COOPERATION FOR SOCIAL BETTERMENT:
THE INTELLECTUAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE OF
SOUTHERN METHODISTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE
SOUTHERN SOCIOLOGICAL CONGRESS
1912–1914

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From 1912 to 1919 the Southern Sociological Congress met annually to hear speakers and share information dealing with social, civic, and economic conditions in the South.¹ Membership in this Congress included both organizations and individuals such as social workers, health care workers, African-American educators, college presidents, librarians, and a number of ministers and workers with denominational and ecumenical Christian organizations. This paper identifies a group of southern Methodist² religious leaders who provided leadership in planning the programs of the Congress. It seeks to determine the intellectual and theological rationale of this group of religious leaders and the ways in which the members of the group translated this rationale into action.

Southern historians have pointed to the Congress as one of the foremost examples of southern progressive social activity and have noted the important role of religious leaders in the Congress.³ Many members of the Congress were ministers or worked for denominational, ecumenical, or para-church organizations. Discussion of the relationship of churches to social service was one of the primary program areas of the early meetings. Religious leaders predominated on the standing committees that dealt with two of the program areas: the connection between religion and social service and the southern racial situation.

At its 1912 meeting in Nashville and its 1913 meeting in Atlanta, the Southern Sociological Congress heard speakers on a variety of social

²Southern Methodist in this paper will refer to members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS).
³As used here, “progressive” refers to the designation by many historians of the period immediately preceding World War I as the “Progressive Era,” a period characterized by political reform, antimonopolistic legislation, humanitarian activity, and centralized corporate and governmental organization. See Dewey W. Grantham, Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 374–385.
concerns—Public Health, Courts and Prisons, Child Welfare, Organized Charities, Negro Problems, and the Church and Social Service. The 1914 meeting, in Memphis, emphasized the program areas of Church and Social Service and Negro Problems. After 1914 the Congress placed less emphasis on these two topics, with Public Health the dominant concern in 1915. The period between 1912 and 1914, when the Congress gave primary attention to the program areas and committees pertaining to the connection between religion and social service and the southern racial situation, forms the basis of this paper.

Most of the co-ordination, communication, and program planning for the Congress fell to the General Secretary, James E. McCulloch, a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS). McCulloch had the services of standing committees for each subject area and an overall program planning committee that provided most of the planning for the Congress. The Congress brought together a wide variety of members and speakers. In addition to the individual members, it included many national organizations such as the National Child Labor Committee and the Federal Council of Churches. According to lists published in each year's proceedings, membership in the Congress included black and white, male and female. McCulloch invited speakers, not only from within the membership, but also from the ranks of nationally known leaders in the field of social service.

Prominent southern Methodist leaders of the Congress included James E. McCulloch, Walter R. Lambuth, John D. Hammond and his wife, Lilly Hammond, A. M. Trawick, John A. Rice, Belle Bennett, Mabel Howell, Estelle Haskin, and Willis D. Weatherford. Their speeches at the Congress and other publications provide a basis for the study of their rationale. Lambuth, J. D. Hammond, Trawick, Bennett, and Weatherford served on the Committee for Negro Problems while Rice and Howell were members of the Committee for the Church and Social Service.


Southern Methodists were identified by various means including Who's Who, Vanderbilt Alumni Directories, and lists of membership for the Board of Missions.
James E. McCulloch received a divinity degree from Vanderbilt in 1901. Working with John R. Mott's Student Volunteer Movement, he studied responses to urban social problems in England and Europe. In 1906 he became principal of the MECS Nashville Training School for Christian Workers, a school sponsored by the southern Methodist Board of Missions. In 1912 McCulloch became principal of a short-lived Interchurch College for Social Workers in Nashville. He later devoted himself full-time to the Southern Sociological Congress.

The elder statesman of this southern Methodist contingent was the southern Methodist medical missionary, Bishop Walter R. Lambuth. Due to his other duties Lambuth was not able to attend many of the sessions of the Congress, but he served on the standing committee on Negro Problems. Lambuth had attended both the theological school and the medical school at Vanderbilt in its early years. He spent fourteen years as a medical missionary to China and Japan and seventeen years as a Secretary of the southern Methodist Board of Missions before his election to the episcopacy of the MECS in 1910. As Board of Missions Secretary, Lambuth founded the Nashville Training School for Christian Workers, of which McCulloch was principal. As early as 1893 Lambuth had urged the southern Methodist Women's Home Mission Society to attack southern urban problems. As Mission Secretary he had further shown his interest in urban problems by directing the reorganization of the Board of Missions to strengthen home missions. In addition, Lambuth was involved with several YMCA sponsored projects to improve race relations.

John D. Hammond, previously the General Secretary of the southern Methodist Board of Education, taught at the Mission Training School before assuming the presidency of Paine Institute in Augusta, GA, a joint project of the ME Church, South and the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. Hammond's wife, Lilly, who spoke at the Congress, was one of the leaders of the Women's Home Mission Society. A prolific writer

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10Methodist Training School for Christian Workers, “Scrapbook” [c. 1915], Scarritt-Bennett Center Library, Special Collections.
12Mabel K. Howell, Women and the Kingdom: Fifty Years of Kingdom Building by the Women of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1878-1928 (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1928), 185.
14Methodist Training School, “Scrapbook.”
she published articles on urban factory problems and wrote several books about southern race relations.15

A. M. Trawick taught sociology at the Nashville Mission Training School from 1908 until 1911. A Vanderbilt graduate and MECS minister, Trawick studied philanthropy at Columbia University.16 In 1912 he was serving the YMCA as the Social Service Secretary in the Student Department of the International Committee.17

Other Training School leaders attended the Southern Sociological Congress, but did not serve on any of the planning committees. Estelle Haskin, who taught practical sociology and worked with the settlement houses that served as laboratory study situations for the Training School, had a long record of interracial concern.

John A. Rice, the Chair of the Church and Social Service Committee of the Southern Sociological Congress had studied Old Testament at the University of Chicago. A pastor in many large southern Methodist congregations, Rice introduced the resolution approving the Social Creed for the MECS General Conference in 1914.18 In 1921 Rice was forced to resign from Southern Methodist University for teaching higher criticism of the New Testament.19

Several leaders of the southern Methodist Women’s Missionary Society were delegates to the Congress. The women were primarily interested in the welfare of women and children and advocacy of the family. Before 1910 the Women’s Home Mission Society had established a network of schools and settlement houses.20 In 1902 the Women’s Home Mission Society had begun to support a Women’s Annex to Paine College that trained black women in sewing and other “industrial” skills. In 1907 the women of the Home Mission society had established a special committee to deal with social problems.

15 Hammond’s books and articles include In Black and White: An Interpretation of Southern Life (New York, 1914); Southern Women and Racial Adjustment (Baltimore, 1917); In the Vanguard of a Race (New York: 1917); and “Some Southern Factory Problems,” Methodist Review 51 (1902): 349–59.
16 Methodist Training School, “Scrapbook”. See also, White, Liberty and Justice for All, 22.
In addition to Lilly Hammond, who spoke to the Congress, two other southern Methodist women were on the leadership committees of the Congress: Belle Bennett and Mabel K. Howell. Bennett, the leader of the southern Methodist Women’s Missionary Council, had previously been president of the Women’s Home Mission Society. Bennett had worked in co-operation with blacks in her hometown of Richmond, Kentucky, establishing Negro Chautauqua Assemblies to which she had invited such black leaders as George Washington Carver and W. E. B. DuBois. She had allowed mixed seating, black and white together, at the events. She had allowed mixed seating, black and white together, at the events.21 Howell was sociology professor at Scarritt Bible and Training School in Kansas City, which was supported by the southern Methodist Women’s Missionary Society. She had been appointed in 1902 to train members of the newly established office of deaconess in the MECS.

A prominent southern Methodist layman, Willis D. Weatherford, a graduate of Vanderbilt and long associated with the YMCA, also supported the Congress.22 After Weatherford received a Ph.D. at Vanderbilt, John R. Mott recruited him for YMCA work. As International Student Secretary for the YMCA, Weatherford, with the help and encouragement of Walter Lambuth, wrote a book on *Negro Life in the South*, published in 1910. This book became a course of study for black and white college YMCAs. Weatherford founded the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly Grounds in the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina, where he held integrated YMCA meetings.

This southern Methodist group worked together in other social reform efforts. In 1914, for example, the YMCA sponsored a Negro Christian Student Conference, attended by black YMCA students. The planning committee and the speakers consisted of an interracial group, many of whom were also associated with the Southern Sociological Congress. John R. Mott chaired the planning committee of this YMCA Conference. A. M. Trawick served as Secretary and edited the *Proceedings*. Others connected with this YMCA conference included Bishop Walter R. Lambuth, Belle Bennett, J. D. Hammond, Lilly Hammond, Willis Weatherford, and James E. McCulloch.24

Several characteristics of southern Methodism at the beginning of the twentieth century contributed to the theological and intellectual rationale of the group. The southern Methodists, like other nineteenth-century evangelical denominations emphasized personal, individual conversion,

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21Mrs. R. W. McDonnell, *Belle Harris Bennett: Her Life Work* (Nashville: Board of Missions, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1928), 135.
exciting, revivalistic preaching, and a pietistic lifestyle that opposed alcoholic beverages, gambling, and amusements such as dancing and the theater. 25

The complex institutional structure of the denomination contributed to the group's rationale. Methodists, both northern and southern, had developed a unique connectional polity that emphasized central leadership but allowed local initiative and activity as well. Between 1900 and 1918 southern Methodist institutional structures increased in complexity, with boards and commissions proliferating at the pivotal Annual Conference level as well as at the higher denominational General Conference level. Southern Methodists had previously organized to support high schools and colleges, Sunday Schools, missions, and publications. However this rate of institutionalization increased markedly after the turn of the century, with health and social service institutions appearing. 26 Thus, one of the primary ways in which the southern Methodists related to society was to encourage the establishment of institutions to deal with social problems.

The growing importance of mission activity was also a contributing factor. Southern Methodists provided generous, enthusiastic support for foreign missions during the years between 1900 and World War I. This period represented the high point of mission support, not only for southern Methodists, but also for northern Methodists and other denominations as well. 27 During this period, southern Methodists opened new mission fields in Africa and elected Walter Lambuth as a special "Missionary Bishop" to oversee their activities in South America.

In addition to their southern background, the southern Methodist leaders in the Southern Sociological Congress were influenced by national trends as well. The foremost national influence was that of John R. Mott. Mott, a northern Methodist layman, was a leader in both the student movement, including the YMCA and the Student Volunteer movement, and the international missionary movement. Mott had two overriding desires: the spread of the gospel around the world and ecumenical cooperation. In *The Evangelization of the World In This Generation*, published in 1900, Mott described his objective as giving all men "an adequate opportunity to know Jesus Christ as their Savior and to become his disciples." 28


26See, for example, *North Georgia Annual Conference Journal, 1904*, 48 and *North Georgia Annual Conference Journal, 1907*, 40, for discussions of the Atlanta Hospital. See *Memphis Annual Conference Journal, 1909*, 45, for a discussion of the beginning of the drive for the Memphis Hospital.


Mott, who was known as one of the foremost ecumenical leaders in the world, expressed his aim, "to weave together all nations, all races, and all religious communions in friendliness, in fellowship and in cooperation." Many southern Methodists were enthusiastic participants in these movements. Walter Lambuth was involved with Mott at the International Missionary Conference in 1910, and McCulloch worked for the Student Volunteer Movement. Trawick and Weatherford worked for the YMCA and spearheaded YMCA efforts to deal with racial problems.

A second national influence was the Federal Council of Churches. The MECS had been one of the original supporters of the Federal Council of Churches with several southern Methodists involved in the planning committees. Southern Methodist Bishop E. R. Hendrix had served as the organization's first President. The Federal Council held membership in the Southern Sociological Congress, and Charles McFarland of the Council was a perennial speaker at the Congress meetings. However, most noticeably, the Federal Council of Churches influenced the Southern Sociological Congress in the adoption by the Congress of a set of position statements about social issues that resembled the northern Methodist-inspired Federal Council of Churches' Social Creed. The Southern Sociological Congress, however, modified the Federal Council Creed to better reflect southern social conditions by including statements on such issues as convict leasing systems and racial concerns.

The Methodist leaders at the Southern Sociological Congress embraced the social sciences, particularly sociology. Sociology attempted to study society scientifically. Some of its major premises about society included the ideas that living conditions or environmental causes lay behind social problems, that social conditions were subject to scientific study, and that changing the environment would help solve social problems. Speakers at the Congress, such as Trawick, and Lilly Hammond, who connected environmental conditions to social problems, further emphasized that environment, not inherited racial characteristics, caused the poverty of urban black slums. Graham Taylor, sociology professor at the University of Chicago, spoke to the Congress.

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32 SSC, Battling for Social Betterment, 1914, 116, 117.
33 SSC, The South Mobilizing, 1913, 455.
34 This emphasis on changing the environment provoked objections from many southern Methodist leaders. See "Bishop Kilgo Scores Eugenics," Southern Christian Advocate,
The socially concerned Methodist religious leaders of the Congress had ties to other northern religious leaders who were concerned with social reform. Northern Baptist theologian, Walter Rauschenbusch, spoke to the Congress. Rauschenbusch had developed a theological rationale for religious social action that emphasized concepts of social evil and sin and the Kingdom of God, which he defined in a specific way. He approached the Kingdom of God from an eschatological perspective that envisioned the gradual development or evolution of a Christian social order that encompassed all areas of life including the economic system and politics. This Christianized social order would precede the Second Coming of Christ.  

S. Z. Batten, a northern Baptist leader in expression of social concern, was a member of the Congress and also a frequent speaker. McCulloch listed books by Batten and Rauschenbusch in his bibliography for the first meeting of the Congress, and A. M. Trawick listed Rauschenbusch’s books as “indispensable” in the study of urban problems. Rauschenbusch, Shailer Mathews, Graham Taylor, and others also exerted considerable influence on the southern Methodist Women’s Home Mission Society.  

The Methodist religious leaders of the Southern Sociological Congress continued to affirm the importance of preaching the Gospel and individual regeneration. Rather than attempting to replace evangelical beliefs, they added to them and modified them by connecting the sacred and the secular. McCulloch summarized their opinions in his description of the purpose of inner city churches, which was “to save all men by all means, abolishing so far as possible the distinction between the religious and the secular and sanctifying all days and all means to the great end of saving the world for Christ.”  

The southern Methodist leaders in the Southern Sociological Congress emphasized personal dignity and justice for all. They thought in terms of family relationships between all humans, using the phrase, “the
fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.” Walter Lambuth claimed the one central truth about the Gospel was, “the fact of the Fatherhood of God. Lying deep within that truth is another—a corollary of the first—the brotherhood of man.”40 YMCA leader W. D. Weatherford,41 in a speech to the Congress also stressed the ideas of brotherhood and justice.

A corollary to the idea that all people were members of the family of God was the importance of the sacredness and value of the individual person as a child of God. The southern Methodists in the Southern Sociological Congress emphasized the “whole person”, both body and soul, as opposed to concentrating on the condition of the soul. W. D. Weatherford identified the social mission of the church as “the bringing in of a new appreciation of the sacredness and value of the individual.”42 McCulloch emphasized the necessity of dealing with “the whole person, spiritual, mental, and physical. The mission of the church,” he wrote, “is not simply to ‘save souls’ but to save men, women, and children—body, intellect, and soul.”43

The southern Methodists of the Southern Sociological Congress also attempted to bridge the gap between the sacred and the secular by stressing the church’s social mission. They stressed the interrelationship of the church’s mission to Christianize society and the church’s mission to save individuals. McCulloch thus related the individual and social mission of the church. “The only way to save society,” he wrote in 1905, “is to save the individuals that make up society. The only power that can save the individual is the life of Christ formed within.” However, he also wrote, “Not only must the church save the individual, but also society and all of society for all time.44 In 1914, at the YMCA meeting on race relations, McCulloch called for social salvation. He said, “Christ certainly meant for us to establish social salvation right here on this planet.”45

The southern Methodist YMCA leader, A. M. Trawick, combined the individual and social mission of the church by opposing his views to those of “a prominent Christian leader” who declared that Jesus never intended “that there should be a Christian community, a Christian State, or anything more than a Christian individual.”46 In opposition to this view Trawick maintained that relationships were more important than individuals. He defined the Kingdom of God as “a Christian society wherein

41SSC, The South Mobilizing, 1913, 183.
42SSC, The South Mobilizing, 1913, 351.
43McCulloch, 185.
44McCulloch, 186.
is released the purpose of God to serve every human life in every human relation."\textsuperscript{47}

These southern Methodists used the concept of service to society as a way of connecting Christians and the world. The life of Jesus provided, for them, an example of such service. Walter Lambuth, for example, defined the major elements of the Kingdom of God as, “Fatherhood and sonship, truth and holiness, life and love, redemption from sin, and salvation for service.”\textsuperscript{48}

Based on their theological and philosophical beliefs, religious leaders associated with the Southern Sociological Congress advocated specific methods for approaching social problems. They supported sociological training for ministers and religious social workers, particularly the use of field and laboratory training. McCulloch emphasized the importance of training city missionaries because the circumstances under which they worked differed from situations other ministers faced. He suggested that training take place in an institution engaged in city mission work.\textsuperscript{49}

McCulloch and the religious leaders of the Southern Sociological Congress also supported new denominational social service institutions such as institutional churches and settlement houses. An institutional church, usually located in an inner city area, provided, not only worship opportunities, but a number of social services such as banks, recreational facilities, schools, and health facilities. McCulloch’s book \textit{The Open Church for the Unchurched} described such institutional churches in England and urged the southern Methodists to support similar institutions.

The predominant focus of the entire Congress, however, was upon cooperation. It supported cooperation between churches of all denominations, between churches and other social institutions, between churches, capital, and labor, and between black and white. A brief survey of the titles of many of the speeches shows the pervasiveness of this theme of co-operation: “A Cathedral of Cooperation,” “How to Relate Church Activities to Social Services,” “Co-operative Efforts of the Church and Organized Labor in Behalf of Health and Justice,” “Race Cooperation in Church Work,” and “Religion, the Common Basis for Cooperation.”

These southern Methodist leaders connected with the Southern Sociological Congress showed more social concern than some of the other southern denominational leaders. But did the Congress affect social policy or help to improve social conditions? The Congress was not an activist organization. It did not directly establish institutions or engage in political activities. Its purpose was discussion and exchange of information, or to be an “agent of cooperation.”\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{48}Lambuth, 33.
\textsuperscript{49}McCulloch, 189.
\textsuperscript{50}Chatsfield, “Organization of Uplift,” 334.
Cooperation for Social Betterment

The program area that most concerned the group of Methodists was race relations. Members of this group combined several influences in their rationale for dealing with racial problems: an emphasis on the establishment of institutions to deal with social problems, an emphasis on missions, a desire for ecumenical cooperation, and approval of social sciences such as sociology. From these influences they developed a unique method of attempting to deal with black poverty in southern urban areas. Moreover, this approach to race relations continued to develop through the 1920s and 1930s.

The MECS provided a concrete model for the approach to southern urban black poverty advocated by the Methodist leaders of the Southern Sociological Congress. The Nashville Training School for Christian Workers, with which many of the Congress' Methodist leaders were connected, responded to urban black poverty using the same methods of institutional cooperation and sociological study that the Congress leaders advocated. Under the leadership of Estelle Haskin, a delegate to the Congress, the Training School, the southern Methodist Women's Missionary Council, the black college, Fisk University, and the city of Nashville provided an interracial board of directors for administering the Nashville Bethlehem House, a settlement house that provided day care, kindergartens, sewing classes, and other services for black women and children. Both the Methodist Training School and Fisk used the Bethlehem House as a laboratory training school for social workers. A local Presbyterian Church provided space for the group to hold organizational meetings, and a member of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church served as head resident. 51

In the Southern Sociological Congress, the Committee on Negro Problems supported a specific set of resolutions. It called for cooperation between health authorities and black ministers, teachers, and doctors, equal justice for blacks and whites, the abolition of lynching, and the improvement of schools for blacks at the liberal arts level as well as the vocational training level. 52 In addition we have seen that several religious leaders who served on the Committee on Negro Problems (Weatherford, Lilly Hammond, and Trawick) published books sympathetic to blacks and their problems. In their addresses to the Congress, Trawick and Lilly Hammond attributed urban black problems to slum conditions rather than inherited racial characteristics.

Although they showed concern for blacks instead of hatred, the attitudes of the Congress' leaders would be found wanting if compared to an absolute standard of racial justice. They did not attempt to change either the developing economic system or the developing racial culture in

51 Sara Estelle Haskin, *Women and Missions in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: Publishing House of the ME Church, South, 1921), 221-223.
the south. White religious leaders of the Congress adopted paternalistic attitudes at times, feeling that their superior position obligated them to help their inferior brethren grow into good citizens.\textsuperscript{53} The Congress did not include many blacks on the planning committees. Although black medical doctors and educators such as R. R. Moton of Hampton Institute served on some of the committees, African-American preachers were not in evidence.

The southern Methodist group differed from other southerners of the period in their growing professionalism in dealing with blacks. By encouraging the establishment of black social service institutions and advocating cooperation with these institutions at an institutional level, they mitigated the personal dependence inherent in paternalism. In addition, their argument for sociological rather than racial causes for black urban poverty allowed them to put their social concern into a larger context than racial issues.

On balance, in a period when white culture attempted to control blacks by excluding them, the southern Methodist leaders at the Congress advocated and practiced interracial cooperation. The Congress also had a number of black members, most educators. Black speakers, including Booker T. Washington, spoke to mixed, black and white, audiences. In one instance, at the 1914 meeting in Memphis, the members of the Committee on Negro Problems, led by W. D. Weatherford, had a public disagreement with local Memphis Congress organizers over the seating of African-Americans in the orchestra section of the Orpheum Theater. When the Memphis hosts wanted to restrict orchestra seating of blacks, the Congress organizing committee moved the entire meeting to the First Methodist Church.\textsuperscript{54}

This emphasis on interracial cooperation continued into the next decades. Willis D. Weatherford was instrumental in urging southern Methodist minister, Will Alexander, to become involved in the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, which continued to keep lines of communication open between whites and blacks in the south until the Civil Rights Movement after World War II.\textsuperscript{55} Estelle Haskins was one of the leaders of southern white women's attempts to cooperate with southern black women.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{53}See, for example, the speech by Mrs. J. D. (Lilly) Hammond, in SSC, \textit{The South Mobilizing, 1914}, 455.


\textsuperscript{55}Dykeman, 134–144.

Responding to a religious ethos that emphasized institutions, regeneration, and a pietistic lifestyle, the southern Methodist leaders in the Southern Sociological Congress searched for ways to bridge the gulf between the spiritual and the secular while retaining the importance of the regeneration experience. In this attempt they made use of such national and international currents of thought and activity as the ecumenical and missionary activities of John R. Mott, the Federal Council of Churches, the emerging social sciences, particularly sociology, and the writings of theologians such as Walter Rauschenbusch. They emphasized the worth of the individual person, the social mission of the church as represented by social service, and the necessity for institutions to cooperate with each other. Embracing the importance of the social sciences, the southern Methodist leaders at the Southern Sociological Congress encouraged analysis of social conditions and cooperation in attempts to solve social problems. They insisted that the churches were an important component in any solution to social problems. The most important result of this rationale was their advocacy of a policy of institutional cooperation between races in dealing with southern urban black poverty.