four ways to work on this problem: to push for open housing initiatives (as de facto residential segregation hurt the inclusiveness goals of community branches); to open YWCA buildings and programs; to better train staff and volunteers in human relations; and to re-examine the Interracial Charter in light of the current situation.<sup>754</sup>

The Y was not alone in outlining its future race relations work. The civil rights movement, too, had undergone a transformation with the influx of student leadership and activists into the movement. With the creation of the SNCC in 1960, young people were leading direct action movements across the South – most notably the sit-ins and the Freedom Rides.<sup>755</sup> Under the Kennedy Administration, the federal government became more involved in protecting both the activists and the right to vote.<sup>756</sup> Outside of the South, communities were also starting to evaluate local racial practices, including the need for open housing.<sup>757</sup>

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<sup>753</sup> Elizabeth Marvel, Helen Claytor, and Edith Lerrigo, “Impressions Gained during Consultations with Presidents and Executives: May – December 1962,” February 27, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 170, 9-10

<sup>754</sup> Elizabeth Marvel, Helen Claytor, and Edith Lerrigo, “Impressions Gained during Consultations with Presidents and Executives: May – December 1962,” February 27, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 170, 9-10

<sup>755</sup> Both of these actions were discussed in Chapter 3. For more on them see: Carson, *In Struggle*, Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC's Dream for a New America*, Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*.

<sup>756</sup> Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969*, Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941*.

<sup>757</sup> De Graaf, Mulroy, and Taylor, *Seeking El Dorado*, Quintard Taylor, “The Civil Rights Movement in the American West: Black Protest in Seattle, 1960-1970,” *The Journal of Negro History* 80, no. 1 (1995),

After their tour, Marvel, Lerrigo, and Claytor spent the next few months creating a new way to address race related issues and policies affecting the organization. A previous program, “Step by Step,” which had been spearheaded by Dorothy Height following the end of World War II, was now considered inadequate.<sup>758</sup> In order to face the “intensified struggle for civil rights,” it was decided that the Y had to embark on a new program to achieve inclusiveness. Marvel wrote to the membership that the “Direct Action programs of Negroes...have precipitated us all into a new situation almost overnight. Would to God we were more ready for it. In most communities we are not. But we no longer have any choice....We are being forced (called on) to move.” The new program, taking its name from the Black southern freedom struggle, was called the (direct) Action Program and its purpose was to reassess the Y’s “life and program” to see what changes were required for the “total desegregation and integration” of the organization, not to mention the larger community and nation. Marvel was clear that these institutional changes would “come either voluntarily or as the result of pressure.”<sup>759</sup> Most of the focus would be on the southern branches, as only 13 percent had fully desegregated by the summer in 1963. The National Board allocated funds to launch the program and an interracial team, led by Dorothy Height and Mary Jean Whittet, was assigned to complete the program’s tasks within two years.<sup>760</sup> The Y decided that the time had come to insist that all members comply with its inclusiveness goals.

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Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, *Freedom North : Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>758</sup> Height, *Step by Step with Interracial Groups*.

<sup>759</sup> Mrs. Archie D. Marvel, Mrs. Robert W. Claytor, and Miss Edith Lerrigo to “Dear Friends,” June 28, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

<sup>760</sup> Mrs. Archie D. Marvel, Mrs. Paul McClellan Jones, Mrs. Robert W. Claytor, and Miss Edith Lerrigo to Presidents and Executives Directors of Community YWCAs, Chairman of Committees on Administration and Branch Executives, and Student YWCA leaders, “Urgent Memo on Civil Rights,” July 30, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

While the main goal of Y's Action Program was to desegregate and integrate all the community branches, National leaders were interested in creating a truly inclusive community, not just a desegregated one.<sup>761</sup> Leaders warned branches against measures such as racial tokenism at the staff and board level, or "doing for" rather than "working with" members on issues pertaining to race. They emphasized that what was necessary was honest dialogue among all members and an honest assessment of one's prejudices and actions. Marvel told the membership,

it is important for YWCA leaders – especially those of us who are white – to remember that however deeply concerned or well-intentioned we are, we can neither understand the situation fully, know what the hidden discriminations are, nor can we know the wisest ways to help remove them. This kind of understanding can only come with the help and thought of those of us who are Negro. We must sit down together, Negro and white, in every community, in every YWCA, to know what is demanded of us as Christian Associations in this critical period. This is a part of our strength in the YWCA. We are inclusive in membership, but we must learn to share together at depths we may have never known before. Only so can we reach the truth and know how to act wisely.<sup>762</sup>

For Marvel and her inner circle of Lerrigo, Claytor, Height, Whittet, and a few others, it was understood that all members needed to engage at a heightened level of racial consciousness in order to succeed in forming a committed inclusive membership. The racial consciousness of the nation had certainly been raised by the civil rights movement, and many of the Black civil rights "activists were explicitly concerned with developing...race consciousness among black people," believing this consciousness was the path to self and community liberation.<sup>763</sup> Sociologist Paula Stewart Brush argues that at the center of one's race consciousness is the ability to build theories and engage in

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<sup>761</sup> The segregation of student branches depended on the racial policies of the host college campus. The Y was committed to the racial desegregation of education, and worked to desegregate academic institutions in order to desegregate student branches.

<sup>762</sup> Mrs. Archie D. Marvel, Mrs. Robert W. Claytor, and Miss Edith Lerrigo to "Dear Friends," June 28, 1963

<sup>763</sup> Paula Stewart Brush, "Problematizing the Race Consciousness of Women of Color," *Signs* 27, no. 1 (2001): 181.

political strategies “that enable [one]...to understand the personal as political.”<sup>764</sup> Scholars have linked the “consciousness-raising strategies...[of] the Civil Rights and Black Power movements” to creating “new identities” for Black women along racial and gender lines.<sup>765</sup> White women participants were also deeply affected, though most scholarly examinations focus on the development of White women’s gender consciousness, rather than their racial consciousness.<sup>766</sup> As a multiracial organization, though majority White, the Y offered a unique environment during the 1960s, functioning as a place for all women to process ideas of gender and race simultaneously. Not only did the civil rights movement strongly affect Y outreach and policies, as seen in the creation of the Action Program and other initiatives, it also served to reinforce (or prick at times) the progressive racial consciousness of the organization.

In July 1963, shortly after the launch of the Action Program, the Y’s national executive staff held a meeting with the upper echelon of civil rights leadership, including Whitney Young of the NUL, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, James Farmer of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Bill Mahoney of SNCC, and Dr. J. Oscar Lee of the National Council of Churches. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was also slated to attend, but at the last minute was unable to participate. The purpose of the conference was to discuss how best to respond to “changes needed in our work because of the new

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<sup>764</sup> Ibid.: 172.

<sup>765</sup> Ibid.: 182. Brush uses Belinda Robnett’s work in highlighting the link between the movements and Black women’s race consciousness, and black feminism. Robnett, *How Long? How Long?*, 37.

<sup>766</sup> Evans, *Personal Politics*, McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, McAdam, “Gender as a Mediator of the Activist Experience: The Case of Freedom Summer.” For newer histories that examine the connection between the civil rights movement and the racial and gender consciousness of White women, see Constance Curry, ed., *Deep in Our Hearts : Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000), Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism : Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America’s Second Wave*, Thompson, *A Promise and a Way of Life : White Antiracist Activism*.

situation resulting from the work of the Direct Action Movements for Civil Rights.”<sup>767</sup> The group brainstormed on “technique and strategy” for the Y’s Action Program, examined ways in which to best prepare communities for action, discussed how to have better communication between Blacks and Whites, and planned future collaboration with the other organizations. The civil rights leaders also asked the Y to be an official sponsor to the upcoming March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom to be held the following month in the nation’s capital.<sup>768</sup> Originally aimed at demanding economic justice, the March shifted focus to show support for the civil rights legislation introduced by President John F. Kennedy in June 1963. The bill called for giving more power to the federal government to ensure school desegregation and to withhold funds from “federally supported programs and facilities in which discrimination occurred.”<sup>769</sup>

While the majority of National Board members believed the Y should be a sponsor, only a few personally supported the March itself. One member thought the March “ill timed” and was “fearful of the Communist element,” yet she also believed the Y “must give approval” to this “positive action.”<sup>770</sup> Helen Claytor also was not in favor of the March, but believed the Y “must” support it.<sup>771</sup> Another member hoped that if the March was successful in getting President Kennedy’s civil rights legislation passed, it would in turn help “Chinese, Japanese & other...near-east – Mexican – Porta [sic] Ricans

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<sup>767</sup> Mrs. Paul McClellan Jones to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., July 3, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171 [The same letter was sent to all invited guests]

<sup>768</sup> Mrs. Archie D. Marvel, Mrs. Paul McClellan Jones, Mrs. Robert W. Claytor, and Miss Edith Lerrigo to Presidents and Executives Directors of Community YWCAs, Chairman of Committees on Administration and Branch Executives, and Student YWCA leaders, “Urgent Memo on Civil Rights,” July 30, 1963

<sup>769</sup> Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1980*, 158-66.

<sup>770</sup> “NOYES,” Handwritten notes on “Phone calls and Letters from X Committee reaction on proposal to support March,” 1963 (July), National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

<sup>771</sup> “CLAYTOR,” Handwritten notes on “Phone calls and Letters from X Committee reaction on proposal to support March,” 1963 (July), National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171. Claytor simply was against any kind of large demonstrations, no matter what they stood for.

(etc.) who are also Americans.”<sup>772</sup> Dorothy Height was very supportive of the March, but she was not as involved with the Y’s participation. In addition to her job at the Y, Height was also the President of the National Council for Negro Women (NCNW). She led that organization at the March.<sup>773</sup> At the end of the extended debate on the topic, the Executive Committee of the National Board agreed not only to be a sponsor of the March, but also voted to “recognize and designate August 28, 1963 as Freedom Day in commemoration of the Centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation and that the National Board offices be closed and regular activities suspended for that day.”<sup>774</sup>

News of the decision went out to all student and community branches. Reaction from them was swift.<sup>775</sup> The San Jose, California branch was initially fearful “that the March would result in violence,” until a board member “spoke in a very quiet way of her concern as a Christian that this was an issue where she must do something to express her convictions. This changed the tone of the meeting – and the Board moved from fear of taking a stand into some real action.” While the San Jose branch chose not to officially endorse the March, several individual members and staff participated in a local march sponsored by the NAACP. The debate concerning the March led Board members to a discussion of how to strengthen its inclusiveness goals and how to design a more creative

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<sup>772</sup> Sally Clark (Mrs. Ralph A.) to Mildred Jones and Edith Lerrigo, July 24, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

<sup>773</sup> Dorothy I. Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates : A Memoir*, 1st ed. (New York: PublicAffairs, 2003).

<sup>774</sup> Mrs. Paul McClellan Jones, Vice President, to Mr. Cleveland Robinson, Chairman, Administrative Committee, March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 2, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

<sup>775</sup> Mrs. Archie D. Marvel, Mrs. Paul McClellan Jones, Mrs. Robert W. Claytor, and Miss Edith Lerrigo to Presidents and Executives Directors of Community YWCAs, Chairman of Committees on Administration and Branch Executives, and Student YWCA leaders, “Urgent Memo on Civil Rights,” July 30, 1963

outreach to the Black community.<sup>776</sup> Similarly, the Portland, Oregon branch also used the March as a chance to reexamine its inclusiveness outreach and programs. Unlike San Jose, Portland firmly joined the National Y as a sponsor and invited “citizens of Portland to participate in a day of prayer on August 28<sup>th</sup> at the YWCA Chapel or Church of your choice.” The branch also collaborated with the local Urban League, SNCC, NAACP, and Council of Churches to fund a bus to carry marchers to Washington, D.C.<sup>777</sup>

Other western region branches also supported and/or sponsored the March, including Berkeley, California and Eugene, Oregon. The Los Angeles Association held prayer vigils throughout its branches on the day of the March. The Tucson, Arizona branch was highly supportive of the March and immediately began working with the Mayor’s Commission on Human Rights.<sup>778</sup> It seems that the 1962 national listening tour by Marvel, Lerrigo, and Claytor had not stopped in Tucson, so the branch was eager to update the National on its “excellent Race-Relations practices,” including “our very good” Board of Directors President, Miss Banks, a Black woman. Banks was also on the board of the local NAACP, and the two organizations frequently worked together. The branch was proud that it attracted membership of “all races,” and was committed to combating “Tucson’s chief [racial] problems [of] employment and housing.”<sup>779</sup>

There was significant positive response from various southern branches, including Asheville, North Carolina, which sped up its desegregation efforts and could claim open facilities eight days before the March. The New Orleans, Louisiana and Norfolk,

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<sup>776</sup> Lois M. Cullison, Executive Director San Jose Y, to Edith Lerrigo, October 18, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171; Florence Stahl and Lois Cullison, San Jose Y, to Mrs. Archie Marvel, et al., August 26, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

<sup>777</sup> Minutes, Portland YWCA Board of Directors, August 19, 1963, Portland YWCA Papers, Box 13

<sup>778</sup> Elizabeth Howsare, Executive Director, Tucson, AZ, YWCA to Edith Lerrigo, August 23, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

<sup>779</sup> Margaret A. Knight, Tucson, AZ, YWCA to Edith Lerrigo, August 19, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

Virginia branches also supported the March, but did not become sponsors. The Alexandria, Virginia branch resolved to support the National Board's decision and to continue its work "for racial equality."<sup>780</sup> In Florida, both the Daytona Beach and Miami branches were supportive, but Miami was unable to support it publicly for fear of losing financial support from the local United Way Fund. Miami's board of directors wrote the Fund, deploring "the fact that economic pressures can be brought to bear upon the leaders of our United Fund to the extent that they would make such a request of us in view of the importance of this matter, not only to our local community, but to our entire country."<sup>781</sup> The Alexandria-Pineville, Louisiana and Charleston, South Carolina branches were also under pressure by the local United Way Fund to not support the March, however neither branch was interested in joining the National Y on this issue in any event.

Various other southern (segregated) branches, including Savannah, Georgia and Lubbock, Texas, were adamant about not sponsoring the March. The Sumter, South Carolina branch was upset by both the march and the new Action Program. The White Birmingham, Alabama branch was the most vocal in its opposition to the Y's participation in the March. The White Board of Directors wrote "we do not believe that those who are leading the so-called March on Washington are persons or organizations having any reasonable objectives in common with the charter functions or proper purposes of the YWCA. Our participation in or approval of such social and political movements and disturbances would in fact be destructive of our organization and

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<sup>780</sup> Wilfred Smith, President Board of Directors, Alexandria, VA, Y to Elizabeth Marvel, et al, August 6, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 124

<sup>781</sup> Mrs. Robert F. Kuhns, Miami, FL, YWCA, to John Ring, President of United Fund of Dade County, August 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 124

objectives.”<sup>782</sup> Elizabeth Marvel wrote back to the branch, stating the Y “has felt a moral obligation to work actively for civil rights for many years,” and reminded it of the past twenty-five years of Y racial policy, including the 1946 Interracial Charter and the reaffirmation of the Charter in 1961.<sup>783</sup> Birmingham also contacted Mrs. John F. Welborn, Jr., Vice President of the Southern Region, regarding its displeasure. Welborn, who supported the March, contacted the National Board stating she was only going to confirm to Birmingham that she received the letter. She wrote, “I guess I didn’t expect just this combination of words...what can you say to people who have this kind of understanding!?”<sup>784</sup> While the White branch was up in arms, the Black Birmingham branch supported the March, and sent three representatives to Washington, D.C.<sup>785</sup>

National’s sponsorship of the March allowed for its participation at the NAACP Strategy Conference on August 6, 1963. The purpose of the conference was “to interpret the President’s Civil Rights Bill to representatives from many states, most NAACP leaders, but also of other concerned organizations like our own, and to develop strategy for getting it passed.” Four Y delegates, all Black, were sent: Dorothy Height, Ruth Penfield, Odile Sweeney, and C. Wright Brooks.<sup>786</sup> These four women joined another thirty-eight members from National, including the Y’s executive secretary, Edith Lerrigo, to form the core of the “YW contingent” at the March. All Y participants were invited to

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<sup>782</sup> Mrs. Herbert E Smith, Jr. President, Executive Committee Board of Directors Birmingham YWCA, to Florence Harris, August 23, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 124

<sup>783</sup> Mrs. Archie Marvel to Mrs. Herbert Smith, September 20, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 124

<sup>784</sup> Mrs. J.F. Welborn to Rosalie Allen, August 24, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 124

<sup>785</sup> Mrs. E. A. Johnson, Birmingham Branch Executive Director, to Rosalie Allen, August 26, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171; Mrs. Herbert E Smith, Jr. President, Executive Committee Board of Directors Birmingham YWCA, to Florence Harris, August 23, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 124

<sup>786</sup> Ruth B. Penfield, August 9, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 124. Penfield wrote a general narrative of her time there, with no formal address line or title.

stop by the Washington, D.C. branch, which stayed open to serve as a reception area for members. Lerrigo saw participation in the March “as a re-commitment to [the Y’s] belief in the worth of every individual,” and hoped it would further the goals of the Action Program.<sup>787</sup>

Twelve southern branches desegregated in the few months between the start of the Action Project and the March on Washington, making the total of desegregated branches in the South twenty-three by the end of 1963.<sup>788</sup> Furthering the Y’s efforts was pressure from local Human Relations Committees inquiring as to the status of community branches. Eliza Paschall, Executive Director of Atlanta’s Council on Human Relations and former local Y board member, wrote to Marvel inquiring about the desegregation efforts at the branch. The Atlanta Y had been a leader during the sit-in movement, and had been the first dining facility to desegregate in the city in 1960, but then the effort had stalled. Marvel wrote to Paschall that she was delighted a former Y colleague was “working in the wider community to accomplish some of the same goals as the YWCA.” Glossing over the true status of the Atlanta branch, Marvel continued, “I know through my contacts with members of our National Board and from our national staff based in Atlanta that the Board of Directors of the Atlanta YWCA are working to reach the goals implied in your reference to ‘one membership.’ We all hope that this can be achieved soon.”<sup>789</sup> Atlanta would not desegregate for another two years. Similarly, the Associate Director of the Arkansas Council of Human Relations, Ozell Sutton, wrote to Lerrigo

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<sup>787</sup> “The YWCA Was There,” *YWCA News*, February 1964, National Board YWCA Papers, Processed Box 18

<sup>788</sup> National Board Workshop on Racial Inclusiveness, Atlanta, December 13-16, 1965, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 295

<sup>789</sup> Mrs. Archie Marvel to Eliza Paschall, Executive Director Council on Human Relations, April 11, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 327, Atlanta Visitation Reports, 1960-1970

regarding the Little Rock branch. Sutton complained that the local Y-Teen division was still segregated, though the

Girl Scout [sic], Episcopalian, and Presbyterian youth encampments have been desegregated without incident. Downtown department stores have opened eating and restroom facilities and have embarked on an employment program for Negroes in non-traditional jobs. Parks have desegregated, the larger restaurants are open, and integrated audience roots for an integrated baseball team all summer long. There is no real reason for the Little Rock YWCA to lag behind the city's policy of progress in this area.<sup>790</sup>

Lerrigo wrote she was “distressed” to learn of this situation in Little Rock and hoped the Action Program would change it. She however, stopped short of saying that National would pressure the branch to change – the pressure that Marvel had spoken of months earlier when launching the Action Program. Lerrigo placed the blame on segregation squarely on the branch, stating that the local Board was elected by its own members and therefore there was little National could do to change the Board's minds. She was effectively saying, if you want the community branch to change, change the community; National has done everything it could.<sup>791</sup> This is surprising since Lerrigo rarely singled out branches for their reluctance to commit to “one membership” and relied heavily on members' Christian faith in the hope they would eventually commit to the organization's inclusiveness goals. Perhaps Lerrigo was tired after shepherding the organization through the debates on the March on Washington, creating the Action Program, and working on other civil rights initiatives as well as leading an organization whose membership was not always on the same page concerning race relations.

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<sup>790</sup> Ozell Sutton, Associate Director of the Arkansas Council of Human Relations, to Edith Lerrigo, October 25, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 124

<sup>791</sup> Edith Lerrigo to Ozell Sutton, November 11, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 124

In November 1963 the Action Program held a workshop in Memphis, Tennessee, with the “stated purpose...[being] to give help to local and national YWCA leadership in carrying their responsibilities in community YWCAs in the present struggle for human dignity and civil rights.”<sup>792</sup> Several branches sent “interracial” leadership teams – the executive directors of the White and Black branches – including Atlanta, Georgia; Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Little Rock, Arkansas; Richmond, Virginia; and, Shreveport, Louisiana. Integrated branches, such as Houston, Texas (1955) and Asheville, North Carolina, (August 1963) were also in attendance. At least three communities were only represented by their Black branches: Birmingham, Alabama; Raleigh, North Carolina; and Sumter, South Carolina.

The conference was opened by Mrs. John F. Welborn, who gave the speech “Who we are and why we are here.” She told the participants: “You had two letters inviting you...One said that we want to come together to see our moral responsibilities as...leaders of a Christian movement in the present civil rights struggle for human dignity. Another...said: ‘We need to come together to think how we can become in spirit and in truth an inclusive fellowship of women and girls deeply united by our Christian Purpose.’”<sup>793</sup> Welborn was followed by Grace Eliot, the former national secretary, who spoke to the women about the connection between their faith as Christians and the fight for civil rights. She was direct in her assertion that as Christians there was no other choice than to support racial equality. Those who do not follow that path “should better

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<sup>792</sup> “Progress Report – Community Direct Action Program: Looking at the Community Division 2-Year Action Program,” May 5, 1965, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 170, 6

<sup>793</sup> Mrs. John F. Welborn, Jr., Vice President, Chairman of the Southern Region, “Who We Are and Why We Are Here,” Memphis Conference, November 19, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 295

take out the word Christian from [their] name lest we take the name of the Lord in vain.”<sup>794</sup>

Those who attended the conference later said it was a “crucial confrontation” and a “soul searching experience.” Participants felt there was real, honest, dialogue concerning the experiences of successful or partial desegregation of branches. Some leaders spoke of membership “losses due to decision to desegregate, but stated that losses were over-balanced by gains”; while others shared their “deep personal conflict” on the issue. Some expressed “the tensions in their communities where the state and community policy is one of the resistance to desegregation and to any ‘outside’ interference. In some cases this included the YWCA of the U.S.A.”<sup>795</sup> While not every participating branch was ready to desegregate after the Memphis workshop, there was a “general consensus” by all “that if a Negro member comes to the Association for any activities or services she will not be turned away.” It was made plain to all present that “the YWCA was moving surely to complete integration and there was no turning back.”<sup>796</sup>

The Action Program soon showed results outside the South. Mamie Davis, the Western Region Correlator and the second highest ranking Black national staff member, visited the Portland branch and wrote members afterwards that she “was impressed with the visible manifestation of inclusiveness.” But she also chided the branch for continued segregation of the residence hall and lack of integration among the “professional staff.”

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<sup>794</sup> Grace Loucks Elliot, “Our Christian Purpose,” Memphis Conference, November 19, 1963, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 295

<sup>795</sup> “Progress Report – Community Direct Action Program: Looking at the Community Division 2-Year Action Program,” May 5, 1965, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 170, 6. There were several cases of White resistive branches complaining that the National Board was interfering with local racial mores and policies. Just like the common complaint that civil rights activists were “outside agitators,” the Y was also seen in this way.

<sup>796</sup> “Progress Report – Community Direct Action Program: Looking at the Community Division 2-Year Action Program,” May 5, 1965, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 170, 6

She warned the branch that they needed to get their house in order prior to the 1964 National Convention, or they would have to answer to other, more inclusive, delegations.<sup>797</sup> The Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania branch used the Action Program as well as its support of the 1963 March on Washington, as an opportunity to reexamine its commitment to race relations. The branch discovered a direct correlation between the (de facto) residential segregation in the city and the lack of integration within the community branches; and the branch soon made open housing a top priority.<sup>798</sup> The issue of de facto segregation became a major concern for many branches, and the requests to National for help in this matter led to an expansion of the Action Program nationally. Action Program housing workshops were held in Southern California and Seattle. Staff were soon working on open housing information guides “to be used in other YWCAs, especially those in areas of de facto segregation”<sup>799</sup>

As the Action Program expanded nationally, three areas outside the South were studied to see how to best tailor the program for their communities. Southern California, with an emphasis on Los Angeles, was picked because of the massive influx of Blacks to the region during and after World War II, and its concomitant issues surrounding open housing. Detroit, Michigan was of interest because of the high level of unskilled labor; and Washington, D.C. offered researchers a chance to examine conditions exacerbated by an increase of Blacks in the inner city and in the public school system.<sup>800</sup> These

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<sup>797</sup> Mamie Davis to Roberta Chapman, December 10, 1963 National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel #340

<sup>798</sup> Mrs. Molly Yard Garrett, “Report of Civil Rights Committee to the Board of Directors of the YWCA of Pittsburgh” March 25, 1965, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

<sup>799</sup> Mamie Davis to Norma Sims, April 10, 1964, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 340; “Some Reflections of Progress – June 1964,” Community Division Action Program in Desegregation and Integration, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 170

<sup>800</sup> “Some Reflections of Progress – June 1964,” Community Division Action Program in Desegregation and Integration

community branches had open facilities, although they were affected by de facto segregation. The National Board thus hoped to transmit particular Action Program goals in these cases, including “leadership which is consciously, deliberately, and continuously representative of the community,...taking initiative in the mobilization of community resources for all youth, [and] supporting civil rights laws and social action efforts to open all facilities in the community.”<sup>801</sup> These studies, which shined a light on the growing racial tensions within each area were completed just before each of the subject cities combusted – the (Los Angeles) Watts Riot of 1965; the Detroit Riot of 1967; and the Washington, D.C. Riot of 1968.<sup>802</sup> It is unfortunate that while the Y was ahead of the times in terms of knowing which cities needed help, it did not, as the years went on, follow up with further national Action Program involvement or focused studies of the affected cities.<sup>803</sup>

Nationally, membership was kept apprised of both the possibilities and obstacles inherent in implementing the Action Program through a series of articles in the *YWCA Magazine*. The program originally directed its efforts to southern branches and targeted

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<sup>801</sup> National Board Workshop on Racial Inclusiveness, Atlanta, December 13-16, 1965, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 295

<sup>802</sup> For more information on these particular incidents, see Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City : The Cavanagh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007), Ben W. Gilbert, *Ten Blocks from the White House : Anatomy of the Washington Riots of 1968* (New York,: F.A. Praeger, 1968), Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time : The Watts Uprising and the 1960s*, 1st Da Capo Press ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997).For general information on these riots and other race riots during the latter half of the 1960s, see Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941*, 127-34, Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1980*, 199-208.

<sup>803</sup> The Los Angeles Y created programs and outreach to help alleviate the conditions that led to the Watts Uprising/Riot, August 11-15, 1965. The Association supported and worked with the newly created Human Relations Commission of Los Angeles. It also created and allocated funds for a leadership program designed for women in Public Housing, which started in the Fall of 1966. The plan was that after awhile, the residents would lead large parts of this program with some guidance from Y professional staff. Los Angeles Board of Directors Meeting, September 16, 1965, Los Angeles YWCA Papers, Box 8, Folder 11; Los Angeles Board of Directors Meeting, February 17, 1966, Los Angeles YWCA Papers, Box 8, Folder 12;“YWCA Proposal for Work within Public Housing of the city of Los Angeles,” September/October 1966, Los Angeles YWCA Papers, Box 56, Folder 16

Black/White relations, so it is interesting to note that two of the four branches highlighted in the *YWCA Magazine* had multiracial membership and were in Texas. They were as close to being “southern,” without being in the Y’s actual Southern region, as one could reasonably find. The Ys of Corpus Christi and Houston were both integrated well before the start of the Action Program; in fact Corpus Christi was “affiliated in 1946 as an integrated Association,” and “from its beginning, administration, program, and services have been participated in by three cultural groups, Latin America, Negro, Anglo-American.”<sup>804</sup> Just by showing their durability, the magazine hoped to put to rest some concerns of Southerners about the consequences of a successful implementation of the Action Plan. In contrast, the other two cities: Charlotte, North Carolina and Memphis, Tennessee, were still working hard to promote a more inclusive environment.<sup>805</sup> To that end, the Memphis association ended its health program because its facilities did not include a gym or pool, and members were allowed to use the local YMCA facilities. Since the YMCA was not concerned with integration, and would not change its policy, the relationship between the two branches soured and ended.<sup>806</sup>

During the Y’s two-year Action Program, the federal government passed major civil rights legislation: the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. The 1964 Act was largely drawn from the June 1963 civil rights bill introduced by President Kennedy. Five days after Kennedy’s assassination in November 1963, President Lyndon B. Johnson stated “No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President

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<sup>804</sup> “Progress Report – Community Direct Action Program: Looking at the Community Division 2-Year Action Program,” May 5, 1965, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 170, 11

<sup>805</sup> May Lebbby Rogers, “Getting to Know You,” *The YWCA Magazine*, October 1964 (Charlotte); Marjorie M. Miller, “The Houston Story,” *The YWCA Magazine*, November 1964; Kara Burney, “The Corpus Christi Story,” *The YWCA Magazine*, December 1964; Mary Frances Lacey, “A Steadfast, Persistent Drive,” *The YWCA Magazine*, January 1965 (Memphis)

<sup>806</sup> Mary Frances Lacey, “A Steadfast, Persistent Drive,” *The YWCA Magazine*, January 1965, 13

Kennedy's memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bills for which he fought."<sup>807</sup> Signed into law in July 1964, the Civil Rights Act prohibited discrimination in public accommodations and employment, created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and funded communities working to desegregate schools. While it was a comprehensive legislative intervention, it did not adequately respond to the voting rights problems still faced by most southern Blacks. The passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act addressed this situation by removing voter qualifications like literacy tests, and allowed federal examiners to register voters. As one scholar noted, "the lock on the ballot box for blacks had been broken."<sup>808</sup> Across the nation, and especially in the South, Blacks were finally recognized first class citizens, their legal status backed by the federal government.<sup>809</sup>

National quickly moved to use the 1964 Act as another way to pressure branches to open their facilities. The organization declared that "COMPLIANCE" with the Act was to be its focus for the rest of that year. The Action Program created "Operation Opportunity," in which "teams of women" within their own community visited "owners of public accommodations...asking this question: 'When the Civil Rights Bill becomes Law, will you comply?'"<sup>810</sup> Of course, it was quickly noted that this same question was to be asked of Y branches as well. After passage of the Act, Marvel, Lerrigo and Anne Thomas, the newly elected Vice President at Large for the National Board and the second Black woman to hold this position (Helen Claytor served in this capacity from 1961-

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<sup>807</sup> Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969*, 298.

<sup>808</sup> Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1980*, 197.

<sup>809</sup> For more on the 1964 and 1965 Acts, please see Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969*, Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941*, Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1980*.

<sup>810</sup> "Some Reflections of Progress – June 1964," Community Division Action Program in Desegregation and Integration

1964), wrote to the membership. The women stated that the “most significant thing it means is that now the law supports our established principles and makes imperative the practices implied in our Interracial Charter adopted in the 1946 National Convention.” They warned branches that “failure to comply is to put ourselves in a position subject to challenge by those who expect our Christian Association to respect and to observe the law.”<sup>811</sup>

Following passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act a number of violent incidents erupted across the South. The majority of confrontations occurred during the summer, when a multitude of students, mainly White and northern, poured into the South to participate in Freedom Summer in Mississippi. The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) ran Freedom Summer, a campaign that set out to organize “freedom schools, register black voters, and dramatize the continued denial of civil rights to blacks throughout the South.”<sup>812</sup> COFO was an umbrella organization, consisting of SNCC, the NAACP, SCLC, and CORE. Their efforts were met with increasing violence, including the murder of three Freedom Summer participants in Mississippi shortly after the launch of the project. By the end of the summer, four others were “shot and wounded, fifty-two beaten, and 250 arrested in connection with the project.”<sup>813</sup> While the leaders of COFO deplored the violence, they also believed that “national sentiment would not tolerate assaults against white students, especially those from leading colleges and prominent

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<sup>811</sup> Mrs. Lloyd Marti, Mrs. Earl D. Thomas, and Miss Edith Lerrigo to “Dear Friends,” March 5, 1965, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

<sup>812</sup> Fernandez and McAdam, “Social Networks and Social Movements: Multiorganizational Fields and Recruitment to Mississippi Freedom Summer,” 359. For more on Freedom Summer see Carson, *In Struggle*, McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*.

<sup>813</sup> Nordhaus, “S. N. C. C. And the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi, 1963-64: A Time of Change,” 97.

families,” and publicity about these incidents would result in greater interest and action in transforming the South.<sup>814</sup>

Yet, the Y’s focus on the 1964 Civil Rights Act did little to open up the resistive southern branches. Between November of 1963 and February 1965, only four more branches integrated. The leaders of the Action Program, Dorothy Height and Florence Harris, decided to meet with various “government agencies, religious groups and interracial organizations” to discuss new “techniques and methods which are being used in racially tense areas.” They met with staff at the Department of Commerce, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, the Commission on Church & Race of the National Council of Churches, and the director of the Southern Regional Council of Atlanta. The women reported that “confidential information was shared,” giving them new “revolutionary ways of working in some of the racially tense communities.”<sup>815</sup> Within one month, fifteen more branches “opened,” including Miami, Atlanta, Oklahoma City, Memphis, Dallas-Ft. Worth, Richmond, and New Orleans.<sup>816</sup> Height and Harris noted there were “hard to reach” organizations based in resistive communities, but even these -- including Birmingham, Mobile, Little Rock, Jacksonville, Baton Rouge, Jackson, Charleston, and Chattanooga -- had made some progress toward the inclusiveness goals of the Y.<sup>817</sup> Then there were the “hard core” branches that refused to desegregate, including: Pine Bluff, Arkansas; Athens and Savannah, Georgia; Shreveport and Monroe, Louisiana; and

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<sup>814</sup> Carson, *In Struggle*, 98.

<sup>815</sup> “Final Report of Action Program to Accelerate the Desegregation and Integration of Community Associations,” October 26, 1965, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 170, 3. The authors were not kidding about stating it was “confidential information” being shared. They did not elaborate on the new techniques used; just that they worked.

<sup>816</sup> National Board Workshop on Racial Inclusiveness, Atlanta, December 13-16, 1965

<sup>817</sup> Minutes of the Community Division Subcommittee on The Action Program, March 9, 1965, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 170

Sumter, South Carolina.<sup>818</sup> The executive director of the Monroe branch wrote to National that she had been on staff for the past twenty three years, but could not support the Action Program, which she argued was being “forced on us.” She believed that the inclusiveness goals of the Y did not reflect the “heritage that I am accustomed to...[as] a Southern Christian woman.”<sup>819</sup>

Though not all the southern branches integrated their facilities, the Action Program officially terminated on August 31, 1965. Harris was retained for further work on “stabilizing the gains” of the Program. Dorothy Height was named the Director of the new Office of Racial Integration at National. Two further Action Program conferences were planned for December 1965 and March 1966. It was still a priority to open the remaining branches – sixty one out of seventy nine southern branches were completely open by October 1966.<sup>820</sup> In Height and Harris’s final report, they noted that the key to opening up branches was in “practice, not attitude...it is clear that it is what we do in program and administrative groups, membership opportunities and leadership development that will create the conditions and climate essential for the growth of persons capable of creative relationships as agents of social change in behalf of an open Association, an open community and an open society.”<sup>821</sup> They pointed to a larger problem on the horizon, the prevalence of de facto segregation in many communities nationwide. The authors reported:

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<sup>818</sup> Ruth Lois Hill to Bess Horton, Virginia Bourne and Flo Harris, March 24, 1965, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 295

<sup>819</sup> Remarks of Bess Sharp, Executive Director, Monroe, LA Y Branch, March 1964, in memo from Mildred Holloway to Ruth Hill, April 5, 1965, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 171

<sup>820</sup> “Final Report of Action Program to Accelerate the Desegregation and Integration of Community Associations,” October 26, 1965, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 170

<sup>821</sup> “Progress Report – Community Direct Action Program: Looking at the Community Division 2-Year Action Program,” May 5, 1965, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 170, 1

De facto segregation in a number of urban communities has made for de facto segregation in the YWCA, even in Associations where the intent to be interracial is clear. Elimination of racial branches in some key Northern cities has resulted in some creative new structuring. It has also meant that in some cities, as neighborhoods have changed from being interracial to being largely Negro and other minority groups, the YWCA has sometimes left the neighborhood with some of the same backlog of community reaction as has characterized the flight of white residents from changing neighborhoods.<sup>822</sup>

Still the leaders were happy with the accomplishments over the prior two years and commended the National Board for allocating additional funds to set up the Office of Racial Integration “to bring the full weight of the movement to effect real change in the structure of racial integration as established by the Civil Rights Act.”<sup>823</sup>

The National Student Y strongly supported the Action Program and continued to work to desegregate campuses and thereby desegregate campus Ys. At the conclusion of the Action Program, the students drafted a resolution that demanded the disaffiliation of any community and student branch not complying with desegregation and integration.<sup>824</sup> This stance worried some members, who were concerned about alienating those who might still have a (religious) conversion and accept the racial goals of the Y. Bess Horton, an older White southerner who served as Chair of the Subcommittee for the Action Program, wrote to Edith Lerrigo voicing this very concern. She stated that the organization was “facing a new dilemma” arguing that, “times are not better; conditions are startlingly worse.” She argued that many southern women were personally supportive of the Y’s inclusiveness goals, but were unable publicly, due to family dynamics or social standing, to support them. She wanted the organization “to be aware

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<sup>822</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>823</sup> Committee on Racial Integration Minutes, October 2, 1967, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 123

<sup>824</sup> National Student YWCA, “Resolution on Integration,” 1967, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 26

of those women who are caught in this dilemma and give support and understanding rather than punitive action.” Stressing that she and the members of the committee abhorred segregation, Horton argued that the easy path was to force disaffiliation, rather than fight for integration. But more important to her, she believed that once these women accepted their Christian faith, they would stand strong for inclusiveness. She wrote,

How can we talk about acceptance and at the same time cast off those who have not yet achieved enlightenment in full measure? We talk about new depth of meeting and encounter which is enriched by differences. We say we are open to all people. The YWCA – open to all people except those who are segregationists? In recognizing that it is difficult to accept segregationists in love and charity, let us not self-righteously forget that it is difficult for them to accept integrationists. In Christ is our only peace.<sup>825</sup>

Horton agreed that the students had a right to their opinion, but thought National needed to guide the students, so they understood the consequences of disaffiliation. Using Montgomery as an example of a place that could be disaffiliated, Horton asked who would then lead these women and girls to the path of righteousness? In a May 1965 Progress Report on the Action Program, the Subcommittee clearly stated that a “conscious and deliberate effort toward integration” was necessary, and this “Christian approach much be one of openness, responsibility and participation.”<sup>826</sup> Horton continued to stand by this approach, even if it meant standing by segregated branches.

Horton was not completely wrong to hope for the best in the South or to have faith that resistive women would, in her view, finally embrace Christianity and thereby embrace racial inclusiveness. When the Jackson, Mississippi branch finally became fully

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<sup>825</sup> Bess G. Horton (Mrs. Oze Horton) to Edith Lerrigo, October 6, 1966, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 26

<sup>826</sup> “Progress Report – Community Direct Action Program: Looking at the Community Division 2-Year Action Program,” May 5, 1965, 4

integrated in 1968, the executive director called National stating, “As I stand before you, you have made me what I am today, the YWCA has brought me to this point.” She also thanked Horton and Harris, “who worked so hard to bring the Jackson YWCA to this point of decision.”<sup>827</sup> Horton continued to fight for the hearts and souls of those southern women, many of whom would eventually get on board with the Y’s inclusiveness goals. However, in one of those great ironies of history, by the time those like the Jackson branch, embraced racial integration, the national organization was already confronting a breakdown in its Christian community as some members began embracing a stance more rooted identity-politics.

#### Self-Determination and Identity Politics

The various student movements across the nation went through tremendous change in a short period of time. The 1964 Freedom Summer, a collaborative effort led by COFO, which promoted voting rights, access to public establishments, literacy skills and general education in the state of Mississippi, changed the entire dynamic of the student led portion of the civil rights movement. Thousands of northern students, mainly White and middle-class, flowed into the South to work on various social action projects. This influx of newcomers shook up leadership dynamics and laid bare the fact that the “beloved community” was no more.<sup>828</sup> While these tensions were growing, another student-led movement against the Vietnam War, was also spreading across campuses.

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<sup>827</sup> Eldri Dieson, “Report of Telephone Call, Mrs. Barbara Barnes, Executive Director, YWCA, Jackson, Mississippi,” December 3, 1968, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 295

<sup>828</sup> The term “beloved community” was used by early Black and White SNCC members to describe the world they were living in and trying to create. After the 1964 Freedom Summer, the interracial membership was coming to an end, and the original goals of integration changed drastically. For more on SNCC, see Carson, *In Struggle*, Greenberg, *A Circle of Trust*, King, *Freedom Song*, Stoper, “The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: Rise and Fall of a Redemptive Organization.”

Many young White male students, after a brief civil rights stint in the South, joined anti-war protestors. Those males who stayed, mainly Black, soon confronted a leadership crisis between those who wanted to continue in the current direction and those who were no longer interested in working interracially but were committed instead to fighting for self-determination in the Black community.<sup>829</sup> This Black Power movement was mainly male-led and tended not to be as interested in issues related to female equality.<sup>830</sup> For many of the young female students who had participated in either or both movements, it became clear by the mid to late 1960s that a movement to liberate women was also necessary. By 1967, the division among these movements was apparent. Most of the time, the anti-war, Black Power, and women's movement focused on their own demands, although there were some incidences of collaboration.<sup>831</sup>

Many of the young male leaders within the Black Power movement originally came from the civil rights movement. The older civil rights organizations, either in terms of history, such as the NAACP or the NUL, or in terms of leadership age, like SCLC, stayed committed to racial integration as the main goal of the movement. SNCC transformed itself in the mid 1960s by changing its leadership and membership and reorienting toward self-determination. It, along with newer groups like the Black Panthers, scorned the goals of integration. Some of the young leaders looked to the early

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<sup>829</sup> For more of the rise of Black Power see Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, Carson, *In Struggle*, Peniel E. Joseph, "Dashikis and Democracy: Black Studies, Student Activism, and the Black Power Movement," *The Journal of African American History* 88, no. 2 (2003), William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>830</sup> This was also true of the anti-war movement, as some men believed that since women could not be drafted into the military, then women should have little say in the movement's leadership. For more see Evans, *Personal Politics*, Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*.

<sup>831</sup> For more on these movements, see Carson, *In Struggle*, Evans, *Personal Politics*, Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*, Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America*

teachings of Malcolm X to decide which issues to tackle. Malcolm X, a former leader in the Nation of Islam, advocated strongly for Blacks to develop racial pride and self-sufficiency from the White power structure. After a power struggle within the Nation and a religious conversion, Malcolm X, now called El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, no longer preached racial separatism, though he continued to work toward the raising of Black racial consciousness.<sup>832</sup> His standing among young Black male activists further distanced them from older organizational leaders who followed Dr. King. The split between the civil rights leadership deepened as the decade went on.

The Student Y was deeply affected by the different tensions in and among the various movements. The national student leadership strove to remain relevant on campuses while continuing to work to build a Christian community, collaborating closely with the Student YMCA in this balancing act. It became apparent to its leaders that the Student YW-YM movement “was not the same as that of SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] or SNCC. We seek to involve a cross-section of the campus in a multifaceted and multi-purpose program. We do not want to appeal to only to [sic] the minority of students who are on the ‘cutting edge’ of social concern.”<sup>833</sup> The efforts to attract a diverse membership became problematic as many campuses saw an increase in a “separatist trend in achieving racial justice,” which seemed at odds with the Y’s inclusiveness goals. There was a general understanding that “the Negro does not want to integrate into a society which has brought so little justice” and that the burgeoning self-

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<sup>832</sup> As there is debate between the Nation’s place within the larger Islamic tradition, I use the term “conversion” to describe El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz’s commitment to the Sunni sect of Islam. For more on Malcolm X see Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Grove Press, 1965).

<sup>833</sup> Bruce Maguire to NSC-YMCA and NSC-YWCA Officers and National Student Assembly YMCA and YWCA Policy Committee, February 21, 1966, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 78

determination movement led by Black students was important as “we [Whites and Blacks] cannot come together as equals until the Negroes know who they are.” And yet, the student leadership saw integration as its “ultimate goal” and believed that interracial “alliance” was a crucial “step in the process.” Still there was the faith that “somehow the YWCA can really grasp the meaning of this and support it.” The students believed that in order to have a “total movement” it was key “to relate or involve black women students in a new ways.” Then, through interracial dialogue, positive change would develop.<sup>834</sup>

Heading into the 1967 National Convention, student leaders crafted a unanimously supported resolution calling for the disaffiliation of any student and community branch that did not comply with the 1946 Interracial Charter and “the 1964 National YWCA emphases” on integration. They called for August 1967 to be the cut-off date for an association to desegregate.<sup>835</sup> Softening the blow it intended to strike, the students stated that prior to disaffiliation a branch’s racial practices would be thoroughly investigated to prove whether there was satisfactory movement toward integration. Helen Claytor, the newly elected National Board President, and Margaret Norton, the Director of the National Student Y, strongly supported the students’ resolution. They wrote that the “accumulated knowledge and experience” of the students in the civil rights movement, specifically those involved in the Y’s Human Relations Project, “led directly” to the students’ demands. This resolution demonstrated “the extent and depth of young people’s determination to bring about social change” within the confines of racial

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<sup>834</sup> Minutes, College and University Division Executive Committee, December 6, 1967, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 155

<sup>835</sup> National Student YWCA, “Resolution on Integration,” 1967, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 26

inclusiveness.<sup>836</sup> The resolution passed at the convention, and this encouraged the students to push the entire national organization even more on issues pertaining to race and other matters.<sup>837</sup>

Dorothy Height gave an impassioned speech at the convention, hoping to get members and staff “more deeply involved in the struggle for human and civil rights.” While she spoke mainly of Black-White relations, she made it clear to the delegates that by “improving the life of the Negro in America” one was “improving it for all minorities and indeed for all Americans.” Height also warned against racial tokenism as a form of integration, “the presence of one Negro, one Mexican-American, one member of a minority group on a board, in the membership or elsewhere has come to be seen as a token, a substitute for a relationship in which all are free to move.” She also alluded to the growing Black self-determination movement, stating that many Black members were not interested in joining the “main stream” as the “main stream of American life now has been found wanting.” Instead these women and girls were demanding equality and freedom on their own terms. While White members might find these Black voices “abrasive...this is what it seems to take to penetrate the middle-class attitudes which have broached reality and thwarted change.”<sup>838</sup> Speeches like Height’s led delegates to pass resolutions supporting the United Nations’ (UN) proclamation that 1968 was to be the International Year for Human Rights. The resolution affirmed the Y’s commitment to the UN to abolish genocide, support the political rights of women, and eliminate “all forms

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<sup>836</sup> Helen Claytor and Margaret Norton, Report to the Field Foundation on the Special Project in Human Relations, September 1, 1966-October 31, 1967, National Board YWCA Papers, Microfilm Reel 311

<sup>837</sup> Dorothy Height, “The YWCA’s One Imperative: Eliminate Racism” 1971 (pamphlet), National YWCA Board Papers, Unprocessed Box 78, 32. There was however no cutoff date for branches that could some type of progress on integration.

<sup>838</sup> Dorothy Height, Remarks at the Twenty-fourth National Convention, 1967, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 342, 217, 220

of racial discrimination.”<sup>839</sup> This commitment deeply affected the organization over the next three years.

Another large issue at the convention was the reexamination of the Christian Purpose. Throughout the 1960s, there were concerns that the National Board was forgoing its Christian commitment in order to be more religiously inclusive. During Marvel, Claytor, and Lerrigo’s 1962 listening tour, they found that branch leaders were unwilling to focus programs and outreach on the Christian faith because they “did not know how to do it without seeming to exclude some.”<sup>840</sup> At the 1964 Convention, delegates had agreed to take the next three years to discuss what it meant to be a Christian Movement at the local, regional, and national level. The topics up for debate included member voting privileges for those who did not subscribe to the Christian Purpose; the balance of ecumenicalism with the Christian Purpose; and adapting the Christian Purpose to a more burgeoning American “secular culture.” In order to gauge the interest of the community, staff were encouraged to promote “more education on [the] Christian faith” and to experiment “with new forms of religious experience and activity appropriate to the YWCA which would both strengthen the religious faith of members and respect the teachings and practices of all the churches to which our members belong.”<sup>841</sup> At the 1967 Convention, a new Christian Purpose was drafted, one that reflected “the movement as rooted in the Christian faith and open to women and girls of

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<sup>839</sup> Adopted Resolution on Human Rights Conventions, Twenty-fourth National YWCA Convention, April 24-29, 1967, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 5

<sup>840</sup> Elizabeth Marvel, Helen Claytor, and Edith Lerrigo, “Impressions Gained during Consultations with Presidents and Executives: May – December 1962,” February 27, 1963, 2

<sup>841</sup> “Recommendations which are to be discussed and voted on at the 23<sup>rd</sup> National Convention – Cleveland, Ohio – April 20-25, 1964,” Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 45, Folder 2, 1-2

diverse faiths or no faith.”<sup>842</sup> The organization once again asked its members to respond to the “barrier-breaking love of God.”<sup>843</sup>

While delegates were reaffirming their commitment to the Y and the creation of an inclusive Christian community, this period also marked an increase in branch disaffiliation and membership loss. By 1968, the organization had lost half a million members, making its total enrollment 2.5 million.<sup>844</sup> There were southern branches that disaffiliated due to the Y’s “progressive policies.” In 1967, the (White) Charleston, South Carolina branch cut ties to the national organization due to the recent Y nationally supported “variety of causes, including recognition of Red China and peace in Vietnam” and its “growing involvement in ‘social action’ programs such as promoting birth control, repeal of abortion laws and defense of black militants.”<sup>845</sup> Yet, the branch continued to use the Y name and was sued by the National Board in 1971 for this infringement. While Charleston first claimed it was National’s “social action programs” that led to disaffiliation, National made the case that “the YWCA of Charleston became independent largely to avoid racial integration of its facilities.” The former president of the local board confirmed that desegregation played a role in the decision to disaffiliate, but argued the “main reason” was that National “was gradually becoming less devoted to Christian

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<sup>842</sup> Edith Lerrigo, “YWCA Purpose: Lodestar of the Movement,” n.d. 1970s, Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 33, Folder 1, 14

<sup>843</sup> Twenty-fourth National YWCA Convention, April 24-29, 1967, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 5

<sup>844</sup> Helen Claytor and Edith Lerrigo to “Friends,” February 28, 1968, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 228, 2

<sup>845</sup> Editorial, May 23, 1967, *The News and Courier* (Charleston, South Carolina) National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 28; Robert P. Stockton, “Political Leanings figure in Suit Involving YMCA.” November 3, 1971, *The News and Courier* (Charleston, South Carolina) The title is a misprint, the article is on the YWCA, not the YMCA.

principles.”<sup>846</sup> During the trial, the attorney for the branch asked former national President Elizabeth Marvel Marti (who was President when Charleston disaffiliated), “Isn’t your bias against all white people?” The attorney then continued, “Didn’t the [National] board state it would be a militant, racist organization for the next three years?”<sup>847</sup> In the end, the White branch stopped using the name, and the former Black branch was renamed the YWCA of Greater Charleston.

The overall decrease in membership also led some local Ys to consider mergers with YMCA branches.<sup>848</sup> Some hoped merging would cut the costs of running facilities, such as in New York City. There were also some local United Funds that did not want to fund separate community YW-YMs, and therefore put pressure on them to merge, as was the case in Augusta, Georgia.<sup>849</sup> In Colorado Springs, the younger members supported efforts to merge, but it seemed to be more a way of forcing the branch to create more programs focused on “leadership development, group discussion and other types of outlet activities for women.”<sup>850</sup>

In the four years between the disaffiliation of the Charleston branch and the trial, great changes had took at the Y. Noticing that the student Y was losing black members at a faster rate than non blacks, both the student leaders and the National Board sought to reverse the trend. An aggressive recruitment campaign for “bright young women” to fill

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<sup>846</sup> Robert P. Stockton, “Political Leanings figure in Suit Involving YMCA.” November 3, 1971, *The News and Courier* (Charleston, South Carolina) The article focuses on the YWCA, not the YMCA.

<sup>847</sup> Margaret W. Garrett, “YWCA’s Policies on Religion, Race, Marijuana Blasted,” *Charleston Evening Post*, November 2, 1971, 1-B. Elizabeth Marvel married Lloyd Marti toward the end of her presidential tenure.

<sup>848</sup> YMCA also had membership loss, which made the discussion of merging possible. It is not clear why the YM had membership loss. Though there are recent studies that point to a general downturn in civic organizations at this time. See Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone : The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>849</sup> National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 25

<sup>850</sup> Phyllis Hagel, Executive Director Colorado Springs Y, to Margaret Cuenod, March 11, 1968, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 25

staff positions and membership was launched. Young women at organizations, such as CORE, NAACP, NUL, SDS, and the League of Women Voters, were invited to join the Y.<sup>851</sup> Examining internal issues, the National Board's Committee on Racial Integration concluded that "Black students will walk out if YWCA does not 'get with it.' White students recognized the validity of this movement." Subsequently a Black Affairs Committee and a Black Caucus were established. This was a direct reflection of the impact of the Black Power Movement on the Y's desire to stay relevant to its Black members. These groups were charged with establishing a "black communications network," implementing "programs relevant to the black community," choosing "authentic black representatives" for "the black constituency," and enlarging the "black membership in the YWCA." It was also agreed to create at the Student Y, "White Liberation Schools...geared to current incidents, what is happening on campus, feeling situations, sensitivity training, looking into oneself." These schools were also charged with educating Whites on racial privilege, similar to the calls of Black nationalists who encouraged White anti-racist activists to work solely within the White community in order to change the racial power structure. The Committee on Racial Integration also recognized that the term "integration" was no longer seen as a progressive goal in light of Black self-determination and also no longer adequately reflected the inclusiveness goals of the Y. They voted to change the name to the Office of Racial Justice.<sup>852</sup>

In 1969, the Student Y was led by an undergraduate student from the University of California, Berkeley, Renetia Martin. A year later, Martin, a Black woman, was also

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<sup>851</sup> Faye Aaker, Young Adult Program Consultant for the National Board, "Program Memo," April 1969, Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 103, Folder 19

<sup>852</sup> Committee on Racial Integration Minutes, October 28, 1968, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 123, 4

named an “ex officio vice president of the Young Women’s Christian Association of the U.S.A., a position created by action of the national organization’s April 1970 convention in Houston, Texas.” Her quick rise to the upper echelons in the Y caught the eye of *Ebony* magazine in 1970, “Black is beautiful. And, as the saying goes, ‘beauty is as beauty does.’ Renetia Martin is black, beautiful, young (24 years old) and she does.” Interested in community development, specifically work with preschool children, she joined the Berkeley Y branch in 1968. Within a year, she was branch president, organizing a “black affairs committee which focused on the needs of black university women.”<sup>853</sup> A speaker at the 1970 convention, Martin reflected both the old and new traditions of the Y. She began her convention speech, “In the name of Malcolm, Martin and Jesus – power to the struggle.”<sup>854</sup>

Martin worked to get college students to join the organization, highlighting the “powerful group of women” who ran the National Board as well as the commitment of the Y to racial justice. She remarked, “If we students want to do something about society, I believe that there is a way through the YWCA.”<sup>855</sup> In *Essence* magazine in 1971, Martin continued her outreach efforts. It was acknowledged that the Y has “often been described in such maudlin terms as a ‘mid-Victorian health spa’ and a ‘Playboy club for the aged.’” But she quickly pointed out that was not the case; the Y has always “been an ‘in’ organization.” Martin reached out to Black women, stating that it was through her

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<sup>853</sup> Marilyn Milow, Bureau of Communications, “Exclusive to Ebony,” n.d. 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 196

<sup>854</sup> “Report from National Student Assembly given by Renetia Martin to 25<sup>th</sup> National YWCA Triennial Convention, April 14, 1970,” National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 196. For more on Martin, see Evans, *Journeys That Opened up the World*, 240-48.

<sup>855</sup> Marilyn Milow, Bureau of Communications, “Exclusive to Ebony,” n.d. 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 196

work in the Y, meeting so many Black women, that made her “realize that we *do* have the collective power necessary to deal with destructive institutions in our communities.”<sup>856</sup>

Dorothy Height also wanted Black women to understand their collective power within the Y. Believing that past organizational racial policies had failed to fully make it inclusive, she, as Director of the Office of Racial Justice, called for a representative gathering of Black Y leaders. Height assured her White colleagues that this conference should not be seen as a “separatist movement but a gathering of a group of people to help themselves. A group that really knows what is happening can give reality to racial integration. In the YWCA are people who have been so long with the Association they cannot be critical of it.”<sup>857</sup> Y leadership was receptive to Height’s request and hoped the meeting would help spur new ideas “in the struggle in the black community and the YWCA as a national movement.”<sup>858</sup> After the Black leaders met, Height shared parts of the discussion with her white colleagues, including some of the meeting goers’ private resentments as well as future hopes for the organization. Height recognized that some of these shared discussions were causing concern and confusion among her White colleagues, especially since there was now a “prevalent feeling” among the Black leadership that the need “for self-determination” outweighed the “need for fellowship.”<sup>859</sup>

One way Height worked to assuage White fears was to bring in guest speakers who, through dialogue, could help build comprehension and some degree of acceptance of separate Black leadership. Right before the 1970 National Convention, Reverend

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<sup>856</sup> Sheila F. Younge, “The Essence Woman: Renetia Martin,” *Essence Magazine*, May 1971, 20

<sup>857</sup> Racial Integration Committee, January 30, 1969, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 123. It is amusing to have Dorothy Height make this point, as one, she had been with the organization for over thirty years at this time, and two, she had also served as a leader on all the major Y racial initiatives since 1946.

<sup>858</sup> Racial Integration Committee, January 30, 1969

<sup>859</sup> Committee on Racial Justice, January 29, 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 123

Lucius Walker, Jr., Executive Director of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization, spoke to the National Board on Black self-determination. Walker commended the achievements of the civil rights movement, but believed that there was still more to be done in achieving equality in the law, public accommodations, and education. Beyond that, he believed it was time for a “radical break” from an emphasis on civil rights to the development of a Black identity. This “changing of attitudes” regarding “blackness” was presented as the responsibility of Whites and Blacks. Walker asked the women, “How does white America adjust its attitudes, its behavior, its whole legal and institutional system to reflect the new awareness of blackness?” While he honored the older White and Black leaders “who have given so much to the struggle,” he acknowledged that their way of life and thinking was now “somewhat threatened.” Rather than let the topic end there, he told his mainly White audience that there was no one more “pathetic” to him than “white liberals who have given so much to the struggle for racial justice and now feel sense of rejection.” The sense of rejection, Walker argued, stemmed from Whites “doing for” or “leading” rather than “working with” the Black community. He instead felt those Whites should embrace the leadership and voice of the Black community. Walker assured the women that the self-determination movement of Blacks was a crucial step in “achieving a truly meaningful integrated society in which all people are accepted for their distinctive differences, a society in which we celebrate what each other are.”<sup>860</sup>

Walker’s speech is important in understanding how the Y attempted to balance its inclusiveness goals with those of self-determination. Whites and Blacks were

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<sup>860</sup> Reverend Mr. Lucius Walker, Jr., Presentation to the National Board YWCA, February 1, 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 78, 1-3

encouraged to embrace their separate racial identities because it was a temporary, but necessary, phase toward the larger goal of racial inclusiveness. And in many cases Walker was right in regard to this particular organization. While it was true that the Y lost members during this time, so did other older organizations. The Student Y was concerned about a loss of Black members, yet the leadership of the national Student Y reflected a multiracial constituency, and there are no statistics on the race or nationality of the women who actually left. At the least, Black women were not leaving the Y in droves. In fact, Black women were so dedicated to the Y that they constantly pushed and prodded the organization to make good on its commitment to racial inclusiveness. There was widespread support for Black self-determination, and there were many Black leaders who embraced the racially separate programs and outreach. Encouraging Black women to pursue these ideas further underscored the commitment to the type of community the Y was trying to create. White leaders of the organization were also open to criticism of their role in perpetuating racism within the institution. Many of these women had been involved in the association since World War II, and had worked valiantly in bettering race relations throughout the postwar era. Walker called these White women “pathetic” if they felt rejected because there was not room for them at the table of self-determination. In truth, many did not feel rejected. These women respected their own absence at the table. Whatever it took to move the organization forward in race relations, these women were ready and willing to “respond to the barrier breaking love of God.” Y leaders, of all races, had stuck with segregated branches in the hopes that by committing to Christ, White racist members and staff would eventually see the error of their ways. As the tide turned, these same leaders were now going to support Black separatists, as a

transitional step in empowering all women and girls, regardless of race. The National Board was determined to change the internal workings of the Y to reflect a more inclusive environment, as well as to repackaging its external programs to attract members committed to combating racism. Thanks in large part to the interracial leadership team of Helen Claytor and Edith Lerrigo, the organization continued to its attempts to create an inclusive Christian community.

### The One Imperative

Height's original call for a gathering of Black Y women resulted in the "National Conference of Black Women of the YWCA." This group of over 500 women from 38 states met right before the 1970 National Convention to discuss "strategies by which they could become [more] deeply involved in the life of the YWCA."<sup>861</sup> One aspect of their discussion was to review the imperatives listed in the Convention Work Book. The imperatives were: to eliminate poverty, combat racial injustice, end war-build peace, reshape the quality of the environment, involve youth intentionally in leadership and decision making, revolutionize society's expectations of women and their own self-perception, and risk involvement driven by the "Barrier-Breaking Love of God."<sup>862</sup> Their discussion of these imperatives led to a report at the national convention, which "concluded that combating racial injustice was inherent in all of the imperatives stated in the Work Book. Working for the elimination of racism must therefore be at the center of the entire effort of the YWCA during the triennium." What became known as the "One

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<sup>861</sup> "An historic response: One Imperative for All," *The YWCA Magazine*, June 1972

<sup>862</sup> Dorothy Height, "The YWCA's One Imperative: Eliminate Racism" 1971 (pamphlet), 2-3

Imperative” was passed unanimously by the convention delegates representing over 300 community branches and 41 student associations. The imperative read:

That the YWCA thrust its collective power behind the one issue inherent in all of the imperatives stated in the 1970 convention Work Book, and that imperative is the elimination of racism wherever it exists and by any means necessary.<sup>863</sup>

Black women leaders also demanded that “local Associations recognize the need that branches and centers located in the black community be more autonomous so that they may be accountable to those communities and that adequate financial support be provided in order that responsible program take place.” The Office of Racial Justice was to be expanded and additional Black staff were to be hired at all levels within the organization.<sup>864</sup>

Shortly after the Convention, the Office of Racial Justice coordinated two five-day national institutes for National Board members and national staff to discuss the “economic factors that contribute to the oppression of black and other minorities.” By demand, eight more institutes were held for staff around the country. Members, staff, and volunteers were given “(1) greater understanding of the current racial situation and of their own leverage in working for the empowerment of the black community, and (2) options for the encouragement of, and participation [in] black economic development and community development.”<sup>865</sup>

While the Y had been a pioneer in multiracial efforts since World War II, as the Black southern freedom struggle captured the attention of the nation in the 1950s and 1960s, it became the main focus of national Y leadership as well. However, some members were concerned that the One Imperative would hurt the Y’s long term struggle

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<sup>863</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>864</sup> “An historic response: One Imperative for All,” June 1972, *The YWCA Magazine*

<sup>865</sup> Dorothy Height, “The YWCA’s One Imperative: Eliminate Racism” 1971 (pamphlet), 33

for multiracial inclusiveness. The executive director of the Albuquerque branch wrote, “many of us who work in the YWCA’s in the southwest are distressed that when there is discussion about ‘racial justice,’ it usually only implies ‘black’ justice. And those of us who work with persons of other minority groups feel that they, also, should be considered.”<sup>866</sup> At the Student Y, while leadership was comprised of Black, Latina, and Asian American women, only a national Black Affairs Committee was created.<sup>867</sup> This worried those committed to multiracial issues and empowerment. Lerrigo agreed, stating that National was aware that “in parts of the country people from other minority groups are in larger numbers than Negroes and we must recognize this.”<sup>868</sup> Many of the branches in the western region worked hard to reflect all the populations within their communities. The Seattle branch created a “Glossary” of race related terms, including, “Asian American, Black, Black Power, Chicano, Integration, Native American, Nisei, White.”<sup>869</sup> Workshops were also held by Odile Sweeney, the Western Region Correlator, to discuss the One Imperative and its impact on the various racial populations in the West.<sup>870</sup> Soon other racial groups were using the One Imperative as a basis to demand their voices be heard in the elimination of racism. Asian American members from across the western region gathered at the Honolulu branch to discuss the role of Asian Americans in the Y. In a position paper that was later published in the *YWCA Magazine*, the women demanded “white women in the YWCA stop treating us as second-class

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<sup>866</sup> Ruth Hillis, Executive Director Albuquerque branch, to Edith Lerrigo, March 5, 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 27

<sup>867</sup> In 1969, the Chairman of the National Student Y was Renetia Martin, a Black woman, and her Vice Chair was Raneer Saverimuttu, an Indian-American. Martin’s tenure was followed by Margartia Mendoza de Sugiyama, a Mexican-American.

<sup>868</sup> Edith Lerrigo to Ruth Hillis, March 10, 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 27

<sup>869</sup> “Glossary,” March 1971, Seattle YWCA Papers, Box 13, Folder “One Imperative: Eliminate Racism”

<sup>870</sup> “Western Region Workshops on the One Imperative,” March 1971, Seattle YWCA Papers, Box 13, Folder “One Imperative: Eliminate Racism - #3.”

whites to be exploited for their own expediency.” Furthermore, the women stated that they were “victims of a white racist society; [and] it has destroyed our Asian self-identity,” and they declared that from that day forward they would no longer be victims of racism.<sup>871</sup>

The willingness to embrace race separatism upset some members and staff. One executive director wrote, that she and her colleagues had “worked so many years to try to bring Negro women and girls into our association that I regret that now they feel they must separate for their ‘own’ segregated National Conference.”<sup>872</sup> Others were concerned when the Student Y’s Black Affairs Committee made it clear that it was only “accountable” to other Black members; it was a “movement” within the Student Y, not an “instrument” of it.<sup>873</sup> This made some White members feel threatened by what was perceived as an overreaching grasp of power by Black women. As well, some of the language in the One Imperative was too close to “Black Power” for comfort.<sup>874</sup> The use of the phrase “by any means necessary” reminded many of Malcolm X. By the end of the 1960s, this term was synonymous with the idea “that all was possible in the name of black revolution.”<sup>875</sup> Yet even with these concerns, the reality is that the One Imperative had been voted for overwhelmingly by the White women who made up the majority of the organization. Many, having dedicated their lives to the bettering of race relations,

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<sup>871</sup> June M. Quan, “The Asian American Women’s Consultation,” *The YWCA Magazine*, December 1971

<sup>872</sup> Ruth Hillis, Executive Director Albuquerque branch, to Edith Lerrigo, March 5, 1970

<sup>873</sup> Eloise Moreland, “The role and function of the National Black Affairs Committee of the Student YWCA,” October 24, 1969, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 191

<sup>874</sup> Mary McDowell Rogers, Odessa, TX, Y, (Board of Directors member) March 1971, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 25; Mrs. Hugh Cochrane, Odessa, TX, Y, March 1971, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 25

<sup>875</sup> Stanley Crouch, “By Any Means Necessary,” *New York Times*, September 10 2006. For more on the use of term by Malcolm X and the Black Panthers, see Peniel E. Joseph, *The Black Power Movement : Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006), Jama Lazerow and Yohuru R. Williams, *In Search of the Black Panther Party : New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon : The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975*, X and Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

were completely accepting of the argument by their Black colleagues that “the YWCA, as much as other institutions, has been unable to give up its racist practices.”<sup>876</sup> Once again, members and staff worked to stay true to the inclusiveness goals and by doing so worked hard to accept and overcome the conscious and unconscious prejudices in themselves and others.

For many, especially those in the national leadership, a sense of awe surrounded the One Imperative. The older women had been working towards racial inclusiveness since World War II, and the One Imperative was the ultimate policy measure of the organization. It represented the moment when the Y intensified its “efforts to move ourselves and the nation from paternal tokenism to bold action in changing power relations and structures.” They believed it was only through the elimination of racism that a true balance in power relations was possible. Once that occurred, members would have “authentic relationships where each is free to affirm and to celebrate his own identity.” All groups were included under the One Imperative as “resolutions linked the words ‘and other minorities’ with the word ‘black’ as the Mexican American, the Indian and the Oriental asked for their rights to be registered in the YWCA public affairs platform.”<sup>877</sup> To all those involved with the passage of the One Imperative, it meant “more than ‘working on race’ or simply improving ‘race relations.’ It [meant] taking a fundamental look at American society and the world in which we live with the determination to recognize and counteract the all-pervasive forms of racism in

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<sup>876</sup> Eloise Moreland, “The role and function of the National Black Affairs Committee of the Student YWCA”

<sup>877</sup> “In a combustible year...” 1969-1970 Annual Report, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 342, 3. These terms had been linked since the 1946 Convention. In this case, pointing out the linkage is in regards to the new programs being developed through the prism of the One Imperative. Though it is clear organizational memory had forgotten the multiracial stance of the Public Affairs Committee in 1946.

institutional and personal behavior.” In the end, “The One Imperative challenges us to turn ourselves around to understand what it means to be a multiracial organization in a society embedded with racism.”<sup>878</sup>

The Y now contended with the implications of implementing the One Imperative, along with the questions and concerns it raised. Members asked, “What do these shifts in direction mean to YWCA member-leaders who have spent much of their lives working to improve interpersonal relationships-when elimination of racism depends upon change in power relations?” and “How can a multiracial organization embrace the rising self-determination and self-consciousness in the black and brown communities?”<sup>879</sup> Or as one anonymous member of a local Racial Justice team, asked, “Was the imperative the result of commitment or of fear?”<sup>880</sup> The Office of Racial Justice planned several educational seminars, leadership development workshops, and speaker series to get the total organization on the same page. Programs covered “the meanings of ‘whiteness,’ to explode the myths of superiority in their various manifestations; the international dimensions of racism; how power must be restructured to be shared; what new mentality, personal and social, must be achieved to redefine values basic to the elimination of racism; what strategies for institutional and systems changing the YWCA must undertake [for reform].”<sup>881</sup>

The passage of other resolutions at the convention also upset some members and branches. One woman from Worcester, Massachusetts, was supportive of the One

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<sup>878</sup> Dorothy Height, “The YWCA’s One Imperative: Eliminate Racism” 1971 (pamphlet), 5, 13

<sup>879</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

<sup>880</sup> Handwritten note on back of program “Western Region Workshops on the One Imperative,” March 1971, Seattle YWCA Papers, Box 13, Folder “One Imperative: Eliminate Racism - #3.” There were four workshops held in March 1971, unclear the date of this particular workshop. All the workshops were attended only by staff.

<sup>881</sup> Dorothy Height, “The YWCA’s One Imperative: Eliminate Racism” 1971 (pamphlet), 19-20

Imperative, but was unhappy with the anti-war stance of the organization. She was “disturbed” by the telegrams sent to President Richard Nixon asking for the end of the Vietnam War and for the removal of U.S. troops from Cambodia. For this, she blamed the influence of the student and younger members.<sup>882</sup> The Bogalusa, Louisiana, branch was also unhappy with the anti-war stance of the organization and the idea that women should have any opinion on the military draft. Most of their “extreme disgust,” however, was centered on the One Imperative and support of a national holiday for Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who had been assassinated in April 1968. Bogalusa leadership argued, “We feel there are many men who have done much greater things for humanity than has Mr. King...What of those boys who have died in Vietnam in order to preserve our freedom – the freedom to think what ever we wish of such people as Mr. King? Do not they deserve a national holiday, too?” The branch was also upset with the move toward race separation as a step toward race inclusiveness, as well as equating racism with poverty. It wanted to know “how poverty is a form of racism. Poverty knows no national nor color barriers.” They were also horrified by the idea of placing “low income people” on the National Board in order to be more inclusive.<sup>883</sup> To these branches, and others, Claytor and Lerrigo often responded with great enthusiasm for the range of viewpoints in the Y, and even with these differences, “our shared trust and our common purpose can hold us together in a larger unity.”<sup>884</sup> It was clear that no matter the dissent,

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<sup>882</sup> Mrs. J. Watson Wilson to the National Board of the YWCA, May 27, 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 9

<sup>883</sup> Mrs. James V. Seal, et al, Bogalusa, Louisiana YWCA, to Edith Lerrigo, June 11, 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 9

<sup>884</sup> Mrs. Robert W. Claytor to Mrs. Nelda H. Purvis, Executive Director, Bogalusa YWCA, June 25, 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 9

the National Y would not be deterred from creating a Christian social order that reflected true racial inclusiveness.

### Women's Liberation

With the National Student Y leader Renetia Martin such a visible asset and with younger women becoming more vocal in shaping the organization, the Y began to tackle more contemporary issues such as the Equal Rights Amendment.<sup>885</sup> The National Y had been against the ERA since its original conception in the 1920s, as were many other progressive women-led organizations at that time. This would continue throughout the postwar era. The concern was that passage of the ERA would undercut protective labor legislation for women.<sup>886</sup> At the same time, the Y worked tirelessly to end discrimination against working women, and supported equal pay for equal work. The most vocal supporter of the ERA, the National Woman's Party (NWP), was a more conservative women's organization. So actually, the split between the NWP and those progressive women's groups was not only based on the ERA, but also on other social justice issues. Scholars have also noted that the NWP was closely associated with the term feminism, making some progressive women's organizations, including the Y, reject its usage.<sup>887</sup> This would have long term consequences by the late 1960s, when support of the ERA and feminism were intertwined. For the Y, as long as it continued its opposition to the ERA, it could not completely live up to the (new) public view of what a feminist organization entailed.

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<sup>885</sup> Eone Harger, Camilla Flemming and Jean Whittet, Memorandum to "Public Affairs Core Group and Consultants," November 27, 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 2

<sup>886</sup> Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 131.

<sup>887</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

Starting in the late 1960s, the Y “had indications that a number of our members, especially students and young adults, and some key national leaders, felt we should change our position,” but no formal review of the ERA was called for. As discussions continued, there were “sharp differences between some of our black leaders and the young white leaders. The older members of the committee tend to feel the issues around ‘protective’ laws are still very germane, as do the black women.” This caused a crisis in the Y, especially after the One Imperative was passed as the guiding force for all Y policies.<sup>888</sup> Discussions were held with both Black and Latina members on the issue of the ERA and race.<sup>889</sup> Eventually, Y leaders came to see the ERA as an “important instrument...in the elimination of racism,”<sup>890</sup> and the Y supported the ERA starting in 1972.<sup>891</sup>

During these ERA debates, students of all races continued to press for further involvement in the women’s liberation movement. The National Student Council of the Y voted to “give serious attention” to the “complex” set of issues set forth of the women’s rights/liberation movement.<sup>892</sup> The Student Y publication, *Interact*, ran a

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<sup>888</sup> Jean Whittet to Mrs. Mary Dublin Keyersling, former Director, Women’s Bureau Department of Labor, November 25, 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 11. The Y was not the only organization dealing with the issue of race and the ERA. Pauli Murray, a prominent Black feminist activist, “who had helped found [the National Organization of Women], broke with NOW over its selection of the Equal Rights Amendment as a primary objective. Murray saw the selection of the ERA as a target as class based, and reminiscent of earlier suffrage battles that had prioritized getting the vote for white women over getting it for Blacks.” Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism : Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America’s Second Wave*, 107n. Hartmann, *The Other Feminists: Activists in the Liberal Establishment*, Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism : Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America’s Second Wave*, 107n.

<sup>889</sup> “Equal Rights Amendment,” January 1971 (typed for distribution) (original notes from October 23, 1970), National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 18

<sup>890</sup> “Equal Rights Amendment,” February 2, 1972, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 11

<sup>891</sup> “Statement on the Equal Rights Amendment,” January 27, 1972, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 11. Official endorsement of the ERA came at the 1973 National Convention.

<sup>892</sup> “Women’s Liberation Issue Group Positive Stance,” June 30, 1969, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 11

special issue on women, equating women's rights to human rights.<sup>893</sup> The student authors were cognizant that the women's rights struggle was complicated by race and class politics and were bothered by the notion of the movement as a "white, middle-class thing." It was hoped that all women, regardless of race, would join the fight for women's empowerment. It was agreed that while "most women's liberation groups are made up recently of white college students and post-college women, such generalizations do not take account of the fact that women's liberation activity is going on among black women." Y leaders believed that White students, and White women in general, needed to be clearer "about the fact [that] black, brown, and poor women are our super-exploited sisters in the oppression of all women." They wanted members to never see a difference between women's liberation and the issues of "racism, poverty, pollution, and militarism."<sup>894</sup> The voices of the students were heard by national leadership, and President Claytor soon created a "special study committee...to investigate the development" of two "resources centers in women's liberation." The first one to work for the entire association, the other "will be related to the needs of black university women."<sup>895</sup> Both centers opened in 1971.<sup>896</sup>

Since World War II, the Y had encouraged racial and gender empowerment, but with the advent of both the women's liberation and racial self-determination movements, the lines between race and gender empowerment were diverging, not converging. This

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<sup>893</sup> "Some Introductory Comments," *Interact: Publication of the National Student YWCA* (Special Issue on Women's Liberation), December 1969, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 11

<sup>894</sup> Betsy Gwynn, "The Women's Liberation Movement: Implications for the YWCA," *Interact: Publication of the National Student YWCA* (Special Issue on Women's Liberation), December 1969, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 11

<sup>895</sup> "Resource Centers in Women's Liberation," *Interact: Publication of the National Student YWCA* (Special Issue on Women's Liberation), December 1969, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 11

<sup>896</sup> "The National YWCA Resources Center on Women..." *The YWCA Magazine*, January 1971

placed the Y in a precarious position, where the thrust of its gender work was based on race and its racial work was geared toward women. The One Imperative argued that by eliminating racism, one eliminated sexism. Almost as quickly as (White) feminism came on the scene, there were critiques of the absence of race in the fight for women's liberation. Soon differing feminist agendas and theories based on race and culture were born, with the "universalist" (White) notion of womanhood scorned by women of color.<sup>897</sup> Race had also become more "male defined," and as the Black Power movement increased in stature, so did the hyper-masculinity leadership that went along with it.<sup>898</sup> The Y was more vocal in its race work than in its gender work, though the association had always prided itself as being an autonomous Christian women's organization. The different approach to its race and gender activism is based on its single sexed community. By virtue of its female only membership, staff, and leadership, every action taken was aimed at empowering women. With women's leadership serving as the basis for every policy, program, and outreach effort, the Y did not have to make a special case for women. In fact, it supported many of the same goals of other newer women's organizations (leading many struggles even before some of those groups existed) – equal pay for women, liberal abortion and other reproductive laws, better childcare and welfare benefits. However, some media accounts of the One Imperative framed its passage as the successful "switching [of] the group's emphasis from the issues of women's liberation to the eliminating of racism."<sup>899</sup> In the end, because it was a women-led organization it was at a gendered disadvantage with the prominent race organizations; and because it would

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<sup>897</sup> Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism : Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave*.

<sup>898</sup> White, *Too Heavy a Load : Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*, 180-81.

<sup>899</sup> "YWCA Revolt Success," *New York Amsterdam News* 1970.

not, and could not, see women's liberation in a colorblind vacuum, it was unable to take its place among the leading women's liberation organizations. By being progressive in both fights, the Y was unable take the lead in either.

This is best exemplified by the role taken by the Y, and the reactions to the Y, in its support of women in the Black Power movement, especially that of Angela Davis. In 1970 the Y made national news twice in its support of Joan Bird in the summer and then of Davis that Fall. Bird, a Black Panther member, was indicted in April 1969, along with twenty other Panther members, on charges of conspiracy to bomb several New York City department stores during the Easter weekend.<sup>900</sup> At the time of her arrest, Bird was "a 20-year old nursing student at Bronx Community College who was also working as a kindergarten teaching assistant."<sup>901</sup> She was unable to post her \$100,000 bail. Soon, a handful of groups and individuals, including members of the Y, fundraised for her bail. The leading supportive organization was the Women's Union, which held a fundraiser at the Y's national headquarters in July 1970. Some national board staff and members attended this event. Dorothy Height and Jean Whittet, the original leaders of the Action Program, had cleared the building's use for the fundraiser with Helen Claytor, and all had personally contributed money. This was interpreted by the *New York Times* as full support by the National Board for the Black Panthers and caused not only a general uproar, but also became an issue for some members.<sup>902</sup> Outraged individuals were informed that while the Y had not taken an official stance on the Bird case, it should have, as "our Christian purpose and our respect for democratic principles demand that we

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<sup>900</sup> "21 Indicted in New York Bomb Plot," *The Washington Post*, April 3 1969.

<sup>901</sup> Edith Evans Asbury, "16 Black Panthers Go on Trial Tomorrow in State Court Here," *New York Times*, February 1 1970.

<sup>902</sup> "Raising Bail for the Panthers," *New York Times*, July 12 1970. Memo "FYI Re: Joan Bird Bail Fund," July 12, 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 26

be concerned for the welfare of a 19 year old young woman who has been held in jail for 15 months because the amount of bail set was far in excess of the money available to her.” As well, the organization believed that “the strength of our democracy rests in a legal structure that safeguards the right of bail and due process. Whatever the charges, the person is presumed innocent until proven guilty.”<sup>903</sup> This reasoning served as the foundation for the support the Y quickly threw behind Angela Davis in the upcoming months.

By the time of her arrest in August 1970, Davis was already a controversial figure due to her alleged support of the kidnapping and shooting of Marin County, California, Judge Harold Haley.<sup>904</sup> A year earlier, Davis had been hired as a professor at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). When it was discovered that she had been a member of the Communist Party, California Governor Ronald Regan enforced an old state law barring communists from teaching at public universities, and she was dismissed. She was soon reinstated, though the state continued trying to fire her. The case made headlines across the nation, sparking off debates on academic freedom, racism, and

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<sup>903</sup> Florence Gordon, Field Consultant Eastern Region, to Harry Scott, July 24, 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 26. Joan Bird, along with all the other defendants, was eventually acquitted of all charges on May 14, 1971. Edith Evans Asbury, "Black Panther Party Members Freed after Being Cleared of Charges," *New York Times*, May 14 1971, Edith Evans Asbury, "The Jurors Found the Case Too Weak," *New York Times*, May 16 1971.

<sup>904</sup> "Angela Davis Is Charged in Judge's Death," *The Washington Post*, August 16 1970, "Angela Davis Is Fingering," *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 13 1970, "Angela Davis Linked to Shootout Guns," *The Washington Post*, August 12 1970, Angela Y. Davis, *Angela Davis--an Autobiography* (New York,: Random House, 1974), "Link 2 Death Guns to Fired Red Teacher," *Chicago Tribune*, August 12 1970, "Paper Links Red Teacher to Gun in Coast Court Raid," *New York Times*, August 12 1970. On August 7, 1970, Judge Haley was taken hostage by Jonathan Jackson and the two San Quentin inmates on trial in his courtroom. Jackson was trying to free his brother George, who was not in the courtroom. Angela Davis through her work in prison reform and the Black Power movement became to George, and knew Jonathan. One of the shotguns used by Jonathan were registered to Davis, though she reported it stolen prior to the incident. Judge Haley, Jonathan Jackson, and the two inmates were killed by the police during the hostage crisis. George Jackson was killed by prison guards on August 21, 1971 during an alleged prison break attempt. For more see Davis, *Angela Davis--an Autobiography*.

communism.<sup>905</sup> She was a household name and when linked to the Marin County shooting and kidnapping, many media stories simply referred to her in the headlines as the “Red Teacher” and “Angela.”<sup>906</sup> Davis had the notorious distinction of being the first Black woman on the Federal Bureau of Investigations’ (FBI’s) ten “Most Wanted List” when she fled California after a warrant was issued for her arrest. She was apprehended in New York City in October 1970, and placed in the Women’s Detention Center in downtown Manhattan.<sup>907</sup>

Although there were (White) women’s and (mixed sex) Black Power groups working towards Davis’s release, they rarely worked in tandem with one another. At a demonstration in New York, there were separate White and Black picket lines (though unclear why this was the case, or who suggested it, it seems that Black leaders were at the root of this decision); with Black protestors chanting, “Liberate Our Nation,” and Whites, “Free Angela.”<sup>908</sup> Some majority White women’s groups were charged with racism. Frances Beal, a Black woman and member of the Third World Women’s Alliance, recalled that at a women’s liberation march her organization held signs reading “Hands Off Angela Davis,” and a leader from the National Organization for Women (NOW) “ran up to us and said angrily, ‘Angela Davis has nothing to do with women’s liberation.’” Beal countered, “It has nothing to do with the kind of liberation you’re talking about, but

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<sup>905</sup> Lawrence E. Davies, "Teacher Barred by Coast Regents," *New York Times*, October 4 1969, Lawrence E. Davies, "U.C.L.A. Teacher Is Ousted as Red," *New York Times*, September 20 1969, "'Greek Tragedy' at UCLA," *Los Angeles Times* October 5 1969, Seymour Korman, "Red Prof Barred from U. C. L. A.," *Chicago Tribune*, October 4 1969.

<sup>906</sup> Kenneth Lamott, "In Search of the Essential Angela," *Los Angeles Times*, May 30 1971, "Link 2 Death Guns to Fired Red Teacher.", Leah Nelson, "Jewish Women Support Angela," *Chicago Daily Defender*, November 21 1970, "Paper Links Red Teacher to Gun in Coast Court Raid."

<sup>907</sup> Linda Charlton, "F.B.I. Seizes Angela Davis in Motel Here," *New York Times*, October 14 1970.

<sup>908</sup> Michael T. Kaufman, "Davis Case Goes to City's Courts," *New York Times*, October 15 1970.

it has everything to do with the kind of liberation we're talking about."<sup>909</sup> These different approaches and ideologies help explain why the Y felt forced to charter an independent course of support in Davis.<sup>910</sup>

In November 1970, the National Board, with the prodding of the Student Y, released a "Statement of Concern," asking "that all which is possible be done to insure that a woman, a black woman, a black woman associated with controversial issues and causes, be granted equal and impartial justice as guaranteed to all citizens by the Constitution of the United States."<sup>911</sup> Claytor informed President Richard Nixon of the Y's position, saying "we feel sure that you share our hope that the climate of public opinion as well as the judicial procedures surrounding this trial will uphold and strengthen the highest traditions of our system of justice, and the confidence of all of our citizens in that system."<sup>912</sup> She also sent him a copy of the Y's statement on Davis. News of the Y's Statement of Concern traveled quickly through the nation, with some news organizations hailing this "historic position" by "one of this nation's most influential and prestigious women's groups."<sup>913</sup> In the *New York Times* coverage of Davis, only the Y was singled out for its support of her, highlighting that this was the first time the association "had spoken out in behalf of an individual."<sup>914</sup>

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<sup>909</sup> Charlayne Hunter, "Many Blacks Wary of 'Women's Liberation' Movement in U.S.," *New York Times*, November 17 1970.

<sup>910</sup> "Hold Rally Here for Angela," *Chicago Daily Defender*, November 5 1970, Nelson, "Jewish Women Support Angela.", Ursula Vils, "Attack by Women's Lib on Two Fronts," *Los Angeles Times*, October 21 1970.

<sup>911</sup> National Student Committee to National Board, October 26, 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 8

<sup>912</sup> Helen Claytor to President Richard M. Nixon, November 4, 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 8

<sup>913</sup> "Judge Orders Angela Davis to Join Prisoners," *Redlands Daily News (California)*, November 5 1970, "Treat Angela Davis Fairly - YWCA," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 7 1970, "YWCA Defends Angela's Rights," *Chicago Sun Times*, November 5 1970.

<sup>914</sup> "Ending of Solitary Confinement for Angela Davis Is Ordered," *New York Times*, November 5 1970. This was the first time the Y had spoken out for an individual; previously with Joan Bird the Y never

There were, of course, reactions from community branches. Letters of support were received from Milwaukee, San Diego, Louisville (though the executive director was personally against it), and Hilo, Hawaii. The (majority Black) Roxbury branch, which was a part of the larger Boston association, held a fundraiser for Davis. Her mother, Sallye Davis, was a guest speaker. The invitations to this “wine & cheese” event stated, “The National YWCA supports her! Numerous national organizations support her! Let us unite and support her!”<sup>915</sup> Various student branches, including UCLA and the University of Oregon, also wrote enthusiastically to the National Board, praising it for such a public display of support. On the other hand, Alexandria, Baton Rouge, Dallas, and Walla Walla, Washington strongly opposed the board. Some, including Cincinnati, Billings, Montana; and interestingly enough, Jackson, Mississippi, reported mixed opinions among staff and members. Beyond the branches, National received “an awful lot of flak” for its Statement of Concern. While leadership agreed that the association had “to stand firm for what we believe,” they also had to be “P.R. conscious, too, when it comes to that awful thing called money.”<sup>916</sup>

In order to combat criticism from unhappy branches and fund sources, an Advisory Committee was formed. The Committee recognized there needed to be “a sorting out of the political aspects of the Angela Davis case in regard to whether the YWCA is taking a stand in support of Miss Davis’ communist convictions.” It was recommended that “emphasis should be put on the fact that the Christian and democratic

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released a statement regarding the case. It was the *New York Times* which erroneously stated the Y was in support of Bird.

<sup>915</sup> Renford Gaines, Roxbury, Massachusetts YWCA, February 17, 1972, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 22

<sup>916</sup> Ida Sloan Snyder to Audrey K. Doughty, March 24, 1971, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 26

principles do permit us to be tolerant about persons whose beliefs are different from ours.”<sup>917</sup> A more elaborate statement, including a “Frequently Asked Questions” section, was sent to members that used the Christian Purpose as the foundation for its support for Davis. Y leaders quoted Elder Hawkins, Co-Chair of Council on the Church and Race, Presbyterian Church USA, who stated “as we interpret the Gospel itself...we cannot limit justice to those with whom we agree or there is no justice for any of us. The defense of Miss Davis’ views is not our cause; the strong defense of her right to justice and a just trial is involved with the basic beliefs of Christian faith itself.”<sup>918</sup> When the Chattanooga branch was under threat of funding cuts by the local United Fund because of the Angela Davis stance, National stepped in, writing to the Fund, “The YWCA, as a national women’s organization with a Christian purpose, is deeply committed to strengthening and upholding the principles and values on which our nation was founded. This includes a responsibility to do our part to preserve and extend the traditional rights and liberties of all citizens.”<sup>919</sup> [emphasis added]

Once Davis was extradited back to California, the San Francisco branch, which strongly supported the efforts to free her, became the National Board’s eyes and ears during the trial. The branch based its actions on the National Statement of Concern, releasing its own statement of support to the media, and asked the Marin County branch “to monitor the trial.”<sup>920</sup> Eventually, a San Francisco Y Program Consultant, Audrey

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<sup>917</sup> Mrs. Norman W. Hamilton to Mrs. Robert W. Claytor and Miss Edith Lerrigo, “Re: Report of the Advisory Committee on the Angela Davis Trial and the YWCA Position,” September 23, 1971, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 22, 2

<sup>918</sup> “QUESTIONS about our ‘Statement of Concern’” October 13, 1971, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 8

<sup>919</sup> Ida Sloan Snyder, Communications Department, to Mrs. Harold J. Weekly, Executive Director of the United Fund of Greater Chattanooga, October 1, 1971, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 20

<sup>920</sup> Odile Sweeny to Jean Whittet, January 29, 1971, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 22

Doughty, covered the trial for the Y. She wrote articles and sent them to the *YWCA Magazine*, but they were not published.<sup>921</sup> Upset with the seeming lack of action by National on this issue, she wrote Edith Lerrigo that the organization was missing an important opportunity to toot its own horn on its commitment to a fair trial for Davis. She wrote,

Having a YWCA observer at the trial has made a very favorable impression on the black community which has made such statements as ‘We didn’t know that YWCA would ever do anything like that for us.’ They are looking at the organization in a new way, speaking to us much more freely and expressing interest in being a part of projected programs having to do with justice.<sup>922</sup>

In addition to attending all the trial proceedings, Doughty was also able to secure a prison visit with Davis. She sent Lerrigo her notes of the meeting, for inclusion in the next National Board of Directors session.<sup>923</sup> There were those who were a little concerned with the amount of responsibility Doughty heaped upon herself, and by extension, the Y. But Lerrigo was grateful for all the work of Doughty and the San Francisco branch, and hoped that the Davis trial would further the efforts of the One Imperative.<sup>924</sup>

Doughty also defended the Y in the press. A local newspaper, *The Ebb Tide*, from Tiburon, California, expressed complete astonishment at the Y’s “favorable” position toward “this militant Communist.” Doughty quickly responded, writing, “I don’t think it is ‘astonishing’ that the YWCA should concern itself with the protection of Constitutional rights. I think it would be astonishing if we did not.” She informed the

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<sup>921</sup> Ida Sloan Snyder to Audrey K. Doughty, March 24, 1971, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 26

<sup>922</sup> Audrey K. Doughty to Edith Lerrigo, November 10, 1971, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 26

<sup>923</sup> Audrey Doughty, San Francisco YWCA, to Edith Lerrigo, November 23, 1971, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 22

<sup>924</sup> Program Planning Committee, January 26, 1972, San Francisco YWCA Papers, Box “Planning Committee Meetings”; Sara-Alyce Parson Wright to Edith Lerrigo, March 23, 1972, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 22

editor that it was the Y's own progressive race history and policies that led the organization to strongly support "a woman, a black woman." She further explained her role for the Y, and added, "we are entirely open-minded about the guilt or innocence of Miss Davis. That is for the court to decide, but it is for all citizens to decide whether or not the trial is being conducted in a manner in which Miss Davis' Constitutional rights are not violated. This should be of concern to everyone – these are your rights, too, which must be protected without exception, and if they are not, they will be lost to all of us. We cannot decide whose rights we will uphold and whose we will not."<sup>925</sup>

*The Ebb Tide* was not alone in its criticisms of the Y's involvement. A lengthy article in the *Los Angeles Times*, noted that while the "revolutionary left" – the Communist Party, the Black Panthers, and Students for a Democratic Society – obviously supported Davis, the author wanted readers to know of the mainstream groups and individuals also on board. Jesse Jackson and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) topped the list, with the National Board of the Y coming in second. The Y was the only organization listed that was not Black led, and was the only woman's group on the list. Other people and groups listed included James Baldwin, Jane Fonda, the Black Caucus of the San Francisco Teachers Union, and the San Francisco chapter of the NAACP.<sup>926</sup> New York's *Village Voice*, wrote, "The Y lent its all-American image to the fight to save the most glamorous and wanted revolutionary on the FBI's 10 most wanted list." The journalist had done her homework, and noted that "if surprising, the Y's statement's in defense of Miss Davis is also consistent with its tradition. Long committed to the belief that freedom and liberties of all of us depend on protecting the

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<sup>925</sup> Audrey K. Doughty, Program Consultant San Francisco YWCA, to Lewis Llewellyn, *The Ebb Tide*, November 11, 1971, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 26

<sup>926</sup> Lamott, "In Search of the Essential Angela."

freedom and liberty of each of us, the Y has repeatedly taken on controversial and racial issues.”<sup>927</sup> Similar to the *Voice*, in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*’ *WEST* magazine, the White feminist Gloria Steinem was quoted saying, “the Young Women’s Christian Association is radical and has passed a resolution supporting Angela Davis.” A Los Angeles member sent along the clipping, and stated that given the Y’s stance on Davis receiving a fair trial and its race history, she wrote: “I don’t consider this a radical stand.”<sup>928</sup>

The Y soon used the Angela Davis trial to encourage local branches to get more involved in examining the justice system both locally and federally. Members were told of a “general crisis in the administration of justice,” including “discriminatory laws, unequal enforcement of the law, bail and detention, sentencing, etc.” The association wanted more analysis of “the implication of the disproportionate number of minorities in prisons, (and to) expose the conditions, and support meaningful efforts for reform.”<sup>929</sup> It is interesting to note that members were contacted about this “general crisis” two months after the Attica Prison uprising in upstate New York, and yet the Y continually used the trial of Angela Davis to frame its debate on racial justice, weaving together race and gender. The National Board did join the Coalition of Concerned Black Americans, in its condemnation of actions of the government at Attica.<sup>930</sup> Members were encouraged to observe both local and federal courts in action, tour local prison facilities, support “ex-inmates” attempts to reintegrate into society, and to “help educate the public about the

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<sup>927</sup> Marlene Nadle, "YWCA Asks Fair Trial for Angela Davis," *The Village Voice*, November 1971.

<sup>928</sup> Judith Ebner, April 30, 1972, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 25

<sup>929</sup> "Some Suggested Guidelines for Action by YWCAs," in "Dear Friends" letter by Helen Claytor and Edith Lerrigo, November 16, 1971, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 26

<sup>930</sup> "Concerned Black Americans' Group Condemns Use of Force at Attica," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, September 25 1971. For more the Attica Prison Uprising, see Herman Badillo and Milton Haynes, *A Bill of No Rights; Attica and the American Prison System* (New York,: Outerbridge & Lazard, 1972), Tom Wicker, *A Time to Die* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Book Co., 1975).

rights of prisoners and ex-prisoners.”<sup>931</sup> Davis was eventually acquitted of all charges in June 1972. While she conducted a national “thank you” tour for all her supporters, there is no record this included the Y.<sup>932</sup>

The Y was conspicuously absent at the end of Davis’s trial arguably because the month of her acquittal was when the Y was hosting a National Convocation on Racial Justice in New York City. This event attracted thousands of people and organizations from across the nation. Organizations joining the Y included the Americans for Indian Opportunity, Japanese American Citizens League, Mexican American Legal Defense Fund, NAACP, National Council of Negro Women, and the NUL.<sup>933</sup> It is interesting to note that no major “new” women’s liberation organizations attended, with the exception of the New York chapter of NOW. Furthermore, even with its commitment to the empowerment of women and girls, the head of the Y’s Advisory Council for the Convocation was a man, Clarence B. Jones, a YWCA trustee and publisher of the *New York Amsterdam News*, a Black newspaper. An overwhelming number of Advisory Council members were also men; the few female members were all Black, including Grace Towns Hamilton, Ruby Dee, Coretta Scott King, and Mrs. Henry Lee Moon.<sup>934</sup>

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<sup>931</sup> “Some Suggested Guidelines for Action by YWCAs,” in “Dear Friends” letter by Helen Claytor and Edith Lerrigo

<sup>932</sup> “Angela Davis Launches U.S. Tour of Thanks,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 10 1972, “Angela Due Here to Thank Backers,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, June 8 1972, Earl Caldwell, “Angela Davis Acquitted on All Charges,” *New York Times*, June 5 1972, James F. Clarity, “Angela Davis’s Thank-You Tour,” *New York Times*, June 7 1972, Philip Hager, “Angela Davis Not Guilty, Jury Finds,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 5 1972, “Plans Vacation in East Europe; Angela Davis to Tour U.S., Thank Backers,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 7 1972.

<sup>933</sup> Other organizations also included: the American Association of University Women, the American Jewish Committee, Association of Black Social Workers, Lutheran Church Women, National Board YMCA, National Conference on Christians and Jews, National Council of Churches, National Council of Jewish Women, SCLC, United Auto Workers’ Women’s Department, and United Methodist Women

<sup>934</sup> Male participants included: Saul Alinsky, Julian Bond, Dr. Sterling Brown, James Farmer, John Hope Franklin, Dr. Francis L. K. Hsu, Jesse Jackson, Jacob Javits, Benjamin Mays, Floyd McKissick, James Michener, Bill Moyers, Alvin Poussaint, Charles Rangel, George Plimpton, Bayard Rustin, and Howard Thurman.

On the other had, the Convocation Organizing Committee consisted solely of women: “Co-Chairmen” Mrs. Laurence S. Rockefeller and Mrs. Ralph J. Bunche; plus others including past Y presidents, Eleanor Holmes Norton, Mrs. Roy Wilkins, and Mrs. Whitney Young Jr.<sup>935</sup>

The three keynote speakers were Congresspersons Ron Dellums and Shirley Chisholm; and McGeorge Bundy, president of the Ford Foundation. Panel topics included: Political Empowerment; The Role of Television in Eliminating Racism; Open Housing; American Racism Exported Abroad; The Social Agency as a Catalyst for Institutional Change; Ethnic Groups and Identity Crises; Racism in Religious Institutions; Economic Empowerment; Quality Education for all Children; Equal Justice Under the Law; Racism and Post-Secondary Education.<sup>936</sup> In addition to many of the Advisory Council members, other panelists leading these discussions included many influential figures in civil rights, media, education, and medicine.<sup>937</sup> The Closing Plenary Session included Dorothy Height, comedian Dick Gregory, actor Brock Peters, and the Dance Theater of Harlem.<sup>938</sup> Local and national media outlets covered the event, including ABC’s “Directions” program, which showed highlights of panel discussions. CBS’s “Woman” held an interview with Dorothy Height. NBC’s “Today” interviewed participants including Ramsey Clark and Eleanor Holmes Norton. New York’s local public broadcasting station, WNET, held live coverage; and “WOR-TV, Channel 9, has asked for Mrs. Rockefeller, Mrs. Bunche and Miss Height for Commissioner Sable’s

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<sup>935</sup> “The YWCA of the U.S.A. National Convocation on Racial Justice” (Program), June 15, 1972, National YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 78

<sup>936</sup> Ibid.

<sup>937</sup> These participants included: Andrew Young, Imamu Amiri Baraka, Unita Blackwell, John Lewis, Tony Brown, Sig Mickelson, Roy Wilkins, Virginia Apgar, Kenneth Clark, Marian Wright Edelman, Jack Greenberg, and Roger Wilkins.

<sup>938</sup> “The YWCA of the U.S.A. National Convocation on Racial Justice” (Program), June 15, 1972

show “Right Now” for airing June 10.”<sup>939</sup> While this was significant national television coverage, the Convocation and the events leading up to it were covered only in Black newspapers.<sup>940</sup> The only roundabout mention of the Convocation in the *New York Times*, was in relation to the successful protest held by Native Americans at the Americana Hotel because of its “Wooden Indian Bar.” The Native American group was in town for the Convocation.<sup>941</sup>

### The Y and Race and Gender

The change in the nation during the late 1960s and early 1970s affected politics, community relations, and how people viewed their own identity. For the Y, this meant a move aggressively towards a goal of racial inclusiveness. Yet it was also a time when it was forced to accept racial separatism as a possible path towards inclusiveness. One staff member wrote, “All around us are liberation movements seeking new hope for those without hope – the ‘out groups’ of society. As members of the YWCA rejoice in this work as it pushes toward out common goals of ‘peace and justice, freedom and dignity for all people.’ Nevertheless, it seems that in this very freedom to be human, to care who we are, walls are not only broken, walls are also built – walls of pride and identity: black-is-beautiful walls; brown-power walls; woman-power walls! Humanity is divided.”<sup>942</sup>

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<sup>939</sup> Minutes of the Convocation Committee Meeting, National Board YWCA, June 6, 1972, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 78, 2-3

<sup>940</sup> “Atlantans to Attend National YWCA Confab,” *Atlanta Daily World (1932-2003)* 1972, “Racial Justice Is YWCA Confab Topic,” *New York Amsterdam News*, June 17 1972, “YWCA Resolution on Racism,” *New Pittsburgh Courier (1969-1981)*, May 20 1972, “YWCA Slates Nat’l Convocation on Racial Justice Next Month,” *Atlanta Daily World (1932-2003)*, May 21 1972, “YWCA Slates One-Day Workshop for Volunteers to Study Racism,” *New Pittsburgh Courier (1969-1981)*, January 29 1972.

<sup>941</sup> “Americana Closes Wooden Indian Bar after Indian Protest,” *New York Times*, June 16 1972.

<sup>942</sup> Letty M. Russell, “A Single New Humanity?” *The YWCA Magazine*, January 1971

The organization “recognized the conflict between racism and feminism” and worked to find new ways to balance its ramped-up race related efforts, while maintaining programs that spoke to the changing nature of women’s and girls’ roles in society.<sup>943</sup> It was not alone in this, as many women of color, and diverse individuals and groups, also worked towards race and gender empowerment.<sup>944</sup> Yet, to a large extent, the Y existed on the periphery and was not seen as a leader on racial or gender justice.

Finding its needs not met by the race and women’s empowerment rhetoric of the day, it created its own. In 1973, the new catchphrase of the Y was “SOROMUNDI!” which translated into “sisters of the world.” This phrase was used not only by National, but also at the World Y. A Soromundi litany was published which called for the sisters of the world, nations, regions, races, and creeds to “unite in responsible membership...in new understanding...in struggle for peace and justice...in freedom and dignity for all people...in our movement, rooted in the Christian faith.” The poem also recounted the different oppressions suffered by the various racial groups in the United States (each had its own stanza), but for Whites, the lines read, “Little white child once taught to hate, Let’s teach him to love ‘fore it’s too late.”<sup>945</sup> Soromundi did not catch on with other organizations, and did not have a prominent role in the Y after its inception.<sup>946</sup> Still, the work of the Y in creating a more inclusive fellowship of women and girls attracted

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<sup>943</sup> Julie M. Yingling, "Women's Advocacy: A Dramatistic Analysis of the YWCA Imperative" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Speech Communication Association Denver, CO, 1982).

<sup>944</sup> Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave : Black Women's Studies* (Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist Press, 1982), Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981), Robnett, *How Long? How Long*, Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism : Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave*, White, *Too Heavy a Load : Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*.

<sup>945</sup> “YWCA...SOROMUNDI,” *The YWCA Magazine*, May-June 1973, 22

<sup>946</sup> To this day, the term is still used by few local branches, and it is still the Cable address of the World Y in Geneva.

people who tired of struggling “against social divisions” and found themselves “always trapped by new barriers.” The Y was the place where “we don’t fight alone and that the barrier-breaking love of God can even break down our own hostilities.”<sup>947</sup> The organization added over one hundred thousand new members between 1968 and 1970, with the majority of them under the age of thirty-five.<sup>948</sup>

The Y worked hard to promote dialogue between White women and women of color during a time when these conversations were becoming increasingly difficult. It has been argued that there are “three cultural narratives of denial, accusation, and confession” that have reflected “a single story about race and ethnicity in the feminist movement” since the 1970s. White women at first denied the role of race, taking a universalist (colorblind) approach in the fight for women’s liberation; then women of color rightfully pointed out the role of race and accused White women of their own racism; to which, White women confessed to their racism. The problem is, the conversation usually ends there, and has therefore hindered “the development of a more broadly defined multicultural feminism whose agenda centrally includes the eradication of racism and the globalization of feminist theory and praxis.”<sup>949</sup>

Many members of the Y, regardless of race, made concerted efforts to move beyond these narratives. At the 1973 National Convention a panel was convened on “the power of women to effect social change.” Dorothy Height moderated, with Cynthia Wedel of the Center for a Voluntary Society, Patricia Nakano of the JACL, and Margarita Mendoza de Sugiyama, chairperson of the Student YWCA, participating. Wedel, a

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<sup>947</sup> Letty M. Russell, “A Single New Humanity?”

<sup>948</sup> “The YWCA in Retrospect,” 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 74

<sup>949</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, “Beyond White and Other: Relationality and Narratives of Race in Feminist Discourse,” *Signs* 21, no. 1 (1995): 11-12.

White woman, acknowledged the problems with the universalist approach to feminism, further stating that White women “have a tremendous responsibility to somehow try to get...close to our Third World sisters.” At the same time she noted, “I’d like to say to our Third World sisters, if you keep putting us down, in terms of the discrimination against women, then you’re stopping us from getting the kind of power where we could do something about this. So let’s just face the fact that we’ve got a dilemma, and we’re women, and we’re smart, and we could find a way out. But let’s work on it.”<sup>950</sup> At a different program event, one Y staffer implored others to understand “that racism and sexism are interlocking parts of our struggle and not two competing ideologies.”<sup>951</sup> There were few majority White organizations of the day working to bridge the racial divide between women. Unfortunately, much of the Y’s theories and practices regarding race and gender were not included in the growing second wave feminist theories being formed during this time.

The Y continued to challenge all members, regardless of age and seniority, on the issue of race. Former Y president, Lilace Reid Barnes, spoke to the delegates in 1973, about how she was forced to “confront” her whiteness after the passage of the One Imperative. Barnes had supported the civil rights movement passively during her tenure, 1955-1961, but was always firm that “true” Christians would support the larger goals of racial justice. She equated her “conversion” to the biblical story of Joshua and the walls of Jericho. Telling the delegates that the “the freedom of the human spirit is trapped within walls, imprisoned in the structure and life style of the white racist system which

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<sup>950</sup> Cynthia Wedel, “Four Vital Cs” in “Discharging Our Collective Power,” *The YWCA Magazine*, May-June 1973, 12

<sup>951</sup> Letty M. Russell, “An unfinished dimension...We Won’t Stop Now! We Won’t Stop Now! We Won’t Stop Now” *The YWCA Magazine*, May-June 1973, 21

we have all inherited,” it was time “to see the truth with new eyes and to face that truth together.” Barnes passionately told the audience “Surely in our hearts we know that there can be no true freedom for anyone unless all are fully free.”<sup>952</sup>

Throughout, the Y stayed true to its goal of creating a Christian fellowship of women and girls, regardless of race. What did change for the organization was the movement from getting White resistive branches to desegregate to supporting race separatism by staff and members of color. In the end, the Y saw them as the same – simply challenges that would strengthen the resolve of staff and members towards the hope of true racial inclusiveness.

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<sup>952</sup> Speech by Lilace Reid Barnes at 1973 YWCA National Convention, March 28, 1973, Lilace Reid Barnes Papers, Special Collections, Lake Forest College, Lake Forest, Illinois, Folder “YWCA-Speeches”

## Conclusion

“A pluralistic organization rooted in the Christian faith”: The Changing World of the 1970s

In 1976, National Board member, Johnnie Marie Grimes, met with a Women’s Center that was interested in affiliating with a local Y branch. The Center wanted to use the branch’s funds to co-create programs for women. However, several of the Center’s leaders told Grimes they were very hesitant to affiliate with “an organization which has the name ‘Christian’ in its name.” To Grimes, this underscored a larger problem facing the association and the rest of the country. She was “aware of the growing presence on college campuses, in junior and senior high schools among girls and women students, of strong fundamentalist ‘religious’ groups who believe it is essential to absolutize the culture in which the Bible was written and to impose that culture on 20<sup>th</sup> century women.” This message was simple: “It is not your place to seek leadership roles; the Bible says to you, serve men; keep your place; do not run for student offices; this is not your role in life.” For Grimes, and many other leaders of the Y, the tenets of Christianity were to be used to empower women, not to preach their submission. Grimes asked, “How can we educate our leaders to say why we, happily, knowingly engage in programs that liberate women – women of all ethnic and religious backgrounds, and that our [Christian] Purpose does not hold us back, but drives us forward?”<sup>953</sup>

As the 1970s saw the rise of the religious right, the American public increasingly equated religious values with conservative ideas, forcing the Y to defend its liberal “Christian roots.” The debate “between pietists, who focus on doctrine and personal

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<sup>953</sup> Johnnie Marie Grimes, “Our Definable Movement: Who Are We?”, March 25, 1976, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 72

salvation, and social activists, who understand faith as developing out of engaging in struggles for justice,” started intensifying in the 1960s and came to a head in the ensuing decade. The Y, like other liberal Christian institutions, believed that the Christian faith required involvement in issues such as the “alleviation of poverty, the equality of women and medical care for the sick and the elderly.”<sup>954</sup> Those who preached personal salvation believed themselves “divorced” from liberal social justice issues, though open to more conservative activism. Christian evangelicals who recommitted to their Christian faith, and hence were known as “born agains,” were the fastest growing religious group in America in the 1970s.<sup>955</sup> Adding to the evangelicals’ prominence was the fact that in the 1976 Presidential race, the Democratic Party nominee and eventual winner, Jimmy Carter, was a self-professed “born again.”<sup>956</sup> However, President Carter’s “conservative Protestant piety” did not attract the growing right wing of evangelicals to the Democratic Party.<sup>957</sup> This type of split between religion and politics only deepened in the years ahead.<sup>958</sup>

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<sup>954</sup> Kenneth A. Briggs, "Theologians Plead for Social Activism," *New York Times*, January 6 1976.

<sup>955</sup> Kenneth A. Briggs, "Gallup Poll Finds New Evidence of the Religious Character of U.S.," *New York Times*, September 12 1976, "Religious Comeback, 1976," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 29 1976, Gary Wills, "'Born Again' Politics," *New York Times*, August 1 1976.

<sup>956</sup> Kenneth A. Briggs, "Carter's Evangelism Putting Religion into Politics for First Time since '60," *New York Times*, April 11 1976.

<sup>957</sup> Charles Mohr, "Pastor of Largest Baptist Church Hails Ford and Denounces Carter," *New York Times*, October 11 1976. For more on the disconnect between conservative Christians and Carter’s own cultural conservatism (while still the representative of the Democratic Party), see Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, 124-31.

<sup>958</sup> For more on the impact of the religious right in the larger American political dynamic see Ruth Murray Brown, *For A "Christian America" : A History of the Religious Right* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2002), Walter H. Capps, *The New Religious Right : Piety, Patriotism, and Politics* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), Dan T. Carter, *George Wallace, Richard Nixon, and the Transformation of American Politics*, 1st ed., *Charles Edmonson Historical Lectures ; 13th* (Waco, Tex.: Markham Press Fund, 1992), Charles F. Hall, "The Christian Left: Who Are They and How Are They Different from the Christian Right?," *Review of Religious Research* 39, no. 1 (1997), Perlstein, *Before the Storm : Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus*, Perlstein, *Nixonland : The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America*, Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, *Rightward Bound : Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).

There was widespread concern by many Christians, both liberal and conservative, about the state of Christianity and how to reclaim lost membership in light of the late 1960s “God-is-dead movement,” and the success of other ideologies that were “triumphantly secular” leading to “a flurry of activism.” Various liberal Protestant denominations led by the National Council of Churches looked to ways to reclaim certain Christian fundamental beliefs, though stopping short of embracing literal translations of the Bible.<sup>959</sup> There was an increase in the literal Biblical translations by more conservative evangelicals, which led to a further split between the Christian right and left.<sup>960</sup> Johnnie Marie Grimes warned the Y about the gender impact of these translations, and the organization wondered what would happen if the Y was unable to reassert its Christian “heart and bloodstream” on its own terms. National Board member Bess Horton bluntly stated that without its Christian faith to guide the association, the Y would become just “another dying institution.”<sup>961</sup> Shortly before her retirement in 1974, the Y’s General Secretary, Edith Lerrigo, expanded on Horton’s fear of the Y’s future if its Christian roots disappeared. Lerrigo did not want the association to become like other “large, religious institutions” that have “lost the heart” of Christianity.<sup>962</sup> The organization worked to make its Christian Purpose relevant to its membership and the nation. It believed having and acting upon one’s faith only helped in the creation of

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<sup>959</sup> Kenneth A. Briggs, "Protestant Churches Returning to Basic Beliefs," *New York Times*, March 9 1975.

<sup>960</sup> In the mid 1970s, the split could best be seen by the internal fighting by the 2.8 million member Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. For more see Eleanor Blau, "Lutherans' Split Is Growing Wider," *New York Times*, July 2 1976, Tracy Early, "Lutheran Schism Widens," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 28 1976, "Lutheran Group Will Bolt Synod," *New York Times*, August 16 1975, "New Resignations Hit Lutheran Church," *New York Times*, October 10 1976, "Women Ministers Backed by New Lutheran Synod," *New York Times*, November 14 1976.

<sup>961</sup> Bess Horton, "The Thrust of Commitment," *The YWCA Magazine*, March-April 1973, 5

<sup>962</sup> Edith Lerrigo, "YWCA Purpose: Lodestar of the Movement," n.d. 1970s, (the pamphlet is adapted from a speech Lerrigo gave in 1973, and also states that she retired in 1974)Atlanta YWCA Papers, Box 33, Folder 1, 6

“single new humanity” and world peace.<sup>963</sup> Lerrigo blamed other religious groups for compromising on this “burning truth,” and believed this was why Christian “values today seem so hypocritical and so empty to many young people.”<sup>964</sup>

At the core of the organization were two beliefs – that the true love of God was barrier breaking and that one should live her life as “seen in the life of Jesus.” National Board President, Helen Claytor, called these beliefs “simple, but of course profound.” She further stated that the simplicity of these beliefs made them threatening to various power structures, “which is why the YWCA sometimes finds itself under attack.”<sup>965</sup> With its faith in God, the Y propelled itself into various social justice struggles, most notably in the postwar era, the seemingly intractable problem of race. “From the very beginning,” it was known that “the YWCA was destined to be a pluralistic organization rooted in the Christian faith.”<sup>966</sup> It was this “pluralistic membership...that has made it imperative, in our day, that we thrust our collective power toward the elimination of racism wherever it exists and by any means necessary.”<sup>967</sup> The way the Y understood its Christian roots, it could not see itself without women of all races. There was strength in “our blackness, our brownness, our yellowness, our redness, our whiteness.” Bess Horton asked where the organization would be if it were a mono-racial movement,

Suppose there were no whites? Guilty as we realize we are, the whites gave birth to the movement [the YWCA], and we, white middle class who need more than anyone else to be ‘open to new understanding and deeper relationships,’ have been a force in holding the movement together....Suppose there were no blacks? It was our black sisters who said in no uncertain words what we really meant when we said we were a pluralistic membership organization...It was our black

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<sup>963</sup> Letty M. Russell, “A Single New Humanity?” *The YWCA Magazine*, January 1971

<sup>964</sup> Edith Lerrigo, “YWCA Purpose: Lodestar of the Movement,” 6

<sup>965</sup> Helen J. Claytor, “A Lifetime Commitment,” *The YWCA Magazine*, May/June 1973

<sup>966</sup> Bess Horton, “The Thrust of Commitment,” 5

<sup>967</sup> Helen J. Claytor, “A Lifetime Commitment”

sisters who taught us that our best intentional efforts at integration were encumbered and thwarted by our built-in societal and institutional racism.<sup>968</sup>

The interaction between women of all backgrounds was a challenge at times, but it was the commitment to the Christian Purpose that gave a sense of structure on which to build and develop multiracial relationships. In an article for the *YWCA Magazine*, former National Board President, Lilace Reid Barnes, wrote of her personal reflections on forty plus years at the Y, her faith, and her commitment to the One Imperative. She explained what made the Y special was that members “dared risk looking one another in the eye, telling the truth to one another, sometimes hurting and separating ourselves from one another so that we can find ourselves, we have risked a kind of relationship which has been at times deeply painful but which is also profoundly precious because it has enabled us together to say certain things not only to each other but to the world of which we are a part.”<sup>969</sup>

This type of honest dialogue, with the hope of building a stronger organization, attracted various types of women. Lillian Kimura, a Japanese American woman, who was a Y-Teen during internment, joined as staff in the 1970s. The One Imperative and the work on women’s empowerment led her to work for the organization. “[T]he YWCA allows me to be an Asian American in a multiracial organization doing my bit to work for a pluralistic society which will bring ‘peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all people.’”<sup>970</sup> Members in the Student Y grasped “opportunity to build woman’s leadership, but to build that collectively, pluralistically between Third World women and white

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<sup>968</sup> Bess Horton, “The Thrust of Commitment,” 5

<sup>969</sup> Lilace Reid Barnes, “This Road We Walk Together,” *YWCA Magazine*, January 1973

<sup>970</sup> Lillian C. Kimura, “Why I Work for the YWCA,” *The YWCA Magazine*, October 1972

women.”<sup>971</sup> Members and staff believed that by committing oneself to the Christian faith and responding to “the barrier-breaking love of God,” all people could be truly empowered and free.<sup>972</sup> The connection between faith and social action, specifically on race relations, was clear to them, but this type of theology/ideology was becoming rarer during the decade of the 1970s.

Just as the evangelical right was becoming more prominent in American society and politics, the country was becoming increasingly disenchanted with the demands of racial social, economic, and political justice that still vied to be heard.<sup>973</sup> The movement towards suburbanization had affected the country deeply in the postwar era, leaving a crumbling urban infrastructure that was heavily non-white and low income. The religious right tended to be white and live outside of the urban centers; whereas, participation in urban religious institutions, of any denomination, plummeted considerably in the 1970s.<sup>974</sup> This changing religious and racial landscape affected the country for decades. For an urban based organization like the Y, this was a dual problem. With the decline of urban religious institutions, its adherence to its Christian Purpose left it vulnerable in the cities, and its One Imperative work was not seen as relevant in the

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<sup>971</sup> “Excerpts from Notes – Student YWCA Consultant on Alternative Plans for the Year,” November 20, 1973, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 26

<sup>972</sup> Edith Lerrigo, “YWCA Purpose: Lodestar of the Movement,” 7

<sup>973</sup> There was significant backlash to the gains of the civil rights movement, the two largest protests against these gains centered on school busing and on affirmative action. Increasing amount of Whites, outside of the South, began to feel “disadvantaged” as compared to racial minorities. For more see, Terry H. Anderson, *The Pursuit of Fairness: A History of Affirmative Action* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), Judith F. Buncher, Joseph Fickes, and Stephen Orlofsky, *The School Busing Controversy, 1970-75* (New York: Facts on File, 1975), Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey*, 413-18, Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, 77-97, Perlstein, *Before the Storm : Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus*.

<sup>974</sup> Kenneth A. Briggs, “Decline in Major Faiths' Influence in City Reflects Last 10 Years of Urban Change,” *New York Times*, August 18 1975.

suburban and rural areas. By the mid 1970s, the Y had lost over half a million members, or more than 20 percent.<sup>975</sup>

While this new situation hurt the organization, it was not the only reason the Y seemed lost in the middle of the 1970s. The organizational leadership was changing at a fast rate. Many of the women, who had shepherded the Y through World War II, the 1946 Interracial Charter, the civil rights movement, and the One Imperative, were either retiring or dying by the 1970s. Edith Lerrigo, who served as the General Secretary for fourteen years and had been with the Y for forty years before that, retired in 1974. National Board President Helen Claytor retired completely from the organization in 1973 after fifty years of service. The second highest ranking African American national staff member, Mamie Davis, who joined the Y in 1928, died in 1975. Maki Ichiyasu, who started at the Los Angeles Y in 1934, continued at several branches over the years and ended up eventually at the National Board, died in 1970. The combination of a changed nation and a loss in leadership, led some leaders to wonder how the Y could “sustain” themselves “as a definable community.” One woman stated, “We are not the Foreign Policy Association, nor the NAACP, nor the League of Women Voters, nor the American Association of University Women. We may have something of all these in us, but what are we?”<sup>976</sup>

That question was not always easy to answer. The organization had worn so many hats over the decades, but it had always stayed true to its Christian Purpose, racial inclusiveness, and women’s leadership. The role of the Y was to “create a community

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<sup>975</sup> Mary Kelly, "YWCA Theme: 'Empowered, Acting'," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 9 1975. In 1970 the National Y reported having 2.6 million members (“The YWCA in Retrospect,” 1970, National Board YWCA Papers, Unprocessed Box 74), in this very positive 1975 article on the Y, it says that the organizations is “serving around 2 million members.”

<sup>976</sup> Johnnie Marie Grimes, “Our Definable Movement: Who Are We?”

that takes each woman and girl where she is and helps her expand her concern, her understanding, her experience: a community of conscious conviction around which to organize her life, where she can discover values in her own religious tradition or discover new values from other faiths to enrich her life.”<sup>977</sup> This community was real for the millions of women who looked to the Y for inspiration and sisterhood. In an ironic twist, in many ways it was the creation of this community that encouraged these women to change the world, and yet it was the changed world that made the Y in some ways irrelevant on the national stage.<sup>978</sup>

By the early 1970s, the Y was not seen as the place a woman went to raise her gender consciousness. The work of the Y in fostering women’s empowerment was less known than its work on race. Yet all outsiders could agree that it was a Christian organization, and by such was not to be trusted on dealing with race or gender progressively.

When Helen Claytor retired in 1973, she gave a farewell speech to delegates at the national convention, which was soon reprinted for all to see in the *YWCA Magazine*. She spoke of her religious convictions, and her belief in making a better world. She urged continued vigilance of the One Imperative and hoped that one day racism and all the evils associated with it would perish. While it was a speech where she reflected solely on her life and career with the Y, the end of the speech summed up why so many women joined and stayed with the Y for so many years. Claytor said, “I have done what I could all my life for the cause of human dignity, multiplying my efforts by those of all

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<sup>977</sup> Edith Lerrigo, “YWCA Purpose: Lodestar of the Movement,” 12

<sup>978</sup> Today, the Y continues to provide vital community services through its local branches. It also continues to promote its One Imperative and has taken a leadership role in domestic violence advocacy. In 2002 the National Board moved from its original headquarters in New York City to Washington D.C. It lost a majority of its national staff.

the members of this organization who, motivated by the barrier-breaking love of God, have kept on a road they cannot and would not get off.”<sup>979</sup> The Y’s road was walked by millions of women dedicated to creating a Christian social order that preached inclusiveness and empowerment for those most overlooked in many aspect of society – women and girls, regardless of race. Along the way, they did help create, not their Christian social order, but certainly, many of our early 21<sup>st</sup> century views about women and race. Their pioneering efforts should be acknowledged and celebrated.

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<sup>979</sup> Helen J. Claytor, “A Lifetime Commitment”

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