RACE RELATIONS IN THE 1920S:
A CHALLENGE TO SOUTHERN METHODIST WOMEN

ALICE KNUTTS

During the decade of the 1920s leaders of the Woman's Missionary Council\(^1\) and a few members of the National Association of Colored Women formed a cooperative relationship which changed attitudes and relationships between black and white southern women. In its December, 1920, annual report the Commission on Negro Work of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America predicted that a Memphis Woman's Interracial Conference held the previous October “in its deliverance will do more to bring the womanhood of the South into active service in behalf of the race than any other yet held.” These women, in cooperation with the newly formed Commission on Interracial Cooperation were hailed as “the strongest force yet organized in the nation on behalf of the colored race.”\(^2\) This essay explores these claims in terms of the interracial work of Methodist women during the 1920s.\(^3\)

Civil rights for black Americans in the south had been denied when Jim Crow laws were adopted following the Reconstruction. Supreme Court decisions upheld segregation in public transportation and schools. Poll taxes and sundry state laws prevented most Blacks from exercising voting privileges. Public welfare laws discriminated against Blacks, schools were substandard and inadequately funded, and color lines severely limited opportunities for employment.

The ante-bellum social roles of race and gender established during slavery days and overthrown by emancipation and the Civil War were replaced by segregation and chivalry. Barbara Hilkert Andolsen has found that after the Civil War southern white men recaptured their power over southern white women, especially because white women had asserted themselves in new roles while men were displaced by the war. After the war white men claimed that white women needed protection from both the hard realities of public life and from the sexual advances of black men.\(^4\)

\(^1\)The Woman's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was a segregated organization for whites.
\(^2\)Eleventh Annual Report of the Woman's Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1921, 38.
\(^3\)The term “interracial” at the beginning of the 1920s meant relations between races, but not integration, equal rights or balance of power.
Further, the incidence of rape of black women by white men increased as a demonstration of white male power over black men and black women. The apparent randomness of these mob killings served to terrify the black community which was unable to predict just when assertive behavior might be rewarded with hanging, burning, and torture. In numerous ways, white men set the norms for social relationships and administered laws which favored the white race and the male gender.

Although black and white American women had shared some common experience through motherhood and historically delayed access to education, suffrage, job opportunities, legal rights, and power within the legislative process, the realities of racial discrimination had made each of these experiences different for black women than it was for white women. In 1920 black women and white women functioned in segregated worlds. Although most black women knew both of the women's cultures well, most white women knew next to nothing about the lives of black women.

In 1920 many men and women, white and black, held to the widespread belief that women had certain inherent qualities by virtue of their gender. Women were perceived as nurturing, "naturally" having a religious spirit, being a moral influence on the home, and having a positive influence on their men. Southern women may have been more submissive than their northern contemporaries, but they were not powerless. Suzanne Lebsock observed that, "No one objected to a woman's acquisition of power as long as she did not ask that it be made obvious, official, or general." These presumed innate qualities of women contributed to a notion, which had circulated among both black and white southern women, that white southern women were in a prime position to make changes in racial attitudes. White women could identify with black women at the level of experiencing bonds of womanhood in caring for home and family, and comprehending the yearning for fairness which black women wanted for their children, their husbands and themselves. White women believed that they could influence their husbands along the lines of Christian responsibility toward this neighboring race.

Although many white women did not want to change race relationships in 1920, there were a few exceptions. Leaders of the Woman's Mis-

---


Missionary Council (WMC), influenced by their reading of the social gospel literature, had started Paine Annex in 1901, an educational program for female black youth affiliated with Paine College, and had begun social settlement work through Bethlehem Houses in Augusta in 1912 and Nashville in 1913. This exposure to black students and interracial governing boards did not change their minds about segregation, but leaders of the WMC began to make decisions from the two perspectives that God loves all people, and that their black neighbors deserved more equitable treatment. In 1913 they first passed a resolution condemning the mob violence and usurpation of justice represented by lynching. In 1920, in response to appeals from their president, Belle Harris Bennett, and Dr. Will Alexander, Director of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, they tabled their plans for "Negro work" as usual and appointed a Committee on Race Relations to spend a year investigating living conditions and needs of southern Blacks. The cooperative spirit with which Blacks had participated in the World War I effort to preserve democracy and freedom abroad led them to expect better treatment after the war. Post-war racial discrimination and prejudice contributed to widespread unrest, riots, and lynchings after the war. Under stressful domestic conditions, the Woman's Missionary Council and the Commission on Interracial Cooperation were willing to consider the problems extant in the established system of race relations.

Ten prominent members of the National Association of Colored Women met at Tuskegee Institute in the home of Margaret Washington, widow of Booker T. Washington, with two members of the Woman's Missionary Council in July, 1920. The club women, all educated and representing the new black middle class, included noted educators who had founded and operated their own secondary schools, a college, and an institution for juvenile delinquents. They were Janie Porter Barrett, Mary McLeod Bethune, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Lugenia Hope, Lucy Laney, Mary J. McCrory, Jennie Moton, Margaret Washington, Marion B. Wilkinson and Mrs. M. L. Crosthwait. Carrie Parks Johnson and Estelle Haskin from the Woman's Missionary Council did not know how to begin to break down the suspicion that their primary concern was to obtain more reliable domestic servants. In time the black women trusted enough to reveal some of their concerns and produced a position paper which summarized the needs they had begun to articulate at that meeting. The paper dealt with domestic service, child welfare, travel, education, lynching, suffrage and the bias of the white press. One Methodist woman wrote, "The Colored Woman's Statement had a broad appeal because of its practical suggestions, its very humanness, and its simplicity. . . ."
Haskin and Johnson had a difficult task ahead. They wanted to persuade white southern Christian women to broaden their view of race relations, a very delicate subject on which feelings ran high and on which women were not agreed. The Memphis Conference held the following October was the first fruit of their work. Nearly one hundred white women gathered for a conference expecting to discuss race relations. They had no social preparation for the arrival of four black women in their midst—Margaret Washington, Elizabeth Haynes, Jennie Moton, and Charlotte Hawkins Brown—who described what it was like to be black, female, and concerned about their race.\(^{11}\) The two-day conference, flying in the face of deeply held interracial taboos, was emotional, informative, and mind-changing. A Continuation Committee formed to carry on the communication between white and black women begun in Memphis became the Woman's General Committee of the Commission on Interracial Concern. Within a year it garnered leadership from civic and religious women's organizations, black and white, representing a constituency of more than a million southern women.\(^{12}\)

Estelle Haskin used her position as a staff member, writer and editor for the Woman's Missionary Council to advance the cause of interracial work through writing and organizing. She wrote study books for women and children, which were used by missionary society members of many cooperating denominations, and articles for the *Missionary Voice*, read by southern Methodist women and men. Representing the Woman's Missionary Council as secretary of the Commission on Race Relations Haskin also traveled throughout the south to urge white church women to form women's state interracial committees.\(^{13}\)


\(^{12}\)Carrie Parks Johnson, "Women and Their Organizations," an address presented to the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, YMCA Auditorium, Atlanta, Georgia, October 7, 1921, 5. Jesse Daniel Ames Papers, Southern Historical Collection. Johnson said, "These women [on the program] from the Presbyterian, Disciples, Episcopal, Baptist, Methodist Churches, the Young Woman's Christian Association and the Woman's Clubs represented more than 1,000,000 members of their organizations, while Mrs. Brown, who is with us today, represents [sic] 100,000 colored women."

\(^{13}\)Twelfth Annual Report of the Woman's Missionary Council, 1922, 150. The various additional names of this group included Commission on Race Relationship and the Commission on Race Relationships. The term commission was used to designate a group with an educational function. The WMC also had a Sessions Committee on Race Relations (of which Haskin was secretary), sometimes known as the Committee on Race Relations or the Committee on Interracial Relationship, a sub-component of the Bureau of Social Service, that recommended actions in accord with the priorities surfaced by the Commission on Race Relations.
The Woman's Missionary Council employed Carrie Johnson half-time as chairperson of the Commission on Race Relations. The Commission on Interracial Cooperation also hired her half-time as Director of Woman's Work and executive staff member responsible for the Woman's General Committee. She held these posts until her retirement for health reasons early in 1926. Johnson set out to inform white southern churchwomen about conditions in the black community across the south and to organize groups of women, white or black, at every level so that they could work together to improve race relations. She knew that for this ambitious program to succeed, attitudes would need to change. This, she felt, could best happen through increasing personal contact of white women with black women, and by introducing white women through books and personal acquaintance to noted black Americans whose lives and achievement demonstrated the human drama, ambitions, desires, and abilities of persons of color. Mrs. W. C. Winsborough's description of her response to participating in a conference of black women held in 1921 illustrates how interracial contact could make a difference:

The effect upon us white women is perhaps as great as upon colored women. We work together, and pray together, and we have a magnificently good time, when we come together. We have no difficulty at all, no insurmountable [barriers] to overcome. There has been no difficulty of adjustment, no race problem; we sit down the white women and the colored women, and we immediately are upon one platform, and that platform is Christian Womanhood.  14

Although overrated in terms of unity, the experience for her was profound.

From the start Johnson secured Methodist support for her CIC work, and used CIC to provide resources for the Methodist work. Following the Memphis model, she set up interracial conferences in each southern state with a sizeable black population. Just as she had invited state Methodist women's leaders of social service to the Memphis meeting, so she invited local and district social service leaders to the state conferences. The attitudes of social service chairpersons tended to be more liberal than those of most missionary society members, but Methodist Woman's Missionary Society members were accustomed to giving to Paine College Annex and Bethlehem Houses, and periodically to studying race relations. As a result, Methodist women provided over half of all the women involved in the interracial movement in its first decade.  15

The organizational network emphasized local action. Among the Methodist Woman's Missionary Societies, state and local level interracial committees were formed. Each auxiliary interracial committee was to have a representative on the community interracial committee, where

---

14 Address by Mrs. W. C. Winsborough, Commission on Interracial Cooperation, YMCA Auditorium, Atlanta, Georgia, October 7, 1921.
Presbyterians, Baptists, the YWCA, and similar women's groups also were to be represented, along with men. The women of the community interracial committees were accountable through the State Woman's Committee to the Woman's General Committee of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation.

While reality was not the same as the paper plan, an interracial movement began to emerge. Initially, except for the Woman's General Committee, where half the members were black, all the other group members named above were white. Minutes of Texas State Woman's Committee in 1922 report that the white women urged black women of Texas to form parallel committees at both the state and local level so that the white women could turn to them for assistance. In Augusta, Lucy Laney led an active group of black women who cooperated with white women in interracial work. In Atlanta and other cities, black women organized for interracial work, and periodically found that there was no parallel white women's interracial committee with whom to cooperate.

Records do not tell precisely how the women of both races related. A sample report from a Methodist auxiliary in south Georgia tersely described from a white perspective interracial activities conducted in one year:

Interracial Community Club, distributed literature; secured rest room; helped to organize Negro co-operative home; organized Negro social service committee; presented to board of education sanitary needs of Negro high school; established Negro clinic, reporting 130 operations; secured Negro public health nurse; assisted in getting Negro playground; helped Negro missionary societies with their work, meeting with them, giving literature, etc.; attended meeting of Negro Parent-Teachers Association, giving talks on food and sanitation; helped plan for new school house for Negro children; interviewed judge and chief of police to secure freedom of innocent Negro boy; community sing for Negroes; established day nursery in cabin on big plantation, caring for children of cotton pickers; gave talks on sanitation to eight Negro groups; committee visited Negro school; Bethlehem House.

Some goals, such as securing a Negro public health nurse, might have been accomplished by having white women persuade white public office holders to designate tax money for such an expenditure, thus requiring minimal interracial contact. Others, such as white women attending the Negro PTA meeting, included interracial mingling in a public civic setting. The variety of projects undertaken and their adaptation to the local setting indicate that black women were naming to white women avenues for interracial activities.

16Minutes of the Texas State Woman's Committee of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, September 27, 1922. Jesse Daniel Ames Papers, Southern Historical Collection.
Johnson reported on the formation of a total of 110 auxiliary interracial committees in 1922, 445 in 1923, and 571 in 1924. Even where there were no formal committees many Methodist missionary societies began interracial work. Maud Henderson, a Methodist who succeeded Johnson as Director of Woman’s Work for CIC, reported in 1926 that over eight hundred interracial committees were working in the South “to form day nurseries, to establish parks and playgrounds, to secure better housing, better sanitation, and better educational privileges.”

The Methodist leaders of the women's wing of the interracial movement found that their organizational work was slowed by stubbornly resistant opposition. At times nothing needed to be spoken for women to know that they risked censure and criticism. In 1924 Carrie Johnson hired Jesse Daniel Ames of Texas as a half-time field secretary for CIC. Ames accepted an invitation from her sister in Mississippi, the president of the Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs, to speak to that group. Fearing that supporters of the Ku Klux Klan were present, Ames chose to speak cautiously, asking for improved treatment of black domestic workers.

Recruiting women for interracial committees was difficult where Methodists were Klan supporters. Ames wrote to Johnson:

> We have not gotten the co-operation from the Methodist superintendents that we should have had but it may be accounted for on the grounds that Methodist preachers of Fort Worth are the most ardent sympathizers of the Klan.

In her 1924 annual report to the Woman's Missionary Council Johnson tried to analyze the causes of the tremendous resistance to interracial work. She suggested that masses of people believed grossly distorted rumors about the desires, attitudes and objectives of Negroes, and made cutting remarks about white supporters of interracial cooperation “who are earnestly and in fear of God trying to interpret the living Christ to a blinded world.” Some women, desiring to follow Christ in matters of race relations, found themselves gripped by fear of criticism and misrepresentation, fear for their social prestige, fear for their own or their husband's business or position. Further, the ability to move ahead in race relations was blocked by trite and emotional responses which salved the conscience while failing to make a sustained, cooperative effort toward the essential work of “better relations, peace, good will, and justice in a community or Church.”

---

22 Ibid., 136.
and the low standards of living they maintained for blacks stood as additional obstacles to interracial work. Johnson concluded:

[I]f men and women . . . refuse to harbor prejudice and to be the carrier of evil report; if they can come to have the love of God dominant in their lives so that fear will disappear; if they will recognize all human beings as children of God; . . . if they will share in raising the standards of Negro life as well as their own, then may we hope one day to lay the whole matter at his feet, a trophy of Jesus Christ.23

In 1928 Johnson’s successor in the Woman’s Missionary Council, Bertha Newell, found that the greatest obstacle to interracial work was not “antagonism to the idea of working with Negroes, though there were plenty of that too, and is still,” but widespread indifference.24 Newell felt that among white Methodist women’s groups more interracial work was being reported than was actually occurring. She differentiated between work done by white groups for black women and children and interracial activities involving blacks and whites working together. In attempts to expand genuine interracial work she offered suggestions:

Under the latter classification I would name helping the colored people of the community through their own organization; cooperating with them in securing better schools; fostering parent-teacher associations; Colored “Y’s” [sic]; enlarging and securing playgrounds; enlarging and securing libraries and reading rooms; securing and assisting in school clinics, in baby clinics.25

Bertha Newell deserves recognition for her role in pressing Methodist Woman’s Missionary Societies to engage in more local interaction between white women and black women. Cooperative interracial tasks required sustained effort and engaged women in consultation and systematic communication across racial lines.

Starting in 1921, when Johnson was employed both by the WMC and CIC, she envisioned the first task of local interracial committees to be one of investigating local conditions——“the Negro home, the Negro church, and the Negro school.” Johnson elaborated:

In a study of the Home, for instance, we believe than an investigation (with the assistance of Negro women) will show the situation in the home as it is by health and sanitary condition, police protection, lights, bad housing or neighborhood conditions, opportunities for recreation, education, morals, etc.26

23Ibid., 138-139.
26Carrie Parks Johnson, “Women and Their Organizations,” Atlanta, Georgia, October 7, 1921, 4 and Minutes of the organizational meeting of the Texas State Woman’s Committee of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, March 20, 1922. Jesse Daniel Ames Papers, Southern Historical Collection.
Methodist missionary women continued their traditional paternalistic forms of service to the black community. They donated used clothing and baskets of food, taught Sunday school for black children, trained black Sunday school teachers, and helped organize clubs for black women. Johnson urged the white women to become better acquainted with local black women, to learn about community needs which required more basic solutions than charity could offer, and to work with black women in resolving local problems.

After Johnson's departure in 1926 Bertha Newell challenged, "Let every committee visit its local colored school." The commission recommended that representatives from each auxiliary visit local black schools and note their conditions, equipment, playground, teacher-pupil ratio and teacher qualifications. Where the schools were not satisfactory the women were urged to visit the school superintendent to discuss the apportionment of school funds per capita to white and black schools. In 1926 Newell told the WMC that the auxiliary interracial committees were "securing more equitable division of State and county funds for school and welfare work."

In all of these steps, taken or recommended by the Woman's Missionary Council or the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, no clarion call was sounded for an end to segregation. Bertha Newell explicitly stated her fear of social equality, which she described as "such forms of intercourse as promote miscegenation of the races. . . ." Newell added that "such a process—by and large—always leads to deterioration of both racial strains." In spite of the fact that the leaders of the Woman's Missionary Council failed to call for an end to segregation or for changes in segregation laws, they were changing race relations in the south. These women who expressly opposed "social equality of the races" and interracial marriage, who staunchly supported segregation, were leaders in the interracial movement. The interracial movement gained immediate success and grew rapidly especially because it was led by southern women who were widely recognized by white women as people much like themselves. Neither the leaders nor their grassroots supporters planned to do more or less than fulfill their Christian and neighborly responsibilities. If the leaders had advocated legal and social equality of the races, they would not have gained a hearing. Unfortunately, by refusing to oppose segregation laws, the white women did not earn the support of black women on the left who, among

Blacks, held black culture in highest regard. Instead they were guided by women who had an interest in improving the lot of the rising black middle class. Hence the interracial movement promoted white middle class standards among the "new Negroes."

In the present it is difficult to understand how, at the very same time they were working with black women of stature such as Janie Porter Barrett and Charlotte Hawkins Brown, southern white leaders of the Woman's Missionary Council unquestioningly supported segregation laws. Did they fail to question because to do so would endanger their interracial efforts? Did they fear that extending voting rights, or broadening civil rights, or genuinely integrating society would be harmful to them? Did they ever question segregationist policies in private but not in their public records?

The Woman's Missionary Council and the Methodist Woman's Missionary Societies provided the leadership for basic local community interracial work across the south in the 1920s. Whether or not it was true, as some white men observed at the beginning of the decade, that southern white women were the biggest obstacle to improving race relations, by 1930 it was not true of many Methodist women who had integrated the leadership of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and held thousands of interracial meetings in the south.

Probably Estelle Haskin was chafing at the racial prejudice manifest in Jim Crow laws and the barbarity of lynching when she claimed that what was needed was a new mind. In an introduction to a children's study course in race relations entitled The Upward Climb, Haskin spelled out for Sunday school teachers the reasons for a new approach to race relations. The conflict between unChrist-like attitudes and actions in "Christian America" undermined the effectiveness of missionary labors. She wrote:

_A changed mind is a necessity._ The present generation is most seriously hindered from attaining right attitudes by a social inheritance that meets them on every hand. . . . Undesirable attitudes cannot be changed except by definitive process. This process must include, first of all, a knowledge of a new race which is emerging. . . . To meet the needs of this new race and to avoid serious friction, the white race must somehow find a new social mind."^30

In 1924-1925, the study theme for women's missionary societies was "The Way of Christ in Race Relations." New materials, including Robert E. Speer's book, _Of One Blood_, had been developed for this ecumenical study. Speer shared with missionary society readers excerpts from the _Recommendations of the Chicago Commission on Race Relations_ which

---

30Sara Estelle Haskin, _The Upward Climb; A Course in Negro Achievement, Developed and Recorded by Sara Estelle Haskin_ (New York: Council of Women for Home Missions and the Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1927) 8-9.
had examined closely the factors contributing to the 1919 race riots in Chicago. In addition Speer summarized some presuppositions which contaminated race relations. Backwardness, he claimed, was not the same as inferiority. Circumstances and oppressive conditions could lead to a reduced capacity to achieve by some individuals and groups of people. Therefore, it was inaccurate to assert that darker races were less intelligent, less human, or less capable than the white race. Further, the conditions of life for a race or a culture were not static. Generalizations about race differences led to deterministic thinking and errors in perception.31

The organizational groundwork in race relations laid by Carrie Johnson in the early 1920s, strengthened by hundreds of auxiliary committees on race relations and hundreds of community interracial committees across the south, yielded rewards in the second half of the decade. Reports of auxiliary work of Methodist women shifted back to the Woman’s Missionary Council. By 1927 some Methodist women had seen to it that domestic science was taught in some black public schools. The addition provided vocational training for young black women who were more employable as domestic servants if they knew elementary skills such as how to turn water taps on and off and if they could perform household tasks to suit white standards. A tuberculosis clinic had been organized in a black community and day nurseries opened to provide care for preschool children of working black women. Study of racial conditions had been added to some college courses.32 In 1928 auxiliary reports mentioned over thirty different kinds of interracial work underway at the local level, including securing bus service for black passengers, holding dental clinics in public schools, and forming a “loan fund for Negro home building, that proper sewerage, sanitation, and lighting might be had. (Eagerly utilized.)”33

In her spring of 1927 annual report Newell identified two priorities for Methodist women’s work in race relations. The first was day care for children of black women employed in homes of white women. “[W]e members of a class and race who benefit by the service of colored mothers . . .” have a moral responsibility in this task, she said. Not in an isolated incident, only three weeks before a two-year old black child had burned to death in a locked room in Newell’s home town. The second priority addressed the need for public education for black students. She urged women to challenge the inequitable distribution of public school funds. By 1929 her committee report called for missionary societies to cooperate with responsible black leaders in each community with the “purpose of

eventually making every Negro elementary school what any school for any child ought to be, and further, of placing a high school education within reach of all Negro boys and girls who aspire to larger usefulness.”

The Woman’s Missionary Council condemned lynching, the most vicious expression of racial prejudice in the south, as early as 1913. After the 1920 Memphis Conference their voice was joined by the women of the State Committees on Interracial Cooperation in Georgia, Alabama, Virginia, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. The women protested the “double standard of morals in regard to race as well as sex” and asked for the equal protection of all women. All over the south women’s groups rejected lynching as a means of protecting white women. In 1923 the Woman’s Missionary Council passed a resolution which, for the first time, urged missionary society women to do what they could to prevent lynchings and to bring perpetrators to justice before courts of law. A five-point program included studying the facts of lynching, cooperating with other organizations to secure anti-lynching legislation, bringing lynchers to justice, preventing mob violence, and creating “a spirit of good will between the races which shall make mob violence impossible.” Carrie Johnson wrote, “In 1924, there were sixteen lynchings, the smallest number for many years. Of these, only one of the lynchers was indicted, and that in Chicago— not a single indictment in the South!” In telling of a sixteen year old Georgia youth who was lynched, Johnson expressed moral outrage that while community leaders issued fine-sounding statements and appealed for justice, social permissiveness called no one to account for the death of this young man. Johnson closed with an appeal for women to raise their united voice in urging governors and state officials to indict and punish people “who illegally murder and burn human beings and otherwise bring shame upon our governors and other officials and upon a noble citizenry who constantly beg for an administration of the law versus a reign of terror in which to live.” The WMC heard a report in 1924 that CIC was proving effective in reducing the number of lynchings in the South and statistics showed a significant decrease. The Methodist women of Asheville, North

34 Nineteenth Annual Report of the Woman’s Missionary Council, 1929, 117. In the long run, the ineffectiveness of these efforts, blocked as they were by resistance and prejudice, contributed evidence which gradually led to the Supreme Court’s 1954 Brown vs. The Board of Education decision that separate educational systems could never be equal.
37 Fifteenth Annual Report of the Woman’s Missionary Council, 1925, 133.
38 Ibid., 133, 134.
39 Ibid., 134.
40 Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Revolt Against Chivalry, 134 and 235.
Carolina, reported that they had helped prevent a lynching and had brought mob leaders to trial.41

Jesse Daniel Ames provided the catalyst for women's campaign against lynching. In 1929 she succeeded Maud Henderson as full time Director of Woman's Work for CIC. Ames chose to broaden the base of interracial work by persuading the women of CIC to set a ten-year goal to work toward improving conditions for domestic workers. Her choice of domestic service provided a clear-cut issue not especially threatening to white women. Many white women personally had the power to make and set wages and working conditions for their domestic workers. The new priority proved helpful in reactivating local interracial committees.

Mrs. Winsborough, a staunch supporter of the interracial work, member of the Woman's General Committee, and leader of the southern Presbyterian woman's missionary society, complained that CIC work was losing effectiveness due to its slow progress in race relations and the predominance of Methodist women. The Methodist majority controlled the direction of what she felt should be a more broad-based ecumenical movement. The CIC women's work was too diversified to advance race relations rapidly, in Ames' opinion. Outside of churches, interracial groups were discouraged and uncertain about their purpose.42

Ames decided to try something new. With support from Newell and Winsborough, with permission from the black members of the Woman's Committee of CIC to take a free hand, with Will Alexander's awareness and her own felt need for greater independence from governance of CIC, Jessie Daniel Ames gathered a small group of white women in 1930 to found the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching. Above and beyond her work with CIC, Ames led the new organization.

The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL) reduced incidences of mob violence and lynching during the 1930s. The choice of a single issue provided a clearly defined task which was not diffused by secondary issues. ASWPL successfully attracted thousands of women across ecumenical lines, yet not surprisingly, once again many of the members and active leaders were southern Methodist women.

The Memphis Conference indeed launched a woman's interracial movement in the south in which Methodist women figured prominently as organizers, leaders, writers, and workers. Thousands of women belonged to groups which were involved at some level or another in interracial work. Mob violence, no longer condoned as a form of protection

42Hall, Revolt Against Chivalry, 127.
for women, occurred less often. White women, now better informed about conditions in the black community, campaigned for the construction of black high schools and for the expansion of city amenities such as playgrounds, street lighting, garbage collection and sewage lines. They continued to hold interracial meetings which undermined segregation by developing a peer-based friendship network across racial lines.

Fourteen years later Gunnar Myrdal reported: “The fact that in most of these and other respects the Negro is still discriminated against in the South should not be allowed to conceal the fact that many small changes here and there have occurred, due to the activity of the interracial movement.”

The interracial movement of the 1920s established new standards for southern race relations which gradually were adopted by liberals. Under new guidelines and with more opportunities, people of different races were enabled to meet for the conduct of religious or civic tasks, such as training leaders of missionary societies or establishing playgrounds for black children. At times leaders within the black community found it useful to share their problems with white leaders in the interracial movement where they were more likely than in earlier times to receive understanding and support.

By the end of the decade many white women had heard of the achievements of famous black Americans and had met one or more educated black women from their own community or heard speeches by nationally renowned black women at a meeting sponsored by a woman’s missionary society or by the Commission on Interracial Cooperation. The novelty of interracial meetings had worn off and it was time for new strategies. Segregation remained entrenched, but interracial contacts had given names, faces and personalities to the women who were divided by color.

---