Addie Hunton: Respectability at Home and Abroad

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A thesis submitted to the

Graduate School of Newark

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts

Written under the direction of Ruth Feldstein

And approved by

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Newark, New Jersey

January 2022
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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In the early 1900’s, at the peak of the women’s club movements, women’s activism and the impending World War, Black women were engaging in international dialogues—conversing with women in other nations about how the race needed to come together, speaking at international conferences, and traveling to understand other nations' social and political systems. Activist Addie Waites Hunton dedicated her life to transnational activism through membership, leadership and service in women’s organizations ranging from the Young Women’s Christian Association, the International Council for Women of the Darker Races to the Women’s International League of Peace and Freedom. Throughout Addie Hunton’s life, her activism shifted between an American lens to a transnational lens, with emphasis on respectability, racial equality and virtue.
Acknowledgements

This thesis is a product of the work of all the women before me.

First and foremost, thank you Addie Hunton. Your dedication to fighting for Black men and women will inspire me for the rest of my life. I would not be here today without the work of you and the strong, intelligent, women who came after you.

Thank you, Dr. Feldstein for guiding me through this research for a full year, I would not be where I am today without your support. Your advice will continue to impact me for the rest of my career.

Thank you, Dr. Tiffany Gill and Dr. Keisha Blain for writing the book that sparked my interest in Black Women’s International activism. I found Addie Hunton’s name in the glossary of that book and have not looked back since.

Thank you, to my two angels that I am convinced got me through this degree program. Grandma and Professor Tyree, thank you for watching over me. Though you will never see my work, I thought of you both every day I sat down to write.

Thank you to my friends, Amirah, Nick, Devyn, Lauren, Keyanna, some of my biggest cheerleaders since we were kids. Thank you for the best writing breaks filled with memories.

Thank you to my colleagues at GHS. I have loved working with you all and am so thankful to have such a supportive team of brilliant historians to work with every day.

Thank you to my students. Thank you for always doing page checks with me and listening to me talk about my degree. It has been my honor to be your teacher.

Last but absolutely not least, I want to extend the biggest thank you to my family. I went through some of the hardest times in my life while writing this thesis and your support never wavered. Whitney, you and Zara were the best roommates a grad student could ask for.
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Introduction

Adelina (Addie) Waites Hunton was born on June 11, 1866 in Norfolk, Virginia. She was the oldest of six children and upon her mother’s death, Addie and her siblings were sent to live with her aunt in Massachusetts. 1 Hunton remained in the north for most of her upbringing and received her high school diploma from Boston Latin School. Following high school, she moved to her hometown in Norfolk, Virginia where she met William Alphaeus Hunton. The couple married in the summer of 1893. William Alphaeus Hunton was a member of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) in Norfolk, Virginia where he became the first Black director of a branch of the YMCA in his region. 2 William A. Hunton dedicated his life to the YMCA, especially when the YMCA’s International Committee began to use branch members from the

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2 Ibid., pg.108.
“Colored Men’s Department” in which William Hunton was a leader. In the early 20th century, many African Americans were navigating newfound passions, pursuing higher education, building up their communities, engaging in activism for civil rights and joining organizations that promoted social, economic, and political progress. William Hunton frequently traveled the world to attend international conferences and conventions, which influenced Addie’s appreciation and understanding of the importance of international relationships and activism. As she watched her husband travel to London, Tokyo, and Canada, Addie dreamt of international travel for herself and her children, William Jr., and Eunice. By the turn of the 20th century, both Black women and men alike were able to travel abroad to discuss and spread awareness of the discrimination and perils of Jim Crow America.

In 1908, she and her two children traveled to Europe for vacation which fed her curiosity surrounding international politics that she never let go of. Though this was a personal trip, she felt inspired by international travel and the work her husband did internationally within the scope of the organizations he participated in. When she returned to the United States, she dedicated her time to the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), which “provided African American women with an organized, well-funded, inter-religious (and nominally, interracial) organization through which they [might] fight for civic reforms.”

Groups like the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), the Young Women’s Christian Association and the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) were led by powerful Black women who were determined to make their voices heard regarding peace, equality and civil rights for the race. These organizations were channels for Black women’s activism across the globe and often, these clubwomen were seen as “true negotiators” of peace movements, human and civil rights, international politics and

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foreign policies. Through her membership, Addie Hunton participated in organizations that uplifted Black women both internationally and domestically for the rest of her life. After William’s death in 1916, Addie continued her work with the YWCA and in 1918, volunteered herself to join the war efforts and go alongside African American YMCA members to France as a minister. She was not an official ordained minister, her work with the YMCA led her to provide religious guidance to troops abroad. Religion was a central part of the Hunton family’s activism and commitment to uplift the African American race. Their idea of uplift was rooted in Christianity and the organizations they were members of upheld their ideologies of respectability and virtue. Each organization in which Addie and William were involved gave room for the couple to establish themselves as political activists in which they believed in “establishing an international army of God for justice.”

Following her experiences in France during the first World War, Hunton’s dedication to racial uplift through activism framed the latter 30 years of her life. When she came back to the United States following the war, she became a member of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and the International Council of the Women of Darker Races (ICWDR). Hunton’s activism was framed around international race policies and domestic racial equity until her death in 1943.

Addie Hunton embodied the standards of a respectable Black woman and spent centuries advocating for peace and freedom across the world. This historical focus Addie Hunton and her membership in organizations can be used as a mechanism for studying Black women’s activism as it shifted from a domestic lens to a transnational lens. This shift is apparent when scholars

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discuss the desires for equality and peace these club members collectively had. They were willing to negotiate, discuss, debate and advocate for each other and what they believed in with whomever would listen, both at home and abroad. Historians of Black women’s international activism focus their studies on the types of organizations these activists were joining, what types of women were most likely to join and focusing on the organizations’ mission statements and mottos. As Addie Hunton’s membership, leadership and service in women’s organizations ranging from the Young Women’s Christian Association to the Women’s International League of Peace and Freedom suggests, her activism shifted back and forth between an American lens and a transnational lens that upheld her lifelong commitment to creating “home ties” across the world. This essay considers the work of Addie Hunton in the context of larger conversations regarding domestic and transnational activism, and sheds light on how her specific activism and global presence were a direct result of her dedication to creating a Black womanhood that extended past private, respectable bounds. As she experienced what the world had to offer a Black woman in the early 1900’s, her outlook on religion, racial inequalities, transnational peace, and wars also shifted.

Hunton’s presence in the Young Women’s Christian Association, National Association for Colored Women, International Council of the Women of Darker Races, and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom allowed her to establish herself amongst activists committed to racial equality at a time when African American women were inserting themselves into the politics of the race for the first time. Addie was able to shift her lens as she engaged in

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6 See also, Brittney Cooper Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women; Keisha Blain et. al To Turn the Whole World Over: Black Women and Internationalism; Keisha Blain Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom; Nikki Brown Private Politics & Public Voices: Black Women’s Activism from World War I to the New Deal.
various organizations both home and abroad. Through transitions from the local to transnational, Addie Hunton dedicated her life to creating “home ties” that expanded far beyond U.S soil.

African American women who were dedicated to uplifting their race used their ideologies surrounding respectability as a driving vehicle in their pursuit of activism both at home and abroad. Racial uplift as a concept promoted the idea that African Americans had the power and ability to better their race through education, social and political organizations, and economic stability. 7 Historian Elsa Barkley Brown claims that in the transition to life as newly freed citizens, African American women specifically sought to “create their own pulpits from which to speak—to restore their voices to the community.” 8 So, when African American men of the early 20th century began to expand their activism across the Atlantic, African American women were right alongside them in the same way Addie Hunton was to her husband, William. Black women brought knowledge regarding how other nations dealt with systemic and institutional racism back to the United States with the intention of spreading the information as far and wide as they could. This suggests that there was a common belief that racial uplift and racial progress could be achieved both at home in the United States and abroad. But also, that this uplift and progress was in the hands of Black women who were using their organizations’ chapter meetings to discuss transnational politics and racial issues. These women were “informal diplomats” across the globe, speaking at international conferences and meetings to spread their desires and goals for the Black race across the world.9 For international activist Mary McLeod Bethune, it was vital to

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advocate for the rights of African Americans to be seen as human rights on a transnational scale in organizations like the United Nations. Mary McLeod Bethune and Addie Hunton alike embraced the ideologies of transnational organizations and rose to the top, embracing leadership roles that sustained their activism. The “relentless activities” within the movements showed that Afro-American women wanted to have a place in the nation and to be a voice for global causes.\textsuperscript{10}

As for the types of organizations that were at the center of Black women’s dedication to their activism, Ramdani emphasizes U.S- centered organizations like the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), NACW, and the ICWDR. On the other hand, Keisha Blain focuses on organizations like the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and the Peace Movement of Ethiopia (PME) to explore Black women’s significance to “Pan-African unity” and the larger fight against “global White supremacy.”\textsuperscript{11} Blain provides a more transnational focus to Black women’s activism rather than Ramdani more American focused organizations. Addie Hunton’s work tied these two types of organizations together. Often times, Black members of various American organizations sought out international organizations that broadened their view of the world, seeking goals of racial uplift and peace transnationally.

Each of these authors and historians, from Ramdani to historian Blain offers a definition of Black internationalism that included and centered the voices of African American women activists during the early 20th century. Scholars are trying to center Black women, and, in this case, the social and political organizations of which Black women were a part of to rewrite the history of Black transnationalism. Studying Addie Hunton’s work allows historians to tie the thread between Black women’s domestic activism and her transnational activism together, while

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{11}Keisha N. Blain, \textit{Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom}, pg. 3.
emphasizing her membership in specific clubs and organizations that upheld both the private, respectable aspects of Black womanhood and public aspects of Black womanhood.

Throughout Addie Hunton’s membership in these organizations, writing became an outlet for the work she was doing on the ground across the world. It brought together both the private portions of her life, in the memoir-style books she published, and the public portions of her life in the public journal articles she published. The work Addie Hunton was doing reflected the time of heightened intellectualism and respectable ideologies amongst the Black race. Historians like Brittney Cooper emphasizes the tie between Black intellectual thought and racial uplift in her book, *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women*, when discussing activist Mary Church Terrell who during the same time frame, was a member of many of the same organizations as Addie Hunton. Over time, Black women regularly sought ways to spread their knowledge and advocacy further in order to serve the race better and uphold a particular identity usually associated with respectability. There was a common belief amongst Black club women that this uplift and progress was in the hands of Black women who were using their organizations’ chapter meetings to discuss transnational politics and racial issues.

Respectability framed many of the socio-economic, class-based structures of African American communities and organizations. According to historian Victoria Wolcott, “respectability encompassed a set of ideas and normative values that had tremendous power among African Americans and was particularly open to competing definitions, inflections and meanings.” Respectability defined Black womanhood at the turn of the 20th century and separated the working-class woman from the middle-class woman, outlining what womanly

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duties were, what motherhood should look like, and Black women’s sexual liberties. How a woman should engage in the work of racial uplift required an acknowledgement of the separation between private versus public, home versus community, and church versus state. Addie Hunton, like others, framed the meaning of Black womanhood and respectability through their ability to toggle between these dualities. Moreover, in organizations like the National Association for Colored Women, “racial respectability acted not only as a tool of class and gender disciplining but also as a tool of gender definition and theorization” that left room for women like Addie Hunton to formulate their own defining factors of respectability through intellectual thought. These organizations created space for redefining Black womanhood and embodying visions of Black womanhood that went beyond traditional standards. 13

As historian Martha Jones recently noted, “so when those women come together under the auspices of a new political organization, they are importing ideas that come out of their churches, ideas that come out of their education, ideas that come out of their own political communities. And they are now honing them into a mission that both says Black women need their own space in their own autonomous organizations to work intersectionally” 14(Historian Martha Jones Podcast transcript). These ideas that came out of their churches, education, political communities warranted space for discussions and meetings created for Black women by Black women.

The work of Addie Hunton proves that racial uplift laced in respectability and transnationalism would be what impacted the Black race. As she traveled around the United

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States and abroad, her activism continued to shift between a private and public lens, leaving space for her to go back and forth between the two. Addie Hunton’s membership in these organizations created space for her to shift from an American focused mindset to American organizations to a transnational focus with international organizations. The ideologies of Addie Hunton overlapped with that of so many other Black women activists before, during, and after the first World War. Activists like Addie Hunton, Mary McLeod Bethune, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell and more promoted political reform, education reform, the expansion of civil and voting rights and used social and political clubs and organizations to bring African American women across the world together.
Chapter III. Respectability & Womanhood

Home is one of the three immutable things in life, and the glory of Christendom. Hence, it is true that to women is allotted the highest and most blessed part of the work of racial uplift. Universally it is conceded that in this development of our home life, the salvation of the race is in the hands of its womanhood.

-- Addie Hunton, “A Deeper Reverence for Home Ties” (1907, Colored American Magazine) 15

At the center of Addie Hunton’s activism was her faith. Christianity intersected with respectability as the two pillars of her ideology, influencing how she acted, what and where she wrote, the types of ideas she had and the way she engaged both in private and in public. Both the standards of respectability and the decrees of the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) established strict standards for how all of their members should act, dress, think, speak and present themselves to society. These standards often separated women amongst socioeconomic classes in many communities, placing the elite, educated and respectable women at the top of the social ladder. Victoria Wolcott considers society’s emphasis on elite Black women in social organizations and clubs to be a “bourgeois respectability.” 16 Bourgeois respectability shaped Black female activists’ desire to act as “unblemished representatives of the race and to reform the behavior of their working-class sisters.” 17 A pillar of Black bourgeois respectability was religion because for many women, their ideologies surrounding domesticity, motherhood, sisterhood, friendship, and wifehood were often rooted in the Bible. The relationship between respectability and religion in Addie Hunton’s life shaped her activism as she placed herself at the forefront of her race’s battles.

17 Ibid.
Wolcott outlines the basis of bourgeois respectability as it pertained to elite Black clubwomen in the early 1900s, while historian, Nancy Marie Robertson’s *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations and the YWCA 1906-46* focused on the standards White women set for themselves in organizations like the YWCA. Both authors discuss the dichotomy between definitions of sisterhood and motherhood across racial lines in women’s clubs. Over time as White clubwomen began to include Black club women in their organizations, their ideals of sisterhood shifted. Sisterhood for white YWCA members “drew upon nineteenth-century ideals of womanhood as well as the values of evangelical Protestantism,” which often skewed the White woman’s definition of womanhood since they frequently didn’t see Black women as equals.\(^\text{18}\) Those “nineteenth-century ideals” were frequently discriminatory in nature, showing that their ideals of womanhood were not attainable for Black women. Historian Nancy Robertson stated White YWCA members “went from justifying racial segregation as compatible with sisterhood” to a mindset that created space for Black YWCA members due to their commitment to their faith.\(^\text{19}\) Black YWCA members frequently defined sisterhood in conjunction with religious connotations of sisterhood, claiming for all men, women and children regardless of race to be children of God.

Addie Hunton discussed motherhood and sisterhood frequently throughout her life as an activist. I found it fascinating that she also paired these terms with her own definition of womanhood; and she outlined how womanhood, sisterhood and motherhood were inseparable. For all the perils faced by Black women in the world, Addie Hunton still saw the value in leading Black women to salvation through Christ. Purity, chastity, and virtue were all things she saw as

\(^{19}\) Ibid.
requirements for respectable Black women, as mothers, sisters to all. For Hunton, the way of keeping herself (and others) aligned with the ideals of bourgeois respectability was to devote themselves to Christendom. This ideology led her to be an active member of the YWCA because they shared similar values, placing purity and chastity at the forefront of their organization’s motto.

In 1902, Addie Hunton wrote “A Pure Motherhood: The Basis of Racial Integrity” as a part of a book called The United Negro” His Problems And His Progress: Containing The Addresses And Proceedings Of The Negro Young People’s Congress. This book was essentially an anthology, about 730 pages in length and 125 chapters written by various authors who offered their take on the role Christian organizations play in resolving or mediating race relations.\(^2\) Addie Hunton was one of very few women to be a part of this book and it is clear she recognized the unique role she played. The book’s title referenced “His” problems and “his” progress, and many of the organizations included in the chapters were men’s Christian organizations and the first 100 pages were written solely by men.\(^1\) Addie Hunton made sure to stand firm in her belief that the work the men were doing was important, while also asserting her belief that it was women who made the real change. At the beginning of her chapter, “A Pure Motherhood,” she wrote “for in the discussion of these problems affecting the highest and purest development of our people, the relation of women to that development cannot be ignored.”\(^2\) This was a particularly important way to begin her chapter. It is almost as if she knew Black women’s voices were going unheard, even in the context of this book; and she reiterated the importance of

\(^2\)The United Negro” His Problems And His Progress: Containing The Addresses And Proceedings Of The Negro Young People’s Congress, 1902.
\(^1\)Addie Hunton, “A Pure Motherhood: The Basis of Racial Integrity,” Page 433
\(^2\) Ibid.
her voice and the voices of fellow Black women in the fight for equality of her race. Her chapter outlines the same idea that Wolcott outlines, that elite Black women take the duty of salvation onto their own shoulders. This chapter combines Hunton’s ideals of womanhood with her reliance on Christian values of purity and virtue. She claims, “to woman is given the sacred and divine trust of developing the germ of life-- it is her peculiar function to sustain, nourish, train and educate the future man.”\(^{23}\) The idea is that as mothers, wives and daughters, Black women held particularly important roles in resolving race relations. Within these roles that women held, according to Hunton, no one else would know the things they knew or be capable of the work they did without a woman’s guidance. This ideology sustained Addie Hunton’s activism and continual membership in the YWCA that similarly valued the relationship between activism and Christianity, womanhood and motherhood. Of these virtuous ideals of womanhood, motherhood and sisterhood, Hunton placed her faith at the center. To her, the combination of bourgeois respectability and Christianity for Black women was what would inevitably uplift the Black race.

In her chapter, “A Pure Motherhood,” she claimed:

> We have seen her abundance the fruits of her devotion to the church. We have witnessed her as a leader in social and moral reforms. Her integrity and faithfulness in position of honor and trust in the business world have been attained, but it is in the uplifting and purifying of the home that her greatest work has been wrought, and there rests her greatest responsibility to God and the human race. \(^{24}\)

She continued to link together her previously stated ideals of womanhood and Christianity in her article, “A Deeper Reverence For Home Ties” for *Colored American Magazine* in 1907. This magazine was published from 1900-1909 and featured writings from activists like Hunton, Booker T. Washington, Alberta Moore and more. According to ColoredAmerican.org, the

\(^{24}\)Ibid.
magazine provided space to develop “African American literature, protesting injustice, and contesting dominant representations of African American culture and history.” 25 Most importantly, the magazine foregrounded an effort to create space for Black women to “construct an aspirational Black middle-class identity.” 26 How exactly Addie Hunton became affiliated with the magazine is unclear, however, due to her membership in various different organizations at the time the magazine was published, it is possible to assume she received recommendations from other frequent writers like DuBois and Washington. Their shared experiences and activism in social organizations likely led her to inquire about writing for the magazine. Regardless, her article, “A Deeper Reverence” upholds her belief in African American women’s ability to uplift the race. She stated:

Certainly you will agree that while we need that fine type of delicate and lovely womanhood, which so effaces itself that we are conscious of us presence only by its sweet fragrance, we need, also, for these hazardous and critical times that are strong, self-reliant type of womanhood-- Spartan-like in faith and courage. 27

The juxtaposition between women being “delicate” and “lovely” to them being “strong” and “Spartan-like” upholds Hunton’s belief that despite all the perils Black women experience, they can and will uplift the race through their devotion to their faith through their independence and courage. This work, for Hunton, began at home. Bourgeois respectability manifested itself in the way that Black women raised their children to act, kept their homes clean, the type of clothes they wore and how often they attend church. 28

25 ColoredAmerican.org.
27 Ibid.
As Addie Hunton’s activism continued, she asserted that the efforts of Black women were not limited “to her own fireside,” but rather, that “home-life is just now in its formative state among us, and, at this period of racial development, the very womanly woman is she who, while seeking ever for the highest and purest ideals for their own home, yet has a heart and an ear for the crying needs of humanity and is willing to consecrate body and soul as a rock whereon the race may build firm and sure.” 29 The shift here from addressing the “crying needs” of a baby asking a mother for help to the “crying needs” of humanity asking their race for help makes for a powerful connection on Hunton’s part. It represented the duality of Black women as both mothers but also, as activists fighting for their race. “Work, pray and hope-- this seems to be woman’s part in the uplift of the race.”30

30 Ibid.
Chapter III: World War I and the Battle for Equality

In 1899, Addie and William Hunton moved their family from Atlanta, Georgia to Brooklyn, New York to escape the never-ending perils of being Black in the American South. When in Brooklyn, Addie became a board member for the YWCA’s Council for Colored Work while William continued to lead African American members of the YMCA. The Huntons continued to be active members of organizations that framed their outlook on life, both at home and abroad. When William passed away in 1916, Addie dedicated her life to upholding her husband’s legacy and decidedly memorialized him through pursuing “the great unfinished tasks, social, religious and racial, to which he gladly gave his life.”

Her membership in the YWCA and her husband’s legacy in the YMCA led her to volunteer for the American Expeditionary Forces in France in 1917.

“The largest cause ever put up to mankind is the only one now before us, ‘to make the world safe for democracy.’ In its highest sense this is the same thing as the Kingdom of God.”

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31 Kathryn Coker, “Black Suffragists and Activists” Richmond Public Library.
33 “Editorial,” Association Monthly 11(January 1918) pg. 6.
In 1918 the YWCA’s monthly magazine put out an editorial on World War I comparing democracy to club members’ faith, protecting women and keeping them safe. For these women, creating a world that is as safe as the Kingdom of God was vital to ensuring the world would be a better place. By 1918, many women in the YWCA across all races had gone overseas as missionaries to facilitate religious and social services for soldiers. It was the organization’s dedication to “cheer and encourage; to administer to the spiritual and physical needs; and establish a connecting link between the soldier and the home” that fueled many women, especially African American women to travel abroad and join the war efforts.34 Many “self-help and social welfare organizations” brought together services, money, and necessary wartime supplies for Black soldiers both abroad and at home.

During the war, the YMCA sent male and female members of Black Chapters of both the YWCA and the YMCA to run majority African American military canteens (or camps) where many of the Black soldiers sought refuge, received supplies and prayers and moral support. Women in the YWCA ran these canteens and supervised their access to supplies, food, and tools. Addie Hunton herself said many of the women “dispensed smiles and sunshine to the oftentimes homesick boys, along with whatever she had to tempt their appetites.” 35 Both at home and abroad, Black women were pillars to the needs of the race.

Her belief in the organization’s values fueled her desire to travel abroad and aid African American soldiers’ religious needs during this tumultuous wartime. When Addie returned from France, she felt called to document her experiences as an African American woman abroad.

34 Addie Hunton, Two Colored Women with the American Expeditionary Forces, pg. 33.
35 Ibid.
during the war. In 1920, alongside YWCA member and fellow volunteer Kathryn Johnson, the two women wrote *Two Colored Women with the Expeditionary Forces* to catalogue their experiences abroad regarding race, gender, and politics.

Though Addie had experience traveling abroad prior to her time in France, the encounters she had in the military canteens shaped her activism for years to come. In *Two Colored Women*, Hunton discusses the difference between the YWCA campsites for White troops versus Black troops. White YWCA members sent overseas to fight in the war were racist and discriminatory toward their fellow African American troops, bringing the structures of Jim Crow America abroad. Most frequently, the YMCA White troops upholding these racist structures were commanders who frequently abused their power in order to mistreat the African American soldiers. Because Black women like Addie played so many roles in the function of these campsites, from “assist[ing] in religious work; equip the library with books, write letters for the soldiers,” they had a unique view of discrimination abroad, they usually witnessed this discrimination firsthand.  

Hunton expressed deep gratitude for the opportunity to travel abroad with the troops from the YWCA, regarding her work at Camp Pontanezen in Brest, France as “constructive and prolific, with wonderful and satisfying results.”  

The discrimination she witnessed, alongside the war itself took away from the “beauty and joy” of the work women like Hunton were doing.  

Upon arrival to France, female secretaries of the YWCA were frequently barred from leaving the Paris YMCA office and going to their assigned canteens. Hunton recalled two times this happened to her, once upon arrival to France and once upon the end of the war. Hunton felt that the YWCA did not do enough to support abandoned troops, outlining how

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36 Addie Hunton, *Two Colored Women with the American Expeditionary Forces*, pg 22.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
it took ten months to get more Black women secretaries to the canteens, leaving just three
missionaries for 150,000 colored troops. Moreover, according to Hunton, close to 40,000
troops were left at Camp Pontanezen from the end of the war in 1918 to summer of 1919. This
hesitation to allow African American troops and secretaries in and out of France could be related
to the fact that the leaders at the YMCA Paris office “came from all parts of the United States,
North, South, East and West, and brought their native prejudices with them”

Racism didn’t just exist in the YMCA’s Paris office, however. According to Hunton’s accounts, there were also “No Negroes Allowed” signs on YMCA canteen huts and Black troops had to request the signs be removed for commanders who wouldn’t always honor their requests. Hunton expressed disdain that Black troops and secretaries of the YMCA couldn’t even be served food in common areas due to their race nor receive medical help in the White YMCA canteens even in emergency situations. One of the most intriguing parts of Hunton’s account of her experiences abroad was the use of photographs to uphold her arguments. On page 31, there is a photograph of a YMCA military hut that has a “Colored Soldier’s only” sign located on the top right. This sign was placed after White YMCA members went to this hut to hear sermons by the female missionaries and African American Reverend, T. A Griffith who frequently preached to the soldiers. The YMCA officer found out about these interracial informal church sermons and banned White soldiers from even entering the hut. Over and over

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39 Addie Hunton, *Two Colored Women with the American Expeditionary Forces*, pg 43.
40 Ibid, 24.
41 Ibid., 26.
42 Ibid., 27.
43 Ibid, 27.
44 Both the photocopied version of the book and the print copy of the book make it difficult to see this photograph. I can’t find a clear photograph anywhere. Her citations give this information.
45 According to Hunton, Reverend T.A Griffith was a Black YMCA secretary at Camp Guthrie, who frequently preached to soldiers abroad.
again, Addie Hunton witnessed the discrimination happening in YMCA huts and canteens, not just amongst fellow soldiers but from commanding officers. According to historian Susan Chandler, Hunton’s view of this discrimination was twofold. On the one hand, Hunton supported the African American troops being abroad and “saw it as a chance for the race, particularly [for] African American men, to prove themselves.” While on the other hand, “…her hatred of war grew” as she witnessed first-hand the discriminatory practices held within the military toward Black YMCA soldiers. By outlining the perils she witnessed amongst Black YMCA members abroad, she displayed the change from a positive outlook for the YMCA’s activism shift into something she did not deem respectable. Though she wrote and published this book while still being an active member of the organization, she did not hesitate to express her disappointment in the YMCA.

Two Colored Women began with such a belief in the power of the YMCA and arguably, the U.S. Government to dismantle Jim Crow structures abroad in the military because African Americans were going overseas to support and fight for America. For Hunton, “it was a wonderful spirit that prompted the YMCA to offer its vast facilities to this service,” with this service meaning the war efforts. Hunton believed the war could be justified if it “ma[d]e universal and eternal the practical application of the time-worn theory of the brotherhood of man,” the idea that on the battlefield, duty transcended race. Once again, she was asserting her ideas of sisterhood, and in this case, brotherhood across racial lines. Hunton felt that in the case of the war and activism, duty, brotherhood, and virtue always transcended racial boundaries.

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47 Ibid.
48 Addie Hunton, Two Colored Women with the American Expeditionary Forces, pg. 23.
49 Addie Hunton, Two Colored Women with the American Expeditionary Forces, pg. 23.
Additionally, I would argue Addie Hunton firmly believed the work she did on those military canteens was worthy of acknowledgement and important to the success of the soldiers abroad. In the ‘Afterthought’ section of the book, Hunton suggests that the acknowledgement would not come from the United States but rather, the French. Yet, neither she nor the other Black YWCA women who traveled abroad to aid these military canteens received recognition within their own organization or by the United States for their presence or work. According to Hunton, her efforts in the war and the Black YMCA troops’ efforts to support the United States Army were diminished by the discrimination they experienced from their White comrades.

That “biting and stinging thing which is ever shadowing us in our own country” transcended borders onto canteens and camps abroad. Racism was inherent in the context of Black women’s international work but also coming out of her beloved organization. She was appalled that the YWCA held up standards of virtue and respectability, yet she watched as racism trumped morals within these military camps. To Hunton, that fact took away the satisfaction that came with being a part of such a monumental moment in United States history. She frequently noted throughout the book that the organization did not do anything to mediate racial tensions amongst YMCA members. In fact, decades after she returned from the war, in her 1938 book, *A Pioneer Prophet of Young Men*, she reflects on how grateful she was that her husband, William, did not live to see the “terrible cataclysm that men named the World War.” This disapproval for the YMCA’s handle on race relations within the canteens shifted Hunton’s domestic activism towards what Susan Chandler called a “peace agenda.”

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50 Ibid, 254.
51 Ibid, 23.
half of her life striving toward peace amongst races. racial equality and racial uplift both at home and abroad. 54 She wanted to fight for the legacy of her own time and sacrifices in the war but also, the lives and legacies of the Black troops who lost their lives abroad fighting for America. It was important for her to be a part of creating safe spaces for American troops around the world. At the end of her book, Two Colored Women, she reflected:

May we not hope that as the heart of this homeland finds its way to those American shrines in France, a real peace, born of knowledge and gratitude, shall descend upon us, blotting out hate and its train of social and civil injustices? Then shall we realize the value and meaning of the pain and sacrifice of these dark-browned heroes of ours. 55

The sacrifices she saw Black YMCA troops making abroad stuck with her for years to follow. She believed that those Black YMCA troops deserved “real peace” and she spent the rest of her career as an activist fighting for them.

As a result of her disappointment with the inherent racism ingrained into the YMCA and YWCA and the US military, Addie Hunton sought out other social organizations that shared similar belief systems to hers regarding activism focused on racial justice, civil rights, transnational peace and politics and anti-War ideologies. She decided to step down from her roles in the YWCA and pursued the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and the International Council of Women of the Darker Races (ICWDR) which aligned with her beliefs more than the YWCA did. At the forefront of her activism was her desire to experience and fight for racial equality and uplift that was transnational and thus, “began to assert [her]self nationally and internationally” as an activist and advocate for African American women. 56

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54 Ibid.
55 Addie Hunton, Two Colored Women with the American Expeditionary Forces, 24.
transnational lens was becoming more and more common; African American women all around the United States were joining organizations with ties to international relations to expand their reach beyond the United States border.
Chapter IV. Transnational Peace Activism & Respectability

Being the report of a Committee of Six disinterested Americans representing organizations exclusively American, who having personally studied conditions in Haiti in 1926, favor the restoration of the Independence of the Negro Republic.57

This excerpt is at the beginning of *Occupied Haiti*, a book written by about 8 members of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in 1926. The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) was an organization in which women—initially white women—opposed war and promoted peace both at home and abroad. Created in 1915 by Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch and hundreds of others, the organization’s goals were rooted in equity amongst nations, peace, and economic equity. Though the concepts of feminism and arguably White feminism, were not clearly stated as vital pillars to their organization in 1915, those concepts were upheld by the active members who frequently advocated and fought for transnational peace even as they simultaneously discouraged the membership of African American women like Addie Hunton into their organization. According to historian Melinda Plastas, the WILPF was “resistant to the idea of integrating the organization.” 58 Similar to many activist organizations led by White women during the early 20th century, Black women were not seen as integral to the overall fight for equality and though they were sometimes given membership, they were rarely at the forefront of the movements or present at conferences.

There was a push by African American members of the WILPF and other organizations to dedicate more time and energy into providing an equal space for themselves and advocating for their right to be full members in that organization. Since the WILPF was separated into

chapters based on location, often there were primarily white chapters with minimal Black members. In many of the local chapters, Black women were outnumbered, and their voices went unheard. Black members of the WILPF weren’t usually in positions of power. African American women made up less than 5% of the members from the time of its inception to 1945. However, in 1927, the organization created an Interracial committee of Black and White women that was spearheaded by Hunton. The Interracial Committee was dedicated to resolving racism and racial tensions within the organization and to resolving issues that Black members had with White members. Once in these leadership positions, Hunton defended the roles Black women played in the organization and frequently advocated for their greater involvement in the organization. This advocacy for Black women’s presence in the WILPF framed her experiences in this organization both at home and abroad because it made her want to fight more for Black members as a leader in the Interracial Committee. Among the other African American women who played a role in the WILPF were activists Margaret Murray Washington and Mary Church Terrell. These women were able to work together as active members in this organization with White organizers and creators. These African American women Addie allied with were vital parts of other organizations like the National Association of Colored Women and collectively brought their extensive leadership skills and advocacy for African American womanhood to these white-dominated organizations. In Michelle Rief’s “Thinking Globally, Acting Locally: The International Agenda of African American Clubwomen,” she argues that African American women who were part of the white organizations and specifically the WILPF were constantly

including racial matters into their peace activism, bringing focus to “sovereign Black nations’ like Haiti, Liberia and Ethiopia.”

In 1926, Addie Hunton and other members of the WILPF including the organization’s secretary, Emily Greene Balch were sent abroad to discuss the United States’ occupation of Haiti. This was a way for groups like the WILPF to place themselves on the international stage to promote their anti-War, anti-imperialist ideologies to other nations. According to historian Evelyn Spears, this trip to Haiti was purposefully organized by the WILPF leaders to include both White and Black members, to “educate White WILPF women about the plight of black America, black culture, black art, and black literature.” Moreover, historian Meredith Plastas claims that “Hunton’s participation in the Haiti delegations deepened her role in the international women’s peace movement…” causing her activism to continue to transcend national borders far beyond her work with the WILPF.

Following this trip to Haiti, Hunton wrote “Chapter X: Racial Relations” about her experiences in a book titled, Occupied Haiti, edited by WILPF secretary, Emily Greene Balch. The chapter gives credit to both Hunton and Balch, since Balch was the book’s editor. The book had 15 chapters total with a range of topics such as the political history of Haiti to its agriculture to its judiciary branch. Of the 15 chapters, 10 of them were written with or by Emily Balch. Chapter X discusses the relationship between Haitians and American troops, nationals, and missionaries, and offered solutions to what Hunton (and other WILPF members) believed could remedy the relationship between America and Haiti.

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60 Michelle Rief, “Thinking Nationally, Acting Globally: The International Agenda of African American Clubwomen.”
61 Melinda Plastas, A Band of Noble Women, pg. 185.
62 Ibid.
In this chapter, Hunton compared the racial tensions in America to the racial tensions in Haiti. She emphasized how Haiti had a history of occupation, in which race relations between White and Black citizens were tumultuous. She began the chapter discussing how prior to the United States’ occupation of Haiti in 1915, political occupation of majority white countries such as France resulted in “almost no color prejudice.” 63 To Hunton, “there was almost nothing to make Haitians racially self-conscious” until the United States brought it to their land.64 Moreover, Haiti had a history of separating its social classes by socioeconomic status, implementing a gap between the elite and the peasants. Hunton argued that America’s history of racial tensions had spread beyond U.S. borders and into Haitian ideologies which changed Haiti's social stratification. As a result, Haitians organized themselves by both socioeconomic status and race. “Haitians felt the color line was drawn as much as it is in the southern part of the United States,” which led to a divided society that persisted in Haiti for decades following U.S occupation. One conclusion Hunton made was that Haitians preferred that the U.S send men of color as diplomats and representatives; this argument countered American politician’s assumptions that Haitians preferred it when the U.S sent white male diplomats, doctors and political officials.65 Despite noting these distinct differences in approaches to diplomacy, Hunton still focused on the impact men across lines of race had on the relationship between Haitians and Americans. She gave solutions to solve issues regarding international race relations modeled by a book called, Black Haiti by Blair Niles. Addie Hunton’s account of Niles’ work outlines how the Americans that Haiti actually needed “are broad in interracial understanding, able not only to meet the upper-class Haitian in this social environment, but to help him to a

63 Addie Hunton, “Chapter X: Racial Relations” Occupied Haiti, pg 310.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
fuller recognition of his responsibility toward the great peasant mass of the island.  

Hunton was asserting that regardless of race, men were capable of resolving racial tensions that existed in Haiti. Hunton continued to argue that the only way to fix the mistake the U.S made when it occupied Haiti at the peak of its racial tensions on its own soil was to send a suitable man to aid the racial and social tensions that kept Haiti from being prosperous and independent.

Never once does Hunton mention the work of African American women, or any woman of any race and the impact they could have on repairing these tensions between Haitians and Americans. She placed the burden of restoring Haiti back to its independence into the hands of any man with diplomatic experience, all the while, she herself was a part of a major organization that advocated for women spreading peace and freedom both internationally and domestically. There were parts of Hunton that may have upheld gender defining roles when regarding political action and diplomacy. On the one hand, she believed that women, specifically African American women, were required to do the work to improve racial tensions both at home and abroad. But on the other hand, as seen in *Occupied Haiti*, Hunton stood by the belief that it was a man’s job to fix the mistakes the United States’ government made abroad. It leads one to wonder how much of this was Hunton’s own ideas or if there were parts that were edited by Emily Balch to convey one ideology or another. Especially when considering Hunton’s frequent statements emphasizing the burden African American women held for the fate of their race. It can be assumed Emily Balch didn’t believe the burden of the Black race was on the shoulders of Black women, although she may have had an impact on the message this chapter conveyed to readers.

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67 Ibid.
Following their return from Haiti and in the years following the publication of this book in 1926, Hunton expressed vocally her disappointment with the WILPF’s discrimination and exclusion against African American members. When Hunton became chair of the Interracial Committee of the WILPF in 1927, she noticed that many chapters of the organization were segregating their members and ostracizing African American women. Over time, as more and more African American women joined the WILPF, their work was frequently diminished by white members. In some cases, there were some members who were not even allowed to attend chapter meetings for the WILPF with their white counterparts and if they did, they were subjected to discrimination and segregation. The African American members of the WILPF were also slighted when it came to leadership roles in the organization, which led major activists like Mary Church Terrell to step back from the organization. Terrell, a close friend of Hunton, saw discrimination happening among local chapters and urged Hunton to take a stance on racism within the organization. These constant discriminatory practices within the organization make me wonder how much of Addie Hunton’s written work for the WILPF, including her chapter with Emily Balch, is her own voice and opinion.

Addie Hunton continued to balance her pursuit of equality amongst African American men and women both at home and abroad. Addie Hunton’s trip to Haiti reinforced her dedication to Haitian independence through her chapter in Occupied Haiti. She advocated for peace and equality, despite the flaws of the WILPF, and continued to want better for the Black race. In the case of the WILPF, African American women were being discriminated against constantly by their white counterparts within their own organizations. Some scholars claim these types of

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discriminatory practices within the WILPF led African American women to the International Council for Women of the Darker Races (ICWDR), a predominantly African American international organization with similar values. 69

69 Evelyn Spears, “Racial Justice and WILPF.”
Chapter V. Convergences

Following World War I, Addie Hunton maintained membership in organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) where she became National Field Organizer, the WILPF, and the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Eventually, she joined the International Council of Women of Darker Races (ICWDR), an organization through which she was able to thread her everlasting home ties in the United States to creating those same home ties abroad. In 1922 when Margaret Murray Washington wanted to create the ICWDR, Addie Hunton was compelled to join. The ICWDR “sought racial justice through their international activism by insisting on defining themselves, seeking support from the international community, and publicly challenging white supremacy.”

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70 YMCA. Swann Auction Galleries.
In 1922, Hunton was appointed Vice President of the ICWDR, and honorary President in 1929.²² The connections she made as she maintained membership led her to leadership positions within the ICWDR.

Ultimately, this time in Addie’s life was spent working towards tying her passions for transnational activism and peace to the fight for civil rights that was simultaneously occurring at home. In her 1911 article about the NACW, she stated “recognizing the home as the real source of strength of our people, the efforts of the Association have most fittingly begun there.”³³ For Hunton, Black women’s activism began at home, hence her focus on motherhood and manifested itself in more public spaces, to include international arenas. Much of her writing from 1910 to about 1914 analyzed the work the NACW was doing for Black communities around the United States. From about 1915 to 1919, she spent her free time writing her first book, *Two Colored Women with the Expeditionary Forces*. Once it was published and she joined the ICWDR in 1922, she dedicated her time to experiencing all the organization had to offer, from international travel to local chapter meetings. Writing took a backseat role in Addie Hunton’s life at the peak of her membership in the ICWDR so there is not much written from her perspective about the work that was being done in this organization.

Her writing from the early 1900’s proved that Addie never stopped believing in the work she was doing for the race and continued to see her work on the ground as a solution to the perils of the race.³⁴ Addie Hunton continued to seek organizations that shared her beliefs; however, the ICWDR caught her attention for many reasons. Most notably, she was compelled by the fact that the ICWDR held similar beliefs to the WILPF but was able to tie race and racism into their

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³⁴ Ibid.
objectives. Following in the footsteps of Mary Church Terrell, who ended up leaving the WILPF in search of an organization more aligned with the ideologies of Black women, many African Americans joined Terrell to join the ICWDR where they could tie their desires for peace to domestic and international racial inequalities. The work of both the ICWDR and the NACW demanded the work to uplift Black people across the world, upholding the NACW motto, “Lifting as We Climb.” Hunton’s activism, both transnational and at home, was shaped by her desire to uplift the race.75 She did not just climb to the top of these organizations, she sought to bring up African Americans from around the globe with her as she ascended.

The aforementioned trip to Haiti with the WILPF in 1926 occurred when Addie Hunton was also the president of the ICWDR. In his article, “‘To Start Something to Help These People’: African American Women and the Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934,” historian Brandon Byrd emphasized the importance the ICWDR had on the United States occupation of Haiti. The organization placed African American women on a global scale where they advocated for anti-colonial and anti-occupation efforts around the world. Though Occupied Haiti was written from Addie Hunton’s perspective as a member of the WILPF, Byrd argues that the actual work done on the ground in Haiti was an “attempt to create a coalition of nonwhite women bound by opposition to white supremacy [that] would grow into a robust Black internationalist feminism linking Third World liberation struggles to women’s’ rights.”76 In Haiti, the ICWDR worked alongside Haitian men and women to fight against American occupation. Additionally, many Haitian women joined organizations like the ICWDR and fought alongside African American women for the gradual freedom from occupation by the United States. The African American

76 Brandon Byrd, “‘To Start Something to Help These People’: African American Women and the Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934,” pg. 158.
women who travelled to Haiti aligned their transnational peace movement to anti-war and anti-occupation measures by working alongside local women and advocating for their rights. Since the ICWDR’s ideologies came directly from African American women, their intentions were tied directly to Addie Hunton’s desires for racial uplift and civil rights for African Americans. Her negative experiences with discrimination in both the YWCA and the WILPF led her to predominantly Black organizations like the ICWDR because “as white women asked Black women to advocate for their sex and as Black men implored Black women to support their race, members of the ICWDR insisted that they would do both in tandem.” 77 Addie Hunton was able to tie together her commitment to transnational peace and activism to her desire to fight for the African American race through the work of the ICWDR.

Chapter VI. “Negro Womanhood Defended”

Hence, it is true that to woman is allotted the highest and most blessed part of the work of racial uplift, Universally it is conceded that in this development of our home life, the salvation of the race is in the hands of its womanhood.78

In her 1904 article, “Negro Womanhood Defended,” Addie Hunton almost puts humanity on trial, defending Black women and showing ways in which, they continued to prevail. 79 Despite all the challenges Black women faced, “while climbing, throwing off much of the dross and becom[ing] more chastened and purified, conforming herself as fast as possible to the demand for upright Christian living.”80 Addie Hunton spent the next twenty years of her life teetering between transnational peace movements and civil rights movements at home. She dedicated her life to organizations like the YWCA, WILPF, ICWDR, NAACP and more. At her last speech for the NAACP’s Annual meeting, she reminded African Americans that the work was not done; the fight for racial equality and world peace would continue so long as African Americans believed in their race’s capacity to ascend. Her fight continued every moment until June 21, 1943, when Addie Waites Hunton passed away from diabetes. 81

To Addie Hunton, the racial uplift of African Americans was not possible without the work and sacrifices of the Black woman. She was not alone in her belief that Black women carried this burden on their shoulders. She became a leader and an activist because she felt she had to be something, if not for the legacy of her late husband, then for the legacy of the Black woman. As Addie Hunton’s life changed, her perceptions of activism changed. She continuously found her way to organizations that held similar beliefs and values because she believed

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78 Addie Hunton, “Negro Womanhood Defended”
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Christine Lutz, “A Dizzy Steep of Heaven,” pg. 267
salvation for the race would come one day. She fought for those organizations and dedicated her evolving activism to uplifting the Black race through domestic and transnational activism and politics. She showed up for the hundreds of unnamed Black women who were founding members of the YWCA, ICWDR and the WILPF because she believed in their right to have peace, freedom, and racial equality. Peace, freedom, and equality both at home and abroad meant having access to organizations filled with like-minded individuals, civil rights for African Americans around the world and an end to brutal wars. Studying Addie Hunton allows us to understand the importance and impact of collaborative women’s activism and its relationship to respectability and how Black women advocated-- for themselves and for others across the world. It conveys just how impactful an organization can be on your own activism and how, with patience and resilience you will find organizations that have belief systems that align with your life’s work. We can use the trajectory of her life to display how Addie Hunton made racial uplift into her life’s work through her transnational politics and dedication to peace movements.

Historian Elsa Barkley Brown claimed that “undergirding all Black women’s work was a belief in the possibilities inherent in the collective struggle of Black women in particular and of the Black community in general.”82 The experiences Addie Hunton had in her lifetime and the goals she sought for African Americans both at home and abroad were framed by her focus on the uplift of the race as a collective. The participation of Black women in political and social organizations and peace movements came out of a generation of struggles, oppression, and inequalities. Thus, the rise of Black transnational activism can be tied to devotion to sparing future generations from the turmoil of their mothers, fathers, grandparents and more. Activists

like Addie Hunton dedicated their lives to the uplift and betterment of African American communities both at home and abroad. With the legacy Addie Hunton left behind, she deserves to be in conversations about respectability, transnational American history, clubwomen, and activist organizations in the United States. An African American woman so dedicated to creating home ties across international borders, a woman so dedicated to uplifting the Black race deserves to be studied across the world. Addie Hunton put herself in spaces that were supported by international and domestic organizations alongside women with similar desires. The analysis of transnational women’s organizations, their power and their legacies cannot be complete without the inclusion of Addie Waites Hunton.
Primary Sources


Photographs of Addie Hunton, *Swann Auction Galleries.*


Secondary and Web Sources


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