5-1-2008

An analysis of the national association of colored women's clubs 1896-1935

Carmen Victoria Walker

Clark Atlanta University

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/dissertations](http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/dissertations)

Part of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons

Recommended Citation


This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in ETD Collection for AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center. For more information, please contact cwiseman@aucr.edu.
ABSTRACT

POLITICAL SCIENCE

WALKER, CARMEN V. B.S. GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY, 1987
M.A. CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY, 1997

AN ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
COLORED WOMEN’S CLUBS 1896-1935

Advisor: Dr. William H. Boone

Dissertation dated May, 2008

This case study examines the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs from 1896 to 1935 to explore the extent to which their programs and activities were shaped by the black community. This researcher asserts that black women’s organizational activity is shaped by the internal black political culture of the black community. This study conceptualizes black political culture as a network of black institutions, values, priorities, and politics that shape both individual and collective behavior. The researcher found that leadership, resources, and political struggles over strategic responses to racism, within the black community, did shape the way in which black women organized collectively and carried out their programs. Finally, the findings suggest that a greater understanding of black women’s activism can be gained by incorporating cultural factors into analyses of black women’s activism.
AN ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF COLORED WOMEN'S CLUBS
1896-1935

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
CARMEN V. WALKER

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
MAY 2008
CONTENTS

CHAPTER

1. CONCEPTUALIZING BLACK WOMEN'S ACTIVISM ........................................... 1

2. BLACK WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVISM ......................................... 34

3. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY ............................... 44

4. CASE STUDY ........................................................................................................ 85

5. CONCLUSION ....................................................................................................... 120

APPENDIX ............................................................................................................. 131

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..................................................................................................... 141
TABLE

1. Black Community Issues Discussed in Black Newspapers.................................. 89
CHAPTER I

CONCEPTUALIZING BLACK WOMEN’S ACTIVISM

Black women’s organizational activities have been conceptualized as black women fighting the consequences of multiple forms of oppression in the United States in order to simultaneously defend themselves and uplift their race.¹ This narrative has focused attention upon external relationships that have affected black women, their activism and their communities. Understanding these relationships is important; however, as historian, Colin A. Palmer has suggested, external analyses do not offer a greater understanding of the “worlds [black people] created for themselves.”² Thus, while understanding the external circumstances that shaped black women’s activism is important, this type of analysis inadvertently omits any understanding of the extent to which internally defined priorities, politics, values, and strategies also shaped black women’s activism. The extent to which the black community’s institutions, relationships, politics, priorities, and issues also informed the activism of black women is marginalized.

Three unfortunate consequences result from this external analysis. First, working class and poor communities become passive and perhaps culpable agents in


their own oppression in this narrative. Second, the subtext of this story becomes that of
the failures of black men to both protect and lead the black community. For example, in
her work entitled *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves 1894 to
1994*, Deborah Gray-White writes:

> At the heart of these feelings lay a sad loss of confidence in the ability of
> most black men to deal effectively with the race problem. Disfranchisement, Jim
> Crowism, lynching, and race riots seemed to be spreading unchecked. Clubwomen
> wanted something done, but black men had, as an editorial in the Woman’s Era
> claimed, failed “to strengthen the belittling weaknesses which so hinder and
> retract us in the fight for existence.” The editorial called for “timid men and
> ignorant men” to stand aside.” Indeed, Williams ridiculed male attempts to tackle
> the race problem when she quipped that the black male’s “innumerable
> conventions, councils and conferences during the last twenty-five years
> have all begun with talk and ended with talk.” Similarly, Anna Cooper
> thought black men were more a part of the problem than the solution. She
> claimed that Southern black men, in particular, had sold their vote “for a
> mess of pottage,” something the black woman would never do, being ever
> “orthodox on questions affecting the well-being of her race.”

While this sentiment captures a valid criticism raised in the black community, it draws
attention away from the reality that black women were not above the corruption of local
political leadership. This narrative does not highlight the fact that black men also
criticized the ineffectiveness of black political leadership. Finally, this narrative does not
capture the full context in which black women’s criticism and activism emerged. Black
women’s national activism emerged during a time of increased organizational activities
for both men and women, a time of unregulated politics heavily influenced by the politics
of patronage, laissez-faire ideology, progressivism, and industrialization. Black men and
women were attempting, however contradictory and problematic, to develop within this
context. Thus, black women’s voices and organizational activity were simply part of a

---

3Gray-White, 36, 37.
larger critique raised by both black men and women of the development and leadership challenges emerging during this period.

**Statement of the Problem**

Every analytical approach begins with a set of assumptions and priorities. For example, the Marxist approach begins with the assumption that the social experiences and the development of societies is a permanent and continuing dialectical conflict between economic classes in a society. The liberal-pluralist approach describes and explains the social world from the perspective that there are no permanent class interests, but rather changing individual interests articulated by competing groups within an open society. Likewise, the approach used to describe and explain women's political experiences is no different. Liberal feminism shapes this dominant approach. This approach emphasizes the role of gender conflict and the quest for gender equality in society and more specifically in individual forms of electoral political participation. This model approaches social and political phenomena from a gendered perspective. The liberal feminist approach combines the feminist assumptions about gender relations with the assumptions about what constitutes legitimate political participation. It explains the political experience of women by focusing on the ways in which women have been oppressed by the patriarchal articulation of political issues, public policy, laws, and social norms.

This model has illuminated much in terms of the relationship between women, men, the state, and politics. However, for black women this model is limited for several reasons. First, it centers gender as the primary category of social and political analysis; second, it prioritizes the experiences of white women. Consequently, this poses many
challenges to understanding black women’s social and political experiences. Second, in
gendered analysis, black women’s experiences are often depicted as aberrations from
normal experiences. Third, and most importantly, the hegemonic positioning of this
feminist model in social science does not allow black women’s relationships,
experiences, and activities to exist, let alone be understood and articulated, outside of
feminist constraints. For black women, their gender relationships and their relationship
with the American state is culturally and historically different from that of white women.

Black women associate the problems of the feminist interpretation with
Eurocentric cultural assumptions about black inferiority and white superiority. They cite
this problem as an outcome of racist political and cultural processes within the larger
society that has characterized black women as intellectually and morally inferior to white
women. Black women have also discussed the limitations of an approach that
emphasizes gender to the exclusion of other variables that shape women’s social,
political, and economic experiences. They have concluded that this approach has led to
the marginalization of black women’s social experiences and their contributions as social
and political actors. This is particularly true in studies of women’s early activism.

According to Hazel Carby, many whites dismissed black women activists because black
women were “incapable of any organized critique.”

invisible in American society. Unfortunately, because of either the historical marginalization or the scholarly misrepresentation of black women in social science discourse, they have led the charge of creating approaches that attempt to address their social realities. Black women scholars have noted that black women's experiences have primarily been "veiled" by a socio-cultural climate that has devalued the contributions and knowledge production of black women.

One of the primary objectives of black women's theorizing has been the refutation of the negative stereotypes of black women. Black women scholars have produced a rich body of theoretical work that has centered their experiences and voices. They have argued that black women occupy a unique social position in the United States that is overlooked in social science. Pat Hill Collins argues that the marginalization of black women through the suppression either of their knowledge productions or their experiences within research is "critical in structuring the patterned relations of race, gender, and class inequity."

Black women have conceptualized their experience as one shaped by multiple forms of oppression. This has led to the creation of alternative theoretical frameworks that begin with a different set of assumptions about race, gender, and class. While not rejecting feminism, some black women have expanded the agenda of the feminist model in order to address the issues of racism and economic class exploitation. Some have pushed this agenda even further to discuss issues associated with age and sexuality.

---


While not mainstream, the notion of black women’s socio-political experience being shaped by multiple social realities is the dominant alternative approach used by black women scholars to understand black women’s status and their different social, economic, and political experiences in the United States. This approach utilizes concepts such as “double jeopardy” “triple jeopardy” or “multiple jeopardy.” These concepts were initially theorized within the early writings of women such as Frances Beale’s work entitled “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” and later Deborah King’s essay entitled “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology.” Both writers argued that both black women and men should rethink the dominant ideas and values scripting the liberation agendas for black people. Beale and King focused attention on the nuances of black life by examining the relationship between race, gender, and class.

One perspective that black women scholars have gravitated toward reflects the models constructed by Frances Beal and Deborah King; however, even this particular model presents challenges to those who are attempting to provide an analysis of black women’s activism. While black women theorized about their unique standpoint, much of the resulting scholarship addressing the socio-political lives of black women has also inherently focused on explaining the “exceptional behavior” of black women. Paula Giddings pointed this out in *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, when she stated, “[m]ost of the books that focus on Afro-

---


American women are of the ‘contributions’ type: the achievements of Black women who, despite double discrimination and oppression, were able to duplicate the feats of Black men or White women. Unfortunately, this model has oversimplified and mystified black women’s activism and has left wanting a more intimate understanding of the different dimensions of black women’s activism as a part of larger community movement for development in this country.

The exceptional black woman thesis finds its origins in black women’s attempts to make visible their lives and the motivations for their activism. An illustrative example is found in Deborah King’s much cited work entitled, “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology,” here she states:

We have also realized that the interactive oppressions that circumscribe our lives provide a distinctive context for black womanhood . . . The dual and systematic discriminations of racism and sexism remain pervasive, and, for many, class inequality compounds those oppressions. Yet, for as long as black women have known our numerous discriminations, we have also resisted those oppressions. Our day-to-day survival as well as our organized political actions have demonstrated the tenacity of our struggle against subordination. As King demonstrates, this thesis has centered the normative experiences of black women in social science research. This framework however, still presents challenges to understanding black women’s politics.

In “African-American Women’s Quilting: A Framework for Conceptualizing and Teaching African-American Women’s History,” Elsa Barkley Brown opens the door for the possibility and the need to find alternative frameworks which will adequately provide for the expression of different types of experiences when she states, “It is not merely a

---


9King, 294.
question of whether or not we have learned to analyze in particular kinds of ways, or whether people are able to intellectualize about a variety of experiences.” She argues that it is about “[pivoting] the center” without imposing one experience over another either consciously or unconsciously. “It is also about coming to believe in the possibility of a variety of experiences, a variety of ways of understanding the world, a variety of frameworks of operation . . .” Barkley-Brown’s argument raises the paradoxical aspect to our current way of understanding black women’s experiences in the social world.

Feminism cannot be repackaged according to a new group of black women scholars. Feminism’s philosophical, theoretical, and linguistic boundaries force the prioritization of gender and Eurocentric values thereby limiting feminism usefulness to black women. This group of black women scholars has suggested that while black women have acknowledged the multiple realities of their lives, they have consistently conceptualized their experience primarily through the prism of race. Therefore, race must be the critical starting point for framing any type of examination of black women.

This critique is a call for reconnecting black women’s social experiences and status to that of black men. Niara Sudarkasa discusses this perspective in *The Strength of Our Mothers: African and African American Women and Families: Essays and Speeches*:

In America, the socioeconomic status of all Black people is defined primarily by reference to race. Historically, African males and females were brought here together in captivity, and the patterns of brutality, exploitation, denigration, and degradation which characterized slavery were extended to male and female alike.  

---


Sudarkasa writes that black women's oppression is fundamentally linked to that of black men. She contends that the gendered analysis changed the discussions about black liberation from one of focusing on the problems plaguing both black men and women, to a series of debates over the quantity and quality of oppression experienced by black men and women and the degree to which black men are responsible for black women's subjugation and black women are responsible for black men's emasculation. Therefore, because of the fundamental assumptions of a gendered analysis, this model cannot provide black people with a broad scope and methodology for understanding the nature and source of black people's oppression. It functions to keep black people focused on themselves as the source of their own oppression. In, "Womanism and Black Feminism: Issues in the Manipulation of African Historiography," Valethia Watkins also writes that this type of analysis actually prevents us from understanding the larger problems facing black men, and women as a community, because it does not project the idea that "African women and men share a mutual problem, a common foe, and a joint fate."12 Even more, Watkins concludes, this type of analysis takes away the historical agency of black people. When one begins from a framework that centers the racial experiences and cultural values of black people, one is forced to recognize that black men and women who organized in the United States had different social, economic, cultural and political that informed their political priorities, strategies, and tactics. And it is this context that must be more fully examined in order to understand what factors informed black women's collective activism.

Several historians have described the inherent differences between black and white women’s secondary associations and activism at the turn of the twentieth century. For example, in Paula Giddings work, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, she noted that black women’s activism at the turn of the twentieth century was more political than that of white women.¹³ Ann Firor Scott also noted that while nineteenth century white women’s organizations focused on leisurely matters, black women’s organizations reflected the needs of their communities and hence were more likely to focus on housing, daycare, education, and other social needs.¹⁴ Scott wrote that the differences between black and white women’s associations reflected different assumptions about social and political priorities. These values began with principles that stressed collective work over individualism and social and community mothering.

Some historical literature has described black women’s organizational activism as essentially reactions to the exclusionary or marginalized experiences within organizations and movements dominated by black men. While black women’s organizations reflected their belief that it was necessary for them to organize among themselves to address particular community problems, these organizations were not constructed primarily as an oppositional gendered space to challenge the ideas and practices of black men as is often implied. If one carefully examines the objectives and missions of the early organizations, one finds that the political concerns of these eighteenth and nineteenth century black women included the entire black community.

¹³Ibid.

Additionally, these women organized as partners with black men, not in opposition to them or because of them. Black women based their public activism on their belief in the African community and their social roles as mothers and caretakers of the community.

Unlike the discussions of western feminists who conceptualize motherhood as a position of subordination and oppression. Many, black women throughout the Diaspora have resisted this type of analysis. Oyeronke Oyewumi wrote that within African communities, the institution of motherhood holds a high level of authority, but it is not simply reduced to its biological significance. African-centered models of motherhood reflect the responsibilities of caring for a community.¹⁵ This notion of mothering is such a ubiquitous sentiment throughout the history of black women’s collective action in the United States and throughout the Diaspora. Unfortunately, within feminist literature, the biological role of mother has been limited to the care and nurturing of one’s biological children. In some feminist schools of thought, mothering has been identified as the primary source of women’s oppression. However, for nineteenth century black women, whether one had a biological child or not, woman as mother, became an important social role in which black women extended nurturing to an entire community. The role reflects an “ethic of care” that becomes important in understanding why black women have often taken the lead or at least a complimentary role in addressing problems that have arisen in the black community. Yet, because feminist analyses of black women’s collective activity defines its meaning and role through a European cultural lens, the political significance of the mothering role is lost. Still it is important to note that the activities carried out by black women represented their ideological and practical commitment to

joining their husband, brothers, fathers, and sons in the struggle for respectability and freedom at the turn of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. What is significant for this analysis is the fact that the motivations for black women’s political engagement began with black women’s self-definitions of themselves and their roles in the community.

Reconnecting black women’s activism to the community implies a fundamentally different conceptualization of their values, problems, priorities and their relationships with black men. I suggest that culture is an important aspect of politics. It is a useful concept to explain black politics. Culture reflects the social, economic, and political worldview of a people. This research begins with the assumption that while two political environments shape black women’s organizational activity, the internal socio-political environment of the black community serves as the most important compass for the such organizations. Second, black women’s organizations do not develop within a cultural vacuum. This means black women’s organizational activities are influenced by the multiple and competing debates, movements, and political activities involving both black women and men who hold different levels of power and compete for influence in the black community. Third, black women’s organizations are not simply objects reacting to various external crises. Their history is not one of simply a brief moment in time in which black women addressed challenges to their womanhood by replicating the activities of exclusionary women or so-called sexist black men. This type of historical interpretation cuts short the possibility that black organizational activity has always been shaped by an internal compass that is inherently more important in shaping organizational activity and outcomes; and thus more important in understanding the nature of black
politics. Black political culture is that internal compass. As Stephanie Shaw has expressed in her work on the nineteenth century black women's club movement, black women's organizational work reflects a long cultural history of African collective consciousness established primarily for the purposes of internal development.\(^{16}\) For example, a review of articles published by black newspapers during this period suggests that overwhelming sentiments articulated at the turn of the twentieth century focused on building the social, political, economic, and cultural interest of the black community; defending the moral, social and political interests of black men and women; defining the appropriate strategies and tactics to protect black interests; and mobilizing black voters in order to hold black politicians accountable for the ways in which they represented black interests. Black women's organizational activities reflected an important part of a larger "protracted" struggle for liberation here in the United States.

When black women's political experiences are examined outside the context of the political priorities, alliances, strategies, and tactics of the broader black community, we are unable to fully appreciate the political agency of black people in general and ultimately black women. We are unable to understand the processes by which black people have simultaneously structured their own politics and navigated the larger political arena in order to achieve self-defined possibilities. Furthermore, we are unable to create political models that help us evaluate and prescribe appropriate courses of political action. However, when the black women's organizational activities are examined from the perspective, a new set of research questions emerge.

\(^{16}\)Stephanie Shaw, "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women," in We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible, ed. Darlene Clark Hine et al. (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1995).
Research Questions:

1. What were the political priorities, ideologies and political interests of the black community between 1896 and 1935?

2. What were the activities of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs and how were their programs shaped by this internal political context, priorities and political interests?

3. What is the legacy of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs and how can it help us to understand the relationship between contemporary black organizations within the black community in the post-civil rights era?

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that black women’s organizational activism was informed by political interests internal to the black community.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, several historians have highlighted the contributions of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs. Examples of such works include Charles Wesley’s book entitled In The History of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs: A Legacy of Service, Dorothy Salem’s seminal work To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, Ruby M. Kendrick’s important article entitled “They Also Serve: The National Association of Colored Women, Inc.,” Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America, Stephanie Shaw’s “Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women,” and Deborah Gray White’s recent examination of black women’s activism in Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in
Defense of Themselves 1894-1994. With these works, we are not only provided an excellent historical narrative of the contributions of black women's secondary associations, but also a very full picture of the external political, social, economic, and cultural issues that shaped black women's organizations from 1896 to 1995. This research will add to the discussion on black women's organizational activism by highlighting the internal community factors that shaped NACWC programs and activities on the national and local level.

Second, the changing nature of secondary associations and their relationship to the protection of political interests make this research timely. In "Advocates Without Members: The Recent Transformation of American Civic Life," Theda Skocpol compared older forms of civic associations with the new organizational models and suggests that the civic world is more oligarchic as a result of the recent transformation. Like Putnam, Skocpol noted that membership in "old line" voluntary associations or membership federations had declined in the face of emerging advocacy organizations which were based on different philosophies for leadership, funding, and recruiting and mobilizing members. She attributed this transformation to changes in the political system, new patterns of race and gender relations, and the emergence and migration of "professional elites." While she suggested that this transformation has created new or alternative routes to civic influence and has broadened public agendas, she also noted that the new civic model did not necessarily mobilize members or even less privileged participants along with privileged constituents. This is an interesting point because she highlights the increase in advocacy and minority associations. Skocpol concluded that
the new associational models “encouraged class-based policy outcomes . . . and polarized voices.”

Other scholars have made similar assessments to that of Skocpol. For example, in an article entitled “The Rise of Citizen Groups,” Jeffery Berry makes the point that although the number of national organizations has grown to provide greater representation of the different interests in American society, there is a socioeconomic bias, which has shaped the face of this representation in the national public policymaking arena. Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady’s have concluded in their work, “Civic Participation and the Equality Problem,” that the nationalization and professionalization of organizational life reshaped the civic terrain in a way that is widening the problem of equal representation in the political arena.

While, secondary associations provide political advantages in the efforts to protect interests, the question becomes whose interests are being articulated and protected. Political scientists now make the point that recent transformations in associational life may have tilted these advantages away from effective mobilization and representation of all interests in the political arena. The one dimensionality of current mainstream political science discussions have limited our ability to understand multiple factors that shape the relationship between black secondary associations and the


community they represent. Deborah Minkoff has noted that since the 1960s, there has been a proliferation of black secondary associations.\(^\text{20}\) However, the increase in black organizational activity in the post-civil rights period has not translated into significant transformations in the socio-economic and political position of a majority of black people in the United States. Thus, within the suggestion that there has been no significant change for the aggregate black community, the question of the relationship of the black community to black organizations emerges. Unfortunately, this question has not been fully addressed within mainstream political science discussions that have centered white associational life.

The virtual absence of discussions on black women’s organizational activity in recent political science literature on secondary associations also makes this study significant. Robert Putnam’s work is an illustrative point. In his 2000 publication *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, the black experience, in general, is overly simplified and the black woman’s experience in particular is absent from this analysis. Considering the significant role black secondary organizations have played in institutional transformation in the United States, as well as in the lives of black men and women in the United States, it is unfortunate that the reader is left with no clear understanding of how recent transformations in organizational life have impacted the civic and political possibilities of black men and women.\(^\text{21}\)


Recent political science research also marginalizes black women’s associations. In “How Americans Became Civic,” Skocpol provides an impressive comprehensive list of American voluntary associations that claimed at least one percent or more of the American male and female population. With the interesting exception of the Colored Farmer’s National Alliance and Cooperative Union, noticeably absent from this list are major black organizations. Skocpol explained such absences by stating:

If groups restricted membership to men or women, then 1 percent of the adult male or adult female population became the benchmark. But, no other relaxations of the demanding size criterion have been made. Groups restricted to particular occupational, racial, or ethnic groups are included in our master list only if they enroll 1 percent of the entire U.S. adult population. Representing every slice of the population is not our goal. (emphasis mine)

From Skocpol’s list, we are provided with more than a glimpse of changes in white American associational life, but nothing significant about a “slice of the population” which contributed significantly both quantitatively and qualitatively to the history of secondary associational life in the United States. Although contemporary discussions on secondary associations have failed to adequately address the secondary associations of black women, this work nevertheless raises important issues that need to be focused on by those particularly concerned with the direction of black organizational activity and black politics in the post-civil rights era.

The challenge of my research is to expand contemporary political discussions about the state of secondary associations in the United States by incorporating the organizational experiences of black women. However, gendered goals of equal

---


23Ibid., 34.
representation in social science literature have had the effect of isolating and distorting the significance of black women’s political activism. This type of contribution would be inherently limited; political science scholarship on black political activism must have a different set of prescriptive priorities. Thus, my research will also provide a model for understanding how black women fit into the politics of the black community. This research will provide a model that allows us to move beyond descriptive studies of black women and gendered analyses.

Finally, if we are to understand the character of contemporary black women’s organizations and evaluate their relevance in the post-civil rights era, then we must begin by creating a new analytical model that centers the priorities, values, and experiences of black men and women. We need a model that allows us to explore beyond the elite/mass dynamics. Thus, this study will contribute to the existing body of research available on black women’s politics by offering an alternative theoretical model for understanding the ways in which internal processes of black people operated to shape the organizational activities of black women. This model will allow us to see more closely, how black women’s political activism fits into the larger black political struggle in the United States.

Research Methodology

The primary methodology used in this research project is triangulation. Triangulation refers to the examination of a research question using multiple research methods or techniques. In The Practice of Social Research, Earl Babbie notes that this method enables the researcher to address different strengths and weaknesses associated with the use of only one research method.24 In “How do I know what I say I know?

Thinking about Slim’s Table and Qualitative Research Design,” Paul Manna wrote that triangulation “involves bringing different sources and types of data to bear on a research question.” 25 In light of these observations I will corroborate information with multiple lens and methods.

I utilize a single case study design for this research project. In Research Design: Strategies and Choices in the Design of Social Research, Catherine Hakim writes that case studies can provide both exploratory and detailed information for analyzing “organizational issues, organizational cultures, processes of change and adaptation.” 26 Specifically, this case study will examine the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (NACWC) from 1896 to 1935. This organization was selected because it is recognized as the first successful national organization of black women during this timeframe. This period analyzed marks the general beginning and end of the historical period referred to as the secular club movement among black women. The period also represents the most successful period for the NACWC and the only time in which they were the only national black women’s organization.

The historical analysis method is also be utilized. This qualitative method will examine primary and secondary historical documents. This analysis will provide a basis for understanding the longitudinal social, economic, cultural, and political context in which the organization operated from 1896 to 1935. The analysis will also provide a discussion of the historical context preceding and following this period. This method will


also provide data for understanding how the community in which black women lived and
organized influenced their activity over time. Documents to be examined include official
government documents, biographies, autobiographies, monographs, newspapers and
magazines, as well as NACWC organization documents such as speeches, minutes,
resolutions, reports, and correspondence.

Content analysis will be the third method used. This qualitative research method
will assist my examinations of archival records and government and non-government
communications and, where necessary, utilize manifest and/or latent coding methods.
This method will facilitate the identification of issues, priorities, strategies, and tactics
communicated within the black community. It will allow for the identification of those
issues and preferences as discussed by NACWC. The issues most important to the
NACWC will be determined by the number of times the subject may appear in
organizational and non-governmental communications. Finally, this dissertation will
incorporate statistical studies related to the research focus to provide aggregate data
necessary to supplement or corroborate other information.

Dissertation Outline

Chapter 1 will provide an overview of the research agenda. Included in this
section will be the statement of the problem, a discussion of the major concepts, and
significance of the research to the larger body of work on the subject. This section will
also contain a discussion of my theoretical framework. Chapter 2 provides a discussion
on the development of black women’s organizational activism. Chapter 3 provides an
overview of the black political cultural context in which the NACWC emerged and
operated. Chapter 4 will present the case study of the National Association of Colored
Women's Clubs. Chapter 5 will present a conclusion and discuss the implications of the case study findings.

Conceptual Framework

This research centers the role of culture in its analysis of the NACWC and conceptualizes the internal ideologies, institutions, priorities and values of black men and black women as black political culture. Hanes Walton argues that despite attempts to dismiss the reality of a black political culture, or even the relevance of such research, there exist internal ideologies, beliefs, and institutions that have shaped or affected black political behavior in one way or another.\(^{27}\) Empirical studies have explored the relationship between black political culture and black political behavior.

A cultural analysis provides a useful explanatory “framework” for understanding organizational activity. This dissertation recognizes that for individuals who share a common historical or social attachment, the concept of culture may be used to describe a common identity. It functions to shape the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable political behavior. It also shapes the political goals, problems, and priorities of a group. However, this dissertation also recognizes that within cultures there are multiple and competing ideas and interpretations of political and social experiences. According to Marc Ross, in “Culture and Identity in Comparative Political Analysis,” culture does not preclude contestation over the “meaning and identity, control over symbols, and rituals, and the ability to impose one interpretation rather than another.”\(^{28}\)

---


\(^{28}\) Marc Howard Ross, “Culture and Identity in Comparative Political Analysis,” in *Culture and Politics: A Reader*, ed. Lane Crothers and Charles Lockhart (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 42.
This research recognizes that the utilization of the concept black political culture suggests that black men and women have a separate political consciousness about themselves as a result of their interactions with the American socio-cultural, economic, and political system, and that this consciousness informs a different set of expectations, ideologies, attitudes, and values about the American political process along with the role of blacks in the American political system.

I define black political culture as a sub-political culture within the American political system. Within this culture, there are formal and informal social, economic, and political networks such as the media, political leaders, civic and voluntary organizations, educational centers, religious centers, and businesses. Competing ideas, sentiments, and opinions that black men and women have expressed about the American political system, its institutions, and processes based on their particular experiences within American political system also shape this culture. This culture shapes the political behavior of black men and women by outlining agendas and boundaries for shaping black political priorities, community goals, and appropriate political participation. This dissertation moves from the position that black political culture is more than a set of attitudes and beliefs about the American political system. It recognizes that the institutions and networks responsible for articulating, shaping, and perpetuating certain cultural values must be incorporated within a definition of political culture.
Concepts

Political Culture

This dissertation utilizes Gabriel Almond’s definition of political culture. Gabriel Almond defined political culture in his 1956 article entitled “Comparative Political Systems” as “the particular patterns of orientation to political action.” He developed this concept further in his 1963 work, *The Civic Culture*. Outlining the four aspects of political culture in “The Study of Political Culture,” Almond wrote that:

(1) It consists of the set of subjective orientations to politics in a national population or subset of a national population. (2) It has cognitive, affective, and evaluative components; it includes knowledge and beliefs about political reality, feelings with respect to politics, and commitments to political values. (3) The content of political culture is the result of childhood socialization, education, media exposure, and adult experiences with governmental, social, and economic performance. (4) Political culture affects political and governmental structure and performance-constrains it, but surely does not determine it. The causal arrows between culture and performance go both ways.

The significance of this concept rests on two important ideas. First, the concept “political culture” was established as the important link between micro and macro level politics. This work implicitly recognized the connection between the everyday world in which people carry out their political and non-political lives as significant to political analysis. Second, this concept was significant because it also implicitly stated that it is not wise to divorce the political context from social and cultural context because the social and cultural context created resources necessary for political actors within a political sphere.

---


The knowledge, evaluative, and affective values and ideas enable certain levels and types of political behavior.

Black Culture

There is a paucity of work examining the relationship between culture and black political behavior in mainstream political science. While Gabriel Almond continues to be referred to as “the father of the concept of political culture,” his initial work failed to address blacks as a sub-cultural group in his case study of the United States entitled The Civic Culture. This is significant because Almond and Verba’s work is still considered the most seminal or groundbreaking work on political culture in mainstream political science discourse and, as such, continues to shape the intellectual conversation on political culture.

The lack of scholarly interest in black political culture in social science literature may be attributed to the historical legacy of the notion that blacks lack a distinctive contributory culture in the United States. There are two aspects to the thesis that blacks have no separate or distinct culture. The first aspect of this thesis posits that slavery destroyed any aspect of African culture. African culture in the United States is described as simply a copy of white behavior or American culture. Hanes Walton cited some of these arguments in his work, Invisible Politics: Black Political Behavior. In 1944, Gunnar Myrdal wrote, An American Dilemma where he described blacks as essentially poor imitators of American culture. This sentiment continued throughout the sixties with Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan’s studies on black culture in Beyond the Melting Pot. They concluded that blacks had no cultural history prior to America and therefore had no distinct cultural values to protect. Finally, E. Franklin Frazier wrote, “These
scraps of memories which form only an insignificant part of the growing body of traditions in Negro families are what remains of the African heritage probably never before in history has a people been so nearly completely stripped of its social heritage as the Negroes who were brought to America."  

The second aspect of this thesis acknowledges a black culture, but describes it as essentially pathological behavior influenced by values and attitudes shaped by poverty, racism, low achievement, and ignorance. This thesis has can be attributed to the nature of racism in the United States.

In 1971, literary critic Houston Baker argued that European western conceptualizations of culture were constructed to limit its meaning to the “intellectual and imaginative work,” of western on European society. Challenging this conception, Baker wrote, “One does not worship, display, or teach culture; one acknowledges it as a whole way of life grounded in history, and one necessarily lives a culture.”  

Maulana Karenga defined culture as “the totality of a people’s thought and practice, which occurs in seven basic areas: mythology, history, social organization, economic organization, political organization, creative production, and ethos.”

**Black Political Culture**

This research model builds on the concept of black political culture as a sub-political culture within the larger context of American political culture. Political sub-cultures represent the political attitudes, ideas and values about the political system that are expressed by different social, racial, or ethnic minority groups within a society. This

---

32Walton, 24


research draws on discussions of black political culture offered by Charles Henry in his work *Culture and American Politics*.35

Charles Henry suggested that black political consciousness, ideologies, and institutions, reflect a “double consciousness” grounded in the historical reality of being both black and American. This discussion has its theoretical roots in W.E.B. Du Bois’ theory of double consciousness discussed in his 1903 essay *The Souls of Black Folk*:

... the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body...36

In this work, Henry identified several scholars who recognize that black men and women share a “distinct political sub-culture.” For example, he cited Milton Morris who asserted that black political culture described the attitudes that blacks hold toward the American political system. He discussed the contentions of Lucious Barker and Jesse McCorry and the work of Manning Marable and Hanes Walton who all recognized that the black community had an internal group process for articulating community priorities and strategies. This conceptualization of black political culture reflects the idea that the knowledge, sentiments, and opinions that black men and women have expressed about

---


their status and socio-political experience is based on their particular interactions with American socio-political institutions, processes, and leaders.

Dubois introduced this concept to describe the reality created by the use of race as a primary basis for the differential treatment of Black people in the United States. William Cross’s theory of “biculturalism,” which posits that black men and women have the ability to construct a separate system of values, ideas, and interest within the larger American culture, builds on Dubois’ double consciousness theory. Contributing to this theoretical discussion, Hanes Walton has noted that this culture shapes the political behavior of black men and women. In *African American Power and Politics: the Political Context Variable*, Hanes Walton wrote that this culture “provides the ideas, beliefs, and attitudes with which a community evaluates and appraises the surrounding world and determines how its members should act and react to the positions and postures taken by others.”

Elsa Barkley Brown found that for the purposes of survival, blacks shared a racial consciousness that informed a sense of “collective responsibility.” This consciousness shaped their political ideas and marked the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable individual political behavior and activity. The idea of collective responsibility contradicted the Liberal philosophical belief that individuals had no obligations to others in his or her community. The notion of collective responsibility also allowed blacks to redefine the meanings of democracy, political participation and political priorities in terms of “collective autonomy.” This means that greater value was

---

placed on political choices that yielded the best possibilities of the black community realizing freedom in the United States.38

This research conceptualizes black political experiences as shaped primarily by the reality of race. Consequently, black political culture reflects a racial consciousness that is often identified in the ideologies that blacks have articulated to interpret and give meaning to their socio-political experience. These ideas are perpetuated and shaped by the social, economic, and political networks within the black community such as media, political leaders, civic organizations, educational centers, religious centers, and businesses. These ideas inform the political activism of black men and women individually and collectively.

**Secondary Association**

Within this dissertation discussion, a secondary association is defined as a group of individuals or groups formally or informally united on a voluntary basis to collectively articulate and represent singular or multiple social, economic, cultural, or political interests. These groups may be classified as voluntary associations, interest groups and civic organizations. According to Dennis S. Ippolito and Thomas G. Walker, voluntary associations attempt to address39 the needs of members with organizational resources. Interests groups on the other hand attempt to meet the needs of its members by influencing government action and public policy making. Although voluntary associations are defined as non-political Ippolito and Walker, as well as others, have

---


suggested that there is a certain level of political activity within organizations classified as non-political. For example, Nancy Burns and others found that for women, voluntary associations were critical spaces for building civic skills necessary for political engagement.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is guided by the theory of black political culture and the discussions of black political scientists who assert the need to locate the study of black politics within a framework that centers the political experiences of black men and women. In “The Study of Black Politics: Notes on Rethinking the Paradigm,” Rickey Hill suggested that the study of black politics was most concerned with “the purposeful activity” to realize and defend the objective interest and choices of black people against class and race domination. According to Hill, the current philosophical assumptions and values that shape the current practice of social science fundamentally limits any useful theoretical understanding and prescriptive analysis of the black predicament.

In a more expanded discussion of this argument, he writes that the study of black politics lacked its own philosophical and conceptual framework for providing this critical analysis. In “The Contemporary Black Predicament: Crisis and Political Obligations,” Hill notes that “the contemporary predicament of black people in the United States ... broadly conceived ... is concerned with those dimensions of black politics internal to the Black community: the struggle over the optimum strategy for liberation and the struggle

---

for political transformation and emancipation." Inherent in this argument is the notion that the political actions of black men and women are not simply reactions to larger events. In "The Nature of Black Politics and Black Political Behavior," Hanes Walton also states that black politics was made to appear as simply reactions to external ideological, political, and social changes. Studies on black politics, which consistently focus on external ideological and structural issues, only serve to perpetuate the notion that blacks do not have political agency.

Challenging the way in which black politics in studied, Adolf Reed comments that black people have a level of political agency that must be held accountable and not simply dismissed as irrelevant to understanding the degree to which black possibilities within the United States are realized or not. Like Hill, Reed believes that more attention must be paid to the internal dimensions of black politics. He concluded that the failure to recognize the political subjectivity of black people is a consequence of the current corporeal model which dominates the study of black politics. Reed maintained that this model limited the study of black politics to "projecting in the name of a mystified, undifferentiated, and in fact apolitical mass and unaccountable elite."

Hill, Reed, and Walton's suggest that a new model is needed which reflects the multiple and competing understanding of the black condition in the United States.

---


44 Ibid., 4.
argued that current assessments of black politics have dismissed the possibility that there are different ideological, strategic, and objective interests articulated, debated and acted upon among black people. Historically, there have always been competing political ideological positions about the nature of the black oppression and solutions to the problems faced by black men and women in the United States. He maintained that the study of black politics has been limited to “projecting in the name of mystified, undifferentiated, and in fact apolitical mass and unaccountable elite.”

This assessment holds true for the study of black women. The dominant models used to examine black women’s political history ensure the representation of black women’s political contributions. However, black women are incorporated as one indistinguishable corporeal body. The most significant critiques are elite/mass discussions which limit the study of black women’s organizations to surveys of how individual elite middle-class black leaders like Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Josephine Ruffin served a largely invisible group of working-class and poor black women. This model has oversimplified and in fact mystified the ideological and strategic differences that influenced black women’s collective behavior and has left wanting a more intimate understanding of the different political dimensions of black women’s activism and how those differences shaped their contribution to the larger process of black politics.

Because of the critiques offered by Hill, Walton, and Reed, my theoretical framework incorporates black political culture. Black men and women share a distinct political cultural experience from that of the larger American society. The reality of race shapes this experience. Black political culture describes the institutions, ideas, values,
and beliefs, which blacks have constructed in the process of defining themselves and articulating their understanding of their social, political, and economic experience in the United States.

In sum, the theoretical assumption that guides this research is that the black political experience should be at the center of the analysis on black women's activism. These experiences are important because theoretical and empirical studies have provided evidence to support the notion that blacks have constructed their own cultural priorities and values that do shape political behavior. A theory of black political culture is therefore used to examine black women's organizational activism at the turn of the twentieth century.
CHAPTER 2
BLACK WOMEN’S ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVISM

This chapter provides a broad historical overview of black women’s organizational activism in the United States. Several works have provided a very important foundation for examining black women’s organizational activity. Much of this work has begun by suggesting that early and contemporary black women’s collective activism reflects a distinct consciousness shaped simultaneously by African cultural values and the racial and gendered experiences of black women in the United States. Much of the work on black women’s collective behavior in the United States has attributed its particular character to both African values and the social practices that developed among enslaved and free black women’s resistance to oppression. This work also highlights the importance of recognizing local black women’s formal organizing efforts as the pre-cursors to national efforts of the NACWC.

During a National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs conference in Richmond, Virginia Ms. Casely Hayford unequivocally reminded black clubwomen that “community life had its real birth in Africa.” Black women’s sense of community responsibility enabled them to build a national political and civic platform upon a seemingly depoliticized domestic sphere. During this period, in which socio-cultural norms proscribed strong and assertive public women and political activism, black women assumed social and moral authority in the black community. They centered their racial
experiences and used their positions as mothers, daughters, and wives as an additional, but unique, standpoint from which to address the major issues confronting their communities. This began with the idea that “the nation begins with the home.” Black women understood and linked the quality of black homes in urban and rural areas to national, state, and local laws and policies in the areas of education, housing, sanitation, criminal justice, employment, and health. Their ability to engage in this community work is rooted in the African values and practices that centered black women in the community.

African cultural traditions, values, and beliefs reflecting the Wolof, Bambara, Hausa, and Yoruba shaped black women’s collective consciousness about themselves as powerful actors. The idea of power was not biologically limited to males in many African cultures. For example, female power was a very important aspect of West African Yoruba culture, and not an anomaly. African women in many pre-colonial West African countries were rulers, traders, farmers, and led struggles against colonial imperialism. These activities and struggles continued in various maroon societies and throughout battles for freedom and autonomy in the Americas. This reality debunks the notion that African men and women in the United States had no cultural identity. It also supports the argument made by Jane Duran in Worlds of Knowing: Global Feminist Epistemology. She contends that cultural knowledge is constantly created and transcends various boundaries to inform and influence ideas and behavior.¹ This consciousness of power may have also been strengthened by black women’s experiences within the slave labor system.

Black women’s organizational consciousness is rooted in both the experiences of enslaved and free black women according to Gayle Tate. Throughout *Unknown Tongues: Black Women’s Political Activism in the Antebellum Era, 1830-1860*, Tate stresses the idea that whether free or enslaved black women were the central agents that held the black community together and perpetuated a “culture of resistance” through the socialization of the children and protection of the community. In *Ar’nt I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* Deborah Gray-White argued that the sex segregated slave system shaped the development of black women’s identity as females who had to be strong and self-reliant as a matter of survival. In “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” Angela Davis notes that African women’s consciousness of their oppression was only sharpened by the realities of their daily life. Black women’s consciousness of their humanity existed prior to this enslavement and, therefore, as Davis argues made resistance organic to their existence.

**Black Women’s Formal Organizations — Pre-Civil War**

The Black Church provided an important space for the development of black women’s formal organizational work. While women worked to raise money for scholarships, the poor, the old and orphans, they developed organizational and leadership skills. They also developed a distinct consciousness or identity of themselves and their needs as black women. According to Anne Firor Scott’s study, *Natural Allies: Women’s...*  

---


_Associations in American History_, black women in northeastern states such as New England and Pennsylvania were among the first women to organize self-help, mutual aid and benevolent societies.\(^5\) In fact, in Scott’s essay, _Most Invisible of All: Black Women’s Voluntary Associations_, Scott found that the number of black women’s organizations compared significantly to or in some cases out numbered the organizations established by their white counterparts during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. She also noted that despite the similarities that may have existed between black and white women’s organizations, black women’s organizations were not “simply pale copies [of white women’s organizations] . . the motivations for black women to organize were quite different.”\(^6\) Beverly Guy-Sheftall suggests that black women found that by establishing separate organizations, it was easier to focus on the self-defined political, cultural, and intellectual agendas of black women.\(^7\)

Regardless of social or economic class differences, Black women organized to address the changing and growing needs of the black community unlike many women’s clubs that focused on socializing and fashion. Gerda Lerner asserted, in “Early Community Work of Black Club Women,” that the origins of black women’s organizational efforts is simply part of a larger black tradition of “self-help, institution building, and strong organization” legacy. These organizations operated nursery schools, kindergartens, health clinics, and daycare centers. They also organized recreational

---


6 Ibid., 3, 5, 9.

programs, literary discussions, and self-study circles for women. Prior to the 1890s, the early local activities of black women attempted to address various social needs in the black community stemming from the absence of government support. Like the broader social welfare movement that shaped all women's organizations in the United States during the Progressive era, black women also organized to address the specific social welfare needs of the black community.

In *African American Women and Social Action: The Clubwomen and Volunteerism from Jim Crow to the New Deal, 1896-1936*, Floris Barnett Cash also wrote that black women had established pre-civil war mutual aid societies and post-reconstruction societies and clubs. Cash cited several organizations to illustrate her point. For example, the 1793 Female Benevolent Society was the first self-help organization established by free black women in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania prior to the Civil War. The Daughters of Africa was established in 1821 as a mutual aid society representing approximately 200 women in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Also in Philadelphia, the Dorcas Missionary Society was also formed in 1824 to provide welfare and benevolent assistance to the poor and sick. Black women in Providence, Rhode Island founded the African Educational and Benevolent Society in 1828 to educate black children in absence of a local public school. In New York City, black women organized the Abyssinian Benevolent Daughters of Ester Association for moral and welfare purposes in 1839.8

These early studies on black women's organizations also provide interesting details on the ways in which black women defined their activism and their notions of politics. For example, despite the fact that these early associations represented black

---

women’s efforts to address public issues created by the unresponsiveness of the state, women such as Mary Church Terrell, Mary Murray Washington, Josephine Ruffin and other early black women activists did not have describe their work as political because of the prevailing socio-cultural conceptions of womanhood and negative perception of politics. However, black women’s organizations, at the turn of the century, were the primary vehicles by which black women and men were able to force public policy change and government responsiveness.

These earlier organizations were inherently political and in many cases subversive. For example, the Female Benevolent Firm was established to provide assistance to those rescued by the Underground Railroad. In defiance of the state of Ohio’s Black Laws and in response to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, many black women of the Colored Ladies Benevolent Sewing Society risked their own lives by assisting fugitive blacks. Prior to 1865 states must have recognized the significance of these organizations since there is evidence of state and local legislative efforts to outlaw the establishment of black organizations. In Maryland, for example, where blacks had established more than thirty mutual aid societies by 1835, which provided various social welfare and financial assistance to the black community, state and city government officials took legislative steps between 1842 and 1846 to outlaw and penalize free blacks for establishing, joining, or incorporating what they identified as secret societies such as black lyceums, Masonic lodges, literary, social, moral and charitable societies. These organizations formed what Cash described as the “foundation of a social service

---


10Ibid., 87.
network” and the political and social context in which organizations like the NACWC would operate in between 1896 and 1935.

Gerda Lerner provides a useful analysis for understanding the environmental factors shaping black women’s organizing efforts. She cites industrialization, urbanization, and demographic changes, beginning in the 1890s, as significant contributors to the nationalization of black women’s organizational efforts. Lerner argues that the formation of multipurpose women’s clubs, like the Colored Woman’s League of Washington, D.C. and the NACWC, took place during a time of economic transformation in the United States. According to Lerner, organizations like the NACWC assisted black migrants in northern urban areas through the creation of settlement homes, employment agencies, daycare, educational programs, and shelters.

**Black Women’s Organizing – Post Reconstruction**

In Dorothy Salem’s seminal book entitled *To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890-1920*, she also found that industrialization, urbanization and immigration were realities shaping the lives of black people. She found that demographic and economic changes during the industrialization period effected how black women organized help black men and women in new urban centers who were also confronted by the reality of racism and sexism. Salem wrote that nineteenth century black club women like Fannie Barrier Williams accredited the increase of black women’s organizations to “the organized anxiety of women who have become intelligent enough to recognize their own low social condition and strong enough to initiate the forces of reform.”

---


anxiety resulted in the birth of the greatest number of black women’s organizations between 1870 and 1930s. In “They Also Serve: The National Association of Colored Women,” Ruby M. Kendrick wrote that while these programs were attempts to uplift the black family, they were clearly a reflection of the internal needs of the black community; specifically, working black women. Kendrick placed a greater emphasis on the changing social and economic interests of black women as the catalyst for the creation of national black women’s organizations.13

The NACWC represented a transformation in black women’s organizational strategies at the turn of the twentieth century. It represented an organizational choice for black women to transform often-isolated local work into more unified mechanism for the achievement of collective goals and an important effort to construct a national agenda or platform that articulated issues of concern for black women. Like other federated and national organizations, the NACWC served as a vehicle to link black women to local, state, and international processes to realize community defined goals and objectives. Thus, the formation of the NACWC was an important organizational accomplishment that carried significant implications for the politics of black women and men.

This review has highlighted the early foundation of black women’s organizational activism. Attention should also be paid to understanding the external pressures placed upon the black organizations. In Organizing for Equality: The Evolution of Women’s and Racial-Ethnic Organizations in America, 1955-1985, Debra Minkoff writes that the institutional environment in which organizations operate is important to understanding

---

the emergence and decline of organizations. Minkoff asserts that changes in the political arena, available resources, along with cultural and normative pressures toward conformity influence the forms, strategies, and goals of organizations. However, politics within the black community are also influential factors.

Internal factors are responsible for shaping the boundaries of black organizational activity just as much as external forces. Two studies on black women’s activism take this position. In “Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women,” Stephanie Shaw maintains that a closer examination of the internal factors shaping black women’s organizing is needed. Shaw has argued that too much historical emphasis is placed on the external factors prompting the creation of the NACWC. She maintains that black women had a substantial organizing legacy prior to the creation of the NACWC that could be attributed to the community consciousness of black women. The second study, authored by Elsa Barkley Brown, entitled, “To Catch the Vision of Freedom: Reconstructing Southern Black Women’s Political History, 1865-1880.” Brown stresses the idea of examining the internal values, priorities, and ideologies of the black community that shape black women’s political participation in general and black women’s political participation in particular.

---


In summary, these two studies serve as a critical point of departure for my examination of the impact of black political culture on black women’s organizations in general and the NACWC in particular.
CHAPTER 3
HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY

This chapter will provide a historical analysis of the institutions and politics that shaped the political cultural context for NACWC activities. At the turn of the twentieth century, the majority of black men and women were located in southern states like Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama. However, by the mid 1930s, many of these men and women became part of a small, but expanding black populations in northern cities like New York, Chicago and Detroit; and western cities like Kansas City. Likewise, as various factors worked to either push blacks out of the South or pull blacks into the north, black institutions grew and expanded their activities in the tradition of self-help and independence. The growth of eighteenth and nineteenth century institutions like the black church, conventions, lodges, benevolent associations and fraternal orders laid the foundation for the growth of late nineteenth century and modern twentieth century institutions like the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs which reflected a black awareness of the need to create a safe oppositional or alternative space that supported their interests. The civic and political energy of this period is reflected in the remarks of W.E.B. Dubois who was quoted as saying that “it would be difficult to find a Negro who [did] not belong to several distinctively Negro organizations in religious, business, or social lines.”

---

Migration Politics

The rate of growth for blacks during this period declined significantly. Even though blacks defied the forecast of black self-destruction made by many in the white community, Dernoral Davis attributed the population decline to infertility and high mortality rates among black men and women. Poor quality of life conditions contributed to this problem. In Carter G. Woodson’s study of black life in the rural South, he lamented that the quality of life for blacks was shaped by the lack of access to critical resources such as decent housing, health care, clean drinking water, education, recreation, and fresh food – all of which were given “such little attention . . . in rural districts.” For example, Woodson noted that while a majority of blacks worked as tenants and laborers on rural farms, they were not often in a position to produce their own food. Consequently, and when their inadequate wages provided, many blacks were forced to buy poor quality food at high prices at local plantation commissaries. For those who complained, they risked death or some type of violence. Woodson concluded that all these factors contributed to blacks having a mortality rate of 16.3 percent compared to the white mortality rate of 10.84 percent in 1925 alone.

Poor living conditions led many to leave the South. According to census data between 1890 and 1930 approximately 1,541,00 black men, women, and

---


4Ibid. 4.

5Ibid. 18-19.
children left the South initially with the support of the United States Department of Labor.⁶ Black newspapers played an important part in the migration movements. The Chicago Defender, Kansas Herald, and Colored Visitor ran regular poems, letters, and editorials encouraging blacks to move out of the South and ran advertisements to purchase homes and land in the northwest as early as 1879. Among the reasons for migration cited by different southern blacks, in 1917, W. E. B. DuBois found that Blacks left southern states like North Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia and Louisiana in such of education, freedom, better treatment and better wages.⁷

Clearly social and economic factors influenced the decision of hundreds and thousands of blacks to migrate out of the South at the end of the reconstruction period. While the South offered the promise of educational advancement, economic opportunities, electoral participation, and social autonomy for black people, it was offered within the context of state sanctioned violence, a growing movement toward political and civic disfranchisement and economic subordination.⁸

The reality of inescapable poverty and promise of better economic opportunities has been cited as a major factor pushing blacks to migrate out of the South. Agricultural problems caused by the boll weevil and floods also created economic problems for

---


blacks. Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck both note that for rural blacks there were few economic opportunities outside of farming sharecroppers, tenant farming, and working as cheap farm labor in the South. The pull of urban industrialization and labor shortages in the north particularly after World War I promised economic opportunities for blacks to make higher wages. In a testimony before the U.S. Senate, Henry Adams, one of the leaders of the 1879 Exodus migration movement, stated that “white violence, peonage, and the abuse of black women, inadequate education facilities, and political intimidation” were the reasons why blacks had decided to leave the South. Thus, it is no surprise that in one of the first efforts, the “Exodus of 1879,” led by Moses Singleton of Tennessee and Adams of Louisiana, approximately fifty thousand blacks who worked as agricultural laborers, maids, and cottonpickers left southern states like Louisiana and Georgia to settle in western states like Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska.

Likewise as black populations in the South declined, black populations increased in states like Kansas, Illinois, Ohio, New York, Michigan, Indiana, Missouri, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, Texas, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. In cities like Detroit, Michigan, the black population increased approximately one thousand percent from 5,741 in 1910 to 120,066 in 1930. In Chicago the black population increased from 44,103 to 233,903 during the same period. Other cities with already sizable black communities like New

---


York, Memphis, and Philadelphia saw black populations increase by 257 percent, 84 percent, and 160 percent respectively.\(^\text{12}\)

However, while life for blacks in the rural South was bad, the quality of life for northern blacks was comparatively just as poor. In northern urban cities, adult and child mortality rates were greater than whites. Blacks who had little or no skills had difficulty finding employment. Black women were often exploited and forced into prostitution, and men into gambling. There was no social safety net available to help southern migrants adjust to urban life in the north. For example, as a result of housing discrimination, blacks were often forced into overcrowded and poor living conditions.\(^\text{13}\) Education and training was still a need for black women and men in the North. Working mothers had difficulty finding daycare for their children. From the lack of adequate health care to the lack of food, the socio-economic conditions of southern migrant families served as a catalyst for the expansion of black organizations, and in particular black women's organizations.

In Darlene Clark Hine’s study of black women in Michigan, she noted that many black women’s organizations, like the Christian Industrial Club formed in 1904, emerged throughout the northeast and Midwest to provide social welfare assistance to southern migrants who came to urban cities without familial support and financial resources.\(^\text{14}\) By 1908, the Negro Working Girls’ Home had been established by black women in


Massachusetts along with the Sheltering Arms Home in California. The foundation for these efforts had been laid by the nineteenth century social activism of black women. For example, Victoria Earle Matthews and others created the White Rose Mission and Industrial Association in 1897 in order to provide employment services and housing assistance to black female migrants from the South. Earlier work by the Sojourner Truth Home for Working provided similar assistance as did the Home for the Friendless and the National Association for the Relief of Destitute Women and Children founded by the Colored Women’s League in Washington, D.C. 15

Black Civil and Political Life

Black civil and political life from the last decade of the nineteenth century through the early part of the twentieth century was infused with the energy of the Progressive era. This period represented the rise in the bourgeois class, a growing number of black entrepreneurs, intellectuals, professionals, and politicians; in fact many of the black clubwomen who responded through their social and political activism represented the first blacks born after the end of slavery who saw solutions to the problems of American citizens through the lens of civic and social activism. These women worked with men to establish organizational and institutional cooperation within the black community. For example, while Dorothy Salem points to the white financial support blacks relied on in the establishment of northern settlement and rescue work, these efforts were only able to expand “as a result of black energies.” This energy reflected the cooperation between black women’s missionary clubs, black professional and financial circles, and black political and civic leadership.

According to Clayborne Carson, many of the networks that shaped the black community emerged from this small number of educated and self-employed blacks in professional services such as education, religion, medicine and personal services such as barbering, undertaking, plumbing, catering and hairdressing, carpentry, baking, shoemaking and tailoring. These formal organizations emerged with the task of protecting the various economic interests of blacks within these networks while also confronting the challenging from the declining status of blacks in the country at the turn of the twentieth century.

Most literature written on the subject of black organizational activity has not failed to note the ideological and material necessity of blacks working together through various voluntary organizations to address the multitude of issues borne out of the continuous socio-cultural, political, and economic consequences of racism in America. Nevertheless, there is a significant amount of literature that has addressed the accomplishments of black organizations. For example, in “The Politics of Black Self-Help in the United States: A Historical Overview,” Lenwood Davis challenged the myth of black dependency through his examination of black self-help organizations. Among other organizational efforts, Davis highlighted nineteenth century local, state, and national black organizational efforts to address black equality. Davis found that black organizations were critical to “mobilization of political influence for black equality, and

---


the development of a commitment by blacks to programs of mutual assistance to the black community.\(^{18}\)

*Black Political Culture*

Black political culture is a reflection of the institutions, practices and values that grow out of the experiences of black people in the United States. According to Hanes Walton in *African American Power and Politics: The Political Context Variable*, understanding the political cultural dimension of black politics is critical for comprehending the ideas and values that have motivated black political behavior. Walton discussed two important quantitative and qualitative studies that build on the earlier theoretical work which laid the foundation for understanding the connection between culture and political behavior. In two articles published by in the *American Political Science Review* and the *National Political Science Review*, Richard Allen, Michael Dawson, and Ronald Brown’s national survey of blacks provided empirical evidence that culture, particularly the moral and religious component of black political culture did shape black political behavior. In a second study, Robert Smith and Richard Seltzer concluded that ideological aspects beyond the social characteristics of race and class did inform conventional and non-conventional black political behavior.\(^{19}\) As such, this discussion is framed by the idea that black political culture represented an alternative space for articulation of black ideas and expectations as American citizens. Additionally, as Michael Dawson notes, this space may also be described as a critical oppositional

\(^{18}\)ibid., 51.

space that not only supported black public interest, but also challenged attempts to suppress black intellectual, social, political, and economic agency.20

Black civic and political activity is an interconnected process based on a logic that differs from that which frames the logic of participation for other organizations in liberal pluralist discussions about associational life in the United States. In “We Have Come This Far by Our Own Hands: A Tradition of African American Self-Help” and Philanthropy and the Growth of Corporate Philanthropic Giving to African Americans,” Marsha Jean Darling wrote that early Black organizational work is inherently rooted in an African cultural values and beliefs which center interdependence, personal accountability, and individual responsibility for the well being of a collective society.21

A nineteenth century public notice published in the March 1, 1831 Philadelphia Gazette provides an example of the cultural consciousness that shaped this black civil society:

Whereas, we believe it to be the duty of every person to contribute as far as in their power towards alleviating the miseries, and supplying the wants, of those of our fellow beings who, through the many misfortunes and calamities to which human nature is subject, may become fit objects for our charity . . . 22

This lengthy advertisement revealed the fact that, by 1830, a growing civil society was being established among free populations of the black community. For example, over forty benevolent and mutual assistance organizations had been established in Philadelphia alone by this time. Some of those organizations listed included: The African Friendly

---


Society of St. Thomas established in 1795, United Sons of Wilberforce formed in 1827, Female African Benevolent established in 1822, Daughters of Ethiopia, 1825; Citizen Sons of Philadelphia, 1830; Sons of St. Thomas, 1823; Daughters of Hosea, 1825, Female Benevolent Whitesonian, 1816; United Sister’s Society, 1828; and Library Benevolent, 1830.23

As Audreye Johnson contended, “in the face of oppression and degradation ... the formation of these organizations represented the awareness of black men and women of the necessity of coming “together with mutual concerns and goals for themselves.”24 Dorothy Salem noted at the beginning of her discussion of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs in To Better Our World Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890-1920, that this collective action in the form of self help “became a means for racial survival.”25 Hence Blacks in the late nineteenth century saw the emergence of the greatest number of formal organizations that not only attempted to address the needs of those who had no public or private support, but also challenge the prevailing assumptions of racial inferiority through various self-help initiatives.

Nina Mjadkij suggests that the development of black civil society must be attributed to pre-civil war black conventions. Free blacks in states like New York, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut organized state conventions beginning with the first national Negro convention organized by Richard Allen in 1830 in

---

23Ibid, 113-114.


Increasingly these conventions grew and by 1843, conventions like those held in Michigan State Colored Convention were attracting delegates from New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, California, Maryland, and Virginia. By 1853, state conventions like that held in Philadelphia were attracting one hundred fourteen delegates from across the country. These conventions were important because they addressed the “political standing” of blacks throughout the world in general and specifically in the United States. Audreye Johnson notes that these conventions were important places for the discussion of problems impacting the black community that required that they “come together as a critical mass for mutual support.” According to Johnson:

> In these Conventions the broad social problems facing Blacks which were debated were: communication, health, freedom, nationalization, political action, self-determination, fugitive slaves, life adjustment, etc. Collapsed, it might be said that freedom, mutual aid, and identity were the overriding issues.

Robert Smith also notes that these convention movements represented some of the earliest attempts by blacks to develop a national black agenda, which would cross all ideological, class, and organizational cleavages. These efforts would later inspire the conferences and meetings that took place during the last decade of nineteenth century and into the twentieth century.

However, while the desire for racial justice and development linked black civil society, various interests also shaped this world. For example, Robert Smith points out that while the national Negro conventions were successful in linking the different

---

26Ibid.


28Johnson, 107.

29Ibid., 115.
interests and leadership of the black community, the reality of various political cleavages proved to be the major weakness of the nineteenth century convention movement. Debates over emigration versus integration or violent strategies versus non-violent liberation strategies resulted in a lack of consensus on black agenda items during the 1840 National Negro Convention. Likewise, the political differences would continue to shape the black politics and the activities of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs.

Regardless of political cleavages, whether enslaved or free, black collective consciousness was linked together by informal and formal networks that centered race and the clear understanding that the fate of one individual was inexplicably linked to the lives of those who shared a similar race. For example, the conventions, according to Smith reflected the underlying assumption that black freedom for both the enslaved and free required a united front. As was suggested in Benjamin Banneker’s 1792 letter to Thomas Jefferson in which he reflected on the contradictions of American freedom, he not only affirmed his identity as an African, but linked his free status to that of his enslaved “brethren.” Banneker stated:

I am fully sensible of that freedom . . . a liberty which seemed to me scarcely allowable, when I reflected on that distinguished and dignified station in which you stand, and the almost general prejudice and prepossession, which is so prevalent in the world against those of my complexion . . . we are a race of beings, who have long labored under the abuse and censure of the world; that we have long been looked upon with an eye of contempt; and that we have long been considered rather as brutish than human, and scarcely capable of mental endowments . . . how pitiful is it to reflect, that although you were so fully convinced of the benevolence of the Father of Mankind . . . that you should at the same time counteract his mercies, in detaining by fraud and violence so numerous a part of my brethren, under groaning captivity and cruel oppression, that
you should at the same time be found guilty of that most criminal act, which you professedly detested in others, with respect to yourselves.\textsuperscript{30}

The collective form of political engagement that characterized the consciousness and institutional development of black politics between 1896 and 1935 is rooted in the sentiments and motivations of free black communities and African resistance movements during the colonial and antebellum period of the United States. This culture began with the liberation efforts of enslaved blacks who petitioned for freedom and established informal associational networks in American colonies. It continued with the development of formal institutions like the first church (Baptist) established by blacks in 1872. Robert Smith notes that these autonomous spaces provided support where schools were formed in basements to educate black boys and girls; that literary clubs, benevolent and mutual aid associations and fraternal orders.\textsuperscript{31}

Between 1880 and 1920, black professional organizations emerged to shape black civil society as black men and women in the professions of journalism, medicine, education, banking, and mortuary services moved to protect their trades and network within the black community. The growth of the black professional class was due, in large part, to the advanced education and training provided to a growing number of black men and women. For example, Stephanie Shaw found that, by 1900, there were black teachers’ organizations in virtually every southern state.\textsuperscript{32} These organizations were instrumental in keeping black teachers abreast of emerging issues in education.


\textsuperscript{32}Stephanie J. Shaw, \textit{What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do, Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).
particularly those issues that impacted black communities. Shaw notes that black women recognized that these organizations had a political and social value as well. Through these organizations, black women served their communities through the construction of schools, teaching of adults and children, and the advocacy of the improvement in public educational facilities.

Black newspapers also increased as important community institutions and agents for the creation of community consciousness. This space provided black men and women with a “critical arena” in which Evelyn Higginbotham notes, “values and issues were aired, debated, and disseminated throughout the larger black community.”33 Black newspapers were responsible for encouraging black political action. In the late nineteenth century one newspaper, the Chicago Defender, would be banned in many southern states because of its role in the mass migration efforts in the south. In 1918, thirty-one representatives of the Afro-American press met in Washington and adopted specific solutions to lynching, the role of blacks in World War I, and Jim Crow accommodations for blacks.34 In 1927, black newspapers in Atlanta, Georgia challenged local black organizations to uphold their responsibility to the community. For example the Atlanta Independent publically challenged the non-action of local organizations and their seemingly unwillingness to address the educational problems that had plagued the local school system and threatened to close night schools in “Incompetency and Cheap Politics Characterized the Management of Our Schools; Receivership the Remedy.”

The Independent would like to know what the Twenty-Seven Club stands for, the Nine O’Clocks, the Twelve, the Fine Arts Club, the Graduate


34 Aptheker, 219-221
Club, the Omega Psi Phi, the Alpha Phi Alpha, the Kappa Alpha Psi, the Phi Beta Sigma, and the Business League, if they do not stand to contribute to the better life of the community... What we want is [for] every church, every school, every club, every movement in Atlanta to rise up... 35

Black newspapers beginning in 1827 with *Freedom's Journal* edited by Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm emerged to publicly represent black public opinion. Media institutions like black newspapers were very important because they provided blacks with an independent space to “plead [their] own cause.” Describing the purpose of their paper, Cornish and Russwurm wrote:

> It is our earnest wish to make our *Journal* a medium of intercourse between our brethren in the different states of this great confederacy: that through its columns an expression of our sentiments, on many interesting subjects which concern us, may be offered to the publick: that plans which apparently are beneficial may be candidly discussed and properly weighed... (84)

Cornish and Russwurm’s sentiments were a common theme found in the prospectus of all nineteenth century black newspapers. For example, the editors of the *Kansas Blackman* published this in their 1894 paper:

> The Blackman is published in the interests of the Negro. This shall be the anchor to our craft... and if in the course of our voyage our battery is not turned on the enemy in defense of our race, then we ask that the support of the public be withheld from us... The interests of the Negro shall be guarded by us. His fight shall be ours; his trials shall be ours; his victory shall be ours... 36

The editors of black newspapers like *Freedom Journal* and the *Kansas Blackman* saw as their responsibility the maintenance of a autonomous black discursive space in which issues could be raised. Black newspapers were also important because they were important vehicles for communication within the black community. As Cornish and

---

35 Shaw, 57.

36 *The Kansas Blackman*, Friday April 20, 1894.
Russwurm’s proclamation shows, these newspapers served to connect black communities across the United States.

According to Henry Lewis Suggs, between the establishment of The Freedom’s Journal in 1827 and the L’Union, the first black newspaper published in the South in April 1862, thirty one black newspapers were established in the urban areas where free black communities had been established. New York was home to twenty one newspapers while the remaining ten were published in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Boston, Cleveland, and San Francisco. These newspapers included: The African Sentinel and Journal of Liberty. It was edited by John E. Stewart. The Weekly Advocate, later published under the name The Colored American and edited by Samuel E. Cornish. The North Star edited by Frederick Douglas. The Colored Man’s Journal founded in New York in 1851. The Mirror of the Times founded in San Francisco and The Anglo-American Magazine published in 1859 by Thomas Hamilton.

Black newspapers like the Savannah Tribune (1875), Chicago Conservator (1878), Los Angeles California Eagle (1879), Washington Bee (1882), Cleveland Gazette (1883), Richmond Planet (1884), and New York Age published in 1885 increased significantly. These newspapers were important because they were the primary vehicles for communication within the black community. For example the “call” for conventions and meeting were placed in the newspapers. Again, these papers were significant in that they connected black communities across the United States.

---


38 Aptheker, 109.

39 Ibid, 163, 413.
Churches opened this space through the creation of publishing companies, the organization of national conventions, and statewide meetings. In fact, Elizabeth Higginbotham notes, “the church sponsored press played an instrumental role in the dissemination of a black oppositional discourse and in the creation of a black collective will.” By 1900, black Baptists were responsible for publishing at least forty-three newspapers at the state and local levels predominantly in the South. By 1910 as functional literacy rates among black people rose from barely 5 percent in 1860 to approximately 70 percent, the AME, Baptists, and AME Zion churches served as a major site of print production in black communities. They published such newspapers as *The Free Speech and Headlight* of Memphis, Tennessee in which was edited by Ida B. Wells. These newspapers and magazines featured discussions on black history, lynching, segregation and public transportation and accommodation, education, and electoral politics. These newspapers were significant because as Higginbotham notes they were instrumental in creation a “black vision.”

The Black Church

Black civil society cannot be discussed without examining the influence of the black church. As C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya note, for those who study black culture, the black church has always been considered the key social institution in the black community. The black church, as an independent black social institution, has its roots in the eighteenth century Free African Societies, of 1787, established by Richard

---

40 Higginbotham, 7.

41 Ibid., 11.

Allen and Absalom Jones in Pennsylvania. From this movement, blacks established churches representing numerous religious denominations like Episcopalian, Methodist, Baptists, and Presbyterian churches. The central values linking the members of different denominations were the implicit understanding of the subordinated position of black people and the belief and desire for freedom. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham contends that the black church was the “most effective vehicle by which men and women alike, pushed down by racism and poverty, regrouped and rallied against emotional and physical defeat.”

For black men and women at the turn of the twentieth century, the black church provided an important public space that blacks were denied outside of the church. It is from this public space representing various denominations that many other institutions were created including post-secondary schools like Allen University, Wilberforce University, and Morris Brown College. In her survey of black organizational activities, Nina Mjakij noted that in the basement of black churches in Detroit, Michigan, blacks formed schools in order to educate black children who were barred from public educational institutions. Banks, insurance companies, mutual aid and benevolent societies also emerged. As Lincoln and Mamiya note, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier described the black church as a nation within a nation because of the multiple social spaces that existed within the institution. In fact, the burst of secular organizations at the turn of the twentieth century like the National Association for the Advancement of

---

43 Higginbotham, 1.

44 Ibid., 7, 11.

45 Mjakij, 215.
Colored People, in 1909, and the National Urban League, in 1911, was due in large part to the help and support of the black church.

By 1915, black secular organizations of the north were increasingly taking the lead in defining and dominating the national black political scene.\textsuperscript{46} The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People established in 1909, which grew out of the efforts of the Niagara Movement, emerged to shape the racial issues in which mobilized around. This organization prioritized voting rights, equal access to public accommodations, employment opportunities, legal equality, protection against lynching, and educational opportunities.\textsuperscript{47} The NAACP distinguished itself as a protest organization. It utilized protest and litigation to address violations against civil and political rights. As stated in the principles of the organization in 1911, it utilized “education, organization, agitation, publicity – the force of an enlightened public opinion.”\textsuperscript{48}

While the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) has received a greater amount of attention, Clayborne Carson and others have suggested that the National Urban League (NUL) was actually the most politically active organization in the early part of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{49} Founded in 1910 by notable women already active in the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs and other local organizations like Victoria Earle Matthews and Lugenia Burns Hope, the NUL

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., 43.


\textsuperscript{48}Ibid., 435.

focused on address the civil and social needs of black working class communities in urban centers of both the south and north.

"The Nadir"

Black civil society is not only rooted in collective black consciousness and shaped by black institutions, it is also shaped by the larger political milieu of the country. The 1876 Presidential election, which eventually resulted in the removal of federal troops from the southern states, represented a major civil rights setback for African American. From the Republican and Democratic compromise, a landslide of both federal and state discriminatory acts followed.

Beginning in 1882, southern legislative bodies in states like South Carolina and Florida enacted voting schemes like the Eight-Box Ballot to disfranchise illiterate voters. Six years later, Levine notes that a wave of legislation designed to disfranchise black voters swept other southern states like North Carolina, Alabama, Virginia, Georgia, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. These measures included the adoption of poll taxes, white primaries, the creation of grandfather and grandmother clauses, and character tests.\(^5\) In addition to the loss of political rights, southern states enacted “black code” legislation in response to attempts by the federal government to establish national citizenship rights through the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. These laws created a legal framework for the establishment of white supremacy.

Lynch law was used to enforce these codes. Robert Gibson wrote that lynching became an “institutionalized” method to control the behavior of blacks in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. He added that while a majority of lynching took place in

southern states and border states like Maryland, West Virginia, Indiana, Ohio, and Kansas, lynching was not a sectional phenomenon. Blacks were not safe anywhere; lynchings occurred in all states with the exception of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Vermont. According to the records of the Tuskegee Institute, between 1882 and 1947 3,426 blacks were lynched with 1,217 of them occurring between 1890 and 1900. According to John Edward Bruce’s report on lynching the charges used to justify lynching included murder, suspected robbery, attempted assault, plot to kill whites, giving testimony against whites, unknown offenses, no offense, race prejudice, arson, and being an informer against a white person. Many lynchings were carried out based on false charges of rape and theft. Robert Smith also notes that those who were economically prosperous, attempted to exercise their civil and political rights, and those who owned property or did not extend a certain level of deference to white were usually the primary targets. Journalist and activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett took every opportunity to publicize this fact as editor of the Memphis Free Press and Chicago Conservator. In a 1901 article published in the New York Independent, Wells-Barnett wrote:

...If the Southern citizens lynch Negroes because “that is the only successful method of dealing with a certain class of crimes,” then that class of crimes should be shown unmistakably by this record. Now consider the record.
It would be supposed that the record would show that all, or nearly all, lynching were caused by outrageous assaults upon women; certainly that this particular offense would outnumber all other

---

52 Ibid., 792.
53 Ibid., 802-803.
54 Smith, 212.
causes for putting human beings to death without trial by jury and other safeguards of our Constitution and laws. But the record makes no such disclosure... It shows that men, a few, but hundreds, have been lynched for misdemeanors, while others have suffered death for no offense known to the law, the causes assigned being “mistaken identity,” “insult,” “bad reputation,”... 55

While it was clear that the South was not dedicated to the principle of black freedom, the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial branches of the federal government were neither united on the position of black civil and political freedom nor committed its principle. For example, people like Wells-Barnett, Frederick Douglass, and W.E.B. DuBois wrote letters and led mass efforts to get federal intervention in the problem of lynching in the south. Organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Afro-American Council, the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs sponsored and supported federal legislative intervention through the enactment of Dyer Anti-lynching Bill, which was never signed into law.

Michael Levine argued that the loss of civil and political rights for black people at the turn of the twentieth century must be blamed on the entire country. For example, while Congress passed the Civil Rights Acts they failed to pass legislation to protect blacks against lynching in spite of the alarming increase of violence against blacks in the South. Congress was credited for passing the Civil Rights Act over the veto of President Andrew Johnson who concluded that the Civil Rights Act would “place every spay-footed bandy-shanked, thick lipped, flatnosed, wooly-haired, ebony-colored Negro in the country on an equal footing with the poor white man.” President Johnson, who became President of the United States after the assignation of Abraham Lincoln in 1865, never

55 Aptheker, 804
believed in black humanity, but rather that blacks were inferior to whites.\textsuperscript{56} As a former slaveholder, Johnson was committed to the notion of states rights – that states had fundamental spheres of authority that could not be violated by the federal government.

The Civil Rights Acts attempted to do several things. Beginning in 1866, they declared equal citizenship to all those born in the United States regardless of race or color;\textsuperscript{57} sought to prevent electoral discrimination based on race and color;\textsuperscript{58} attempted to enforce the provisions of the Fourteenth amendment to the United States Constitution;\textsuperscript{59} and finally sought to enforce the civil rights of black people.\textsuperscript{60} The issue of states rights, during this period was simply a political cloak for the right of state and local governments to discriminate against newly freed black men, women and children.

The Federal Courts paved the way for public and private discrimination against blacks in states across the country, particularly southern states. The 1871 Ku Klux Act was "emasculated" and Fourteenth Amendment was interpreted to apply only to national citizenship. In the \textit{Slaughterhouse}\textsuperscript{61} and \textit{U.S. v. Cruikshank}\textsuperscript{62} decisions in 1873 and 1875 respectively, the Supreme Court conceptualized the notion of dual citizenship. They ruled that the Fourteenth amendment was applicable only two federal or national citizenship and not the rights and privileges defined by state citizenship. In 1896, \textit{Plessy}
v. Ferguson made segregation legal. Later in the 1898 Supreme Court case Williams v. Mississippi, the Supreme Court sanctioned literacy tests and poll taxes.63

Further eroding the federal protections of blacks, In a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1883, the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was nullified by a vote of eight to one on the basis that Congress lacked the authority to prevent discrimination of private individuates “unsupported by state authority.” A compilation of five cases challenging the sections one and two of the 1875 Civil Rights act, these cases challenged the rights of individuals to deny blacks accommodations to private establishments in New York City, New York, San Francisco, California, and Memphis, Tennessee. Citing the experiences of free blacks prior to the abolition of slavery, Justice Bradley noted, that “Mere discriminations on account of race or color were no badges of slavery.” Bradley went on to write:

Can the act of a mere individual, the owner of the inn, the public conveyance, or place of amusement, refusing the accommodation, be justly regarded as imposing any badge of slavery or servitude upon the applicant or only as inflicting an ordinary civil injury . . . Such an act of refusal has nothing to do with slavery or involuntary servitude . . . It would be running the slavery argument into the ground to make it apply to every act of discrimination which a person may see fit to make as to the guests he will entertain, or as to the people he will take into his coach or cab or car, or admit to his concert, theater, or deal with in other matters of intercourse or business.64

However, the local governing apparatus supported these private acts of discrimination. The overwhelming feeling of betrayal was reflected in the comments of Bishop Henry Turner, founder of Morris Brown College, who called the Supreme Court decision in the

63 Williams v. Mississippi, 170 U.S. 213 (1898).
64 The Civil Rights Cases, 109 U.S. 3; 3 S Ct. 18:27 L. Ed 835 (1883).
Civil Rights Cases of 1883 a “barbarous decision that absolve[ed] the allegiance of the Negro to the United States.”

Black Politics – Booker T. Washington era

The debates between W.E.B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington over the appropriate social and political priorities and strategies shaped black politics during this time. Dubois advocated liberal arts education and active political involvement to end racial discrimination. Rather than fight discrimination, Washington’s more conservative southern approach favored accommodation to white supremacy, vocational training for blacks, economic competition, and discouraged political participation. Deborah Gray White notes that Washington’s emphasis on the home and uplift, along with Dubois’ push for political and social activism, not only shaped the black community, but also the activities of the NACWC. Washington’s influence was felt from the very beginning of the black clubwomen’s national movement. It is worth noting that the 1895 black women’s convention received a formal endorsement from Booker T. Washington.

Washington’s ideas and politics influenced members like Mary Church Terrell and Margaret Murray Washington, Booker T. Washington’s wife, who played an important part in the leadership of the NACWC, like her husband, Margaret Murray was known for her conservative politics. Through his wife, Booker T. Washington conservative politics also influenced the NACWC activities. For example, when the NACWC cancelled their meeting at the Word’s Fair ground in St. Louis, Missouri in 1904 only to have its President Margaret Murray Washington publically deny this action, many NACWC members including Lucy Thurman attributed her actions to

---

65 Smith, 352.

66 Gay-White, 82-83.
pressures from her husband. Found throughout the convention minutes and *National Notes* newsletter of the NACWC are numerous expressions of praise and commendation for the work of Booker T. Washington.

A year before the establishment of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, Booker T. Washington gained particular political prominence as a result of the political strategies that he espoused in his 1895 Atlanta Compromise and 1901 publication *Up From Slavery*. Washington would shape black politics for the next fifteen years. Through his annual Tuskegee Negro Conferences, which began in 1892 and continued until his death, he regularly brought together hundreds of individuals, “not politicians, but the representatives of the common man, hard working farmers and mechanic – the bone and sinew of the Negro race – ministers and teachers.”

Washington stated the goal of the conference as follows:

> When they were first instituted, it was to confine ourselves mainly to conditions within our own power to remedy. We might discuss many wrongs which should be righted; but it seems to me that it is best to lay hold of the things we can put right rather than those we can do nothing but find fault with. Be perfectly frank with each other; state things as they are; do not say anything for mere sound, or because you think it will please one or displease another; let us hear the truth on all matters. We have many things to discourage and disappoint us, and we sometimes feel that we are slipping backward; but, I believe, if we do our duty in getting property, Christian education, and character in some way or other the sky will clear up, and we shall make our way onward.

As Washington’s speech makes clear, the major issues affecting blacks were education, economic advancement, survival, and civil and political rights. Washington, however,

---

looked at the an increasingly hostile climate and encouraged blacks to make economic
capitalism the foundation of black development and liberation, not political activity.

The nationalization of black politics during this period helped to spread the
principles of Washington’s economic nationalism and conservative politics through the
creation of local organizations like the National Business League which was established
after the secretary of the National Negro Business League, Mr. A. L. Holsey, spoke out
about the activities of black women in Harlem, New York. This encouraged Fannie
Peck, the wife of Reverend William Peck, pastor of Bethel AME Church, to establish the
Housewives League of Detroit (HWLD) in 1930. Prior to the establishment of this
organization in the same year, Reverend Peck had established the Booker T. Washington
Trade Association. The idea of economic nationalism clearly informed these
organizations. As their declaration of principles states:

We emphasize and declare it to be the most desirable to our own business
and manage it ourselves; while we recognize as an act of fairness, the
employment of Negroes in businesses owned and operated by other racial
groups, yet we feel that the solution of our economic problem is the
ownership of business, and to this end we shall confine our efforts.68

Between 1892 and 1910, Booker T. Washington’s conservative strategies dominated
black politics – particularly those of the South which was home to a majority of the black
population. Those who chose to operate outside that of context risked public
condemnation. For example, W.E.B. DuBois’ call for black autonomy and “nationalism”
was dismissed in black newspapers as “irrational.”69 Additionally Ida B. Wells,
considered to be the ideological mother of the national black women’s club movement,

68Majkaji, 214.

69Robert S. Abbott, “Full Equality for the Race is Only True Course, Editor Takes Issue With Dr.
DuBois’ New Doctrine” Chicago Defender, June 8, 1935.
found herself not only politically marginalized in Chicago, Illinois because of her open criticism of the United States and Booker T. Washington, but also within the broader national black political community.

Booker T. Washington was the mainstream of black politics for approximately twenty years. Support for industrial and vocational education, public strategies of accommodation and any other sentiment which did not threatened white supremacy generally led to white philanthropic and political support for black leaders like Washington. For example, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, President of the North Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs from 1915 to 1936, was able to secure funding for her Alice Freeman Palmer Institute only after convincing white financial doners that her school would focus only on vocational training and not liberal arts education.70

Booker T. Washington’s strategies gave him access to white political and economic resources which institutionalized his seemingly ubiquitous power. Consequently he was able to influence and control black resources, individuals, and organizations. Washington’s influence included newspapers, political organizations, and political leadership. For example, when NACWC president Mary Church Terrell, who was initially referred to as the “female Booker T. Washington,” became increasingly more critical of Booker T. Washington ideas on politics and education in her speeches and writings, she was reminded that her husband Robert Terrell’s federal judicial appointment in Washington, D.C. was a result of his relationship with Washington.

Partisanship and Northern Black Politics

With the suppression of black political activity in south, the north by default became the region where most black electoral activity took place. Black political

machines emerged in both the Republican and later the Democrat party in the north. Black politicians gained office on the city, county, and in some cases state levels in northern and western states like Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York, Boston, and Illinois. After World War I, blacks had more political influence in Chicago than in any other city in the United States. For example, as aspiring black politicos like Edward H. Wright learned to mobilize southern black migrants, who were increasingly filling urban neighborhoods like the south side of Chicago, blacks rose up to control politically important positions in northern ward politics.

Blacks took advantage of their increased numbers in northern cities in order to secure more rights and support from the Republican Party. However, it is not clear, whether the advances that blacks were making in their partisan efforts were seen as benefiting the larger black community; particularly where black political activity was less suppressed. With much of the population seemingly limited by illiteracy, poverty, and presumably fear, blacks were expected to be docile and easily manipulated. This was not the case for black women. Black women began to tackle more political matters. The changing perceptions of black women as political actors is evident in a 1912 comment made by Adella Hunt Logan,

The fashion of saying I do not care to meddle with politics is disappearing among the colored woman faster than most people think, for this same woman has learned that politics meddle constantly with her and hers.71

Interestingly, while black women associated with the NACWC did not describe themselves as political, they worked in various capacities on the local level to shape

---

electoral or party politics. In Chicago, for example, black women organized Republican caucuses in order to specifically mobilize and educate black voters on making informed political decisions.

In this period of machine politics, politicians bought votes, not only black votes, but also poor white and European immigrant votes with promises of money, employment, and assistance with ordinary problems like rent and food. Thanks to the role of the Republican Party in ending slavery, black support for the Republican Party continued for decades. However, during this period an increasing disenchantment with the Party of Lincoln grew within the black community. Blacks publically criticized the Republican Party’s retreat away from the protection of black civil and political rights and the lack of enforcement of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.

Editorials in black newspapers pointed to the lack of Republican support of the enforcement of civil rights measures and an unwillingness to directly address the physical violence taking place in southern states. In addition to the complaints against the Republican Party, black politicians were increasingly being seen as unscrupulous players in the buying and selling of voters in the game of urban machine politics. For example, numerous editorials, like the following published in 1895, entitled “The Colored Combination in the Eleventh Ward,” publically denounced the buying and selling of black leaders:

How long are the honest toiling and sincere Afro-American citizens to remain victims of such audacious conspiracy? Now is the time for them to show their colors. If they are for the true interest of the race it will be evident, and if they are simply on the political market to command a price, this also will be made manifest. In the meantime the eyes of the people are upon them and sooner or later such hucksters inhuman rights and betrayers of
Like this editorial, black women's increased activism and criticisms of black men emerged at a time of increasing disappointment of local black elected officers and organizational leaders.

Blacks had already begun to reassess their role and the outcomes of the political party system before 1894. This began with well-publicized critiques of both the Republican and Democratic Party. Blacks in Rhode Island criticized the party during a 1882 state convention for taking their support for granted and demanded respect and fair representation. During the Texas State Convention, blacks separately discussed the issues of lynching and Jim Crowism. Blacks organized all black political parties like the Negro Protective Party of Ohio in 1897 and ran local and statewide candidates. In New York, the United Colored Democracy, organized in 1898, played a role in directing an independent black voting bloc. The increase in independent black party efforts was an outgrowth of the Civil and Personal Liberty Leagues established by blacks in the South and east. Blacks like Taylor recognized that blacks were an influential segment of the social, economic, and political progress of the United States. By 1904, Black independent party candidates like Iowa's George Taylor encouraged a "revolution through the ballot box." Recognizing the inherent racism shaping other parties, blacks formed third parties or political organizations across the country like the 1904 National Liberty Party, Black Independent Political Party, The National Independent Negro

---

72 Ibid., 685.
73 Ibid., 686.
League, Negro National Democratic League, and The National Negro American Political League

After World War I, black Anti-Republicanism led some blacks to flirt with the Democrat Party or join third parties like the Populist Party. Disillusioned with the Republican Party, Ida B. Wells would eventually question the party as did W.E.B. DuBois, who wrote a public letter questioning black support of the Republican Party and called for examining the politics of the northern Democrat party that had been responsible for the election of blacks to state and local elected positions in the north.  

However, despite the growing criticism and disappointment with the Republican Party, so strong was the political attachment to the Party, that those who discussed “independent politics” or the consideration of the Democratic Party were quickly, and very publically, ridiculed as selfish. The following editorial from the July 27th edition of the People’s Friend, a nineteenth century Kansas black newspaper provides an example of this public ridicule:

Why is it we wonder, that just as soon as a Negro quits the Republican party. He always makes the statement that the Negroes are beginning to think?” Is it because he that is leaving the party is so narrow-minded that he thinks that by his joining either the Democratic or Populist parties he will be able to better the condition of his race of people? We answer no; whenever you see a colored man leave the Republican party the betterment of the condition of his race does not for a single instant bother his mind; all he has in view and all he cares for is to get his head into the crib and thereby benefit himself and no one else . . . They are hypocrites and are not to be trusted with the welfare or representation of the race; in fact they are traitors to their race . . .

As this editorial shows, support for the Republican party shaped boundaries of acceptable black electoral behavior and also shaped the context in which the NACWC operated. For

---

74Ibid., 858.
example, while NACWC member Fannie Barrier Williams called for non-partisanship, even her independent anti-Washington politics was marginalized within the Illinois state that was solidly Republican. In spite of the criticisms raised, the perception of the Republican Party as the key to the achievement of racial justice and power for blacks shaped black political behavior and those like Wells, Williams and Du Bois who attempted to operate outside of these norms had their motives publically questioned and criticized within the black community.

Black Independent Politics

As southern blacks migrated north, they left behind the passive accommodationist politics that shaped the South. Robert Brisbane noted:

> Upon reaching the Northern or Western city of his destination, the Negro migrant underwent a mental transition. His racial attitude was swiftly hammered into conformity with a new pattern. He was instructed by the Negro press, his associates, and sometimes even his minister to drop all trappings of “Uncle Tom.” He was to fight either alone or in groups any time he was attacked by whites. He was to take advantage of the ballot and to protest against any infraction of his civil or legal rights.\(^75\)

Black politics in the South may have been influenced by Booker T. Washington and his Tuskegee machine. However, by 1908 Washington’s political ideas had little influence on middle and working class blacks in the north who were most likely to be influenced by the liberal protest strategies of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. As black men and women were drawn to the industrial and manufacturing jobs of the north, a working class and nationalist consciousness developed within the black community.

Radical and Nationalist Politics

Sharon Harley defined working-class consciousness as "the expression of shared interests and the articulation of work-related concerns." In her article, "When Your Work is Not Who You Are: The Development of a Working-Class Consciousness Among Afro-American Women," Harley notes that while a majority of black women were worked as farmhands and domestics, they were excluded from workers unions and organizations that were established to protect their working interests. Despite the knowledge of their poor working conditions, these women and men did not identify themselves primarily with their working status and consequently the ideals of trade unions. Likewise, A. Domingo lamented that there was a lack of popular support for the socialist program in the black community, "despite their situation as the economic, political, social door mat of the world." In a 1919 essay entitled "Socialism: The Negroes' Hope," Domingo argued that across the world Africans throughout the Diaspora were in a greater need of liberation than whites because they were an exploited and oppressed people. In fact, socialist, communists, and labor trade unions were watched carefully because it was expected that black men and women would gravitate to these organizations precisely out of frustration with their economic conditions. For Domingo, what hindered the widespread development and popular mass support of a black socialist movement was the ignorance surrounding the benefits of socialism for the black community.  

Between 1896 and 1935 in the United States, blacks were primarily employed as domestics, sharecroppers, farmers, and peons. Many have argued that Marxism seemed the most logical of philosophies to attract African-Americans. This is due to its principle of liberation of the working class. There were already multiple struggles on the local area.

to address the needs of these groups. Marxism seemed to be another useful tool in this liberation struggle. Cedric Robinson wrote that Marxism's "universalism" appealed to many particularly the radical tradition that was already in existence at the beginning of the twentieth century.

However, throughout the history of the relationship between blacks and the Socialist Party and later its progeny the Communist Party and Communist Labor Party, there was always a struggle to have the "unique experience" of blacks recognized as more than a mere by-product of capitalism. The marginalization of race in Marxist politics, according to Harold Cruse, meant that during the 1920s, black issues were primarily subordinated to economic issues. In *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, Harold Cruse explains that when Marxist publications gave greater space to the discussion of black issues, what was revealed was the lack of relevance Marxism had for addressing the conditions of blacks in America as a major reason for its practical failure. Michael Dawson explains that:

> The dilemma that communists generally felt during the 1920s was felt especially keenly by black communists inside and outside the Communist Party. Animosity on the part of whites, particularly white workers, toward blacks, and the perception that the political economy was racialized and racist made "traditional" socialist organizing extremely ineffective among blacks. This was especially true since those organizing from this perspective viewed racial oppression as merely a residual effect of capitalism that was better ignored until after the revolution.\footnote{Dawson, 173}

Dawson's assessment reflects both the philosophical and cultural dimensions that shaped the way in which black issues both recognized and discussed within the Marxist political philosophical framework.
As Philip Foner and James Allen point out in “American Communism and Black Americans, A Documentary History, 1919-1929,” the ambivalence and neglect of the issue of race is traced back to the Karl Marx who provided no significant discussion on the problem of racism in his critique of capitalism beyond a discussion of the relationship between the enslaved and the working class prior to the American civil war.78

Although the Communist International eventually recognized the racialized experience of the black American worker formally, it was unsuccessful in shaping the practices of the American Socialist and Communist parties. For example, Sally Miller revealed in, “The Socialist Party and the Negro, 1901-20,” that the Socialist Party of America never took active steps to back up its rhetoric of political and civil rights for blacks who were at the same time members of the Party. The political and economic problems of black men and women were never given special attention. Although the party officially denounced American discrimination and at least recognized the unique experience of blacks, black economic and political problems were continuously discussed as being the same problems faced by white workers.79 In the context of black lynching, murders, and protests, the party never changed its position that class rather than race was the main source of oppression for blacks when it was clear, as Miller concludes, that the racial violence against blacks long surpassed the economic exploitation cited as the oppression of blacks.

Miller contends, not only was there no attention given to the unique problems of black workers, blacks were not recognized outside their role as economic workers. As the


following Constitutional Article adopted at the founding Convention for the Communist Party indicates:

In close connection with the unskilled worker is the problem of the Negro worker. The Negro problem is a political and economic problem. The racial oppression of the Negro is simply and expression of his economic bondage and oppression, each intensifying the other. This complicates the Negro problem, but does not alter its proletarian character. The Communist Party will carry on agitation among the Negro workers to unite them with all class conscious workers.

Thus, no one blinked an eye when the both the Communist Party and Communist Labor Party held their first conventions after their 1919 formation and had not one black delegate in attendance. Foner and James note that the Communist labor Party did not even mention the subject of black workers in their convention. As the following Article adopted at the founding Convention for the Communist Party indicates:

Not having come to terms with the realness of racism, racist practices went unchallenged inside and outside the Party. Miller also notes that the Socialist Party was never able to aggressively support black liberation efforts because they were shaped by the cultural and intellectual climate that viewed blacks as inherently inferior to whites. Consequently, it left alone the segregationist practices of the local organizations of the Deep South. It did not aggressively challenge the more conservative wing of the Party, which held racist perceptions of black workers including the notion that they would be nothing other than potential scabs and ultimately unorganizable. These attitudes encouraged coalitions with trade unions like the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which had a long history of discrimination against black workers. 

---

80 Foner and James, introduction.
81 Miller, 228-229
Black nationalist perspectives articulated within the black community began from the position that America is fundamentally racist and as a result there will never be a basis for black and white unity. Black nationalism has taken many different forms—from Booker T. Washington’s economic nationalism to Marcus Garvey’s cultural nationalism. Regardless of the strategy it takes, the broad principles of autonomy and self-determination for black people can be found. At the turn of the twentieth century, these strategies aimed for the establishment of a separate black state, powerful economic base, and the awareness of a great African culture.

Some of the earliest Black Nationalist thinkers like Martin Delany, Alexander Crummel, and Marcus Garvey were very influential at the turn of the century. Wilson Moses notes that the uniqueness of modern Black Nationalism is that it is “premised on the assumption that membership in a race could function as the basis of a national identity.” Unlike other nineteenth century nationalism, it focused on race rather than, language, economic circumstances, geography, or other similarities, which might connect a group of people. Moses defined this ideology “as the effort of African Americans to create a sovereign nation-state and formulate an ideological basis for a concept of a national culture.”

More simply, Black Nationalism, from its earliest expression in the establishment of maroon societies to the emigration efforts to Mexico, Liberia, and Canada, was fundamentally about the idea of securing some physical, economic, cultural, ontological, and political space for the protection and maintenance of black survival, black autonomy, and black humanity.

82 Ibid.
Pan African Conferences and Nationalist associations fueled the energy that provided the space for Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association. This organization became one of the largest and arguably most successful black mass movement in the United States. Mobilizing poor and working class blacks particularly in the north, this movement challenged the liberal assumptions and strategies of organizations like the NAACP and even the NACWC because Garvey centered “black self-determination” and the solution to racial discrimination in the context of emigration to Africa for a new black nation. While this solution may have seem utopian, his ability to celebrate African contributions to society, culture and beauty garnered much respect among the working class black community who were constantly bombarded with negative images of black people.

Criticism of the Garvey movement came from both liberal and radical organizations like the NAACP and ABB; in particular W.E.B. Dubois and A. Phillip Randolph who like other black leaders whose strategies worked toward equality within the United States, condemned Garvey’s political strategies and even his leadership. Surveys and symposiums were held on Garvey’s strategies and leadership. Black newspapers, organizations, middle class churches and social organizations with resources effectively ostracized the leaders within national black politics. Still by 1919, Garvey had established local branches of the UNIA in at least 36 states; additionally branches were established outside the United States in Canada, the Caribbean and African countries. According to Ula Taylor, by 1923, the UNIA had a total membership of six million people with at least nine hundred branches here in the United States and throughout the
Garvey would later be targeted and sent to federal prison on embezzlement charges.

In summary, migration movements, the rise of the black civil society and disillusionment with American compromises on black freedom all came together and reflected a distinct set of ideas and beliefs that black people held about themselves and their expectations as American citizens and their relationship to the American state. The desire for racial justice and development linked black civil society and it represented a reflection of the various interests which made up this multidimensional society; suggesting that blacks during this period did not view black development in the same way. This continues to be an inescapable reality shaping black politics today just as it did at the turn of the twentieth century. For example, Robert Smith points out that while the national Negro conventions were successful in linking the black community’s different interests and leadership, the reality of various political cleavages proved to be the major weakness of the movement. For example, debates over emigration versus integration or violent strategies versus non-violent liberation strategies resulted in a lack of consensus on black agenda items during the 1840 National Negro Convention. These types of ideological and strategic differences would continue to shape the national efforts to construct a national black agenda and collective strategy for black development. Some trace this dilemma to the refusal of blacks to recognize that different interests that the politics of the black community. These dilemmas also point to the extent to which black political culture – the dominant institutions leadership and even public opinion is used to structure the boundaries of acceptable forms of political behavior, political strategies and

programs for achieving black equality and those who operated outside this dominant conservative-liberal paradigm during this time were ostracized.
CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORED WOMEN’S CLUBS

This chapter presents a case study of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (NACWC) from its inception in 1896 until 1935. Prior to 1896, previous attempts to organize a conference as well as establish a national organization for Black women had been discussed, but never successfully carried out. Like many other organizations during this time, some had suggested that black clubwomen’s organizational efforts were plagued by disunity. Based on the records of the first national newspaper published by black women, The Woman’s New Era, public calls for a national meeting had been made as early as 1894 because, as Josephine Ghant wrote in an 1894 essay, “Shall We Have A Convention of Colored Women’s Clubs,” there was a growing sense of disconnection among the various local organizations throughout the country. Re-emphasizing the importance of a national organization for black women in her first speech as president of the NACWC, Mary Church Terrell stated:

We have become National, because from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Maine to the Gulf, we wish to set in motion influences that shall stop the ravages made by practices that sap our strength and preclude the possibility of advancement, which under other circumstances could easily be made. We call ourselves an Association to signify that we have joined hands one with the other to work together in a common cause.1

1Beverly Jones, Quest for Equality: The Life and Writings of Mary Eliza Church Terrell, 1863-1954 (New York: Carlson Publishing), 133.
Between 1896 and 1935, ten different presidents, along with thousands of black women across the country, successfully tackled various issues from underserved and racially segregated public facilities and convict lease programs that preyed on young black children in the South to employment training and the advocacy of fair wages and protection for black laborers in the north and south. With the creation of the NACWC black women created a national platform in which issues like these could be more effectively addressed. NACWC president Josephine Silone Yates referred to the organization’s creation as “the first step in nationbuilding.”

It is important to recognize that the NACWC developed within an existing socio-political space shaped by multiple political ideas in the black community. By the late 1870s, blacks increasingly organized national, state and local conferences to discuss increasing violence and repression as well as devise appropriate strategies for black development within a climate of violence and repression that had reached an all-time high. Within these gathering debates over emigration and armed revolutionary strategies united and divided many. Black politicians and proponents of electoral participation encouraged black men and women to use their newly gained votes as a means of protecting black interests and improving the conditions of the black community. These debates and gatherings represented the network of social and political capital within the black community which ultimately functioned to institutionalize ideas and practices and define issues within the black community and ultimately shape the socio-political environment in which the NACWC operated.

Black Political Culture and the NACWC

*Black Priorities at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century*

Local movements, organizations, institutions, and conventions provided a context for the NACWC activities. The work of local black organizations and institutions formed the foundation of NACWC activities. This included not only the women’s organizations that were affiliated with them, but also local black businesses, churches, colleges and universities, and other organizations. The NACWC worked with liberal and conservative organizations, like the National Negro Business League and the more radical National Afro-American League. They worked with the National Urban League and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to name a few organizations. They were supported by major black churches and businesses and black newspapers in local black communities across the county. For example, the advertisements in the *National Notes* provide an interesting list of organizations that supported the NACWC efforts through paid advertisements. Advertisement support came from Morehouse College, Johnson C. Smith University, Alcorn A&M College, The Prentiss Normal and Industrial School, Miles Memorial College, Morgan College, Tuggle Institute, Samuel Houston College, Bethune-Cookman College, Atlanta University, Okolona Industrial School, Mosaic Templar’s of America, The Woodmen of Union, USA, Afro-American Sons and Daughters, Millie E. Hale Hospital and Nurse Training School, Ministerial Institute and College.

Black newspapers, churches, businesses, and local clubs had been articulating concerns and defining broader national discussions about major issues and the direction of black social, economic, and political development as early as the antebellum period.
In fact, several conventions and conferences had been held in the time leading up to the formation of the NACWC. National organizational strategies emerged as the seemingly must efficient way to defend local black interests. By 1895, the national conference organized by black women was just the latest organizational effort in the black community.

Newspapers like the New York Age, Chicago Defender, Kansas Blackman, Washington Notes, Afro-America, the People’s Friend, the New Era, and the Historic Times, to name a few, provided the necessary venues to articulate important issues such as the crisis of disunity, criminal justice system, black politicians, lynching and overcrowded, black schools, health concerns, voting, poor urban and rural housing conditions for blacks. It is clear that these papers began with the assumption that their mission was to protect, unify, educate, and politically mobilize the black community. For example, in 1893, when Reverend W.M. Alexander, editor of the Afro-American published in Baltimore, Maryland wrote, that “[t]he interests of the Afro-American population of Baltimore are identical and any faction of the race who fosters strife to gratify their own selfish ambition should be classified with the enemy.” With this in mind, the newspapers became an excellent point from which to also understand the key issues being articulated on the local level.

A content analysis of some major nineteenth and early twentieth century black newspapers in those states cited as major black political centers in the north and south was also completed in order to create a profile of the major issues, institutions, personalities, organizations, and leadership within the black community. The following newspapers and issues were identified for this analysis in Table 1.

---

3Reverend W M. Alexander, The Afro-American, 1893
Editorials and articles in black newspapers as early as 1870 were already discussing the need for black public school resources, the nature of education for black people, the conditions of migrants in the North, and blacks in the rural South, political equality, and the state criminal justice system. Later, entrepreneurship, industrialization, organization, and informed political participation were discussed as the major economic and political strategies necessary for black advancement. Additionally, the articles and editorials published in black newspapers suggest a growing sense of distrust of black political leaders and the local party system. This issue was consistently covered in the newspapers. The accountability and responsibility of black politicians and organizational

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Chicago Defender</td>
<td>1. Race Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New York Amsterdam News</td>
<td>2. Discrimination against black laborers by white unionist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The People’s Friend</td>
<td>3. Jim Crow in Secondary Public Schools and Redistricting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Historic Times</td>
<td>4. Race Prejudice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Era</td>
<td>5. Black Political Leadership controlled by white party machine or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Kansas Blackman</td>
<td>Washington Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Conservator</td>
<td>6. Uneducated Black Voters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wichita Tribune</td>
<td>7. Mob Violence, Race Riots, Lynching of Blacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Virginia Star</td>
<td>8. Criticism of the Republican Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The American Eagle</td>
<td>9. Workers Rights for Women Garment Workers (state specific NY)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Afro American</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The American Negro</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh Courier</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Bee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Patronage System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Criticism of New Deal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Independent Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Interracial Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. Industrialization and black Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. Colored Coal Miners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17. Race Disunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18. Women Voters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19. The Color Line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20. Depression Conditions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1
Black Community Issues Discussed in Black Newspapers
leaders was also a major issue shaping black politics and seemed to be the issue of most concern to black newspaper editors. One editorial lamented the lack of unity and organization within the black community and suggested that this was the major issue contributing to the decline of the status of the black community.

Black liberalism

During this period Liberal philosophy, and more specifically black liberalism, provided the dominant ideological framework shaping how priorities and political strategies were defined in the black community. There are few people who would disagree with the belief in human social, political, and economic freedom and this is the basic idea of Liberal philosophy. Although black political culture reflects particular attitudes, practices, and behaviors that are an outcome of the racial experience in the United States, Robert Smith notes that blacks do share many of the broad liberal principles that shape the larger American polity. In The Liberal Tradition in America, Louis Hartz wrote “the American community is a liberal community.”

Classical liberal philosophy and liberal ideology hold an uncontested epistemological position in the American political consciousness. Both the principles of classical liberal philosophy and the ideas of American liberalism shape the political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of all institutions and individuals alike, so much so that Hartz contended that American citizens had an unconscious and irrational attachment to its principles. Many have noted the obstacles that this philosophy presents to black equality.

For example, Robert Smith suggests that the liberal principles of individualism, capitalism, and limited government have received less support within the black community than the American liberal ideology. He wrote:

---

Classical liberalism has an ambivalent relationship to African-American politics first because, as individuals, African Americans were excluded because of racism and white supremacy from the social contract that created the American democracy. However, even after they were included as a result of adoption of the thirteenth amendment and the fourteenth amendment, the ambivalence remained, primarily because of the primacy the philosophy gives to individualism. This is because African-American politics is not and never has been primarily concerned with individualism or individual rights. The classical liberal principles of constitutionalism and capitalism and the sanctity of private property have always had less support . . . because these principles have from time to time been viewed as adverse to the interests of Blacks as a community. 5

Smith notes that whites have philosophically based their opposition to many civil rights programs and laws on the principles of Classical liberalism. Mack Jones and others also note that the values of liberal political philosophy have proven to be problematic in the struggles of black people because the Framers of the United States Constitution did not recognize blacks as citizens. 6 However, Charles Mills argues that this idea goes back, much further than the Framers of the United States political system.

Mills writes:

But the overly political battles – for emancipation, decolonization, civil rights, land rights – were only part of this struggle. The terms of the Racial Contract norm nonwhite persons themselves, establishing morally, epistemically, and aesthetically their ontological inferiority. What does it require for a subperson to assert himself or herself politically? To begin with, it means simply, or not so simply, claiming the moral status of personhood. So it means challenging the white constructed ontology that has deemed one a “body impolitic,” an entity not entitled to assert personhood in the first place. In a sense one has to fight an internal battle before even advancing onto the ground of external combat. One has to overcome the internalization of subpersonhood prescribed by the Racial Contract and recognize one’s own humanity. . . Particularly for Blacks, ex-slaves, the importance of developing self-respect and demanding respect from whites is crucial. Frederick Douglass recounts, “how a man


was made a slave," and promises "you shall see how a slave was made a man." But a hundred years later this struggle is still in progress.\footnote{Charles Mills, introduction to \textit{The Racial Contract} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 207, 208.}

Mills is suggesting that while western political philosophies center white supremacy they also norm non-white inferiority. Thus, the denial of race in such philosophies and ideologies as liberalism and Marxism is fundamentally about the ontological denial of black humanity and any therefore any subsequent political claim made against the state in the name of justice.

American liberal philosophy, which emerged with the 1930s welfare state, expanded the role of government to address issues of social inequality and economic opportunity. American liberal ideology modifies classical liberal philosophy by promoting greater governmental intervention in social, economic, and political affairs of a society for the purpose of fostering social change and equality.\footnote{Smith, 207, 208.} However, even before this period, black political strategies pushed government and political party intervention in the fight for black equality and justice. Proponents of black liberalism focused on appealing to the promise of America, proving black humanity, and black civic, political, cultural, and economic worthiness. It must be noted the black liberalism encompassed both conservative and radical political strategies. For example, while history has portrayed the ideological rift between W.E.B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington as one of fundamental ideological disagreement, Michael Dawson notes that the two actually shared the ideological belief in America liberal principles and the notion of racial uplift, they simply differed in their approach to achieving those liberal principles.
Black liberalism shaped the key institutions and leadership defining the major social, economic, and political issues affecting the lives of the estimated 8,800,000 blacks living in the United States. In the following appeal, Frederick Douglas' plea exemplified black liberalism:

"[t]he very groundwork of this government is a good repository of Christian civilization. The Constitution, as well as the Declaration of Independence, and the sentiments of the founders of the Republic, give us a platform broad enough, and strong enough, to support the most comprehensive plans for the freedom and elevation of all the people of this country, without regard to color, class, or clime."

Black leaders like Douglas believed that justice could be achieved in the United States because it was just a matter of changing racist behavior. This belief also prompted black ministers of Washington, D.C. to appeal to President William H. Taft after the murders of approximately thirty or more black men and women whose only crime was that of protesting against the Texas peonage system in 1910. In a letter, dated August 13, 1910, this committee of ministers, who among them included Reverend W. D. Norman, A. Sayles, I. N. Ross, and T. L. Jones expressed the anger felt by blacks who, in spite of (or rather because of) their economic, social and moral progress and patriotism were increasingly being "lynched, murdered, burned, and persecuted." These ministers appealed to the "enlightened consciousness of the great American people," to impartially "enforce laws and unprejudiced treatment of citizens regardless of ancestry." Their actions, like many other blacks, were guided by the idea that America would remain an unfulfilled promise until racism and lesser extent sexism were eliminated from society.

Leaders like Frederick Douglas challenged racial oppression through political struggle

---

and moral and intellectual improvement. As Douglas wrote in 1848, "Industry, sobriety, honesty, combined with intelligence and due self-respect find them where you will, among black or white, must be looked up to – can never be looked down upon. In their presence, prejudice is abashed, confused and mortified. Encountering this solid mass of living character, our vile oppressors are ground to atoms."¹⁰

Liberalism created a framework through which the NACWC, members, their agenda and activities were constructed during the Progressive period. As club women, they were expected to represent virtue and guard morality and virtue. The nineteenth century Victorian models of true womanhood reflected the virtues of moral strength and self-sacrifice on the alter of motherhood. These ideals also influenced black women. Dorothy and Carl Schneider noted that club women believed that as mothers American women could positively influence politics and decision-making and cleanse national, state and local politics for better quality of life.¹¹ According to Deborah Gray-White, NACWC members embraced these assumptions about women's natural inclination toward morality, altruism, and nurturing. NACWC member Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin believed that the dawn of the twentieth century did represent a "new era" for black women. While this new era embraced the ideas of a "woman’s sphere," black women enlarged this sphere to reflect their expanding social welfare responsibilities within the community and influence on important public issues.


Contrary to assumptions that blacks were retreating from politics, the women of the NACWC began their activities from the perspective that black people were legitimate citizens entitled to the protection and services that the state owed them. For example, in 1904, NACWC member Miss Annie Jones' published "How Can Women Advance the Standing of the Race?" In this essay she stated the following:

We thank thee for our very unrest, our dissatisfaction; we want all—everything that the most favored race on earth has, all the comfort, the privilege, the education, the culture, the liberty, the religion. Nothing else will satisfy. The fact that we pay taxes on $460,000,000 worth of property, according to statistics of the dominant race would seem to indicate that we show a clear title to something other than mansions in the sky.

Jones' essay is significant because she recognized that criminal behavior was not unique to the black community, rather it was a reflection of the socio-economic environment shaped by racism and poverty. Additionally, she directly stated that blacks had a right to make demands on the American state because they were fulfilling their obligations as citizens.

NACWC members had no problems requesting meeting with state governors, mayors, and city councilmen in order to speak on behalf of the black community. In many cases they often went alone to address specific incidents of juveniles sentenced to state execution, housing conditions, health concerns, and public school resources. These comments also help to explain why these women had no problem withholding public support of Woodrow Wilson in 1914 because of his segregationist policies in the federal government.12

The NACWC represented a new era of black leadership for Black women. Tulia Hamilton found that the leaders of the NACWC were more likely to be born in North. Only half of the general membership had been born in the south. Many had been educated in some of the best black colleges and universities that had been established primarily to train middle class black teachers, like Atlanta University, Howard University, Straight College, Scotia College, Spelman College, St. Augustine College, and Wilberforce. A majority of NACWC clubwomen also worked outside the home. They held such positions as teachers, lawyers, nurses, hairdressers, and bookkeepers.

All across the country black women occupied the lowest levels of the socio-economic ladder. Racial discrimination prevented a majority of black women from working in most employment sectors like service and administrative oriented jobs. In the South, which was home to a majority of the black population, black women were most likely to work as domestics or field laborers. In the North, black women were sometimes able to secure temporary and menial factory positions. However, in most cases, black women in the north worked as domestics. For example, in 1920 ninety percent of black women in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania worked as live-in servants, maids, day workers or washerwomen. In fact, approximately two-thirds of all black women employed in the North worked as domestics.¹³ Jacqueline Jones notes that in all cases, black women were relegated to the least paid and most denigrated jobs in both the north and the South.

According to Sharon Harley, black women’s exclusion from trade unions designed to protect workers led NACWC member Victoria Earle Matthews and others to establish the White Rose Industrial Association and White Rose Working Girls Home in New York.

City to protect working black women from being exploited. Additionally, black women established vocational training schools, associations, settlement homes, daycare centers, and other programs to address the issues or needs of working black women.¹⁴ NACWC clubwomen, like Victoria Earle Matthews, who were born before 1860 had long histories of activism. Members like Anna Julia Cooper believed that “it was up to women to mold the strength, the wit, the statesmanship, the morality, all the psychic force, the social and economic intercourse of the era.”¹⁵ NACWC member Josephine Ruffin’s work, for example, included The Kansas Relief Fund and the American Woman’s Suffrage Association.¹⁶ Even after the establishment of the NACWC, members remained active with other movements including the temperance movement and the international women’s movement.

NACWC organizational activities reflected the middle class Christian ideology of racial uplift and social integration. Dorothy Salem described these values as the “Protestant ethic of hard work, frugality, and individual initiative [which] had stimulated the drive for social standing, education, and material well-being among segments of black communities both in the North and in the South.”¹⁷ Sieglinde Lemke also noted that the foundation of NACWC efforts was built on the ideals of racial-uplift and collective advancement, Protestant-work ethic, Christian values, and American patriotism. Keeping


¹⁵Gray-White, 37.


in line with the broad ideals of liberalism, the NACWC strategies for ending
discrimination against black women and men centered on working within the system-
working to become integrated and understood as respectable and contributing American
citizens. As Lemke wrote, “Since the ultimate goal was to improve white perception of
the race, it is not surprising that the values taught were in accordance with the Anglo-
American value system.”\textsuperscript{18} These values, for example, were reflected in the seven-plank
platform of the NACWC described in the April 1928 edition of their official organ
\textit{National Notes}, which included – education, industry, thrift, citizenship, racial solidarity,
inter-racial relations, and social service.\textsuperscript{19}

To address the question of how black liberalism informed the NACWC, one could
conclude that the prevailing Black middle class ideology which shaped local black
politics overwhelmingly shaped the strategies of these black clubwomen. Ultimately, the
organization did not challenge the prevailing American order. For example, while W.E.B.
DuBois publically denounced the United States and other European colonial powers
during World War I and spoke about the need to address the exploitation of the African
continent, the NACWC also uncritically supported the 1914 World War efforts by raising
money for both the Liberty Loan Drive and the Red Cross. NACWC did not seek to
provide a public space for those who sought to challenge American values. This is
evident from the blatant marginalization of Ida B. Wells who in the end created her own
radical public venues and worked with other political organizations. Still, the activities

\textsuperscript{18} Sieglinde Lemke, “Introduction” in Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, \textit{Lifting As They Climb} (New York: G K. Hall and Company (1933) 1996), xx, xxvi.

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{National Notes}, April 1928.
of this organization may be described as radical within the liberal framework because they did protest and work to challenge prevailing forms of racial discrimination.

NACWC – Nationalist Politics

While the liberal ideology overwhelmingly shaped NACWC, their activities were also influenced by the radical and nationalist movements of the time. The research suggests that although NACWC adopted certain aspects of nationalism, they did not actively work with nationalist organizations like the United Negro Improvement Association. Still, the popularity of the organization – its emphasis on race pride and Africa did impact NACWC. NACWC members acknowledged that community work had its roots in Africa. Gerda Lerner noted in black Women in White America A Documentary History, that “there was always a strong emphasis on race pride, on the defense of the black community and home and on race advancement.”

From the local level of club activities, the NACWC reflected a commitment to collective support and social, economic, and political development. While the NACWC did not advocate emigrating to Africa or establishing a separate territory within the United States, the local organizational strategies of NACWC member organizations did reflect a nascent level of nationalism that infused many black organizations during this period. The following quote by Amelia Johnson in an 1899 National Baptist Magazine describes this nationalist sentiment best:

"It goes without saying that if we are to develop, expand, improve, or advance, we must launch out for ourselves, and help ourselves... We must do as others have done before us: make a way for ourselves through the ranks of opposing forces – peaceably, if we can, but none the less..."

---

firmly. We must fill our place in the world if we are to furnish our true and complete parallel to its history.\textsuperscript{21}

The idea of self-determination was reflected in organizational activities of the NACWC even the most simplest of rituals. For example, after the publication of James Weldon Johnson’s song “Lift Every Voice,” this Negro national anthem was sung at opening sessions of the NACWC biennial conventions.

NACWC members paid tribute to the achievements and cultural values of Africa and recognized its influence on black life in the United States. Additionally, historical records provided evidence that NACWC women took every opportunity to cultivate relationships with African women throughout the Diaspora. On several occasions brothers and sisters from different countries in Africa were invited to speak during NACWC biennial conventions. In fact after NACWC member Ms. Ida Gibbs returned from her visit to Madagascar and presented her notes on the impact of colonialism on African families, she concluded saying “Africa for Africans.” According to the minutes, these remarks were loudly applauded.\textsuperscript{22}

**NACWC Activities**

Broadly, NACWC programs between 1896 and 1935 centered around domestic, education, children, and working mothers issues. Between 1896 and 1935, the NACWC was one of the leading liberal black organizations. The agenda and speeches prepared for the 1895 conference show that those who gathered intended to use that opportunity to discuss broader, “pressing needs” related to public education for black men, women and

\textsuperscript{21}Higginbotham, 47.

\textsuperscript{22}Papers of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs 1895-1992, ed. Lillian Serece Williams (Maryland: University Publications of America, 1993), microfilm.
children, the social and economic conditions of the rural south, southern migrants in urban centers in the north and the political and civic disfranchisement of black men and women. Among the many presenters, Anna Julia Cooper gave a presentation on the “Need for Organization” and T. Thomas Fortune discussed “Political Equality.” Additionally, Henry B. Blackwell, William Lloyd Garrison and Miss C.E. Hunter were also listed on the agenda.

The beginning of the NACWC reflected the broader movement toward regional and national organizing that characterized many black and white voluntary associations in the United States during the Populist and Progressive era. Theda Skocpol made this clear in “How Americans Became Civic.” Skocpol noted that the American political structure based on federalism, separation of church and state, and corporate interests contributed to the growth and character of voluntary associations both black and white. Additionally, the growth and transformation in the number and character of voluntary associations at the turn of the twentieth century should be attributed to the lack of a social safety net for citizens both black and white and the prevailing interests of private corporations.

By the mid to late nineteenth century through early twentieth century, there was a significant rise in voluntary associations resulting from the consequences of economic, social and political institutional transformations from migrations, urbanization, and industrialization. As Howard Zinn notes:

---

23 Ibid.

Immigrants would come from Europe and China, to make the new labor force. Farmers unable to buy the new machinery or pay the new railroad rates would move to the cities. Between 1860 and 1914, New York grew from 850,000 to 4 million, Chicago from 110,000 to 2 million, Philadelphia from 650,000 to 1.5 million.25

While it was this population that made the industrial revolution a reality, their growing social, economic, and political interests were unprotected. As Eric Foner wrote:

. . . a few giant corporations dominated steel, oil, sugar refining, meatpacking, and the manufacture of agricultural machiners. The political influence of these enterprises matched their productive power. In the post-Civil War era or “Gilded Age,” as it was called by Mark Twain, the giant corporations powerfully influenced the activities of both major parties and political decision making at the national, state, and local levels.26

During the industrial period the philosophies of individualism, corporate freedom, limited government, and Social Darwinism shaped Congressional politics, Supreme Court decisions, and Executive priorities. Manufacturing, textile, steel and coal, banking, and insurance corporate interests dominated the national political arena. Creditors were protected over debtors, employers over workers, and monopoly power over fair competition. On the state and local level merchant and landlord interests were protected over consumer interest. As a result service organizations, fraternal organizations, unions, professional clubs proliferated and transcended local boundaries in order to address the problems that grew alongside of the expanding economic and political opportunities.

It is no surprise therefore that the greatest number of black women’s organizations emerged during this period. Many of them, like the NACWC, were established to address the specific needs of black development within this economic and political context. Several factors are important for understanding the ideological, institutional,


and structural factors which also prompted women's organizational efforts in general and black women's organizational growth in particular during this period.

First, Anne Firor Scott notes that the expansion of economic opportunities for men along with the comodification and production of domestic life middle and upper class women greater amounts of disposal time of which they used to step into roles of voluntary or civic actors left vacant by their husbands. While this thesis is not in dispute, one must also recognize that structural opportunities for black women's collective activity also resulted from increased attacks upon black men through legislation and mob violence. Deborah Gray White argues that the black woman activist or the "woman's era" emerged within a context marked by increased physical violence against black men as a result of the increased economic competition.

Two interesting schools of thought emerge from historical studies on the NACWC and help to provide possible explanations of the motivations that inspired the activities and programs of the NACWC. First, the altruistic interpretations of black club women's motivations have focused on their efforts to address the black community's needs arising from problems of homelessness, illiteracy, employment, healthcare, and housing through the theme of "domesticity." Sieglinde Lemke believes that even though the overall focus of the NACWC seemed limited to issues related to morality and character, these activities should be considered as part of an overall strategy for social change between 1896 and 1933.²⁷ Although under the rubric of "domesticity," the NACWC was successful in addressing what would today be defined as critical public

²⁷ Lemke, xviii, xix, xx.
policy issues such as working women's employment rights, education, equal pay, and training, housing, children's daycare, social welfare and justice, and health care.

In addition to the more altruistic interpretations, there is a possibly more class-based interpretation that centers the contempt for lower-class black behavior; their morality and consequently the need to transform the character and behavior of southern migrants, particularly that of women locating to urban and northern areas. In the constitutions, mission statements and preambles of many local black women's clubs, there was a focus on morality and virtue. It was not unusual for women's clubs to focus on reforming, uplifting for the "moral, mental and material improvement" of the woman and her sphere of influence or addressing "the deficiencies of the race found within the home." For example, the Preamble for the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of Boston, established in the early nineteenth century, states its purpose as to "associate for the diffusion of knowledge, the suppression of vice and immorality, and for the cherishing of such virtues as will render us happy and useful to society." 28 These concerns may reflect a certain level triviality. However, concerns over cleanliness went hand in hand with communicable diseases associated with overcrowded housing with inadequate sanitation. The concerns regarding behavior for working women and girls related to realities of sexual harassment and discrimination in private and sometimes isolated employment environments that were still largely unregulated; where in women and children were regularly exploited. While, black women were concerned about the negative perceptions of black women, their politics of respectability was directed at the exploitive and discriminatory realities that bred and perpetuated attacks upon black

---

women. Through the creation of a national black women’s organization, black women, not only addressed community needs, they also fought for black citizenship on the national, state, and local political levels.

From NFAAW and NLCW to the Founding of the NACWC

After the 1895 black women’s convention, the National Federation of African American Women (NFAAW) was established as the first national black women’s organization. However, the Colored Women’s League of Washington (NLCW) actually predates the NFAAW and had established itself as a national organization. Formed by several black women, including Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, and Hallie Q. Brown, the NLCW had been in existence since 1892. From editorials published in the *New Era* newsletter, it seems as if some in the black community recognized it as a national organization. Interestingly, the New Era Club, refused to acknowledge the national scope of the NLCW when the call went out for a national women’s convention. It is not completely clear why this organization was not recognized as a national body; especially when several editorials published in the *Women’s Era* newsletter suggested that the NLCW spearhead a national event because of “its superior age, size, and power.” After reviewing the minutes and proceedings of the committee meetings leading up to the merger between the NFAAW and NLCW, three possible explanations emerge to possibly explain why the NLCW was not recognized as national.

First, at the time of the merger between the NFAAW and the NLCW, the NLCW represented 113 women’s clubs. However, with 85 of those organizations located in Washington, D.C. a legitimate argument could have been made that the NLCW was more

---

of a local organization because more than half of the clubs represented were located in
the District of Columbia. This fact is acknowledged in their Act of Incorporation.
Furthermore, while this Act includes the general statement that “[t]he object of the
League is the education and improvement of Colored Women and the promotion of their
interests . . .,” more emphasis is placed on their work and goals as an Association of
Washingtonian women.30 In fact, in the first edition of the Women’s Era Newsletter, they
identified themselves as the “Washington Colored Women’s League.” Nevertheless, the
Constitution does state that membership is open to “Any woman in sympathy with the
object of the League” and able to pay the initiation fee. Clubs affiliated with the League
could be found in Colorado, Rhode Island, Maryland, and Pennsylvania. Additionally, in
their Preamble and Constitution, which was revised in 1896, phraseology which suggests
a national scope is clear:

Whereas, we, as a people, have been the object of race prejudice,
proscription and injustice, the more successful, because of our lack of
unity and organization;

Resolved, That we, the colored women of Washington, associate ourselves
together to collect all faces obtainable, showing the moral, intellectual,
industrial, and social growth and attainments of our people, to foster unity
of purpose; to consider and determine methods which will promote the
best interests of the colored people in any direction that suggest itself.

Resolved, That we appeal to the colored women of the United States,
interested in the objects set forth above to form similar organizations,
which shall co-operate with the Washington League, thus forming a
National League in which each society shall be represented.

Second, the minutes from the first annual meeting of the Convention of the National
Federation of Afro-American Women reveals that not only was the scope of the
organization in question, but also the number of clubs it purported to represent. This

became an issue after the two organizations agreed to merge because the leadership of the newly organized NACWC would be based on the number of clubs represented by both organizations. With the NLCW representing 113 organizations and the NFAAW representing only 81, clearly the NLCW would wield a greater amount of influence in the new organization. The minutes note that one member of the NFAAW, Mrs. Arthur S. Gray, did not believe the numbers that the NCLW claimed to represent and suggested that they provide specific names and locations of these organizations and their representatives. I could not find more evidence to explain this contention or the origins of the distrust between the two organizations. Despite this concern, both Mary Church Terrell and Mrs. Booker T. Washington declared the discussions out of order at the risk of “casting doubt on the NCLW honesty and credibility.” While the source of the discontent is not clear, additional correspondence to the National Federation of Afro-American Women seems to also suggest that there was some sense of dissatisfaction with either the leadership or the actions of the NCLW. For example, in a letter dated July 16, 1896, Ms. Ida Depriest of the National Colored Women’s League of Denver Colorado expressed Loyalty to the “Federation” and disappointment with the Colored Women’s League. Unfortunately, there was no explanation provided for the cause of her disappointment.\(^3\) What this suggests is that within the black community, particularly among black women, the credibility of the NLCW had been damaged and the lack of support may have pushed the Boston New Era to national prominence.

A final possible explanation is that Mr. Booker T. Washington exerted influence in the Boston community giving the Boston New Era Club greater political strength not

only in making the call for a national conference, but also in deciding where the
conference would take place. Jacqueline Moore noted Washington’s dislike of the
nation’s capital in her work entitled *Leading the Race The Transformation of the Black
Elite in Nation’s Capital*, where he is quoted as saying in a 1901 correspondence to
Francis Grimke, “The office seeking atmosphere which seems to pervade the whole city
disgusts me so very much . . . that I rarely stay longer than I am absolutely compelled to
do so.”

It is possible that this sentiment also shaped perceptions held by others
regarding the city, along with black organizations and leadership of this area including
the NCLW. Thus, in spite of recommendations that the convention be held in a central
location like Chicago, Illinois, the decision to hold the conference in Boston,
Massachusetts was made and supposedly based on the historical reputation the city held
for progressive movements in the country.

According to Historian Dorothy Salem, the impetus behind the formation of the
NFAAW was the desire to “correct the image of Black women.”

The creation of this organization seemed to be formal way of linking participating individuals and
organizational resources, ideas, and efforts across the country. Margaret Murray
Washington, the wife of Booker T. Washington, was selected to head the organization.
Others working with this organization included Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin and Victoria
Earle Matthews. All organizations whose missions centered the concerns of working and
middle class mothers and women were eligible for membership. Interestingly, both

---


33 *Women’s Era*, (vol. 1 no.2)

34 Salem, 22.
organizations held there national conventions in Washington, DC in 1896 and it was
during this time that committees were established by both groups to consider a merging.
As a result, the National Federation of Afro-American Women (NFAAW) merged with
the National League of Colored Women (NLCW) and formed the National Association of
Colored Women’s Clubs. This was an attempt to move beyond the territorial problems
that seem to pit organizations after each other in the black community.

It can be concluded that while the two organizations merged, the battle over who
originated the idea of a national organization continued throughout the early years of the
organization and seems to suggest that despite the clean outward appearance of the
organization, the merging of these two organizations was not as smooth as suggested in
their official history written by Elizabeth Lindsey Davis:

Let us now turn to the history of the NACW and how it was told by one of
its members. The book is dedicated “affectionately” to Mrs. Josephine St.
Pierre Ruffin, the president of the Woman’s Era Club of Boston. On July
29, 1895, two years after the club was founded, Mrs. Ruffin invited Black
women from clubs all over the country to attend the first national
conference of colored women. The result of this meeting was the
formation of a national organization, the Afro American Federation of
Colored Women. Its president-elect, Mrs. Booker T. Washington
(Margaret Murray Washington), decided to unite with leaders of the
Colored Women League of Washington (founded in 182935) in the
summer of 1896, they held their first convention at a Baptist church in
Washington, Mary Church Terrell became the chair of this new
organization, which was named the National Association of Colored
Women.36

In the end, the Colored Women’s League never relinquished its title as originator of the
movement to nationally organization black women. Fannie Barrier William’s 1900 essay

35I think this is a printing error; there is no evidence to suggest that 1829 was the correct founding
date for this organization. However, there are references to 1892 as the correct date.

36Elizabeth Lindsey Davis, *Lifting As They Climb*, (New York, NY: G K. Hall and Company),
xviii.
entitled, “The Club Movement Among Colored Women of America,” notes that the Colored Woman’s League of Washington, D.C. initially claimed this title. However, quoting their first President Mrs. Helen Cook, Williams wrote, “The idea of national organization has been embodied in the Women’s League of Washington from its formation. It existed fully developed in the minds of the original members even before they united themselves into an association which has national union for its central thought, its inspiring motive, its avowed purpose – its very reason for being.”

NACWC – Programs and Objectives

Through its objectives, programs, and bureaucratic structure, the NACWC provided a more unified mechanism for the achievement of collective goals. The women of the NACWC made it their responsibility to “define the needs, set the goals, and voice the concerns of black women.” This effort began with the organization’s objectives:

1. To promote the education of women and children,
2. To raise the standards of the home,
3. To improve conditions for family living,
4. To work for the moral, economic, social, and religious welfare of women and children
5. To protect the rights of women and children
6. To secure and enforce civil and political rights for the African American race, and
7. To promote interracial understanding so that justice may prevail among all people.

Like other federated and national organizations, the NACW served as a vehicle to link black women to local, state, and international processes in efforts to shape government

---


actions impacting black men and women. This was accomplished through the bureaucratization of women's clubs around the country. The organization had five regions – northeastern, northwestern, southeastern, southwestern, and central. Within these regional associations there were state and city federations. Its executive board was represented not only by national officers, but also state and sectional presidents.

The organization’s activities were facilitated through specialized departments. Under the leadership of the second president Josephine Silone Yates, twelve departments were established. The departments and leadership are listed below:

1. Social Science – Miss Cornelia Bowen, Waugh, Alabama
2. Domestic Science – Mrs. Seliena Gray, Chicago, Illinois
3. Mother’s Clubs – Mrs. Susan P. Vashon, St. Louis, Missouri
4. Kindergarten – Mrs. Hadie Campbell, St. Louis, Missouri
5. Business Women – Mrs. M.L. Crossthwaite, Kansas City, Missouri
6. Professional Women – Miss Hallie Quinn Brown, Wilberforce, Ohio
7. Rescue Work – Mrs. Alice D. Cary, Atlanta, Georgia
8. Art – Mrs. Lottie Jackson Wilson, Bay City, Michigan
9. Literature – Miss Anna H. Jones, Kansas City, Missouri
10. Music – Mrs. Dovie King Clark, Wilberforce, Ohio
11. Temperance – Mrs. Rosetta Lawson, Washington, D.C.
12. Church Clubs -

In her history of the NACWC, Elizabeth Lindsey Davis, noted that Yates’ efforts to systematize the organization improved its efforts toward “conscientious and untiring effort for race elevation.”39 These twelve departments eventually grew to thirty-eight. However, they were narrowed to “Mother, Home, and Child” and “Negro Women in Industry” in a re-organizational effort under Sallie Stewart’s leadership in 1932. Like Davis, other historians also attributed the narrowing of the NACWC’s activities by the

39Davis, 43.
New Deal period to the growth of other national black organizations in the early
twenty-first century like the National Urban League and the National Association of
Colored Women’s Clubs. As Davis notes,

During the last decade, many other national organizations have come into
existence, and these for the most part specialize in one phase of welfare
work and their programs include various forms of welfare work formerly
attempted by the National Association of Colored Women.  

_NACWC and local women’s clubs and leadership_

Local club politics had a significant influence on the national leadership of the
National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs. As suggested by the 1904 comments of
Josephine Bruce, “The National stands as the teacher and helper of the local clubs, just as
it expects to be taught and helped by the local clubs. The life of the National is
dependent upon the individual clubs. There is an interchange of strength and opinion.”

This relationship sometimes negatively impacted leadership, agenda setting, and
collaborations. For example, Dorothy Salem’s work on the National Association
revealed that Mary Church Terrell was pressured by local club in Chicago to exclude Ida
B. Wells-Barnett from participation in the 1899 biennial convention or risk the loss of
local support. In her autobiography, Wells-Barnett notes she was occupied with the
work of the Afro-American Council and attributed the organizational slight to Terrell’s
ambitions for holding a third term as president of NACWC. However, it is worth noting
that this political marginalization may have also been caused by her association with the
Afro-American Council and their condemnation of President McKinley in his failure to

---

40 Ibid, 88,89, 182.

41 National Notes, July 1904

42 Salem, 32 and 33.
address the 1898 Wilmington, North Carolina, race riots in his “Message to Congress.” Additionally, Wells-Barnett’s ostracization may have also been a consequence of her being associated with a supposed attack on Booker T. Washington which was publically condemned by his wife and NACWC member Mrs. Booker T. Washington at a dinner hosted by the Afro-American Council in which the NACWC members were invited guest.43

The organizational practices and concerns of local women’s from across the country helped to set the national agenda of the NACWC. This began with the presentation of individual speeches and organizational reports at the biennial conferences. For example, based on a review of the program and minutes of the conventions held from 1895 to 1935, the ability of the NACWC to address issues of Jim Crow cars, chain gangs, day nurseries for working moms, educational training, criminal justice, suffrage, working women, segregation, the exploitation of black children in prison systems, African colonialism, health needs, southern migrants in the north, exploited female workers, settlement housing, and negative depictions of blacks in literature came from local women like Mrs. Beatrice Cannady of Colorado, Miss Mattie Bowen of Washington, D.C., Ms. Mary Church Terrell, Ms. Nannie Helen Burroughs, Victoria Earle Matthews, Ms. Ida Gibbs, Ms. Posey, Ms. Cornelia Bowen, Ms. Rosa Branche, Ms. Josephine Bruce, and others representing such organizations as the Independent Sisters of Dayton, Ohio, the Willing Workers Club of Detroit Michigan, The Women’s Progressive Club, the Burden Bearer’s Circle of Kings Daughters, the Women’s Civic League, the Ida B. Wells Club, The Three Times Ten Club, Women’s Twentieth Century Club, the

Wheel of Progress Club, the Life Line Club, the Mother's Congress, the Metropolitan Business Club and the Phony Lafon Co-Operative Association of New Orleans. These local organizations established scholarships, protested poor educational systems in the south and established independent schools. Through state federations, women addressed issues juvenile justice, reformatory schools, and orphanages for children.

Looking at the names of the participating organizations, suggest that from the very beginning, even within the ideological constraints of middle class ideology, the local women who gave life to the NACWC were self-defined and progressive thinkers in reference to ways in which they defined their responsibilities and contributions to black community development. Their efforts touched on workers rights and employment issues of working women and girls. They developed programs and strategies to address problems associated with tenement housing, fair wages, decent working conditions, and training for advancement. Women of the NACWC went into various parts of southern states in efforts to rescue children as young as three years old who had no one to advocate for them and who were increasingly being sentenced to disproportionately long prison sentences for minor crimes for the purpose of providing southern states with free labor. As early as 1924, these women were part of national labor efforts led by the Chicago Federation of Labor to outlaw the use of convict made garments from the labor market. In the 1930s, while they applauded the New Deal efforts of the Franklin Roosevelt

---


45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.
administration, they did not hesitate to challenge the racism that plagued the early New Deal programs in 1933.\textsuperscript{48}

At a time when so many issues were confronting the black community, black club women looked at the home as the vehicle through which they could make change in the black community and gain respect. Their activities were informed by the liberal ideals that were articulated by most middle class blacks during this period. It is important not to dismiss these activities as reflections of false consciousness held by black club women. By looking at the conditions of blacks in urban centers of the North, a practical reason for the NACWC’s focus on “Mother, Home, and Child” may be offered. In cities like Chicago for example, black newspapers like the Chicago Defender exposed the substandard sanitary and health conditions in which black men, women, and children lived. Diseases associated with trash in alleyways, overcrowded tenements, stagnant water in the streets included tuberculosis, small pox, and pulmonary consumption. In communities from the South to the North, efforts were made to push local governments to address poor urban infrastructure issues like sewage systems, water-treatment plants, and appropriate housing. At the same time, local women’s clubs called on newly transplanted blacks to keep their homes clean; and while classes were held and articles were published which stressed the importance of “not being a nuisance” or a “beer can crusher” or “not letting children run in the streets,” the reality was that many Black women did not have the skills necessary to prevent the conditions where were contributing to these communicable and sometimes fatal diseases and accidents.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{48}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49}Anne Meis Knupfer, Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood, African American Women’s Clubs in Turn-of-the Century Chicago (New York: University Press, 1996), 42-43
While bad behavior brought reproach upon all black women, high black mortality rates, particularly those of infants and children forced black clubwomen like Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin to acknowledge that those with resources could no longer be “indifferent to temperance, morality, the higher education, hygienic and domestic questions.” Thus, during her leadership the NACWC focused national attention on improving the hygienic standards of black homes not simply because of embarrassment of southern migrant behavior, but also because of the health consequences of the behavior.

In response to the changing needs of the community, NACWC attempted to adjust by also changing. Still the traditional ideas of improving the conditions of the home remained the center of their organizational strategies. For example, in 1929 under the presidency of Sallie Stewart a “Better Homes” campaign was carried out by affiliated local organizations throughout the country in conjunction with local public health departments. Local organizations were asked to discuss topics and show films that included steps on how to sanitize disinfect and properly ventilate homes. Mrs. Fouse’s highlight of the Better Homes Department describes the 1929 efforts of the NACWC:

No group of people can rise to the higher levels of thinking nor attain the best in ethical appreciations while living in the slums and ashes. We, then, as club women have a far-reaching challenge that should grip us and urge us to the most heroic action to have every household in our own communities inoculated with an irresistible pride for a better home - a better domicile to live in. Sewage, lights, better streets, playgrounds, schools must also enter into the equation. We must study the most effective methods of approach to the hearts of the magistrates- of all the powers that be to the end that even our submerged tenth may have these God-given rights . . . But we must not forget that while the city has its part to play in making our environment moral and wholesome, on the other


51 National Notes, September, 1929.
hand we as occupants and owners of homes must make our full contribution in transforming and elevating our environment. One of the most telling contributions that can be made each year is to join the National Clean-up Week. To stimulate our people to have a greater pride in themselves they must know more and more about themselves and the glorious past even in Africa. . . In closing, may we not suggest again that there are spiritual values with which the homes must be adorned. “Integrity must be the architect and tidiness the upholsterer. The true home must be warmed by affection, lighted up with cheerfulness; and industry must be the ventilator, renewing the atmosphere.52

As the foregoing passage suggests, while NACWC efforts focused on educating and changing behavior of southern migrants, their efforts also included pressuring local government officials to address the infrastructure needs of urban residents in particular.

From the many articles published in the National Notes, one finds that NACWC programs typically focused on improving and purifying conditions in the home, race pride, personal hygiene, the value of thrift, parental issues ranging from discipline to nurseries, along political and civic engagement. Additionally, they also promoted interracial collaborations and thus in the National Notes always placed emphasis on the degree to which black and white organizations were able to collaborate and the degree to which white organizations attempted to understand or address “special problems of Race women in the South” and encourage inter-racial cooperation activities.

NACWC Programs as a Reflection of Community Priorities

Finally, an analysis was completed in order to address the question of how the NACWC programs actually reflected issues articulated within the community. The NACWC convention minutes as well as their monthly newsletter the National Notes were examined in order to identify the major programs, discussions, and organizational

52National Notes, March 1929.
priorities. A table was created to match NACWC activities with those activities identified by black newspapers. See Appendix.

A slight difference is noted in the issues addressed by the NACWC and those identified by the black press. Of the twenty issues identified in the black newspapers, lynching and labor issues stand out as the most recurring issues. The analysis suggests that the NACWC activities addressed broad community issues. These issues included: suffrage, lynching, labor issues, education, and segregation were all targets of NACWC activity. However, NACWC also identified and addressed “gendered” issues that were more likely to be identified by women, but relevant to the black community in general. For example, while the newspapers selected for this study did not identify children’s issues, NACWC activities did address the need for kindergartens, the problem of child labor, urban youth problems, the juvenile justice system, juvenile court system, children in the penal system, and children’s orphanages. However, by the 1920s NACWC activities increasingly became less gendered and more “political” or racial. NACWC addressed issues such as labor rights, employment patterns and placement, the penal justice system, the need for civic forums and political study clubs, housing issues, and the women’s vote.

The change in organizational activities may be a reflection of the emergence of civil rights organizations that had greater organizational resources. Nikki Brown suggested that the organization had lost much of its activist energy after the 1920s. NACWC faced increasing competition with the more racial agendas of organizations such as the National Urban League (NUL) and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). These organizations were increasingly
absorbing many of the local activities and national issues that had been associated with the NACWC. For example, antilynching, once associated with the NACWC, became a central issue for the NAACP. In fact, Paula Giddings notes that many of the programs established by the NACWC like their health care centers and kindergarten programs became models for NAACP and NUL.  

The change in NACWC activities and programs may also reflect a possible disconnect between the NACWC and the black community. As noted by Paula Giddings, NACWC programs which continued to emphasize the tradition ideas of home seem to be out of touch with the realities facing the black community, particularly after World War I and during the Great Depression of 1929. For example, while no biennial convention was held in 1929, data collected from 1928 and 1930 suggest that while the black newspapers identified community issues like the conditions caused by the Depression and mob violence, the NACWC carried out national programs that focused on standardizing the home, creating better environments for children, and etiquette for girls.

---

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the relationship between black women’s organizational activity and the black community. It was asserted that feminist theoretical models limited the understanding of the relationships, values, and institutions within the black community that shape black women’s organizational activism. It was hypothesized that black political culture could provide a useful alternative theoretical model for the study of black women’s activism and its connection to the black community. Black political culture was conceptualized as a collection of formal and informal institutions, values, political ideologies, practices, and priorities within the black community which come together to define boundaries of acceptable behavior and reflect the beliefs and expectations that blacks hold about themselves as citizens. This research theorized not only that black political culture, as a sub-culture within the United States, could be used to describe black political attitudes and beliefs about the American political system, but also explain the activism of individuals and groups within the black community. Several research methods were utilized in order to test the hypothesis: an historical analysis, content analysis, thematic analysis, and case study of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs from 1896 to 1935.
Summary of Findings

The historical analysis presented in chapter 2 provided a theoretical and historical discussion of the development of black women’s informal and formal collective activism in the United States. The data presented in this chapter provided information about the African cultural values and beliefs that informed black women’s consciousness about themselves as powerful agents and their responsibilities to each other and their community. Beginning in Africa and shaped by the experiences of enslavement in North America, black women’s organizational activism began with the belief that they were central figures in the community. These ideas fueled the informal collectives that enslaved black women established to help one another through resistance and survival.

The sense of communalism that shaped the informal organizational experiences for black women also informed their formal organizational experiences which many locate in the black Church and early mutual aid societies. Again, these formal institutions reflected black women’s beliefs about their capacities as black women citizens and their responsibilities to their communities. Through their early work, their consciousness of community, leadership and organizational skills were further shaped. It was noted that the post reconstruction period through the early 1930s saw the emergence of many black women’s clubs dedicated to addressing social welfare needs of black men and women.

In all, through these informal and formal religious and secular organizations, black women worked with black men to establish schools, kindergartens, insurance and burial services, health care, food, housing, and many other needs of the black community. However, it is important to note that black women found it necessary to create a gendered space that would allow them to define for themselves their priorities.
This chapter also noted that despite the emphasis on social needs, black women’s organizational activism has always been inherently political. Black women have a long history of informal and formal collectivist organizing. Between 1896 and 1935, public health and sanitation, housing, employment, education, public perceptions of blacks, economic development, discrimination in the criminal justice system, protection of children, and urban migrant needs were significant local issues black women’s clubs addressed.

Chapter 3 provided a historical and demographic portrait of black life between 1896 and 1930. While small black populations increased in the North, a majority of blacks still lived in the South. However, with the removal of federal protection in the south, various northern cities emerged as political centers for black political and social activity. Within cities like Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. conventions, organizations, associations emerged as black attempted to collectively address the federal, state, and local assault on their civil rights. Critical to the development of a collective political consciousness was the establishment of community institutions. This chapter also presented historical data related to the development of community institutions like the black newspaper, Church, and professional organizations and the networks that created an oppositional and autonomous space to sustain black intellectual, social, economic, and political lives. What this research found is that multiple political ideologies and strategies existed within the black community. These strategies included migration, emigration, protest, and accommodation. These strategies were informed by Marxism, nationalism, pan-Africanism, and black liberalism. Each ideology. However, black men and women overwhelmingly accepted the belief that
America could live up the promises of freedom and quality. Consequently, black liberalism and the strategies associated with this ideology dominated black politics and the organizations and individuals within the black community.

Chapter 4 presented a case study of the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs. The research provided evidence to support the assertion that black women’s organizations are informed by the institutions, priorities, and values of the black community. This began with the nationalist consciousness that informed black women as community activist. This consciousness reflected a sense of race-pride or African consciousness and this may have been due in large part to the Pan-African and Back to Africa movements within the black community during this period. Despite this influence, NACWC members embraced the liberal ideals of America, Victorian womanhood and domesticity. Like blacks who reconceptualized liberalism and Marxism to meet the needs of the black community, black women also reconceptualized the dominant and limiting traits associated with womanhood in order to embrace community responsibility, strength, and courage. For black women, black politics began with the quality of the home and community and they played a critical role in the improvement of the black community.

While the NACWC provided a national political structure for black women’s organizational activism, local black women’s clubs played a critical role in defining priorities. This is a reflection of the decentralized structure of the organization. NACWC club members focused first on addressing local and state needs first. Thus, it is not surprising that the research identified local institutions, including black women’s clubs at the forefront in articulating the needs of the black community. They existed prior to the
establishment of the NACWC. This is an important point. The creation of a national secular organization created an instrument to more efficiently nationalize and connect local community efforts. As Stephanie Shaw pointed out in her research, black women’s organizational work did not begin with the creation of the NACWC. Chapter two identified black women’s organizations that dated back to the antebellum period. Furthermore, the names and missions of the organizations highlighted in Chapter 4 point to the progressive nature of black women’s consciousness and organizational work.

Chapter 4 also highlighted the cooperative nature of the NACWC. NACWC worked with both liberal and conservative organizations within and outside the black community and their ability to navigate the political tightrope that had been set by the ideological debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois suggest that the organizational leadership embraced both liberal and conservative ideologies as well as the political strategies need to accomplish their goals and objectives.

There is consistent evidence that the NACWC collaborated with other politically like-minded organizations like the Urban League, the National Negro Business League, and the National Association of Colored People. Many movements and organizations emerged in the black community between 1896 and 1935; however, based on the primary and secondary materials that were examined for this case study, there were no collaborations with socialist or radical organizations. In fact, socialist activity was denounced at one of the biennial conventions. The NACWC played a very important role in the trade union movement among black women. While, there may not have been direct association with the more radical organizations, it is suggested that the willingness of the NACWC to nationally address wage and labor issues for women must be
recognized since this reflects and effort to address the needs of a majority of working black women who were employed in unprotected employment areas during this time.

What this research on the NACWC also revealed is that black political culture is a reflection of multiple and competing political interests. The communalism created by black institutions, practices, and values created networks of support for members and organizations of the black community. However, this was also a contested space. Individuals and organizations competed for membership, economic resources, and political legitimacy. Institutions and individuals with greater access to white political and economic resources garnered greater political power within the black community because of the internal need for these resources. By the end of the 1920s, the NACWC had been overshadowed by larger, more efficient organizations who had greater access to economic and political resources.

This reality influenced the activities of the NACWC whose environment was overwhelmingly shaped by the politics of Booker T. Washington. As was noted in the chapter, the organization was “blessed” by Booker T. Washington from the very beginning. Washington’s influence in the organization extended as a result of the political favors extended to both NACWC members and their husbands along with role his wife played in the NACWC leadership. NACWC members who challenged Booker T. Washington found themselves politically isolated both within the organization and in the larger community as well. The marginalization of middle-class women like Ida B. Wells and Fannie Barrier Williams provided examples of the political cost of challenging Booker T. Washington’s accommodationist politics. Thus, the political marginalization of
women like Wells and Williams also points to the idea that the black middle and upper
class is not monolithic, but rather shaped by different political interests.

This research provided evidence to support the hypothesis that a black political
cultural model is useful for illuminating the community dynamics that shape black
women’s organizational activism. By comparing NACWC activities with issues
articulated by black newspapers in the black community, this research found that the
NACWC did address community issues. While the NACWC addressed community
issues, their national approaches and solutions to the problems were shaped by the
politically conservative and middle class ideas and not simply gender politics. Even
more, this research supports Adolph Reed’s contention that black politics and black
political activity not be dismissed as a monolithic experience. Multiple political
ideologies and movements emerged and competed for attention and legitimacy within the
black community; likewise from nationalism to liberalism, the activities and members of
the NACWC reflected the embrace of multiple political ideals and strategies for
addressing the problems facing the black community.

Through the analysis of black newspapers and NACWC records, it was found that
NACWC successfully addressed more gender related issues; like those associated with
children and women, which were not identified by black newspapers. However, the
traditional and somewhat outdated approach to those issues hurt the organization’s ability
to connect to those outside the middle-class community.

Beginning in the 1920s and in response to the growing competition of race
organizations like the National Urban League, the United Negro Improvement
Association and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the
NACWC activities began to reflect less gender specific issues. This finding suggests that within the black community, gender is still a variable in need of closer examination. Consequently, the idea that feminist theoretical models are inappropriate in the study of black women’s organizational activity is not supported. However, black political culture is an important model that should be incorporated in future studies of black women’s activism. Black political culture is not static. Collectively, black priorities, strategies, and institutions can change over time. As Nikki Brown noted, the changing nature of black politics beginning in the 1920’s did shape organizational activity of the NACWC and noted that this period marked a significant masculinization of black politics, priorities, and strategies.\(^1\)

Implications for Future Research

Initially, this research suggested that an examination of the NACWC activities and their relationship to the black community could provide a model for understanding contemporary black organizations today. The findings from this research support this assertion. Black political scientists have noted that securing resources, adopting particular political ideologies, leadership, and particular strategic choices present challenges to the life of black organizations. These were all challenges faced by the NACWC. This research found that financial instability constantly plagued the NACWC and impacted the publication of their newsletter and the ability of the national structure to actively support local efforts across the country. The NACWC drew its strength from the networks and activities of the local clubs. However, while not politically or economically substantial on the national level, and with a Washington, D.C. headquarters, the

NACWC’s strength came from the perception that it represented the interests of all black women a position that many local black women’s clubs rejected.

In an article entitled “Where Do We Go from Here? Facing the Challenges of the Post-Civil Rights Era,” Valerie Johnson wrote that the socioeconomic position of blacks in the United States confirmed the conclusion that black organizations are “constrained [in] their ability to promote lasting solutions to problems affecting black people.” Johnson contended that black organizations were limited in their ability to address the root causes of black socio-economic inequality because they were fundamentally guided by middle class preferences.  

This study of the NACWC supports Johnson’s position. The popular misconception that this organization is no longer in existence may suggest something about its contemporary relevance. During its 100th anniversary celebration in Washington, D.C. the organization boasted a small membership of only 20,000 representing 698 chapters across 32 states. Despite, the collaborative efforts between the NACWC and leading contemporary organizations both inside and outside the black community, its name is still relatively unknown or considered to be a middle class institution of the past.

Today, as the oldest black woman’s organization, the NACWC maintains is five region bureaucratic structures. Its current and twenty-seventh president is Dr. Marie Wright Tolliver. Its programs still center the importance of the home and family; in particular the youth. It currently has operated through three active departments:

Educational Programs

Within the Educational department, the NACWC sponsors scholarships, workshops, international outreach projects, and an intergenerational academy.

Youth Department
The National Association of Girls Club established in 1930 along with the National Association of Boys Clubs established in 1984 merged and is now referred to as the National Association of Youth Clubs. These youth clubs are sponsored by adult clubs affiliated with the NACWC and seek to promote civic engagement within the black community among the youth along with the development of leadership skills.

Young Adults
This department provides a forum specifically designed for Generation X and Y. This department functions to develop leadership skills through innovative and creative opportunities and projects.

The NACWC has been responsible for establishing male and female mentorship programs; they have collaborated with international non-profit organizations in the building of a maternity healthcare center in Africa, and the establishment of intergenerational programs in the black community. While these programs are important, it may be suggested that these programs serve the interest of middle and upper class youth; and may be out of touch with the crisis facing a majority of black youth who are faced with underperforming public schools, a lack of resources, and violence. These issues are critical; however, they are not part of the programs sponsored by the NACWC.

These findings suggest that further research needs to be conducted on contemporary factors shaping black women’s organizational activities. From the analysis of the NACWC, the research has shown that organizational membership; need for financial resources, community politics, and priorities shape organizational activities.

While the politics of Booker T. Washington impacted the activities of the NACWC, research is needed on the impact of the current conservative climate and federal and philanthropic funding on programs of contemporary black organizations. Thus, while this
research suggests that the black community provided the legitimacy and direction for black organizations, this may no longer be the case as contemporary national organizations rely primarily upon research on the black community instead of institutions and networks within the black community that cross class, political and gendered lines.

In the post civil rights era, the key institutions that were once relied upon to articulate black issues, like the black newspaper have declined. At the same time, national black organizations have proliferated during this period in which political scientists have noted a decline in local community groups. What local community networks do contemporary organizations rely upon to stay connected to the groups they represent? The NACWC has adopted a strategy that includes the establishment of NACWC chapters on college campuses. It is not certain whether or not this strategy has been successful. However, it may prove successful in maintaining its middle and upper class membership.
Appendix

National Association of Colored Women's Club Issues, Programs, and Black Community Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues/Programs identified in NACWC Biennial Convention Minutes, National Notes (Organ) and President</th>
<th>National Departments or Programs of NACWC</th>
<th>Issues Confronting Black Community/issues identified in selected Black newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1896-Washington, DC – Convention Location</td>
<td>•Mother, Home, and Child Department purpose:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Church Terrell, President until 1900</td>
<td>•Negro Women in Industry Department purpose: improve working conditions for Black girls and women - to organize domestics, laundry women, personal service maids, manufacturers, sales ladies, elevator operators, and those engaged in menial work - goal better wages, fight shorter working hours, industrial insurance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•NFCW union with NLCWC</td>
<td>(1895) Booker T. Washington makes Atlanta Speech</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Higher Education</td>
<td>•Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court Decision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Industrial Training</td>
<td>•Lynching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Political Equality</td>
<td>•Sheat's Law in Florida and Segregated Public Schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Convict lease and use of chain gangs in the South</td>
<td>•Treatment of Poor Blacks by Middle class Blacks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Antilynching Resolution</td>
<td>•Corrupt Black Politicians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Support efforts of Ida B. Wells Barnett</td>
<td>•Justice for Blacks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Use of Afro-American and Colored Terms</td>
<td>•Black women organizing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Sheat's Law – Segregated School Systems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•B.T. Washington commended</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Segregation in Public facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court decision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Colored Orphans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Housing conditions and home purity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Temperance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Morality and women and girls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897-Nashville, TN-Convention Location</td>
<td>continued</td>
<td>•Lynching – lynching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>•White Rose Mission addressing issues confronting Black female migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>•The National League for the Protection of Colored Women addressing issues confronting Black female migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•NACWC constitution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Corrections Institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Urban Youth Problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Antilynching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Convict lease program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Temperance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Missionary work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Chain gangs in Georgia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues/Programs identified in NACWC Biennial Convention Minutes, National Notes (Organ) and President</td>
<td>National Departments or Programs of NACWC</td>
<td>Issues Confronting Black Community/issues identified in selected Black newspapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899 Chicago, Illinois</td>
<td>continued</td>
<td>• Afro-American Council designated June 4th as national day of fasting to protest lynching • Anti-Imperialist Movement • Support the Republican Party • Lynching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jim Crow Cars • Child Labor • Interracial Cooperation • Industrial Education • Kindergartens • Equal moral standards for men and women • Prison work • Temperance • Invitation to African American Council meeting by Ida B. Wells Barnett</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900 Buffalo, NY Josephine Silone Yates, President until 1904</td>
<td>Departments Created: • Temperance • Domestic Science • Rescue Work • Music • Religion • Mother’s Meeting • Education • Kindergartens</td>
<td>• National Negro Business League Founded in 1900 by Booker T. Washington • Booker T. Washington meets with President T. Roosevelt • Lynching • Black men and women and labor union discrimination in the north</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Temperance • Relations with the NCW, WCTU, NCM • Thanked President T. Roosevelt • Condemned lynching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# National Association of Colored Women's Club Issues, Programs, and Black Community Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues/Programs identified in NACWC Biennial Convention Minutes, National Notes (Organ) and President</th>
<th>National Departments or Programs of NACWC</th>
<th>Issues Confronting Black Community/issues identified in selected Black newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1904 St. Louis MO Lucy Thurman, President until 1908 | • Denounced Ragtime Music  
• Racial Discrimination at St. Louis World's Fair  
• Temperance  
• Segregation of Common Carriers  
• Advocated Women's Suffrage and Adopted Suffrage Plank by Josephine Yates  
• Supported Republican Party Platform against Black disfranchisement  
• Missionary Work  
• Theodore Roosevelt thanked for defense of Negro Race  
• Commended National Republican Convention for position on Blacks and disfranchisement  
• Organizing NACWC work in Africa | State and local federations created  
Additional Departments Created:  
• Literature  
• Professional Women  
• Business Women  
• Art  
• Suffrage  
• Church Clubs  
• Social Science | • Lynching  
• Socialist Labor Party and Black people  
• Growing Independent Political Movement – National Liberty Party Presidential Candidate  
• Anti-Republican Sentiment |
| 1906 Detroit, Michigan | • NACWC Interest in Africa  
• Belgian atrocities in Congo  
• Relations with YWCA  
• Blacks encouraged to buy property for self-respect  
• Juvenile Court System | Additional Departments Created  
• Juvenile  
• Forestry  
• Science  
• Temperance | • Brownsville, TX riot  
• Atlanta race riot "massacre"  
• Lynching  
• Afro American Council sponsors day of prayer in protest of lynching (supported by NACWC)  
• Seneca, SC riot  
• Georgia Equal Rights Convention coverage  
• Niagara Movement |
### National Association of Colored Women’s Club Issues, Programs, and Black Community Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues/Programs identified in NACWC Biennial Convention Minutes, National Notes (Organ) and President</th>
<th>National Departments or Programs of NACWC</th>
<th>Issues Confronting Black Community/Issues identified in selected Black newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1908 Brooklyn, NY  
Elizabeth Carter Brooks, President until 1912  
• NY Settlement Movement  
• Symposium for working girls  
• Domestic Training  
• Female Industrial Placement  
• Thrift and Morality  
• Racial Attitudes of Domestics  
• Black children in GA penal system  
• Housing for female industrial workers  
• Child labor  
• Anti-lynching Resolution  
• Commend Rescue Work  
• Tuberculosis  
• Rescue work among youth  
• Symposium on Juvenile Court Work  
• Ode to Ethiopia  
1910 Louisville convention minutes not located | Additional Departments Created  
• Parliamentary Law  
• Mother’s Club  
• Evangelistic  
| • NAACP formed  
• Lynching  
• Springfield, IL race riot  
• Women’s Suffrage |
| 1912 Hampton, VA  
Mrs. Booker T. Washington, until 1916 | continued | • Segregated neighborhoods  
• Lack of support for Black institutions (banks) by other Black institutions (ie Black lodges, churches, individuals, societies)  
• Murder of Blacks by white Americans  
• Emigration to Mexico  
• Segregation/Redistricting Schools  
• Corrupt and Ineffective Black Politicians in Northeast  
• Independent Black Politics – strategic alliances  
• Segregation in North – Chicago schools  
• Ineffective educated people  
• Race riot in Marion, AK  
• “100 Negroes Murdered Weekly in US by White Americans” |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Association of Colored Women’s Club Issues, Programs, and Black Community Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issues/Programs identified in NACWC Biennial Convention Minutes, National Notes (Organ) and President</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Spread of Segregation in YWCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Report from Mary Church Terrell on the execution of 17 year old VA girl on death row</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Segregation on trains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Supported Full Women’s Suffrage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Commended and endorsed National League on Urban Conditions among Negroes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Destruction of Colored Orphanage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Advocated the formation of political study clubs to mobilize interests on social and political matters concerning Black men and women.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| 1914 Wilberforce, OH | continued | |
| · Legislative pressure against Jim Crow bill in Illinois | | |
| · Boycott movement against racial discrimination | | |
| · NAACP endorsed | | |
| · Peace in Europe | | |
| · Antilynching Resolution | | |
| · Segregation in Washington, DC | | |
| · Opposition to extreme fashions in girls attire | | |
| · Opposed sending condolence letter to President Wilson because of his role in segregation in federal government | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues/Programs identified in NACWC Biennial Convention Minutes, National Notes (Organ) and President</th>
<th>National Departments or Programs of NACWC</th>
<th>Issues Confronting Black Community/issues identified in selected Black newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1916 Baltimore, MD – Convention Location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Talbett, President until 1920</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• endorsed the efforts of women in southeastern section of the country to form a southeastern council of colored women to meet the peculiar conditions of that section</td>
<td>• Women’s Suffrage Program</td>
<td>• Lynching – 50 Blacks lynched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fundraiser for B.T. Washington memorial</td>
<td>• Frederick Douglas Home Project</td>
<td>• Pan African Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Endorsed women’s suffrage</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Black Migration movements from the South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cooperation with National Negro Business League</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Colored contribution for NAACP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discussed Waco, TX lynching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918 Denver, CO – Convention Location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Women in Industry Program</td>
<td>• Race Riot at Camp Merritt, NJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• End of WWI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Race riot in Philadelphia and Chester, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Lynching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Black Press Protest discrimination and lynching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Black labor organizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Work of Urban League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues/Programs identified in NACWC Biennial Convention Minutes, National Notes (Organ) and President</td>
<td>National Departments or Programs of NACWC</td>
<td>Issues Confronting Black Community/issues identified in selected Black newspapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1920 Tuskegee, AL – Convention Location  
Hallie Q. Brown, President until 1924 | | |
| *women and children in penal system  
*Elaine, AK riot case  
*Impact of women’s vote on politics  
*Clemency plea for Negro soldier in Anniston, AL  
*Mission work  
*Relations with YWCA  
*Tribute to B.T. Washington by Dr. Moton | continued | continued |

(1919) Pan African Movement – Du Bois  
(1919) African Blood Brotherhood – Marxist  
(1919) Race riots  
*Marcus Garvey movement  
*Lynching  
*Women’s Suffrage  
*Harlem Renaissance  
*Discrimination and White Supremacy  
*President Harding and Black voters  
*Criticism of Marcus Garvey |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1922 Richmond, VA – Convention Location</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| *Appreciation of West African culture  
*Walter White presentation on antilynching  
*Prohibition endorsed  
*Interracial female work in Virginia  
*Planned cooperation with NAACP  
*Civic forums  
*Women must promote purity of politics  
*Improve public schools  
*Protest mammy statue by Daughters of the Confederacy | continued | continued |

*Lynching  
*Federal lynching legislation filibustered  
(Dyer Anti-lynching) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues/Programs identified in NACWC Biennial Convention Minutes, National Notes (Organ) and President</th>
<th>National Departments or Programs of NACWC</th>
<th>Issues Confronting Black Community/issues identified in selected Black newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1924 Chicago, IL – Convention Location Mary Mcleod Bethune, President until 1928</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Education of Black Children in Tennessee</td>
<td>• Scholarship Fund – Education Program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Chicago Federation of Labor work against convict lease labor</td>
<td>National Organization Divided into Five Sections:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ida B. Wells address on female exercise of the vote</td>
<td>• Northeast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Illiteracy</td>
<td>MA, VT, DE, RI, NY, MD, CT, NJ, ME, PA, DC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• City Federation of Philadelphia works with Andrew Stevens to pass Antilynching Legislation in PA in 1923</td>
<td>• Southeast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VA, GA, NC, SC, AL, MS, FL, TN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Central</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IL, MI, WV, OH, KY, MO, IN, IO, WI, NE, KS, MN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Northwest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ID, CO, UT, SD, ND, WY, OR, NV, MT, WA, AK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Southwest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CA, AZ, NM, TX, OK, AR, LA, HA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926 Oakland, CA – Convention Location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Black employment patterns</td>
<td>continued</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dyer antilynching bill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Child Labor Amendment endorsed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Black College Women’s sororities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928 Washington, DC – Convention Location Sallie Stewart, President until 1933</td>
<td>Additional Departments created</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interracial Relations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interracial Politics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Election of Oscar DePriest in Chicago, IL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### National Association of Colored Women's Club Issues, Programs, and Black Community Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues/Programs identified in NACWC Biennial Convention Minutes, National Notes (Organ) and President</th>
<th>National Departments or Programs of NACWC</th>
<th>Issues Confronting Black Community/issues identified in selected Black newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Segregation in federal agencies  
• Various state homes for delinquent colored girls  
• State political activities  
• Colored women as home owners  
• Social hygiene work  
• Purchase NACWC headquarters  
• Report on Female Wage Earners  
• Recognized Republican leadership of the North for their efforts to help migrant women moving to urban centers  
• Criticized the lack of support from the Democrat led states where the majority of working women live  
• President of the National Negro Business League, Robert Brown, discussed the importance of supporting Black businesses  
• Prison work of the Mississippi State Federation discussed  
• Organizational support for FL urged | • Thrift  
• Industry | • Criticism of the Republican Party on Black interests and Black influence  
• Major conference on women garment workers where Blacks paid half; no representation from NACWC  
• Criticism of Black politicians who can’t speak up in two party system because they are under indictment or condemnation or suspicion |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1930 Hot Springs Arkansas – Convention Location</th>
<th>Departments Created/Reorganized and Constitution revised for increased interracial cooperation</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Protest of segregation of Gold Star War Mothers  
• Daisy Lampkin Address on NAACP  
• NAWC participation in ICW  
• Depression conditions and lynching deplored (continued through 1935) | • Established the National Association of Colored Girls  
• Standardize Negro Home  
• Make the best environment for Black children  
• Train Black girls to be industrious and artistic, gracious and deserving  
• Raise standards of service available among Negro women  
• Make working conditions what these women and girls need |abetic of Republican Party  
Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, NAACP  
International Ladies Garment Workers Union present.  
• Criticism of Patronage System  
• Support for Black Institutions  
• Mob violence against Blacks  
• Police Brutality  
• Criticism of "lilly white" Republican Party  
• Criticisms of political strategies of Black elected leaders  
• Black unemployment  
• Conditions caused by Depression |

| 1933 Chicago Illinois – Convention Location  
Dr. Mary F. Waring, President until 1937 | continued | • New Deal programs criticized  
• Unemployment |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Association of Colored Women’s Club Issues, Programs, and Black Community Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issues/Programs identified in NACWC Biennial Convention Minutes, National Notes (Organ) and President</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Protest of racial discrimination in National Recovery Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Oscar De Priest presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Better homes movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• NACWC legislative program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Endorse Keynesian consumption theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1935 Cleveland, OH – Convention Location</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black interests in communism and socialism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Segregation on trains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discrimination in National Recovery programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Formation of NCNW discouraged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Departments or Programs of NACWC</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>continued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issues Confronting Black Community/issues identified in selected Black newspapers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Race equality for Blacks - desegregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Criticism of Dubois’ economic nationalism and “nation within the nation” theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bias in New Deal public works programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jim Crow in Public Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Condition of Blacks in South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Race Prejudice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Improving the status of Black workers and farmers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Chicago Defender Platform for America: Destroy Race Prejudice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open all trades and trade unions to Blacks and white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation in the President’s cabinet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineers and firemen on all American railroads and government controlled industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation in all departments of the police forces over the US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government schools open to all American citizens in preference to foreigners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conductors on all railroads throughout the US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motormen and conductors on surface, elevated and motorbus lines throughout America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full enfranchisement of all American citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Black Cooperative States/Black Nationalism/Separatism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Hull, Gloria T., Barbara Smith, and Patricia Bell Schott eds. *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies*. New York: The Feminist Press, 1982.


