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PREPARING THE WAY: AFRICAN AMERICAN CLUB WOMEN AND SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY IN TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY CHICAGO

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determination, strength, and brilliance of women contributes to a brighter future for you. And Erin, my love, this work (and all my work) is dedicated to you. I never would have been able to finish this dissertation without your sacrifice and unwavering support. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION

> *As I look about me in this veiled world of mine, despite the noisier and more spectacular advance of my brothers, I instinctively feel and know that it is the five million women of my race who really count. Black women (and women whose grandmothers were black) are today furnishing our teachers; are the main pillars of those social settlements which we call churches; and they have with small doubt raised three-fourths of our church property.*
>
> –W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*[1]

While Du Bois's own track record on gender issues is complicated—he was at once a strong critic of gender oppression and advocate for women's suffrage while also exhibiting chauvinistic and sexist tendencies in his personal and professional lives—when he looked back in 1920 and reflected on the Black church in the decades that preceded, he confessed that it was Black women "who really count," that is, in terms of building and sustaining Black social Christianity.[2] Yet, even while some Black women have been included in scholarly accounts of Black social Christianity in recent years, they remain only secondarily so, supporting actors in what has been cast as an otherwise male-dominated movement for social betterment. The problem this dissertation addresses is one of "twoness," to return to Du Bois and his articulation of the Black experience in America in *The Souls of Black Folk*.[3] On the one hand, the Black

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[1] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1920; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover, 1999), 104.

[2] While I take particular issue with Gary Dorrien's treatment of Black women in the making of the Black social gospel (see below), to his credit he does cite Du Bois's shortcomings on the issue of gender and sexism in his extensive treatment of Du Bois and the Black social gospel, including coming to terms with the quote above. Gary Dorrien, *The New Abolition: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 27.

[3] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover, 1994 [1903]), 2.

women of the social gospel struggled against a *gendered* color line, which was a particularly heavy burden within the parameters of official religious/church work. In this case, they experienced the kind of marginalization that Black women have long been subject to in the Black church—what one womanist scholar has described as a "sacralized schizophrenia," whereby Black women and girls in the church are conditioned with a Duboisian double-consciousness such that they embody this perpetual twoness: "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals," ever conscious that they are the keystones of the church's work—both spiritually and materially—but also always subject to the men in their lives, whether Black or White.[4] Even within the world of Black social Christianity, and despite its resistance of anti-Black racism and claims for the sanctity and worthiness of Black lives, the church perpetuated what Eboni Marshall Turman has described in theological terms as the "social crucifixion of black women."[5]

The peculiarly heavy burden Black women were forced to bear—not only in the realm of religion but also in their everyday lives—was articulated forcefully at the turn of the century by the Black club woman and social gospeler from Washington, D.C., Nannie Helen Burroughs.[6] In her 1900 address to the National Baptist Convention, USA, in Richmond, Virginia, titled "How the Sisters Are Hindered from Helping," Burroughs explained how Black women and their

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[4] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2; Eboni Marshall Turman, "Black Women and the Burden of a New Abolition," paper presented at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) National Meeting, San Antonio, Texas, November 19-22, 2016.

[5] See Eboni Marshall Turman, *Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation: Black Bodies, the Black Church, and the Council of Chalcedon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[6] I am indebted to Eboni Marshall Turman for this invocation of Nannie Helen Burroughs, which she referenced during a panel we were both a part of discussing Gary Dorrien's book, *The New Abolition,* at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) National Meeting, San Antonio, Texas, November 19-22, 2016.

untapped potential for Christian evangelical and social work were oppressed and restricted by what she often described as the "clutches of men."[7] Burroughs's framing discloses a reality for Black women who were shaped by and shapers of social Christianity that is at once a historical problem as well as a historiographical one.

For the most part, historians of social Christianity have dismissed the centrality of Black women in the work of social Christianity (this is also true for White women, though less so).[8] Womanist scholar Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas explains that the historiography of Black women challenges and seeks to rewrite dominant historical accounts, which have been constructed largely by the "perpetually conjoined gazes of white supremacy and male superiority."[9] This resulted in a peculiar burden that Black women were forced to bear. For them, the encounter of the gendered colorline was like a double bondage—a struggle to escape not only slavery's long

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[7] For the "clutches of men" reference, see Nannie Helen Burroughs, "The Colored Woman and Her Relation to the Domestic Problem," in *The United Negro: His Problems and His Progress* (ed. I. Garland Perm and J. W. E. Bowen; Atlanta: D. E. Luther Publishing, 1902), 326ff. In her discussion of the struggle of Black working women, Burroughs states, "Thousands of our women are today in the clutches of men of our own race who are not worth the cost of their existence. They dress well and live on the earnings of servant girls. Negro men can aid us in the solution of the problem by becoming self-supporting rather than live on the earnings of women who often get less than ten dollars per month. Not only does this increase idleness among us but weakens the moral life of women. . . . The solution of the servant girl problem, then, can only be accomplished—first, by making it possible for these girls to overcome their ignorance, dishonesty and carelessness by establishing training classes and other moral agencies in these large cities and maintaining one or more first-class schools of domestic science."

[8] While this is largely the case in terms of the historiography of social Christianity in the United States, which has typically been attended to by historians who are often White and usually male, there have been a few recent appraisals that have sought to recenter the work and thought of Black women, treatments which have emerged mostly from a womanist theological and ethical perspective, and which have significantly shaped my own approach. See, for example, Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006); Eboni Marshall Turman, *Toward a Womanist Ethic of Incarnation: Black Bodies, the Black Church, and the Council of Chalcedon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community* (New York: Orbis, 2001); Martia G. Goodson, *Church Ladies: Untold Stories of Harlem Women in the Powell Years* (Bloomington: AH, 2015); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham**,** *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[9] Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode,* 105-6.

shadow but also to break free from the patriarchal hierarchy that had the effect of shrinking their worlds and realm of influence, including in terms of religion.

I. Black Club Women and the Historiography of Social Christianity

This dissertation seeks to recast the history of social Christianity with Black club women in mind, addressing a lacuna in the historiography that has paid little attention to the religious activism of Black women beyond the official activities of Black churches. The narrative theme that has guided the better part of the historiography of social Christianity was set in the first comprehensive historical study of the social gospel, Charles Howard Hopkins's *The Rise of the Social Gospel Movement in American Protestantism* (1940). Hopkins, regarded by some as the "dean" of social gospel studies, structured his study around the thesis that the social gospel arose among certain Protestants—he focused almost exclusively on White pastors and seminary professors—in response to the plight of the working class and the burgeoning labor movement at the end of the nineteenth century, eventually declining with the onset of World War I.[10] This thematic focus on the plight of the working class was advanced in Paul Carter's *the Decline of and Revival of the Social Gospel* (1956), even while the narrative arc of the movement was reconsidered. Carter suggested that the decline of the social gospel was only temporary, weakened by a rising secularism and misplaced efforts at prohibition only to find renewal in the years leading up to World War II. Thus Carter signaled toward the possibility of a longer social gospel movement, implicitly gesturing toward the midcentury movement for civil rights.[11] Both

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[10] Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel Movement in American Protestantism 1865-1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940).

[11] Paul A. Carter, *The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1956). Carter made this connection more explicit, though only briefly, in the second edition of the text.

of these studies, however, for all their contributions to advancing the study of the social Christianity nonetheless failed to adequately or even remotely account for the roles that race and gender played in shaping the movement.

Historians began to address these oversights in the historiography in the latter decades of the century, reconsidering the role that women (or issues of gender) played in the development of Christian social reform work, even if not always in terms of the intellectual contributions of women in its theological formation. Janet Forsythe Fishburn led the way in exploring how issues of gender—especially the male focus of social gospel initiatives as well as male authorship and leadership—coupled with a commitment to a Victorian idea of the family shaped the movement in her book *The Fatherhood of God and the Victorian Family: The Social Gospel in America* (1981). While pursing otherwise progressive social and political agendas, Fishburn suggests that social gospel leaders resisted more radical or progressive notions of gender in favor of a more conservative—i.e., Victorian—gender ideology, for the most part at least. Fishburn's study is also notable for the ways that it interrogates how the assumptions and perspective of its White male leaders shaped the movement in ways that stymied efforts for racial equality.[12] Ralph Luker's study of the social gospel as a movement for American racial reform, in *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (1991), was the most important in reframing the history of the movement around issues of race. In documenting attempts to resist racial injustice and reform race relations through religious (i.e., social gospel) means, Luker expanded the cast of social gospel figures by paying some attention to the contributions of a number of African American social gospelers, including two of the most notable Black club

[12] Janet Forsythe Fishburn, *The Fatherhood of God and the Victorian Family: The Social Gospel in America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981).

women—Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Mary Church Terrell—and their flagship organization—the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACW). Luker's treatment of the Black club women in relation to the social gospel, while the most in depth of any published account to date, places their contributions only on the periphery of the movement's history.[13]

The most profound corrective to the historiography's "gender problem" appeared in a volume of collected essays edited by Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Giffords, titled *Gender and the Social Gospel* (2003).[14] The editors of the volume suggested that the problem is not necessarily that historians have intentionally or explicitly excluded women or issues of gender in their studies of the movement, but rather that their "remarkably non-gender-specific" definitions of the movement have resulted in an almost exclusively male focus in the historical narratives, establishing a pattern of omitting women and the causes for which they worked as social gospel-minded Christians.[15] Taken together, the essays in the collection provide a fairly comprehensive and in-depth examination of the role of gender in the movement and the contributions of women associated with it. Of the thirteen essays in the volume, two consider the contributions of African American women—Ingrid Overacker, "True to Our God: African American Women as Christian Activists in Rochester, New York" (Chapter 12), and Michael

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[13] Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1991). For Luker's treatment of the NACW, see pp. 111, 137; for Ida B. Wells-Barnett, see pp. 91-7, 102-12, 193-5; for Mary Church Terrell, see 93, 179, 212. That these Black club women do not figure into Luker's construction of social gospel theology in terms of issues of race, but rather only in terms of their racial politics and activism, is evidenced by their complete omission from his chapter—one of the most important of the book—on the subject, "Theologies of Race Relations" (pp. 268-311). Ronald C. White's book, *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel 1877-1925* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), is important in this regard alongside Luker's study.

[14] Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Giffords, *Gender and the Social Gospel* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 2.

[15] Deichmann Edwards and De Swarte Giffords, *Gender and the Social Gospel*, 3-4.

Dwayne Blackwell, "In the Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Social Gospel of Faye Wattleton and Marian Wright Edelman" (Chapter 13). Overacker's essay explores the activism of Black Christian women against White racism in the urban North, reimagining the traditional maternal role of Black women as a force to deal with and overcome the effects of racism. Overacker also suggests that these women were the "backbone" of their churches, the institutions which were most responsible for equipping them for their social gospel activism.[16] Blackwell's essay explores the influence of social gospel thought in the lives and activism of two Black women well beyond the 1920s, tracking the legacy of social gospel thought through Martin Luther King Jr. and into the latter decades of the twentieth century.[17] *Gender and the Social Gospel* offered an important corrective to the historiography insofar as it demonstrated the central role gender issues played in the movement as well as highlighting the importance of women's contributions, helping to "reverse the longstanding trend of omitting women and gender from mainstream social gospel historiography." However, while including two chapters at the end of the book that signal a relationship between African American women and the social gospel (even if they offered very little in the way of critical analysis of the structural frameworks that shaped Black women's social gospel activism), the collection as a whole focuses on the organization and activism of White women in the social gospel, thus marginalizing Black women in the narrative of the movement, even if unintentionally.

The most in-depth critical treatment of Black women's relationship to the social gospel remains Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the*

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[16] Ingrid Overacker, "True to Our God: African America Women as Christian Activists in Rochester, New York," in *Gender and the Social Gospel*, 202-16.

[17] Michael Dwayne Blackwell, "In the Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Social Gospel of Faye Wattleton and Marian Wright Edelman," in *Gender and the Social Gospel*, 217-29.

Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920 (1992).[18] Higginbotham's study explored how the Women's Convention of the National Baptist Convention became a sphere in which Black church women exercised religious leadership within the Black church by helping to turn the National Baptist Convention's attention to social issues affecting Africans American, specifically in terms of urbanization and industrialization. In fact, Higginbotham demonstrated that most of the National Baptist Convention's efforts at social reform during the period of the social gospel's heyday were initiated, fundraised, and carried out by the women's "convention movement." In Higginbotham's narrative telling, Black social gospel women, in their collective efforts and organization, were principle actors in "the struggle for the rights of blacks and the rights of women."[19] It is precisely in the relationship between these struggles, as both a racialized and gendered minorities, where the story of the women of Black social Christianity deserves further exploration.

The marginalization of Black women in the historiography of social Christianity is evident even in recent studies that might otherwise be regarded as being at the forefront of gender inclusion simply by expanding the cast of historical figures to include Black women. This is the case with Gary Dorrien's recent magisterial study of the Black social gospel, *The New Abolition: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel* (2015), notably the most comprehensive

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[18] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham**,** *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). Higginbotham's study is important for my analysis in this dissertation for a number of reasons, as I will highlight later on, but the point that needs to be stressed here is that hers is the first book-length study to critically analyze the relationship of Black Christian women to the social gospel, both in their position as "church women" but also as a collective force apart from their churches.

[19] Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 174-80.

intellectual history of the movement.[20] Dorrien's study is a significant contribution in the historiography for several reasons, especially for the number of thinkers, activists, institutions, and regions he brings into a single narrative. Central to his account is the taxonomy he develops in which he identifies four primary streams of the Black social gospel (as well as a "tiny Socialist flank" that probably deserves its own grouping). The first group, the "Bookerites," at one point the most powerful group, included those compelled by Booker T. Washington's pragmatic and concessionary approach to racial uplift, "bargaining with white elites for a season of peace and economic opportunity for blacks." The "Turnerites," following the lead of Henry McNeal Turner, took the path of nationalist separation and/or African emigration, although Dorrien is clear to point out that all four groups included some thinkers with nationalist tendencies. The third group, the Niagarites, were strongly opposed to the Bookerites and, in line with Du Bois, advocated for a more radical "new abolitionist politics of racial and social justice." Notably, Ida B. Wells-Barnett is a featured member in this group, the woman to whom Dorrien devotes the most attention in his study. The fourth group, the civil rights activists, was sympathetic to the cause of the Niargarites, but they were also more diplomatic in relation to the Bookerites. They "conceived the social gospel as a both/and enterprise, contending that Du Bois-style militancy and Washington-style pragmatism were both indispensable to the civil rights movement that was needed."[21]

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[20] Gary Dorrien, *The New Abolition: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

[21] Dorrien, *The New Abolition*, 4-8. Among the ten or so leaders he highlights in the fourth group is Nannie Helen Burroughs, though she receives significantly less coverage than Wells-Barnett in the rest of the book.

Dorrien's taxonomy is significant for the project of redefining the social gospel, and it provides a useful starting point for historians to further investigate the diversity and fullness of the Black social gospel—it is the most important work to date, to be clear—but even as it draws the circle wider to include notable Black women as figures in the movement and signals to their significance (Wells-Barnett and Burroughs) it nonetheless continues a pattern of categorically marginalizing Black women and their contributions. Again, this is not to suggest that Dorrien omits women or overlooks them, because he is in fact breaking ground in the historiography by including the women he does in the larger narrative. Rather, as Turman has offered in critique of Dorrien, "While the presence and contributions of black women like Jarena Lee, Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and even Nannie Helen Burroughs are specified and highlighted to an extent, as a whole, their stories and influence advance only as secondary and perhaps tertiary to the primary work of multitudes of black men in church and society."[22]

For Dorrien, the continued marginalization of women in the Black social gospel results from a continued assumption, like historians of the movement before him, that Black churches were the "anchors of the black social gospel." Although he recognized the limited resources of most Black churches to act as effective "social welfare agencies," he still claimed: "[N]early every U.S. American city with a sizable black population had a few large, social conscious congregations that developed programs offering child care, health care, garbage removal, and employment counseling. These congregations were anchors of the black social gospel."[23] Dorrien is not wrong to emphasize the role of institutional churches in the Black social gospel, in

[22] Turman, "Black Women and the Burden of a New Abolition."

[23] Dorrien, *The New Abolition*, 20.

Chicago and elsewhere, a focus that has significantly shaped our understanding of social gospel Christianity, and rightly so. However, what one might describe as a myopic focus on the institutional church (or a direct connection to it) without accounting for the myriad ways that women's voices and activity have been historically marginalized in ecclesial structures driven primarily by male leadership and concerns, at least at the official level, will fail to see the numerous ways that Black Christian women have worked out their religious convictions in public spheres not otherwise religious or officially connected to Black churches. Historians of the movement, therefore, would do well to consider how Emilie M. Townes talks about "black women's spirituality as social witness," accounting for the many and various ways that Black church women participate in a tradition of active theological reflection in their social engagement with institutions beyond the church.[24] Townes explains,

> African American women [at the end of the nineteenth century] began with an intense personal experience of the divine in their lives and took that call to salvation into the public realm to reform a corrupt moral order. Their spirituality, which at first viewing resembles a self-centered piety with little relation to the larger context, is an excellent example of the linking of personal and social transformation to effect salvation and thereby bring in the new heaven and new earth. These women sought perfection and advocated social reform in the framework of a spirituality that valued life and took seriously the responsibility to help create and maintain a trust in moral social order. ... [They] lived their spirituality.[25]

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[24] Historian of the social gospel movement, Heath Carter, makes a compelling argument about social gospel work and its often invisible connection to its churches: "social gospels often fared best outside the walls of the institutional churches." Carter, "Social Gospels Thrived Outside of the Church," *Church History* 84.1 (2015): 199.

[25] Emilie M. Townes, *In a Blaze of Glory: Womanist Spirituality as Social Witness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 36.

This "lived spirituality" in the public sphere is on display especially in the context of Black women's club work, as this dissertation will show was the case in Chicago.[26]

The double burden of racialized and gendered prejudice experienced by Black women severely limited their ability to work within the traditional parameters of Black churches, due to misogynistic theologies and patriarchal hierarchy. And yet, as this dissertation will demonstrate, this barrier to engaging in the Christian social work to which many Black women felt called would be overcome as women of the Black social gospel created new institutions and realms of influence in which they would work out and live into the theology of the Black social Christianity, even while the domains in which they carried out these projects were not officially or clearly "religious." On account of this, that is, the otherwise secular nature of the context and manner in which they carried out their social gospel work, but also because of the mostly White and largely male perspectives of the majority of historians and scholars who have engaged the intellectual and social histories of American social Christianity, the efforts and even existence of these women has eluded much of the historiography. This dissertation proceeds on the premise, therefore, that the lives and contributions of the Black women of social Christianity matter and merit more attention than they have been given.

II. Methodological and Theoretical Considerations

One of the issues at the heart of this study is trying figure out how scholars should investigate the religious lives and contributions of African American women, especially in an era

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[26] Cheryl Townsend Gillkes makes this point compelling, demonstrating how the spiritual lives of Black women were always intertwined with their social lives, activism, and service such that it formed "an indispensable central framework on which every expression of black religion survives." Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community* (New York: Orbis, 2001), 10-11.

when their religious leadership and activism within their churches were most often limited because of patriarchal hierarchies and the privileging of male voices in matters of the sacred. However, focusing on African American women's clubs offers the opportunity to think about religion on the margins of the "Black church," and to recognize that Black Christian activism often occurred beyond the church's domain within what I refer to as "extraecclesial" institutions, that is, institutions that were not directly connected to a church or denomination (i.e., parachurch organizations) but existed independently and yet were structured by religious ideas and sensibilities and were sites for religious social activism. I take Judith Weisenfeld's study of New York City's YWCAs as particularly instructive here, thinking about women's religious lives and contributions on what she calls the "perimeter of the black church," and how such a perspective shifts our understanding of the activity and organization of Black Christian life and activism. As Weisenfeld argues, "In studies that pose 'the black church' and its male leadership as the exclusive arena for understanding black religiosity, those of us interested in women's lives are too often forced to remain satisfied with examining the background or the supporting roles played by black women."[27] Thus, following other scholars who study women's history, I place women at the center rather than the periphery of my investigation of the Black social Christianity in Chicago, which encourages us to look beyond the traditional spheres of African American sacred activity that have mostly centered on "the black church." This dissertation suggests in fact that we should not think about such spaces as "secular" but as "extraecclesial," nondenominational institutional spheres in which Black women (in this case) carried out their visions for Christian mission and leadership that they could not have practiced as women in most

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[27] Judith Weisenfeld, *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York's YWCA, 1905-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 4.

of their churches. Thus in this dissertation I try to understand how Black Christian women in Chicago navigated the different worlds in which they lived and worked, between the secular and the sacred, churches and clubs, home and social. Although the lens of the following narrative will shift between institutions, individuals, and their ideas, as well as from church to club, the argument that provides a through line for this narrative is that these women utilized the language and activist spirit of evangelical Christianity coupled with the ideological framework of the social gospel as guides in both the sacred and secular spheres of their lives for pursuing projects of social and racial reform. In other words, the language of evangelical Christianity and the theology of the Black social gospel—as it was articulated in their churches and discerned in their own study of the Christian scriptures—provided the primary framework and moral motivation for the projects of social, racial, and gender reform they pursued through their Black women's clubs.

One of the primary reasons that historians have failed to incorporate Black women's club work into histories of American social Christianity during the era between Reconstruction and the Great Migration is because the institutional archives of these clubs, where they exist, do not lend themselves to discussion about the religious connections and motivations that Black women brought to their club work, at least not in obvious terms. The religious valence of their work is more clearly seen in their individual writings, whether for public audiences (e.g., newspaper articles, speeches) or in their personal papers. While there are multiple reasons for the non-religious nature of their institutional papers and profiles, chief among them is that Black clubs modeled their institutional presentation on White women's clubs and the social settlements they founded and ran. As the final chapter of the dissertation will discuss, White clubs and settlements

made significant efforts to present their social work as "secular," emphasizing reliance on social scientific principles in contrast to the religious "charity" work done by churches and missions. While Black club women often mirrored the presentation of White women's clubs in their institutional organization, many (though not all) of their personal writings and testimonies about club life reveal an understanding that their work and organization was indeed very much grounded in a Christian theological framework (see chapters three and four) and driven by their sense of Christian mission. Thus this dissertation prioritizes the personal writings of club women in trying to understand the motivations, concerns, and hopes (religious or otherwise) they brought to their reform activism and service. In particular, much of the dissertation's second section focuses on one woman, Fannie Barrier Williams, who wrote and spoke quite a lot about the religious dimensions of Black women's club work, especially when one considers the dearth of personal writings of Chicago club women that are preserved in the archive. In doing this, I focus on an individual and their ideas in trying to tell a fuller, more nuanced story of the institutions of which they were a part, recognizing also that there are limits to this perspective. In this methodological decision, I take Catherine Brekus's history of the rise of evangelical Christianity in early America, which she tells through the life and writings of the laywoman Sarah Osborn, as instructive, especially as it helps to correct male-centric historical narratives of religious movements.[28]

Black Christian women around the turn of the century made the decision to carry out their Christian activism and apply their Black social gospel theological ideas within the context of women's clubs. In other words, and an important qualification for the main argument of this

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[28] Catherine A. Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

dissertation, Black women's club work was not *necessarily* religious. Black Christian women exercised agency in choosing their clubs as sites to perform religious leadership and participate in efforts for reform that they understood within the frameworks of their faith and theological visions. Conversely, not all Black women considered their club work as a form of Christian activism, even those who were affiliated with Black churches. One important example in this regard is Ida B. Wells-Barnett, arguably Chicago's most famous Black woman in the decades surrounding the turn of the century and an involved club woman and leader. Wells-Barnett, who was a member of several churches associated with Black social gospel initiatives, did not engage her political or club work with the kind of explicitly Christian discourse or understanding as many of her fellow club women.[29] Outside of some statements, like her late-in-life lesson to her Sunday school students that "We worship God by serving man," Wells-Barnett mostly avoided using religion as a framework for her activism, commentary, and protest, especially when compared to some of her fellow club leaders in Chicago (e.g., Fannie Barrier Williams, Elizabeth Lindsay Davis).[30] The most consistent religious engagement that Wells-Barnett exhibited throughout her public career was as a critic of the shortcomings and harm caused by Black male clergy in Chicago (and elsewhere), most often for seeking self-advancement at the expense of their parishioners and fellow Black citizens. Gary Dorrien, who includes Wells-Barnett as one of

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[29] Wells-Barnett attended both churches Reverdy Ransom pastored in Chicago—Bethel AME and then Institutional AME Church and Social Settlement—and after his departure she attended and taught Sunday school at Grace Presbyterian Church and then Metropolitan Community Church when W.D. Cook founded it in 1920. It was not until she joined Cook's church, in the twilight of her career, that she began to demonstratively engage in Christian social activism and reform activities. See Alfreda M. Duster, ed., *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (2d edition; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020 [1970]), x, xxv, xxx.

[30] Quoted in Patricia A. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 171.

the few women in the "apostolate" of the Black social gospel in his book on the topic, characterizes her religious contribution primarily in terms of this critique of male clergy, some of whom were proponents of the Black social gospel, suggesting that her "militant politics and loner-style" put her at odds with many Black male leaders.[31] Beyond the ways Dorrien's treatment of Wells-Barnett lends toward a characterization of her contribution to Black social gospel primarily in terms of being an "angry Black woman," it also fails to consider her contribution (if there is one) apart from her connection to the men on whom Dorrien primarily focuses in his study. This is not to say that Wells-Barnett does not have a place in the story of Black social Christianity, but when one considers her activist and protest work beyond her critique of the churches and its male leaders, it becomes evident that she distances herself from religious discourse and frameworks in her racial politics, organization, and activism. In other words, Wells-Barnett resists the essentialist conflation of Black political activism, discourse, and progress with Black religiosity, challenging assumptions that Black political activity and progress were innately religious or had to be achieved through the "Black church."[32] Thus, although Wells-Barnett appears in several chapters throughout the dissertation—because she was one of the leading Black club women and commentators in this era—she is not a central figure in this story of Black club women's Christian activism precisely because she deliberately chose not

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[31] Gary Dorrien, *The New Abolition: W.E.B. DuBois and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 119.

[32] See Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9-11.

to engage club work (or racial politics) in terms of *Christian* activism.[33] However, as we will see, many Black Christian women did choose to live out their sense of calling to Christian activism in and through their club work, especially as they encountered barriers to doing so within their churches.

This is also a local study of a city—Chicago—a major urban center at the turn of the century that was also one of the primary destinations for southern Black migration in the first decades of the new century. Black Chicago was transformed during the migration era, and Black social Christianity was an important part of that story. The dissertation builds on recent scholarship that focuses on the tradition of the "Black social gospel," which highlights a cadre of Black Christians and institutions overlooked in previous histories. However, even as these histories make an important contribution to our understanding of the movement and its theology by expanding the "apostolate" of the social gospel to include prominent Black theologians and activists, their focus on the thought of individual Black social gospelers divorced from a close examination of the contexts in which they lived, worshipped, and worked yields only a partial view of Black social Christianity. So what do other histories of the Black social gospel miss that one delimited to a particular context might catch? I argue that they are prone to miss the often invisible or otherwise unacknowledged work of Black women. Even when historians have expanded the cast of social gospel to include Black women in the movement, they are only ever secondarily so, categorically marginalized in narratives driven by male interests, activities, and

[33] One of the most difficult decisions I made in the writing of the dissertation was to not include Wells-Barnett as a central figure in the Christian activism of Chicago's club woman, with whose papers and writings I spent considerable time during the research portion of the project. In fact, early on in the project I had envisioned dedicating an entire chapter to Wells-Barnett. Admittedly, there is another project here, examining the distinctions between Wells-Barnett's conscious secularism and the religious decisions of other club women. It is one perhaps that I hope to take up as I continue to build on this research.

concerns. My dissertation tries to offer a corrective to this problem in the historiography, by focusing on local history in an effort to better understand the contributions of Black women to the social gospel movement in a particular cultural context like Chicago.

One significant historiographical intervention this dissertation makes in terms of the study of Black social Christianity, specifically as it developed in Chicago, is in demonstrating how projects of the Black social gospel were in fact underway and well-developed in the city in the decades prior to the Great Migration. One of the most important studies of Black Christianity that includes Chicago in this era is Milton C. Sernett's book, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration*, which provides one of the most helpful and robust accounts of the religious motivations and realities of the Great Migration for shaping African American Christianity. In his chapter surveying religion in pre-migration-era Chicago, Sernett concludes that there was not a significant tradition of Black social Christianity until the years of the Great Migration, even while he highlights a couple exceptions (most notably Reverdy Ransom, who is also featured in chapter one of this dissertation).[34]

The argument for the Great Migration as the starting point of Black social Christianity's widespread significance in Chicago is developed even further in Wallace D. Best's study, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago*. Best's study of Black religion's transformation as a result of the Great Migration is important and informs much of the narrative account for chapter two, in discussing Black social Christianity in the years following 1915. However, this dissertation will show that Best (along with Sernett) overemphasizes the significance of the Great Migration for the development of Black social

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[34] Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 116-21.

Christian thought and practice in Chicago. Best argues that a significant piece of the "new theological orientation" that developed in Chicago during the Great Migration—the "new sacred order" of the city—was the embrace of a "new pragmatism" that was shaped to some extent by the Social Gospel.[35] However, the study that follows will show that a "theological orientation" attuned to the social and material circumstances of Black Chicagoans was already very much a part of the religious culture of Chicago's Black churches, albeit some more than others. The corrective this dissertation offers, therefore, is that the Great Migration was not so much the starting point for projects shaped by Black social Christianity but rather a moment of transition, as the center of Black social gospel thought and practice shifted—both from one denominational home to another, as well as from the Black churches to "extraecclesial" institutions like Black women's clubs. One scholar who recognized the significant early influence of social Christian thought upon African American church life is historian of Black Chicago, Christopher Robert Reed. Reed, whose cultural histories of Black Chicago do not focus on religion but take African American religion seriously nonetheless, notes strong connections between the "social gospel" and the activities of Black churches in Chicago as early as the 1880s. As will be seen in the chapters that follow, I agree with Reed and think it is possible—especially if one considers extraecclesial sites like Black women's clubs in addition to traditional sacred spheres—to assign an earlier date to Black social Christianity in Chicago.[36]

In this study of the religious dimensions of Black social and racial reform in Chicago, I am choosing to privilege Protestant Social Christianity in the city, rather than other established

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[35] Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3-4.

[36] See Christopher Robert Reed, *Black Chicago's First Century: Volume 1, 1833-1900* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 315-27.

Black religious traditions or the new religious movements that proliferated in Chicago in the first decades of the twentieth century. The argument for the contribution of Black club women to social Christianity in what follows builds on two important recent contributions in the historiography of American Protestant Social Christianity. First, I take Gary Dorrien's argument for the need to "recover" the Black social gospel to be compelling and instructive, recognizing that it has been severely overlooked in the historiography. Dorrien argues, "The black social gospel is wrongly and strangely overlooked. One might expect there to be dozens of books on a tradition of thought and activism that began in the 1870s, that included the mentors and allies of Martin Luther King Jr., plus King himself, and that remains relevant today. Instead there are none." While there have been a few studies in recent years which treat the Black social gospel, Dorrien's is the first book-length study that takes the Black social gospel as its subject. I take Dorrien to be right on this point, and what follows is largely an attempt to help address this lacuna in the historiography.[37] In terms of defining the Black social gospel, I follow Dorrien: "The full-fledged black social gospel combined an emphasis on black dignity and personhood with protest activism for racial justice, a comprehensive social justice agenda, an insistence that authentic Christian faith is incompatible with racial prejudice, an emphasis on the social ethical teaching of Jesus, and an acceptance of modern scholarship and social consciousness."[38] The second significant historiographical intervention this dissertation follows is Heath W. Carter's recent argument for the making of a working-class social gospel in Chicago, which challenges

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[37] See Gary Dorrien, *The New Abolition: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 1. Ralph Luker's book, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), comes perhaps closest to what Dorrien is getting after in terms of dealing with the Black social gospel, but Luker is really more focused on thinking about race as an issue with which the social gospel dealt.

[38] Dorrien, *The New Abolition*, 3.

standard narratives of social Christianity that privilege intellectuals and social elites. I follow Carter in thinking about how a religious tradition like the Black social gospel emerges in many ways as a grassroots movement constructed significantly by everyday people.[39]

Before moving on to the argument of the dissertation, it will be helpful to make two more brief methodological comments: the first about my approach to the study of race and religion and a second comment about studying religion in "secular" institutions. First, in this dissertation I treat race as a social construct, and an incredibly malleable and contested one at that, which challenges thought about race that assigns it a fixed and ontological status. To signify the constructed nature of race, my treatment of race builds on Michael Omi and Howard Winant's "racial formation theory"—"the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed"—which they made famous over three decades ago.[40] The framework of "racial formation" is particularly useful for interrogating sociohistorical processes that create and challenge racial identities and boundaries. Importantly, this approach recognizes the often unexamined ways that race is embedded in institutions and is a powerful (even if not always dominant) force driving categorization in American culture. Omi and Winant describe the work undertaken to construct racial identities with their concept of "racial projects," which they explain are the "building blocks" of the racial formation process. Racial projects are at once interpretations, representations, and explanations of racial meanings and identities, and they function to organize and distribute economic, political, and cultural resources along the very racial lines they help construct. They connect racial ideology with the way that social structures

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[39] See Heath W. Carter, *Union Made: Working People and the Rise of Social Christianity in Chicago* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 4-6.

[40] Howard Omi and Michael Winant, *Racial Formation in the Unites States, from the 1960s to 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

come to be organized. Racial formation plays out as various racial projects compete with one another for the dominant racial view in society. In the realm of religion, racial formation unfolds in contests for orthodoxy in which distinct "religio-racial projects" (i.e., racialized theologies) are fashioned in their encounter of competing religio-racial projects.[41] Importantly, these distinct religio-racial projects are developed in instances of momentary and sustained contact and exchange with one another. Thus, histories that focus solely on a single religio-racial project, while beneficial in certain regards, fail to capture not only the larger and more complex process by which religio-racial identities are created but, more importantly, they miss the fullness of what race *is doing* to serve the interests of these groups, whether those are religious, political, economic, cultural, or otherwise. The crucial point here is that the constructive work of these various projects of identity formation and boundary drawing along religio-racial lines occurs in spaces of contact and exchange between them.

I also depart from standard grammatical practice in choosing to capitalize the words "Black" and "White" in writing about racial identities, and I employ them always only adjectivally. My hope here is to highlight the constructed nature of these categories, even at the risk of being cumbersome, and to resist the slippage of "black" or "white" (or "Asian" or "African" for that matter) into physical description. And by capitalizing "White," it is my aim to mark the category that so often is unmarked and assumed as the norm, and to signify, as Peggy

[41] I am indebted to Judith Weisenfeld for her concept of "religio-racial identity,"which is helpful to highlight how racialized groups resignified their racial identities and the boundaries imposed by race by insisting on distinctive religious projects. See *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 5-8.

Pascoe has suggested, that "in American history, to be 'White' is often an aspiration as well as an entitlement."[42]

The second comment on methodology has to do with my approach to studying religion in otherwise secular spaces. One of the emphases of this dissertation is to show that we can gain a better understanding of the fullness of social Christianity (or the Black social gospel) during this era if we shift our attention from the "centers" of sacred activity (e.g., the churches or parachurch organizations) to the peripheries, or those places that do not necessarily strike us as religious (in this case Black women's clubs). On this point I am drawn to Jonathan Z. Smith's critique of Mircea Eliade's reliance on the idea of "sacred space," which assumed stable "centers" of religious activity. Instead, Smith suggested that there was much we can learn from the "peripheries" of religion, especially if one considers how the importance of a sacred "center" or "periphery" is also dependent on one's relation to power.[43] I think scholars are hesitant to turn their gaze to the peripheries of the sacred precisely because it becomes difficult to trace a continuous through line of religiosity in these "extraecclesial" or seemingly secular contexts. What are to we to make of spaces where "religion" surfaces and then recedes, where individuals or a group might draw on religious ideas and motivations and then deliberately distance themselves from the sacred institutions where those ideas and motivations were created and tend to reside? For these reasons, I apply a lived religionist approach in trying to study the Christian activism of African American women within the contexts of their Black women's club

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[42] Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 14.

[43] Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Wobbling Pivot," *The Journal of Religion* 52 (1972): 134–49. I am indebted to Chip Callahan for this insight. See Richard J. Callahan, Jr., "Wobbly Religion: Tactical Formations of Religious Idioms and Space in the Industrial Capitalist City," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (2022): n.p.

movement. By paying attention to the different spheres in which religious actors move—sacred, secular, and religiously neutral ones—a lived religion approach emphasizes the activities and interpretations of individuals rather than trying to interpret them through pre-defined understandings of religion.[44] As Robert Orsi has explained, “The interpretive challenge of the study of lived religion is to develop the practice of disciplined attention to people’s signs and practices as they describe, understand, and use them, in the circumstances of their experiences, and to the structures and conditions within which these signs and practices emerge.”[45] In this approach, particular attention is given to the interweaving of religion into the ordinary rhythms and activities of people’s everyday lives. This interpretive recasting of a lived religion analysis in this dissertation attempts to complicate the scholarly prioritization of Black engagement with institutional religious life and activism by shifting the focus from women’s church activity to their club lives. In doing so, I emphasize the lived religionist understanding that, as Nancy Ammerman explains, “to privilege the everyday entails prioritizing the experiences of people

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[44] Kim Knibbe and Helena Kupari, “Theorizing Lived Religion: Introduction,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 35.2 (July 2020): 159.

[45] Robert A. Orsi, “Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live in? Special Presidential Plenary Address, Salt Lake City, November 2, 2002,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42 (2003): 172.

who are not religious experts or specialists as well as social locations and situations that are not institutionally religious."[46]

III. The Argument

This dissertation focuses on Chicago in the decades surrounding the turn of the century (1890-1919), and it tells the story of how Black Protestant social Christianity protested and actively resisted what I term the "spiritual burden of whiteness"—that is, the conflation of whiteness with godliness that has time and again been recreated in American history—that they observed at work in the city and among their White Christian neighbors. The work of fighting white supremacist logic and prejudice and advocating for civil rights became the central task of Black social gospel activism by the first decades of the century. In this movement African American women, working both within the walls of the church but also especially beyond them in the context of the Black women's club movement, developed a robust and distinct "tradition within a tradition." Black club women refashioned social gospel theology in response to the experiences, concerns, and struggles unique to African American women. It was a critique of the

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[46] Nancy T. Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4-5. Although I find lived religion to be the most helpful methodological framework for this kind of study, my analysis also learns from Leonard Norman Primiano's notion of "vernacular religion," which is neither exclusively official nor popular but is rather "religion as it is lived," religion "as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and practice it." See Leonard Norman Primiano, "Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife," *Western Folklore* 54.1 (1995): 44. Instead of focusing exclusively on the "popular religion" of the many or the "elite religion" of the intelligentsia, I consider religion simply in the manner that people invoke it in their day-to-day lives, speaking religiously as they piece life together in one way or another. As Catherine Albanese suggests, "In the religious vernacular, everybody creates; everybody picks and chooses from what is available to constitute changing religious forms." Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2007), 8-9. The approach I take in studying "vernacular religion," is closely aligned with the methodological school of "lived religion" (also "popular religion"). For "popular religion," and its inherent problems, see Catherine L. Albanese, "Religion and American Popular Culture: An Introductory Essay," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64.4 (1996): 733-42. For lived religion, see especially David D. Hall, *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997), vii-xiii; and Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950* (Yale U. Press, 1985).

theology of the Black social gospel that had up to that point been primarily articulated—formally at least—by Black male clergy. However, through their speeches, writings, social activism, rescue work, and institution building, these African American club women articulated and lived out a distinct theological vision of Black social Christianity.

I argue that Black club women drew their theological motivations for social and racial reform activism from their churches in Chicago, even while they reformulated those theological ideas to address issues that concerned them as Black women and mothers. Therefore, the first of two sections of the dissertation closely analyzes the development of Black social gospel thought and activism in Chicago by focusing on the places where it was first formulated and shared, that is, in Chicago's Black churches—especially Quinn Chapel A.M.E., Bethel A.M.E., Institutional Church and Social Settlement (A.M.E.), and Olivet Baptist—first surveying the long history of Black Chicago before then turning to focus on the decades between 1890 and 1919. The first chapter, "Saving the Black Belt: Early Social Christianity and Chicago's African American Churches," tells the early history of Black social Christianity's development within Chicago's African American churches in the decades surrounding the turn of the century. In the decades between the Columbian Exposition (1893) and the start of the Great Migration (1915), Black social Christianity in Chicago came into its own as a Christian tradition and was given full form as both a theological system and an embodied lived religious practice. The chapter focuses on two experiments of social Christianity undertaken by the AME Church, Reverdy Ransom's Institutional Church and Social Settlement and Richard R. Wright Jr.'s Trinity Mission, and their creation of a distinct racialized theology of the Black social gospel—a theology of brotherhood. The second chapter, "'Welcoming the Stranger: The Great Migration and the Test of Black Social

Christianity," examines how the Great Migration transformed Black social Christianity in Chicago. Black social gospel churches expanded their ministries and services in response to the waves of migrants moving to Black Chicago. However, this expansion of Black social Christianity was not without its growing pains. The chapter discusses also how the AME Church's social program struggled for a variety of reasons, while at the same time some Baptist churches in the city, notably Olivet Baptist, flourished as centers of social gospel ministry.

The second section of the dissertation turns its attention to the Christian racial and social reform activism of Black club women. Taken together, the three chapters in this section show how the organization, activism, and social reform work of Chicago's African American club women at the turn of the century was at once an extension of the ministry of Chicago's Black social gospel churches, as well as a critique and reformulation of that theology. Although not official parachurch organizations, Chicago's Black women's clubs provided realms for leadership and creativity in social work and racial reform efforts motivated by the religious convictions of Black Christian women. Coming from church contexts which afforded only limited possibilities for women to create and lead social reform initiatives, Black Christian women sought out alternative sites and spheres of influence to "apply their faith" in the context of Black Chicago. Upper- and middle-class Black women did this primarily through participation in the burgeoning Black women's club movement, and especially through various club projects that focused on caring for the most vulnerable in their midst. The three chapters in this section document how women involved in the reform and activist work of Chicago's African American women's clubs often acted like clergy (albeit not officially ordained) of the Black social gospel: preaching the good news of social salvation, protesting racialized and gendered prejudice and discrimination,

and caring for the "least of these" (Matthew 25:40). In their work, they formulated what I describe as a "theology of collective kinship," a distinct vision of the Black social gospel which combined the African American tradition of "other mothering" with social gospel ideals in their efforts to care for the most vulnerable Black Chicagoans and to uplift the race. They also developed a distinct two-pronged strategy for racial advancement that combined their care for the "least of these" with an emphasis on interracial cooperation.

Chapter three, "Homes for the 'Least of These': The Christian Social Activism of African American Women's Clubs," focuses on one particular line of social reform work in which Chicago's Black women's club engaged—the founding of homes for African American children, women, and the elderly. Drawing on the African American women's tradition of "other mothering," in combination with various gender ideologies at the turn of the century, these club women developed a theological vision that centered on caring for the "least of these," and they forged a strategy for racial uplift that leveraged their club members' mostly middle- and upper-class status to both reshape White perceptions of Black Chicago and provide significant-yet-attainable means of social uplift for their poorer Black neighbors.

Chapter four, "Collective Kinship: Fannie Barrier Williams and a Theology for Club Activism," spotlights the writings, activism, and thought of one prominent club leader, Fannie Barrier Williams, in an effort to better understand the ways in which social gospel thought and the social and racial reform work of the Black women's clubs interacted. Barrier Williams was a driving force in shaping Chicago's Black women's club life and activism in the decades surrounding the turn of the century, helping to develop and articulate the theological vision that

motivated their work and activism—a theology of collective kinship—and modeled a strategy for racial uplift that centered on Black women's domestic role.

The final chapter, "'Lifting as We Climb': Neighbor Love and Interracial Cooperation in Black Settlement Work," focuses on club women's work with Black settlements, and especially with the Frederick Douglass Center, which was an interracial settlement founded by three club women—Fannie Barrier Williams and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, along with Celia Parker Woolley, a White club woman. The chapter details how Black club women forged a two-pronged approach to racial advancement that combined interracial cooperation among middle- and upper-class Black and White women with an educative uplift program for poorer Black women. This multilayered strategy, which relied heavily on respectability politics and class division, was complementary rather than contradictory and corresponded with the theological ideas that drove their activism for racial reform in their club work: care for "the least of these" (uplift) and "neighbor love" (interracial cooperation). This tension—casting a vision of racial solidarity and uplift while pursuing reform strategies that necessitated strong class differentiation—is embodied in the two-tiered motto of the national Black women's club movement (the NACW), "Lifting as We Climb."

CHAPTER 1

Saving the Black Belt: Early Black Social Christianity and Chicago's African American Churches

> *Let us stand up for Chicago. Let us show the people of the city that we are interested in making it good morally, in cleaning it.*[1]

On a Sunday morning in May 1903, Reverdy C. Ransom preached these words from the pulpit of Institutional Church and Social Settlement (ICSS), an AME church plant on Chicago's South Side. While this particular charge was situated between scriptural citations, its provenance was not biblical, nor did Ransom draw it from a commentary or a theological book on the shelves in his office. In fact, he had not stepped foot in his office that week because it had been bombed in the intervening time since he last stood and preached from that pulpit. The blast, which had also destroyed part of the sanctuary, was the result of an attack on the church for their efforts against organized crime in the neighborhood. Against this backdrop of heightened-but-not-all-unfamiliar violence in the life of his church, Ransom preached a gospel message of social redemption for the city.

I. Introduction

This chapter tells the early history of Black social Christianity's development within Chicago's African American churches from the establishment of the first church—Quinn Chapel AME in 1844—through the early part of the first decade of the twentieth century. Black social

[1] Reverdy C. Ransom, quoted in "Policy Men Scored—Rev. R. C. Ransom Again Warns Flock Against the Evils of Gambling," *Chicago Record-Herald*, May 11, 1903.

Christianity emerged as a significant socioreligious tradition in Chicago around the turn of the century, arising out of the tradition of the historically Black churches (especially the AME churches, as well as certain Baptist ones), and it was refined in its encounter of the theology of the social gospel that was practiced predominantly by White Protestant churches and taught in the city's seminaries, divinity schools, and sociology departments (especially at the University of Chicago). The earliest churches established in Chicago—Quinn Chapel AME and Olivet Baptist—engaged in some projects of Christian social and racial reform in the years prior to Emancipation, but it was especially in the pre-migration era that Black social Christianity emerged as a significant movement among Chicago's churches.

In the decades between the Columbian Exposition (1893) and the start of the Great Migration (1915), Black social Christianity in Chicago came into its own as a Christian tradition and was given full form as both a theological system and an embodied lived religious practice. In this era, Black social Christianity in Chicago had a denominational identity in the AME Church. While congregations of almost every denominational affiliation engaged in projects of black social Christianity during this era (the vast majority of which were Baptist or AME), it was Chicago's AME churches that carried out the bulk of the work of social and racial reform by remaking its churches and parachurch organizations into centers for social gospel work in the city.

II. The First Decades of Black Social Christianity in Chicago

Black social Christianity dates back to the earliest days of African American church life in Chicago in the pre-Civil War period, or what Benjamin Mays and Joseph W. Nicholson

identified as the "Slavery Epoch" in African American religious history.[2] In the early 1840s, the African American population of Chicago was relatively small, numbering only 500 in 1843 and growing to just over 1000 by the eve of the Civil War.[3] Although there is some evidence of White missionary work among the Black population of Chicago, no churches existed until 1844.

That year the first African American church meeting occurred in the living room of John Day, who lived near Lake and State Streets. He was joined by six other Black Chicagoans, five of them women. Functioning mainly as a prayer group in the first years, they soon relocated to the home of Maria Parker, one of the original seven. In 1847, just three years after the Methodist church split on the question of slavery, White Chicago Methodists, "wishing to express a token of interest on behalf of their colored brethren in the city," donated a small fund and helped to procure a meeting place (on Wells Street) for the prayer group so that a proper "colored Methodist church" could be established.[4] Founded as Quinn Chapel Methodist Episcopal, the small group of Black Christians soon associated their fellowship with the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, founded by Richard Allen a half century earlier. The congregation quickly gained the approval of White Churches in the city as a "respectable" church exhibiting "remarkable behavior." In 1850, the *Chicago Daily Journal* reported to its mainly White

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[2] Benjamin Mays and Joseph W. Nicholson, *The Negro's Church* (New York: Institute for Social and Religious Research, 1922), 20. Mays and Nicholson break African American history into five eras prior to World War II, a historical framework which helped to shape the sociological studies of the Chicago School, such as St. Clair Drake's *Churches and Voluntary Associations in the Chicago Negro Community.* The five eras included: "The Slavery Epoch" [1750-1859]; "The Civil War Epoch" [1860-1865]; "The Post Civil War Epoch" [1866-1899]; "The New Century Epoch" [1900-1914]; and "The Migrant Epoch" [1915-1930].

[3] Miles Mark Fisher, "The History of Olivet Baptist Church," M.A. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1922, 1-2.

[4] St. Clair Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations in the Chicago Negro Community* (WPA Project 465-54-3-386, District 3, Chicago, IL, 1940), 36-7.

readership: "Our readers may not be aware that the colored population of this city has a very neat church edifice on Wells Street, and that it is crowded every Sabbath to its fullest capacity. … Such evidences speak volumes for the enterprise of those whose fathers dwelt long ago, where the White Nile wanders through its golden sands."[5] Much of Quinn Chapel's activity in these early years (beyond worship services) was concerned with respectability, but even these endeavors began to reveal their social concerns. Within several years the church raised enough money to move into a new church building to house their growing congregation. The new building had three spaces which they dedicated to three distinct purposes: to house worship services, which was first and foremost, but also to house a school for African American youth in the neighborhood as well as provide a library for the community.[6]

While the public activity of Quinn in these early years might best be understood in terms of respectability politics, it was the secretive activities of its women in the late 1840s and early 1850s that signal the beginning of an active Black social Christian tradition in Chicago. A group of (mostly) unnamed women in the church, known as the "Big Four," were some of the most active "conductors" for the underground railroad in Chicago, providing fugitive slaves with food, shelter, and other necessities for their journey or settlement in the city. Under the direction of the Big Four, Quinn Chapel served as one of two stations for the underground railroad that were organized by African Americans in Chicago. According to a WPA report that examined institutional responses to fugitive slave laws, "Chicago was openly defiant. Not only did the white population express its antagonisms, but the Negro community gave proof of its strong

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[5] "A New Colored Church," *Chicago Daily Journal*, January 20, 1850. Quoted in Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations*, 37-8.

[6] Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations*, 44.

resentment against the [fugitive slave] law. Two of the terminals of the [Underground] Railroad during the forties and fifties were organized and managed by Negroes. One of those was a Negro church; the other a private home. The newly founded African Methodist Church soon broadened its scope to include organized activity on behalf of fugitive slaves. Apparently the most articulate segment of the Negro population attended this church."[7] In addition to Quinn Chapel, the other station was the home of Mary Richardson Jones, one of the Big Four, who along with her husband John Jones became the most influential family in Black Chicago throughout the latter-half of the nineteenth century. While they would soon transfer their membership to the Baptists (at Olivet), Mary and John Jones helped Quinn Chapel coordinate with abolitionists to fight racist laws and challenge Black Codes and other policies that threatened the lives and wellbeing of African Americans in the city.[8]

Following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in September of 1850, the Big Four worked with their new pastor, Rev. George W. Johnson, to establish the first parachurch organization of Chicago's Black social gospel—the "Liberty Association."[9] In October of that year, they convened a "large and enthusiastic meeting" of approximately three hundred of the "colored citizens of the city" at Quinn Chapel for their inaugural meeting where they passed a resolution that appealed to "The *Supreme Judge of the Social World* to support us in the justice of our cause" in denouncing and challenging fugitive slave laws, and which stated, "[I]t behooves

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[7] Hazel Hayes, *Growth of Negro Institutions in Chicago* (WPA Project 3789, District 3, Chicago, IL), quoted in Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations*, 47, f.n. 36.

[8] "A History of Quinn Chapel," Quinn Chapel A.M.E. Church Archives [Box 3, Folder 1], Chicago Public Library, Woodson Regional Library, Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature.

[9] Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations*, 47.

all good and true colored freemen to be as one man upon this subject and that your main characteristic be union, both of feeling and principle, with a view to be a union that will last forever."[10] A few years later, the Liberty Association organized one of their most significant actions, forming seven "police divisions" to patrol the streets of Black Chicago nightly to "keep an eye out" for "slave catchers."[11] Throughout the early years of Black church life in Chicago, Quinn Chapel remained a hub for social and political movements for Black Chicago.

In the pre-Civil War period, there is evidence of both AME and Baptist involvement in the kinds of racial reform efforts that would be the keystone of Black social Christianity at the turn of the century. The pre-Emancipation churches in Black Chicago belonged to the two denominations—AME and Baptist—who would be most responsible for shaping the religious landscape of Black Chicago in the more than half a century prior to the Great Migration. The four churches were Quinn Chapel AME (1844), Zoar Baptist (1850), Olivet Baptist (1861), which was formed by the merger of Zoar Baptist and the nascent Mt. Zion Baptist (1860), and Bethel AME (1862). However, as St. Clair Drake noted, compared to Quinn Chapel's antislavery activism, "the Baptist Church was much less active than Quinn in these 'extra-worship' activities."[12]

The earliest Black social gospel activism among Chicago's African American Baptist churches occurred in the years immediately following Emancipation, as the newly-founded

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[10] "Liberty Association, Quinn Chapel," *Chicago Daily Journal*, October 15, 1850, Quinn Chapel A.M.E. Church Archives [Box 1, Folder 2], Chicago Public Library, Woodson Regional Library, Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature. My emphasis.

[11] "Anti-slavery Patrols," *The Daily Democratic Press*, March 12, 1855. Quoted in Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations*, 46.

[12] Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations*, 37-47.

Olivet Baptist Church (1862) came to rival Quinn Chapel AME in terms of membership and influence in Black Chicago. Olivet Baptist Church's first pastor, Rev. Richard de Baptiste, was an early leader in the movement for civil rights in Chicago.[13] In 1869, Rev. de Baptiste gathered a group of leaders from Black Chicago to form a "Colored Convention" that would be primarily concerned with securing and protecting the rights of the city's Black citizens. Rev. de Baptiste was elected the Convention's first president, and he outlined their mission in his first address to secure "every recognition by the laws of our state … [to] disavow any and all imputations of a desire to obtain social equality … [to] demand equal school privileges throughout the state. … To accomplish the objects mentioned, we appoint two of our ablest citizens, capable of credibly presenting our interests to attend the coming State Constitutional Convention … [to] beseech that honorable body to favorably consider our necessities and submit to the people of the State such amendments to the State Constitution as will remove the disabilities under which we now labor."[14]

A year prior to forming the Illinois Colored Convention, Rev. de Baptiste challenged the "missionary efforts" of the American Baptist Missionary Convention, one of the largest parachurch organizations tasked with "uplifting" African Americans in the South following Emancipation. Presiding at the convention as a representative of the nascent "colored National Baptist Convention," de Baptiste said in his report,

> Our white brethren … are bound together, as such, for the defense and perpetuity of their own distinctive interests. They are true to themselves. They not only retain all they have, but draw much more from us than they appropriate directly to us. Thus, in a pecuniary point of view, their *burden* is greater than their relief, although they profess to help us. It

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[13] Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations*, 54.

[14] "Colored Convention," *Chicago Times,* October 5, 1869.

> is necessary, therefore, for us to seek and find resources among ourselves; to apply the rewards of our own labor to the development of our own religious and social interests by the use of our own native instrumentalities.[15]

In a decade in which Black-White relations were shaped significantly by White "welfare work" among African American communities (e.g., The Freedmen's Bureau at the federal level and numerous denominational missionary societies at the ecclesial level), Rev. de Baptiste's calls for Black ecclesial independence from White institutions and denominations was important, and it should be recognized as a discourse of resistance that served to bridge abolitionist and antislavery Christianity with Black social Christianity of the late nineteenth century. De Baptiste's plan for ecclesial autonomy would also shape the life of Olivet Baptist Church for the decades to come, and it would prove vital for the survival and flourishing of their social gospel ministries during the migration era in the following century.

The decade and a half following Emancipation was one of significant growth but also trial for Chicago's Black churches. The Black population of Chicago boomed in the decade following the Civil War, more than tripling by 1870 (1000 in 1860; 3,500 in 1870), and the churches grew significantly as a result. However, the Chicago fires of 1871 and 1874 devastated much of the progress that Black Chicagoans had made in the previous decades. The fires burned down residences and businesses and displaced more than a thousand Black Chicagoans.[16] While the churches did the best they could to help the city's Black citizens, many of them recent

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[15] Lewis G. Jordan, *Negro Baptist History, U.S.A.* (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Publishing Board, 1930), 270.

[16] Prior to the 1871 fire, most Black Chicagoans lived between Monroe and 16th Streets. However, as the city began to rebuild after the fire, they could no longer afford to live on those blocks just on the edge of the central business district and were forced to move further south, settling below 22nd Street and some even further around 51st Street and Dearborn Avenue. See Estelle Scott, "Growth of the Negro Community" (WPA Project 3684, District 3, Chicago, IL, 1940), 18. Cited in Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations*, 60, f.n. 10.

migrants from the southern states, the churches faced their own challenges following the fires. Quinn Chapel AME, for example, which had established itself as one of the two most influential churches in Black Chicago, lost its building to the fire of 1871. As a result, the church was unable to continue many of the social relief ministries it had built up over the previous decades and was forced into a somewhat nomadic period in its history, moving from one temporary worship space to another until 1891, when the church purchased the site of its present building on 24th Street and Wabash Avenue. The church completed the building the following year, in 1892.[17] Despite these challenges, however, Quinn Chapel remained the center for African American activism and the primary platform for Black social programming throughout the Reconstruction era.[18]

III. Black Social Christianity's Coming of Age: The Pre-Migration Era

[17] "A History of Quinn Chapel," Quinn Chapel A.M.E. Church Archives [Box 3, Folder 1], Chicago Public Library, Woodson Regional Library, Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature.

[18] The increased diversity of Gilded Age Chicago provided opportunities for intercultural encounters that very likely shaped the religious imaginations and activism of Chicago's Black churches. One of the more consequential of these potential encounters for the development of Black social Christianity would have been with immigrant German Christian socialists, whom historian Heath Carter has shown were influential in shaping the social gospel thought and activism of Chicago's working-class White Christians during this era. Heath W. Carter, *Union Made: Working People and the Rise of Social Christianity in Chicago* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). Despite a lack of archival evidence to establish the influence of German Christian socialism on Black social Christianity in this period, St. Clair Drake, in his study of African American churches in Chicago, suggests that such encounters did occur in places of industry and the stockyards where many African Americans worked. Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations*, 61-62. St. Clair Drake suggests that this "radical" form of socially-conscious Christianity, imported by German immigrants, was likely as influential in shaping Black Christian social thought as the "Puritan" social Christianity of such groups as the Women's Christian Temperance Union in Chicago: "They differed with the Puritans on religion, for while both were protestant by blood, the German radical faction had long ago dismissed orthodoxy… They were more interested in bettering the lot of man on this earth than in considering the problems of the hereafter." While scholars who have written about the Black social gospel around the turn of the century have made much about the influence of White social gospel theologians (e.g., Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden) for shaping the Black social gospel, it is perhaps just as likely, if not more so, that working-class encounters with German immigrants who held to some version of Christian socialism had an influence on the socioreligious thought and activity of Chicago's Black Christian workers.

The years leading up to the turn of the century were "hectic years" in Chicago, which by 1890 had become the second largest city in the U.S. The city was growing and diversifying with over two-thirds of its habitants (68%) being foreign born.[19] However, it was not just nationality that contributed to the city's increasingly diverse and cosmopolitan makeup—its African American population was also growing (at increasing rates) and diversifying, especially along class lines. As early as the last decade of the nineteenth century, Chicago was being transformed by the migration of southern African Americans for whom Chicago was coming to be seen as a "Promised Land," luring African Americans away from southern states that were increasingly being shaped by the culture and laws of Jim Crow.[20] The two decades prior to the "Great Migration" was an era marked by possibility, institution building, and unrivaled optimism on the part of African Americans in Chicago, an era and ethos that matched the appeal which would motivate the mass migration event.[21] As Ida B. Wells-Barnett wrote in 1914, reflecting on the spirit and potential of these decades, "Chicago … points the way to the political salvation of the race. … In the last twenty years, on but one spot in this entire broad United States has the black man received anything like adequate political recognition and that one spot is Chicago."[22] As

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[19] Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations*, 86.

[20] See Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land,* 154-55.

[21] I use the terminology of "migration era" and the "Great Migration" interchangeably to denote the mass migration event that occurred during the second decade of the twentieth century (c. 1915-1918). However, Black migration from the South was occurring at significant and increasing rates for each decade prior to the Great Migration, which was especially true following the World's Fair and Columbian Exposition in 1893. Thus, the description of these decades (1890-1910) as the "Premigration Era" does not mean that migration was not happening or that the Black population was not growing. In fact, the reality is quite the opposite—Black Chicago was being transformed as a result of southern migration, and it was shaping the social programs of the Black churches in significant and important ways.

[22] Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1914) quoted in Alfreda Duster, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), xxxviii-xxix.

optimistic as many in Black Chicago were during this era, especially when compared with Black populations in other regions of the country, it was always tempered by the specter of racialized violence and burden of living within societal structures constructed by White supremacy.[23] Nonetheless, the post-Reconstruction optimism—especially in the possibilities of institutions (and the Black American's place in them)—that marked this era in Black Chicago's history is significant, and it provided fertile soil in which the Black social gospel could take root.

In the decades between the Columbian Exposition (1893) and the start of the Great Migration (1915), Black social Christianity in Chicago came into its own as a Christian tradition and was given full form as both a theological system and an embodied lived religious practice. In Chicago's Black churches during the premigration era, a contextually-specific social theology emerged and was developed in the encounters between the theologically-trained minds of Black pastors and the experiences, struggles, hopes, concerns, and religious vernacular of their congregants and "parish" neighbors, particularly as they struggled against racist systems in the

[23] W.E.B. Du Bois's description of the "double consciousness" of African American existence in this era (among others) is important here: "After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, 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 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 feels his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa; he does not wish to bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he believes—foolishly, perhaps, but fervently—that Negro blood has yet a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without losing the opportunity of self-development." Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover, 1994 [1903]), 2-3.

city.[24] This emergent theological tradition was a bricolage of sorts, a combination of a loose-but-coherent constellation of theological ideas—social gospel theology—coupled with a lived religious component that was at once quotidian and yet forceful, rooted in tradition and yet malleable. The individuals and churches who practiced Black social Christianity in this era drew on a tradition of socially-engaged Black Christian practice and preaching that had been developing in Chicago's African American churches (see above), but they gave it new theological language and institutional significance at the turn of the century. This theological and lived religious movement was characterized by ambitious institutional experimentation and innovation. Black churches engaged in this ecclesiological reformation by taking on projects of social service within the parameters of the church, entailing a wholesale reevaluation of the ministry of the church so that religious institutions (e.g., congregations, parachurch organizations) were reimagined as sites of theological experimentation and innovation.

At the same moment African American social Christianity was developing into a significant religious movement through the preaching, writing, and activism of Black church folk in Chicago, their efforts also exposed points of tension and disconnect between the churches (and denominations) and their projects of Christian social and racial reform. Put another way, Black social Christianity did not always fit with the vision, practices, and/or leadership of the church structures in which it was developed during the era of its maturation into a full-fledged religious tradition in Chicago. One of the findings of this close study of Chicago's churches is that the

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[24] Black religious leaders' adoption of the "parish" designation, an otherwise Catholic nomenclature, to describe their ministerial contexts in Black Chicago is significant. This shift from "congregation" is important, I argue, because it demonstrates a conscious expansion of their perceived ministries from the bounded "congregation" to a more capacious notion of the "neighborhood," a nuance that is easily overlooked but critical for understanding the theological transformation that I argue constitutes Black social Christianity.

ministers and congregations who were ministering "on the ground" in Chicago were much more likely to embrace Black social gospel thought and practices, especially when ministering to the ever-growing southern migrant community, than their denominational leaders who were often removed from the actual ministerial work being conducted in Black Chicago. These tensions are especially evident in the AME churches during the period of the Great Migration (next chapter), and it helps explain why the social gospel projects of the AME churches suffered during the Great Migration while those of their Baptist coreligionists (who had significantly more congregational autonomy) flourished.

In what follows, I explore these dynamics in the development of Black social Christianity by conducting a close study of the work, thought, and ministerial contexts of two AME ministers and their social-gospel-inspired church plants at the turn of the century, the moment when I argue that a Black social gospel was realized in full form in Chicago. Reverdy Ransom and Richard R. Wright Jr. imagined their respective pastorates with Institutional Church and Social Settlement and Trinity Mission like "research and development" projects. They each had been taught social gospel theology and they were interested in experimenting with new theological ideas and novel institutional forms of church. Their laboratories were their "parishes" on the South Side of Chicago. One experiment succeeded—Ransom's ICSS—and a new theology of "brotherhood" was born from it. The other failed—Wright's Trinity Mission—and yet a new conception of the pastoral vocation, one that turned to sociological study, was developed out of the failed experiment. In the next chapter, I consider how the Great Migration tested the social programs of the churches of Black Chicago, revealing serious limits for the development of Black social Christian projects within certain ecclesial structures.

The Black Belt as Mission Field

While early Black Chicago was made up of a constellation of clusters of Black Chicagoans living on the South and West sides near the downtown business district, by 1890 Chicago's Black population started to form a continuous "belt" from the edge of the downtown business district on the south end to 35th Street and between State Street and Wentworth Avenue. In the 1890s, Black Chicagoans represented a significant majority of the inhabitants in this district.[25] Some chose to live in this district, while others were forced to move there for economic reasons out of their control. Increasingly, class became a significant factor in the makeup of the Black Belt as lower- and middle-class Black migrants represented most who lived in the district while wealthier Black residents tended to move east of State Street and south of 35th Street, following the movement of wealthy White Chicagoans who had lived in the Prairie Avenue district. Over the two decades surrounding the turn of the century a "class-based hierarchy," separating the city's African American elite from the masses, came to structure the life and relations in and surrounding the Black Belt. Class distinctions in the Black Belt also came to structure the religious landscape of Black Chicago. As a result most established Black churches came to view the Black Belt as their "mission field," the site for Black social Christianity's projects in Chicago in the decades surrounding the turn of the century.

In the pre-migration era, the center of Black social gospel thought and experimentation in Chicago resided in the AME churches. For the decades surrounding the turn of the century, the AME churches in Chicago were the most active and theologically inventive churches in developing institutions for the Black social gospel, that is, ecclesial structures that addressed

[25] Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations*, 86.

social and racial reform efforts in Black Chicago. However, as we will see later in the next chapter, the Great Migration exposed the limits of this kind of social program within the AME Church. As Wallace Best has argued, the Great Migration threw the AME Church into a crisis, one which was felt acutely by its Chicago congregations.[26]

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois famously said that the AME Church was "the greatest Negro organization in the World," serving as a the primary platform for social and political movements for African Americans throughout the nineteenth century.[27] Du Bois's description certainly fit the Chicago AMEs, as Quinn and Bethel had served as centers of political life and social relief during the second half of the nineteenth century. In particular, Quinn Chapel, affectionately known as the "Mother Church of the Midwest," had hosted U.S. presidents, along with other influential politicians and intellectuals.[28] In 1900, the AME Church in Chicago added a church plant, Institutional Church and Social Settlement (ICSS), to its six other congregations in the city (Quinn Chapel, Bethel, St. Steven's, St. John's, Wayman Chapel, and St. Mary's). This institutional development for Chicago's AMEs, occurring at the advent of the new century, indicated a commitment to Black social Christianity and a desire to save the Black Belt.

IV. Institutional Church and Social Settlement

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[26] Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 11.

[27] Quoted in Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 118.

[28] E.g., William McKinley, William Howard Taft, George Washington Carver, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Booker T. Washington, Rabbi Emil Hirsch, Jane Addams, and others. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 119.

Upon completing his degree in theology at Wilberforce University in 1885, and having been licensed to preach by the AME Church in 1883, Reverdy Ransom embarked on a pastoral career that would last until 1912, taking him on a journey of the North's major urban centers. In 1896, he was assigned to the pastorate of Bethel AME Church in Chicago. Bethel AME was an attractive pastorate, and Ransom expressed no qualms about the appointment, which offered both social prestige and a significant salary. At Bethel, Ransom achieved some national notoriety as a preacher, and he began to articulate what David Wills has described as a "new style of ministry" in his efforts to uplift the race.[29] This turn in his ministry sought to bring together in the church "the Negro who is up and the Negro who is down, the Negro who is good, and the Negro who is ignorant."[30] Ultimately, Ransom believed that in this equation the harder task was bringing up the "poor Negro," and thus he became convinced that the church's resources needed to be directed toward this work. Yet he found he could not do the kind of ministry he was envisioning in his current role at Bethel AME. So, in 1900, just four years after arriving in Chicago, he left his pastorate at Bethel AME to embark on a new adventure in ministry.[31]

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[29] David Wills, "Reverdy C. Ransom: The Making of an A.M.E. Bishop," in *Making the Gospel Plain: The Writings of Bishop Reverdy C. Ransom* (ed. Anthony B. Pinn; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 29.

[30] Ransom, *The Pilgrimage of Harriet Ransom's Son* (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Union, 1949), 81-82. Quoted in Wills, "Ransom," 29.

[31] Ransom, *Harriet Ransom's Son*, 49. Ransom's "awakening" to the need for the institutionalization of the social gospel occurred in 1888 during one of his earliest pastorates in Manchester Mission, Allegheny City, Pennsylvania. Ransom recalled, "My first vision of the need of social service came to me as my wife and I almost daily, went through the alleys and climbed the dark stairways of the wretched tenements, or walked out on the shanty boats where our people lived on the river. . . . [I] aspired in changing their material condition as well as in things of the spirit." It would not be for another decade, however, that his vision for an "institutional church" based on the theology of the social gospel would be realized. So after four otherwise successful years of ministry with Bethel AME Church in Chicago, Ransom resigned to establish a sort of experimental form of church combining the traditional work of the church with the kind of social service he had begun to dream about more than a decade earlier (Morris, *Ransom*, 103-4).

In the summer of 1900, Ransom established Institutional Church and Social Settlement (ICSS), which came to incarnate the old 'Railroad Chapel" on Chicago's South Side. There Ransom attempted to bring the social gospel into full connection with the AME Church, catering his ministry to the needs of Chicago's most underprivileged people, most of whom happened to be Black and many of whom happened to live in the neighborhood of ICSS.

The social ministry of ICSS was significantly modeled on and inspired by a network of social reformers in the city, many of whom Ransom had befriended and courted their guidance. Most importantly, perhaps, Ransom developed relationships with Jane Addams, Mary McDowell, and Graham Taylor, who were each involved in the settlement house movement. Ransom's connections with these leaders in Christian social service went far towards shaping not only his theology but his practice of social and racial reform as well. Ransom's relationship with Jane Addams was important for his work in establishing ICSS not only because her Hull House served as the model for his social ministry, but also because she provided counsel and financial support. Ransom considered Addams "one of the finest personalities I know," and he relied on her experience and advice during ICSS's early, formative years. Financially, Addams also contributed to ministry of ICSS—to the tune of $100—and more importantly connected Ransom with several "wealthy and influential people of Chicago," particularly Mrs. George Pullman (widow of the founder of the Pullman Railroad Co.) and Robert T. Lincoln (son of Abraham Lincoln and president of the Pullman Co.). Pullman and Lincoln funded the salaries of six employees at ICSS annually, which was a major boon for the ministry because the AME Church provided no financial backing beyond purchasing the property for the mission ($35,000).[32] While

[32] See Ransom, *Harriet Ransom's Son*, 105, 112; also, "To Help the Negro Race" *Inter Ocean* (July 29, 1900), Illinois Writers' Project papers, box 18, folder 7, Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, Chicago.

ICSS was largely modeled on the ministries of his Chicago colleagues, especially Addam's Hull House and Taylor's Chicago Commons, it differed in that it was established by Black Christians to help underprivileged Black people, especially the growing population of southern migrants.[33]

The ministry of ICSS grew out of Ransom's conviction that a "new AME Church was needed to help speed the development of the Negro race, which was experiencing an increase in population."[34] An *Inter Ocean* report on the opening of ICSS noted, "Although the settlement is called 'Church,' it is not a church in the ordinary sense. It is a Hull House or Chicago Commons founded by Negroes for the help of that race," and it quoted Ransom preaching on the church's inaugural Sunday, "Primarily our aim is to reach and teach the 15,000 negroes on the South side. . . . Beside that we intend to bring young men and women from the Southern states and help them to get work in Chicago and in the Northwest."[35] Within months of its establishment, ICSS housed numerous social programs for both youth and adults, and Ransom had served notice that central to the mission of ICSS was to fight against the "superpersonal" forces of vice and racial hatred in the city, particularly the "saloons and gambling places."[36] While Ransom was at the helm of ICSS for only four years, it was a turning point in his thinking about Black social

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[33] Calvin S. Morris, *Reverdy C. Ransom: Black Advocate of the Social Gospel* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 106; also, Terrell Dale Goddard, "The Black Social Gospel in Chicago, 1896-1906: The Ministries of Reverdy C. Ransom and Richard R. Wright, Jr.," *The Journal of Negro History* 84.3 (1999): 233, 236.

[34] "Institutional AME Church," Illinois Writers' Project papers, box 18, folder 7, Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, Chicago. Ransom's was a vision for a new "AME Church in the twentieth century," that is, one concerned primarily with the "moral and social redemption" of Black Chicago. As Ransom's biographer notes, "The primary manifestation of Ransom's combination of Social Gospel theory and racial consciousness was Institutional Church" (Morris, *Ransom*, 106).

[35] "To Help the Negro Race" *Inter Ocean* (July 29, 1900), Illinois Writers' Project papers, box 18, folder 7, Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, Chicago.

[36] Ibid. Ransom's use of the language of "superpersonal" forces is remarkably similar to the language that Walter Rauschenbusch would employ in his theological treatises on the social gospel in following years, especially in his book *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (1917).

Christianity as well as an important institution in anchoring Black social gospel practice in Chicago during the pre-migration era.

With the purchase of the old "Railroad Chapel," a large brick building formerly used by First Presbyterian Church to minister to White railroad workers who had by then mostly moved out of the neighborhood, Ransom embarked on something of a "research and development" project for the AME Church, an experimental venture in the "church of the future."[37] In the process of founding ICSS, Ransom developed a robust ecclesiology that emphasized the church's role in social transformation, believing in fact that "social salvation still comes through the church" rather than through any political party or secular social organization.[38] And yet he believed the church had to adapt to new social realities in every new age and place. If the "church" (which for him most often meant the AME Church) was going to survive it would have to rethink its ecclesiology. Just a few months after the launch of ICSS, Ransom wrote in one of the main organs of the AME Church, "It is our belief that the days of the old method of church work are numbered. . . . Through the Institutional Church our connection is stripping itself to enter the moral and spiritual race of the twentieth century, with the fleetness of foot and the wisdom of method which will make her equal to the forces she has to combat and the obstacles she must meet and overcome."[39] He described this new ecclesiology he envisioned also in poetic terms,

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Ransom, "Lions by the Way," Sermon, published in *The Disadvantages and Opportunities of the Colored Youth* (Cleveland: Thomas & Mattill, 1894), n.p.

[39] Ransom, "The Institutional Church," *Christian Recorder*, March 7, 1901. Ransom went on to say, "African Methodism has a great opportunity here to set an example to the entire connection, that under the inspiration of the gospel, moral and social redemption may come to our people in a practical way."

> A mightier church shall come whose convenient word
> Shall be the deed of love.—Not Credo then—
> “Amo” shall be the password through its gates,
> Man shall not ask his brother anymore
> “Believest thou?” but “Lovest thou?” and all
> Shall answer at God’s altar, “Lord, I Love.”
> For hope may anchor, Faith may stir; but Love,
> Great Love, alone is captain of the soul.[40]

Ransom’s ecclesiology was thus thoroughly ecumenical, which he articulated in a theology of “brotherhood” (discussed more below), as well as radically missional. In fact, Ransom began an article in the *Christian Recorder* by addressing these very ecclesiological issues:

> The Institutional A.M.E. Church of Chicago was not born before its time. It comes to meet and serve the social conditions and industrial needs of the people, and to give answers and solutions to the many grave problems which confront our Christianity in the great centers of population of our people. It is not a dream spun out of the gossamer web of fancy; it is not an evasion, an abridgment, or a short-cut method for the realization of Christ and the Christ life in the life of the people. It is a teaching, ministering nursing-mother, and seeks through its activities to level the inequalities and bridge the chasms between rich and poor, the educated and the ignorant, the virtuous and the refined, and to bring all ages and classes of the community to contribute to the common good.[41]

With this vision, Ransom established the first social settlement in the country for Black Americans.

The ministry of ICSS went well beyond the traditional activities of the AME Church to include a full host of programs catering to the needs of the neighborhood in which the church was planted. According to one report on ICSS nearly a year into its ministry on the South Side, “Not only were sermons preached, prayers uttered and songs of praise sung, but *more* was done. . . . humanity in all its breadth is taught.”[42] It was this “more” that was the heart of ICSS and

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[40] Reverdy C. Ransom, “The Institutional Church,” *Christian Recorder* (March 7, 1901), 1.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Katherine Leckie, “A South Side Institution,” *Hearst’s Chicago American*, March 1, 1901. My emphasis.

Ransom's vision of the future of urban ministry in the AME Church. Katherine Leckie's newspaper feature on ICSS for *Hearst's Chicago American* (quoted above) provides perhaps the fullest picture of the everyday life of ICSS. Leckie reported that ICSS, "the only colored Social Settlement in the world," existed for two purposes—"for the betterment of humanity" and "for the uplift of their race"—and that Ransom understood the success of each to be contingent on the success of the other. Noting the existence of other similar social settlements in the city (e.g., Hull House and Chicago Commons), Leckie reported Ransom's belief that much social service work in the city intending to "better humanity" was really only interested in the betterment of that humanity which was also deemed "White." Thus Ransom talked about the need for Black people to do the same work for their own race. ICSS featured a gymnasium, dining hall, kitchen, eight large rooms, and an auditorium with the capacity to seat as many as twelve hundred souls. The program at ICSS, modeled significantly after Graham Taylor's Chicago Commons, included clubs for boys and girls, a nursery, a kindergarten, sewing and cooking classes, regular concerts, discussions groups, lectures, a women's club, and musical lessons for children, all in addition to the "regular" Sunday worship services and Sunday schools. ICSS was kept open and staffed twenty-four hours per day, and Ransom and his family made their home in two of the rooms of the building so that he would always be available.[43] In a city that was the hub for the settlement house movement, Ransom's ICSS was the first to directly address the needs of Black people. In Ransom's mind, ICSS was the practical expression of social gospel ecclesiology to help Black

[43] Ibid.

city dwellers in “practical daily living,” a form of “church” designed specifically for the redemption of Black Chicago.[44]

Ransom’s ministry with ICSS was shaped by a “practical theology” that certainly resonated with the mainstream of social gospel theology (articulated especially by individuals like Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch) and yet also distinct insofar as his thought was always inflected by his awareness of the “color line.” Raised in a socially conscious stream of African American Christianity (i.e., the AME Church) and exposed to the ethos of the Progressive era, Ransom was aware of social gospel theology, especially in emphasizing the ethics of Jesus and believing that the kingdom of God was the heart and telos of the Christian gospel.[45] He preached that the kingdom of God would ultimately be realized on earth as “every man” came to embody in his “soul and actions” the ethical teachings of Jesus. In a 1909 sermon, Ransom preached, “Our confusion will grow more confusing until we as a nation comprehend the fact that the ethics of Jesus, as set down in the New Testament, is not an iridescent dream; that foundation stones of this nation have their resting place upon the ethics of Jesus Christ, that of brotherhood based on the fatherhood of God.”[46] In these and other ways, Ransom aligned

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[44] Richard R. Wright, Jr., *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain: An Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Rare Book Co., 1965), 149-50.

[45] Ransom, “Out of the Midnight Sky: A Thanksgiving Address,” Mount Zion Congregational Church, Cleveland, Ohio, November 30, 1893.

[46] Ransom, “Thanksgiving Sermon: The American Tower of Babel; or, The Confusion of Tongues,” Sermon, Bethel A.M.E. Church, New York City, November 25, 1909. Published in *The Spirit of Freedom and Justice: Orations and Speeches* (Nashville: A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1926).

closely with the social gospel movement, though he departed from White social gospelers in emphasizing racial justice as part and parcel of this gospel message and work.[47]

That Ransom's social gospel theology is deserving of distinction from his White social gospel coreligionists is perhaps most evident in his formulation of a "theology of brotherhood," which functioned for him as the central theological principle of the Black social gospel.[48] For Ransom, the signification of "brotherhood" was primarily racial, suggesting a more capacious vision of human unity and cooperation than articulated by others who employed the term (i.e., White social gospelers). In an article dealing with "The Negro and Socialism," published in the *A.M.E. Church Review*, Ransom spoke directly to his belief that Black people were being neglected in the social revolution: "[White labor unions] have steadily refused to recognize the cause of the Negro workmen as one with theirs. . . . In the great hives of industrial activity, the

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[47] A survey of Ransom's preaching and writing during and after he was in Chicago reveals the extent to which he held to the basic tents of social gospel theology. For instance, in a sermon given just as he was departing Chicago, he proclaimed, "Of all the movements of modern times, the social is destined to wield the greatest influence. The social awakening of the peoples within the last century has brought into organized society a new force. . . . The hands upon the dial-plate of progress cannot be reversed. The process of the readjustment of the relations of men to society has begun" (Ransom, "Thanksgiving Address, 1904," Sermon, Bethel A.M.E. Church, New Bedford, Massachusetts, November 1904). This emphasis on the social teachings of Jesus, which he referred to occasionally simply as "ethical religion" or "gospel ethics," would lead to a better kind of society, notably one in which altruism rather than selfishness would dictate the "relation between man and his brother man." He argued that the social gospel "rejects the doctrine of selfishness which rules the present social order and affirms that altruism is a principle sufficient to govern the relations of men in the sense that it is opposed to individualism and does not regard society as composed of an army of warring atoms" (Ransom, "The Negro and Socialism," *A.M.E. Church Review* 13 [October 1896]: 193).

[48] Ransom was not alone in articulating a "theology of brotherhood" within the Social Gospel Movement vis-à-vis the issue of the "color line." Curtis J. Evans's forthcoming study, in which he investigates this "capacious vision of the human family" in the work of the Federal Council of Church's Department of Race Relations, is instructive for my reading of Ransom's theology here. Evans defines this "theology of brotherhood" as "a positive affirmation of the unity of humanity, the common bond of Christians in the body of Christ, the church, and the fatherhood of God over all human beings. It was a denial of invidious distinctions between the races, a repudiation of the hierarchical ordering of races, and a rejection of a theology that grounded white supremacy in the divine order. This theology of brotherhood was a capacious vision of human unity that had specific relevance to the problems of racial division in the US, though it was never solely about the black and white divide." Curtis J. Evans, *A Theology of Brotherhood: The Federal Council of Churches and the Problem of Race* (New York: New York University Press, forthcoming).

Negro finds almost every door leading to the skilled trades closed against him. . . . The great 'labor unions' and 'brotherhoods' of this country have, by introducing the word 'white' into their constitutions, excluded the Negro from membership."[49] Ransom recognized that this exclusion of "the Negro" happened in less obvious ways as well, and he preached against the whiteness of social Christianity that reduced the Black American to "a silent spectator."

Ransom addressed the marginalizing power of whiteness in the thought and activism of the broader social gospel movement with his "theology of brotherhood," highlighting the need for interracial solidarity on the one hand while also stressing the salience of race in the project of social reform on the other. In a 1893 sermon contemplating the "superpersonal" powers of racism and White violence (i.e., lynching), Ransom stressed not only the need for White and Black cooperation but that Black people must be the initiators and leaders in forging this cooperative strategy. Drawing on the biblical imagery of the Exodus, Ransom proclaimed, "This land of the Negro's suffering must bear witness to his triumph. . . . When the generations yet unborn shall gather around their hearthstones to tell to their children at what cost America bequeathed the priceless heritage of 'brotherhood, fraternity, and equality' to all mankind, how the Negro wrought to achieve this connection will be the inspiration of their theme."[50] Ransom argued (and preached) that restoring racial dignity and a sense of responsibility was as much a part of the social project as anything else. Growing up in the latter half of the nineteenth century,

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[49] Reverdy C. Ransom, "The Negro and Socialism," *A.M.E. Church Review* 13 (October 1896): 194.

[50] Reverdy C. Ransom, "Out of the Midnight Sky: A Thanksgiving Address," Mount Zion Congregational Church, Cleveland, Ohio, November 30, 1893. Ransom envisioned Black leadership in forging an alliance between the races as the work of the Black elite, that is, in similar terms to W.E.B. Du Bois's notion of the "talented tenth." ICSS provided Black professionals and the Black intelligentsia of Chicago an opportunity to serve their race. For example, the Board of Directors of ICSS was a veritable "Who's Who" of Black elites in Chicago. See Morris, *Ransom*, 107.

and coming of age during a time when White racism increasingly sought the degradation of black souls and the brutalization of black bodies (e.g., lynching), a major concern of Ransom's church, according to his biographer, "was to remove the stigma of inferiority from black consciousness."[51] Thus, Ransom came to believe that the church's mission included preaching that God had not created Black people as inferior beings but as equals. God determined the worth of Black people, not White society. Ransom's preaching of "brotherhood" was thus in part a call to his Black coreligionists to assume their role as co-agents in the redemption of society, something they needed to first believe and then fight to achieve.

While there was a certain capaciousness to Ransom's theology of brotherhood—encompassing such themes as Black dignity and protest as well as interfaith and interracial cooperation—the core of its message was to counter the often unstated doctrine of segregation that he perceived among even the most well-intentioned White theologies and social activism. In this respect, Ransom was painfully aware of the persistence of the "spirit of slavery" at the dawn of the new century, even in the North.[52] While segregation may not have been as conspicuous in the urban North as it was in the South, Ransom acknowledged its perseverance as well as its ability to still have a corrosive effect on the spirits, psyches, and bodies of northern African Americans. Against this doctrine of segregation Ransom formulated his theology of brotherhood "based on the fatherhood of God" and "resting upon the ethics of Jesus Christ."[53] Ransom

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[51] Morris, *Ransom*, 74.

[52] Reflecting on the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decision, he wrote, "Slavery did not die when General Lee surrendered his sword to General Grant. The Spirit of slavery still lives and stalks abroad day and night here in the industrial North, in economic segregation just as implacably as it does in social and political forms in the South." Ransom, *Harriet Ransom's Son*, 55.

[53] Ransom, "Thanksgiving Sermon: The American Tower of Babel; or, The Confusion of Tongues," Sermon, Bethel A.M.E. Church, New York City, November 25, 1909. Published in *The Spirit of Freedom and Justice: Orations and Speeches* (Nashville: A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1926).

preached that America had two paths she could follow in remaking society—segregation or solidarity—and he urged the nation to remain true to her Christian and democratic principles and choose the latter, preferring cooperation and unity over individualism and selfishness. In a 1904 sermon, Ransom proclaimed,

> You may call me a dreamer when I tell you that my vision beholds the fetters of race and class broken from the limbs of humanity forevermore. I see humanity with arms so long that *brother* joins hands with *brother* across the broad expanse of sea, until, in a circle that girdles the globe, man to his *brother* is joined in a loving hand clasp around the world. I see the men of a new civilization rejoicing in the fulfillment of our golden dreams, when from the centuries of its wanderings humanity comes back to its common unity, knowing but one family altar, that the altar of humanity; but one *brotherhood*, that the *brotherhood* of man; but one fatherhood, that the fatherhood of God.[54]

Ransom believed this strategy of brotherhood was necessary for the eventual realization of the kingdom of God on earth. So he preached, "The battle before us must be fought, not on the principle of the *inferiority of one race and the superiority of the other*, but upon the ground of our common manhood and equality."[55]

Brotherhood, Ransom argued, functioned as a unifying principle for both Christian theology and American democracy. In a sermon riffing on the biblical narrative of the Tower of Babel, in which God confuses the language of people engaged in a misguided project of vain human glory, Ransom suggested that "brotherhood" constituted a new, common tongue for a nation experiencing its own "babel" in trying to address the "present social crisis," a common language whose grammar was the "ethics of Jesus." To quote his sermon at length,

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[54] Ransom, "Thanksgiving Address, 1904," Sermon, Bethel A.M.E. Church, New Bedford, Massachusetts, November 1904. Published in Pinn, *Making the Gospel Plain*, 85-91. My emphases.

[55] Ransom, "The Spirit of John Brown," an Address delivered at the Second Annual Meeting of the Niagara Movement, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, August 17, 1906. First published in *The Spirit of Freedom and Justice: Orations and Speeches* (Nashville: A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1926). Also published in Pinn, *Making the Gospel Plain*, 92-102. Ransom's emphasis.

> I see, as from the tower of Babel, the scattered groups returning from the confusion that has so long kept them separated and divided. They have learned that despite all differences of speech, they have at all times had one word in common—that word is MAN. Now we learned to articulate in unison another word—that word is BROTHER. Now standing face-to-face they say—'MAN AND BROTHER.' The recognition is instant. Barriers are broken down, the confusion is silenced, and in brotherly cooperation they set themselves the task of building their civilization a tower of strength, because all men who toil and strive, who hope and aspire, are animated by a common purpose that is peace, happiness, and the common good of all.[56]

The acquisition of this common tongue, that is, the language of brotherhood, was necessary in Ransom's view for solving the social crisis at hand. Even more, Ransom believed that this spirit of brotherhood was essential for the American project. He articulated a notion of American exceptionalism, grounded in the "ethics of Jesus" and the ideals of "democracy," in which the nation's chief task was to "prove" to the rest of the world "that the indifference of color which divides us is only superficial and entirely nonessential . . . [and] that men of different races may live together upon terms of equality, of fraternity, and of peace."[57] And yet as much as he preached about the importance of brotherhood on global or even national levels, in practice he demonstrated his belief that brotherhood, i.e., solidarity between the races, must begin at the most basic level of human interaction, a lesson he learned through his ministry at ICSS.

Ransom's theology of brotherhood, which I am arguing developed significantly from his pastoral contexts both at ICSS and his encounters in Black Chicago, came to serve as a kind of hermeneutical key both for his interpretation of scripture as well as for his reading of the

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[56] Ransom, "Thanksgiving Sermon: The American Tower of Babel; or, The Confusion of Tongues," Sermon, Bethel A.M.E. Church, New York City, November 25, 1909.

[57] Ibid.

"worlds" in which he moved.[58] This dual hermeneutical function of "brotherhood," which hinged on the idea of universal kinship, is perhaps best observed in a speech Ransom gave not long after he left Chicago. In 1906, Ransom gave an address to a Boston church titled "The Race Problem in a Christian State."[59] In it Ransom discussed what he considered to be the greatest challenge faced by the so-called "Christian nation" of America—"the race problem." He began the address by recognizing the problem: "there should be no race problem in the Christian State" and yet one very clearly existed. In light of this irony, Ransom, in biblical fashion, directed a social prophetic critique against white Christianity in particular and the United States in general.

In the address, "brotherhood" functioned as a kind of hermeneutical framework through which Ransom interpreted scriptural *kerygma* and his surrounding culture. First, he turned to the "heart of scripture." Jesus, the "founder of Christianity," preached the hope and mandate of the "brotherhood of man" (alongside the "fatherhood of God"). The crowning achievement of Jesus's ministry, according to Ransom, was "to 'break down the middle wall of partition' between man and man, and to take away all the Old Testament laws and ordinances that prevented Jew and Gentile from approaching God on an equal plane."[60] In similar fashion, the early church structured its life by a commitment to human kinship (Acts 4:32-35). And the apostle Paul preached brotherhood's preeminence for Christian life and encouraged his churches to live up to its ideal: "St. Paul, standing in the Areopagus, declared to the Athenians that, 'God

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[58] Vincent L. Wimbush has suggested this kind of dual hermeneutical model, based on the theme of "universal kinship," in the thought of several African American pastors and theologians at the beginning of the twentieth century, including Ransom. See "Reading Texts through Worlds, Worlds through Texts," *Semiea* 62 (1993): 129-40.

[59] Reverdy C. Ransom, "The Race Problem in a Christian State," (1906) in *Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness* (ed. Milton C. Sernett; Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1985), 296-305.

[60] Ransom, "The Race Problem in a Christian State," 296.

hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth'" (Acts 17:26).[61] Ransom reiterated at several points that the "good news" of universal human kinship was not to be confined to scripture, however, but fully *applied* to the present context, namely to the "race problem" before them. Convinced of the centrality of "brotherhood" for the Christian message, Ransom likewise interpreted America's racial divide, "separating man from his brotherman," as the "most serious problem in our country today," precisely because it threatens the brotherhood ideal. He preached, "American Christianity will un-Christ itself it if refuses to strive on, until this Race Problem is not only settled, but, settled right."[62] Invoking the biblical concept of "covenant," Ransom concluded that a Christian nation (i.e., a people chosen by God for a specific purpose) is thus obligated to "build upon the teachings of Jesus, with the doctrine of human brotherhood as taught by Him, until fraternity realized, shall raise us to the skies."[63]

One way to think about Ransom's hermeneutics here is to understand him extrapolating a biblical concept—universal human kinship or "brotherhood"—and applying it to his social situation.[64] This seems at once obvious and right, especially taking into account the extent to which Ransom had been shaped by the theology of the social gospel. However, a hermeneutical

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[61] Ransom, "The Race Problem in a Christian State," 296-97. Ransom also invoked Paul's letter to the Ephesians (2:14-15) to demonstrate that Paul rendered the gospel message of Jesus in terms of the "brotherhood" ideal. Ibid.

[62] Ransom, "The Race Problem in a Christian State," 298.

[63] Ransom, "The Race Problem in a Christian State," 304.

[64] Ransom's formulation of "brotherhood" theology is unique in this era among Black social Christian thinkers, but he's not the only to reimagine the theme to embody the unique concerns of African American Christians. In fact, as will be explored in the rest of the dissertation (especially Chapters 3 and 4), African American women, both within the churches but also in their extra-ecclesial contexts, worked this theological even more so that it included their experiences as Black women and their concerns for the flourishing of *all* society, especially those who were often overlooked within Black Chicago. There are strong resonances, but also important differences, between Ransom's conception of the "brotherhood" and what I will describe in third and fourth chapters as their theology of "collective kinship."

reversal is also possible, that is, his situation at ICSS in the heart of Black urban America and the firsthand knowledge that afforded him of the intense racial struggle faced by his parishioners in turn shaped his reading of scripture and his prophetic critique of the nation. This is to suggest another source for his theology of brotherhood—the lived experiences of his congregants and neighbors on Chicago's south side. The hope for full (or at least fuller) integration into the life of the nation grew up from their lives. For them, "brotherhood" was as much, if not more so, a yearning as it was a biblical truth.

That Ransom's theology of brotherhood was rooted in his ministry at ICSS is evident in the episode from Katherine Leckie's feature on ICSS which captures the connection between Ransom's preaching of brotherhood and the everyday lives of those on the South Side. Leckie, who spent a week with ICSS, reported the following incident while observing the "boy's club": "At first the lads [i.e., the Black boys] demurred at letting the white boys in to fellowship. 'They don't let us into their swimming tank,' was the way the boys voiced their protests against their white brothers. But after hearing of the *brotherhood* which knows neither creed, color, nor condition explained to them, these little men declared in favor of white club members."[65] In Ransom's view, what these "little men" did by choosing solidarity with their White playmates, rather than segregation, even though they had themselves been victimized by the White boys, was the key principle of the social gospel that had been overlooked by many of his White coreligionists. Ransom argued for the need to recognize the issue dividing the city—race—and to choose to overcome it by proclaiming and practicing the theology of brotherhood. For Ransom,

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[65] Katherine Leckie, "A South Side Institution," *Hearst's Chicago American*, March 1, 1901. My emphasis.

this theme of "brotherhood" functioned as the central theological principle of his theology and social work.

One place where Ransom's practical theology of "brotherhood" was forged and tested was in his fight against the incessant forces of vice in his neighborhood. Gambling, prostitution, and saloons provided most of the entertainment for Black South Siders, and even many of Ransom's own flock were prone to frequent the brothels, gambling joints, and saloons. Gambling presented an especially difficult obstacle to Ransom's ministry. He was fully aware that some of those who "worshipped hardest" in his pews on Sunday were also among those who "gambled hardest" on Monday.[66] An editorial in the *Chicago Evening Post* praised Ransom for his fight against the gambling syndicate, hoping that he might be the person to lead the fight: "The conviction of 'Al' Adams, the policy king of New York, was brought about mainly through the efforts of one man. Perhaps the Rev. Mr. Ransom . . . will be this one man in Chicago, at least so

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[66] One newspaper report on Ransom's fight against the gambling syndicate included a quote from one of his female congregants: "I liker Elder Ransom, he allus brings me luck every time I play his text," suggesting that she used the numbers from the biblical passages from which he preached to gamble. "The Rev. R. C. Ransom Bitterly Denounces Policy Game While Police Watch for Dynamiters," *Chicago Tribune*, May 11, 1903. At the time there were over fifteen hundred branches of the gambling racket in Chicago, and the police and courts had proven inept in offering any kind of challenge to the syndicate. Ransom, along with some other AME ministers on the South Side, became especially incensed when the gambling syndicate made it their strategy to set up shop near schools in order to prey on Black youth. According to Ransom, "It was not until the policy gamblers waxed bold enough to ply their trade among our Negro school children on Chicago's South Side, that we determined to do something about it. . . . Since I could get no action from [city aldermen or the police], I announced a series of sermons based on the facts ascertained and the evil effects of its operation on our youth and the people in general." Ransom, *Harriet Ransom's Son*, 117-18.

far as enlisting interest in the crusade is concerned."[67] Many also saw Ransom's fight against the gambling racket as a stand for Black Chicagoans, and respect for it came from the most unexpected places.[68]

However, the response of some members of the gambling syndicate was to try to kill Ransom, or at least threaten his life, by planting dynamite in his office at ICSS following one of his anti-gambling sermons. The bombing destroyed his office and one newspaper reported that "[h]ad Mr. Ransom been seated in his study when the bomb exploded he would no doubt have been seriously hurt, if not fatally injured . . . evidenced by the shattering of the stone ledge, nearly two feet thick."[69] In Ransom's view, the "dynamiting" of ICSS was "one of the greatest sensations to stir the city of Chicago in many years," and it only served to embolden him and galvanize both Black and White support in the anti-gambling crusade.[70] One newspaper quoted Ransom's immediate response: "They may blow my church off the earth, but unless they blow

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[67] "How to Drive Out Policy," *Chicago Evening Post*, May 4, 1903. Among Black leaders in Chicago, there was a shared feeling that they were often neglected when it came to working to solve the city's issues. A *Chicago Tribune* editorial, written by a Black Chicagoan, stated, "When any question arises which affects the public good our white fellow-citizens rarely, if ever, call the colored man to co-operation . . . . We are never consulted or considered except the something happens in the black belt. . . . We intend from now on to insist that we be permitted to have an opportunity to co-operate with all the influences that work for the overthrowing of vice and the upbuilding of moral and social purity." "The Rev. R. C. Ransom Bitterly Denounces Policy Game While Police Watch for Dynamiters," *Chicago Tribune*, May 11, 1903.

[68] Ransom, *Harriet Ransom's Son*, 134. Support for Ransom in this mission came from White Chicago institutions as well. A *Chicago Tribune* editorial praised Ransom in "doing a noble work and one much needed, for many of his own people are victims." "The Policy Swindle," *Chicago Tribune*, May 4, 1903. According to Ransom many years later, even some of the Black ring leaders of the gambling racket found Ransom's crusade against their business admirable. He recounted having been accosted one night during his sermon series by "Policy Sam," who was in charge of all the policy gambling on the South Side and reported to the central offices of the syndicate downtown. Policy Sam told Ransom during their brief and "frightening" encounter, "You may put me out of business, but I am proud to see one of my race standing up in the city of Chicago, just like some of the big white preachers do here." Not everyone who profited from gambling in Chicago responded as kindly as Policy Sam, however.

[69] "Declares only Death will Defeat Him—Clue to Explosion," *Hearst's Chicago American*, May 4, 1903.

[70] Ransom, *Harriet Ransom's Son*, 117.

me off with it, I will continue my crusade against the policy game promoters. If this church stands I will make my next talk against the evil from its pulpit next Sunday."[71] Sure enough, the following Sunday the old "Railroad Chapel" building was still standing and Ransom preached his most fiery anti-gambling homily to date. In his sermons the two Sundays following the bombing, which received coverage in all the major city newspapers, Ransom preached a message of resistance in the face of oppression and opposition, and he called for a united front, articulating his theology of "brotherhood," in the effort to reform and save Chicago in the battle against the "superpersonal forces of evil" in the city.[72] He preached for moral and social reform, but not the kind that is achieved by hatred and violence, but rather with unity and the "law of love." While Ransom recognized the need for legislative reform, he argued that rewriting words on official documents did but little in changing hearts and societies: "Men may be restrained, but they cannot be made morally upright by law." Instead, Ransom preached, "Moral and social reform should be carried on by education and love, and that is our method in this matter."[73] On the first Sunday following the attack, he said, "Let us stand up for Chicago. Let us show the

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[71] "Declares only Death will Defeat Him—Clue to Explosion," *Hearst's Chicago American*, May 4, 1903.

[72] Years later, in his autobiography, Ransom shared part of the text from one of his sermons following the bombing: "Dynamite and violence are a poor answer to an argument. The explosion with this these men south to stop the utterance from this pulpit in condemnation of policy went ringing throughout the city. It was not the first time that men called to task for their sins or violation of the law have answered with a blow. But you can't shoot great principles dead. I want to say once and for all to the people who are opposed to us—that they may burn down this place, but if they don't burn me with it the police and firemen may cool the embers, and I will stand on the ashes and keep pegging away. We would not attempt to destroy these people who are opposed to us; we would not life one hand against them, for we want to *save them*. If a man finds an animal in a stream he seeks to remove it without injuring it. Policy is an animal in the stream of humanity which we wish to cleanse. Many of the persons engaged in it are our brethren and friends. We would not harm them. Christianity is not violence, but love." Ransom, *Pilgrimage of Harriet Ransom's Son*, 129.

[73] "The Rev. R. C. Ransom Bitterly Denounces Policy Game While Police Watch for Dynamiters," *Chicago Tribune*, May 11, 1903. It also is worth noting that while Ransom preached nonviolence, one newspaper reporter "caught the glint of the pastor's revolver, hurriedly slipped beneath the Bible on the lecturn [*sic*]." "How to Drive Out Policy," *Chicago Evening Post*, May 4, 1903.

people of the city that we are interested in making it good morally, in cleaning it."[74] The "city" (i.e., Chicago) provided the backdrop for his preaching on social reform, and it was precisely the "city" that needed saving. This emphasis on the "salvation of the city" shaped his ecclesiology and undergirded the philosophy behind ICSS. Unfortunately, however, Ransom's leadership in this crusade was short-lived as denominational politics would force him to leave Chicago in the course of the following year.

Ransom's practical theology, and particularly his formulation of a "theology of brotherhood," derived as much from his encounter of his congregants and neighbors of ICSS as it ever did from books or lectures. In his theology of brotherhood, Ransom gave theological language and meaning to lived religious practices on the streets of Black Chicago, practical in every sense as it was always concerned with racial uplift and the redemption of Chicago's Black Belt.

V. Trinity Mission

Richard R. Wright Jr. moved to Chicago in 1898 after graduating from Georgia State Industrial College intending to study at the University of Chicago Divinity School. At the University of Chicago, Wright discovered the theological and biblical building blocks for the kind of Black social Christian tradition he would later help to construct within and beyond Black

[74] Ransom, quoted in "Policy Men Scored—Rev. R. C. Ransom Again Warns Flock Against the Evils of Gambling," *Chicago Record-Herald*, May 11, 1903.

Chicago.[75] Shailer Mathews, who came to the Divinity School in 1894 as professor of New Testament and later moved to theology, played an especially important role in Wright's formation as a social gospel thinker.[76] According to Wright, the greatest gift Mathews ever gave him was teaching him the social gospel. One of the most formative courses Wright reported to have taken at the Divinity School was one Mathews taught on the social ethic of Jesus.[77] Wright described his encounter of the social gospel in that course with Mathews as affecting a "revolution in my thinking" and that "[Mathews] was introducing me to a concept of Jesus for which I had for

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[75] The motivation behind his move to Chicago was twofold. First, his father, an academic and educator himself, admired W.E.B. Du Bois and challenged his son to follow in his footsteps, which meant especially to get the best possible education in order to work for the uplift of the race (Du Bois had received his Ph.D. from Harvard). The second motivating factor was that he wanted to measure himself against White colleagues in a prestigious and academically rigorous environment. In his autobiography he reflected, "The main thing which intrigued me [about attending the University of Chicago] was that I would go to school with white men and women and have an opportunity to test my ability with theirs. I had faith that I would be equal to the task. . . . When I left for Chicago, an old ex-slave said, 'Don't you let those white boys up North beat you in anything,' and I determined not to do so. For, I felt that I not only represented myself, and the preset of Professor Wright's family, but also the whole Negro-American race." To be sure, Wright held his own and progressed in preternatural fashion in respect to his peers at Chicago. Richard R. Wright, Jr., *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain Behind the Black Curtain: An Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Rare Book Co., 1965), 37. Cf. Terrell Dale Goddard, "The Black Social Gospel in Chicago, 1896-1906: The Ministries of Reverdy C. Ransom and Richard R. Wright, Jr.," *The Journal of Negro History* 84.3 (1999): 239-40.

[76] Wright's studies at Chicago were highlighted by the tutelage he received from William Rainey Harper (the university's founding president and a scholar of Old Testament), Ernest Dewitt Burton (a New Testament scholar), and Shailer Mathews. Wright attributed to Harper and Burton his understanding of the historical-critical approach to the study of the Bible, which at first troubled him but later became something of a love affair for him. In fact, it was Mathews, who guided Wright through his momentary "crisis of faith" upon discovering higher criticism. Wright learned from Mathews that the church's future depended on its scholars and ministers coming to terms with modern developments in science and historical criticism and that the study of modern theology was in this way actually an "act of faithfulness to the gospel" (Dorrien, *The New Abolition*, 490). As a result, Wright felt himself drawn to his professor of theology. "I admired Burton," he said, "I loved Matthews. . . . [he] became my adviser and confidante" (Wright, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain*, 43). Wright became close with Mathews during his time as a student, and Mathews also came to Wright's aid on more than one occasion in difficult times during his first pastorate on Chicago's South Side.

[77] In his 1897 book on the same subject, Mathews wrote, "were one to come to the words of Jesus unbiased by traditional interpretations, the impression would be inevitable that the goal of his efforts was the establishment of an ideal society [i.e., the kingdom of God]. . . . By the kingdom of God Jesus meant an ideal (though progressively approximated) social order in which the relation of men to God is that of sons, and (therefore) to each other, that of brothers." Shailer Mathews, *The Social Teaching of Jesus: An Essay in Christian Sociology* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1897), 40, 54.

years been searching unconsciously."[78] Wright was particularly influenced by Mathews' social gospel emphasis on what he described as the basic ethical principle of "neighbor love." He reflected later in his life, "Brought up as I had been, with a theology which took little account of social conditions and concerned itself chiefly with "getting to heaven," I found in the social gospel a more satisfying meaning and purpose for Christianity than ever before. The more I read my Bible, and indeed the history of my own church, the more enthusiastic I became about the social gospel. . . . For me there was little else for the church to do than to make practical [the social gospel's] belief in God and brotherhood, and to help build a Christian society on earth."[79] With the social gospel taught to him by Mathews, Wright was inspired to pursue a ministry shaped by the kingdom ethic of Jesus that he felt had real meaning and relevance for the modern world.[80] The extent of Mathews' influence on Wright in terms of the social gospel is evident in Wright's B.D. thesis, in which he observed how the industrial situation of Black laborers in Chicago had corroded their sense of purpose and self-worth. He argued, "In these people must be instilled a self-respect, a love for the community, a high sense of morality, of thrift and those high spiritual forces which uplift men into better relations with their God and their fellows," and he believed the "Negro Church" was uniquely suited for just this task.[81]

Wright's theological formation in social Christian thought also benefitted significantly from a brief academic residency he undertook in Germany in 1903. Having dreamed about

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[78] Wright, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain*, 43.

[79] Wright, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain*, 149-50.

[80] Dorrien, *The New Abolition*, 490.

[81] Richard R. Wright Jr., "The Industrial Condition of Negroes in Chicago," (B.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1901), 6.

studying historical criticism abroad (e.g., Glasgow or Edinburgh), Mathews encouraged Wright to "Go to Berlin!" where Mathews encouraged him to study in particular with Adolf von Harnack and Bernhard Weiss.[82] He went and was trained in the "Ritschlian school" of theology by Weiss and Harnack and was exposed to "Christian Socialism," in many ways the German equivalent (and predecessor) to the American social gospel.[83] Though more importantly, perhaps, Wright (not unlike W.E.B. Du Bois before him) described his year in Germany as "epoch-making," noting that for the first time he felt he was truly equal with White people.[84] He wrote, "I forgot American prejudice, for even the Americans in Germany treated me as a human being."[85] Thus when he returned to Chicago in 1904 (with the primary intention of continuing his education at the University of Chicago), Wright had already begun to ponder in theological terms about a distinctly Black social gospel, even though he had little idea what precisely that would look like until he was at work in Black Chicago. In Germany, Wright's theology of the social gospel became wedded to his vision of racial justice for Black Americans, and he regained the confidence necessary for the task he saw before him that had been systematically squeezed out of him by the oppressive racial climate in America.

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[82] Wright, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain*, 42.

[83] Albrecht Ritschl, trained in historical criticism by F. C. Baur at the University of Tübingen, was the leader of a movement in German theological circles that became the major proponent of German "Christian socialism." He emphasized the centrality of the kingdom of God, and he interpreted the kingdom and the teachings of Jesus primarily in ethical terms. As Gary Dorrien has pointed out, Harnack in particular, in his post at Berlin, trained an entire cadre of American theologians in Ritschlian theology around the turn of the century, in no small way shaping American theological liberalism and the ethical contours of the American social gospel. Cf. Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 24-31.

[84] Ibid., 46. Cf. Dorrien, *The New Abolition*, 493.

[85] Wright, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain*, 47.

Perhaps no figure shaped Wright and his ministry in Chicago more than his ministerial mentor, Reverdy C. Ransom. In 1900, Ransom welcomed Wright to serve as his student assistant at Institutional Church and Settlement, and it was there that Wright got his first real taste of "on the ground" social gospel ministry.[86] In addition to getting firsthand experience of leading a multifaceted ministry, Wright learned from Ransom to focus his ministry on "practical daily living." Wright modeled much of his later ministry, including his short stint as pastor of the Trinity Mission in Chicago, after Ransom's program at ICSS.

When Wright returned to Chicago in 1904 from his academic residency in Germany (Berlin and Leipzig), he finished a master's thesis and fully believed that the next chapter in his life included earning a doctorate in New Testament at Chicago. However, with the encouragement of some close friends, he decided to try his hand at church work. So he asked the AME bishop, C. T. Shaffer, to find a placement for him, indicating he would be willing to serve anywhere in Chicagoland. Shaffer agreed and Wright found himself tasked with the ministry of a new storefront church on Chicago's South Side called Trinity Mission.[87] The church was in no way the ideal ministry job, however. A description of Trinity Mission from the Illinois Writers' Project in 1905 described its setting, "Down on 18th Street, in the very heart of the most populous district in the city inhabited by colored people there is a mission, to be exact, although all the work is along christian lines. This settlement has been named Trinity Mission and culture

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[86] Wright, reflecting on his mentor and his time serving under him many years later, said, "Rev. Ransom's idea was that the church should help the community in *practical daily living* [my emphasis]. His church building was open all day, every day. He organized in addition to the usual boards and clubs, a Sunday School, clubs for boys and girls, a kindergarten, a kitchen-garden, sewing classes, physical culture classes, and other group activities. Many sympathetic whites and blacks alike volunteered to help. My duties were to conduct the opening services of the religious worship on Sunday nights, to sponsor a boys' club and to teach a girls' Sunday School class" (Wright, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain*, 94-95).

[87] Wright, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain*, 99-100. Dorrien, *The New Abolition*, 493.

center and its object is to serve the same purpose for the poor Negroes as the West Side settlements were for the white people. In the district north of 22nd Street and between Michigan and Clark Streets there live more than 7,500 colored people. There is not a church in this district, and the dwellers in the neighborhood are practically shut off from all the benefits of the church. Most of the people are very poor, the majority are working people, and most women of the district are compelled to leave their homes and children every day to go out to [help] make a living."[88] In fact, when he received his appointment there, one of his presiding elders told him he "would not find much there but to go, 'do your best until something else turns up.'"[89] Wright learned that the mission had had many pastors during its fourteen-year history, though he said, "it seemed that none of them did much more than preach on Sunday, raise the conference claims, and collect whatever they could for themselves."[90] Wright also did not find much to be hopeful about in the membership he inherited.[91]

The challenge Wright faced in rehabilitating the Trinity Mission was made even more difficult by the dilapidated state of the storefront church and the neighborhood in which it was

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[88] "Trinity Mission," Illinois Writers' Project papers, box 18, folder 33, Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, Chicago.

[89] Wright, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain*, 100.

[90] Ibid., 101. This was echoed in a 1905 report on churches in Chicago, filed during his tenure at Trinity, which observed, "Until now very little has ever been done to aid the people of the district. The colored themselves have founded several organizations, but they are located farther south, where the more well-to-do live" ("Trinity Mission," Illinois Writers' Project papers, box 18, folder 33, Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, Chicago).

[91] With the help of the outgoing pastor of Trinity, Rev. Manley, Wright was able to track down four of the eight members who had attended in the previous year and visited them. Two of them, Sisters Bramlett and Turner, assured him of their loyalty to the mission. Another woman, Sister Howard, warned him that he should stay away. While the lone male member he contacted, Brother Howell, told him not to expect a salary and that he would need to get a job in addition to the pastorate, which indeed proved to be the case. Wright, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain*, 101. "Trinity Mission," Illinois Writers' Project papers, box 18, folder 33, Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, Chicago.

situated. In his autobiography he recounted that the morning after he received his assignment to Trinity he visited the storefront church and described what he found as “disheartening.” In fact, he wrote,

> The church was on the first floor of a three-story brick building; the second and third floors being occupied by tenants—three families. The front part at one time had been a store. The front door was in the center, both right and left windows had missing panes and were covered with cardboard, where glass should have been. Inside were about thirty-five chairs, all disarranged. The floor was unpainted and uncarpeted; the pulpit was substantial but the altar rail was fragile. There were four chairs in the pulpit. Paper hung from the ceiling, and that on about half of the walls had been torn off. The big bellied stove seemed never to have been polished, and the floor must not have been swept for several weeks, or scrubbed in months. I brushed off one chair, sat down and thought. I knelt and prayed for the guiding presence of God and His illuminating power. . . . I walked around the block and over much of the neighborhood, which I found to be much rundown, smelly, and neglected.[92]

Wright was also informed by “Brother Howell” that the church owed three month’s rent, forty-five dollars, and that the church had less than three dollars in the treasury.

The neighborhood in which the church was situated did little to bolster any hope he might have needed to begin his ministry. Upon surveying the neighborhood and visiting most of the local shops and businesses, and aided by his undergraduate degree in sociology, Wright composed a strategic map of the neighborhood that would help tailor the social ministry he envisioned to the needs of the surrounding community.[93] With this map he outlined what he called “my parish,” stretching “four streets from my church each way with Trinity Mission in the

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[92] Ibid., 101-2.

[93] It is noteworthy that Wright’s approach here took a page directly out of Jane Addam’s playbook in her work with Hull House just down the road. In 1895, Addam’s had commissioned the *Hull House Maps and Papers* project, directed by Florence Kelley. The project was a groundbreaking publication and was comprised of wages and nationalist maps, followed by short essays that detailed in narrative form the living and working conditions of the poor in the 19th Ward. See *Hull House Maps and Papers: A Presentation of Nationalities and Wages in a Congested District of Chicago, Together with Comments and Essays on Problems Growing Out of the Social Conditions* (Urbana, IL: U. of Illinois Press, 2006 [1895]).

center, bounded on the north by 14th Street, on the east by Michigan Avenue, on the south by 22nd Street, and on the west by LeSalle Street. . . . [I] found that there were approximately 2,500 of *my people* [i.e., Black people] in the vicinity."[94] He also discovered a high concentration of saloons, brothels, and "gambling joints" within his parish. Wright's "parish" was situated adjacent to a vice district, a neighborhood which historian Kevin J. Mumford has specifically identified as an "interzone," that is, an interracial vice district consisting of a high density of brothels and dance halls.[95] On some of the streets in the neighborhood more than half of the buildings were prostitution houses, the most organized servicing White customers (employing both white and lighter-skinned Black prostitutes), which accounted for the majority of the sex business in that particular district. All of these posed a serious challenge to any kind of ministry or social service in the area, and Wright was well aware of the obstacles before him.

The greatest challenge in Wight's mind, however, was not necessarily the flourishing of vice in the neighborhood but the overwhelming economic depression experienced by the vast majority of the neighborhood's Black inhabitants. In his survey he quickly learned that nearly every Black person in his parish was "just poor" though many of them made "great effort to be decent." One of the great ironies Wright documented in his survey commented that while the Black population of his parish were extraordinarily poor, even by the standards of Black people

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[94] Ibid., 104. He also described the key for his map: "On my chart of the parish I drew a black, circular spot for saloons, a black square for known houses of prostitution, a hollow circle for deaths, a hollow triangle for murders during the preceding five years, and a hollow inverted triangle for raids on gambling houses during the previous five years. My information was checked as far as possible with police and health records. I had a cross for each church for white people and "X" for a colored church, a gable for a school, and a crib for nursery" (105). Again, it is noteworthy that Wright's mapping closely resembled the work done by Jane Addams at Hull House a decade earlier.

[95] See Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997), 48.

on the South Side, he found that many of Chicago's wealthy White citizens lived there, above the squalor of its Black ones. He did not probe this issue further however. Similarly, he was surprised that while there were very few churches to service the vast majority of the poor black people in his parish, some of Chicago's "richest churches and ablest ministers were in my parish," including the Michigan Avenue Presbyterian Church (20th Street and Michigan Avenue), the Methodist Church at 16th Street and Wabash Avenue, as well as Grace Episcopal Church.[96] He noted that "the better circumstanced Negro-Americans" lived south of 22nd Street (the southern border of his parish), and if they lived in his area then they had every intention of moving south soon. To compound the economic hardships his parishioners faced, Wright observed that there were very few "decent" (i.e., not vice-related) jobs available in the neighborhood, and the jobs that did exist paid considerably less than those in the vice industry. Those who resisted the life of crime had to travel outside of the neighborhood to find work, which rarely consisted of permanent employment but mostly "odd jobs as laborers, handymen, or domestic servants." These economic burdens contributed to what Wright described as a "spiritual depression" among the Black people of his parish, particularly as many of them were southern migrants from "Mississippi, Tennessee and Kentucky," who had moved north hoping "to better their conditions."[97] Black people in the neighborhood desired to improve their conditions, but

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[96] Ibid., 104-6. See also, "Trinity Mission," Illinois Writers' Project papers, box 18, folder 33, Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, Chicago.

[97] Ibid., 105. Wright's encounter of poor, Black migrants from the South in his Trinity parish would significantly influence the trajectory of his ministry and scholarly focus after leaving Chicago. The migration of Black southerners to urban centers in the North became the primary subject of his inquiry and activism for much of the rest of his life.

they faced serious obstacles in doing so, in most cases insurmountable ones.[98] As he looked out over the place where he was called to minister, Wright saw that "poverty overshadowed everything."[99]

Despite this less than auspicious beginning to his tenure at Trinity, however, Wright believed God had heard his prayer there in the empty storefront church on that first Monday morning, and so he committed himself to the work in that place fully aware of the challenges before him. In fact, to some degree, the dire socioeconomic depression permeating his parish inspired him, because it was precisely these circumstances that called for the kind of social gospel he had learned under Mathews at the University of Chicago and Harnack in Germany and the kind of social ministry in which he had been trained under Ransom at Institutional Church.

Recognizing the many burdens poverty cast on his parish, Wright began by taking aim at what he was coming to understand as one of the Black Belt's most pressing problem—neglected children.[100] The women who had helped sustain Trinity through the previous years, helped Wright to see the plight of children in the neighborhood as chief among those that Trinity should allocate resources and attention. Wright came to understand that poverty was the main contributing factor to the condition of these children, and he held both the city and the church

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[98] Wright's analysis of the socioeconomic reality of the people in his neighborhood was substantiated by the 1905 report for the Illinois Writers' Project cited above, which read, "Most of the people are very poor, the majority are working people, and most women of the district are compelled to leave their homes and children every day to go out to help make a living." "Trinity Mission," Illinois Writers' Project papers, box 18, folder 33, Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, Chicago.

[99] Wright, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain*, 105.

[100] In thinking about the first phase of his ministry at Trinity, he wrote, "The most serious problem was that of the greatly neglected children. Outside of the public schools there was almost nothing done for the colored children, many of whom roamed the streets, dug into the garbage cans, did petty thieving, learned early the excitement sexual experience and became cynical at fifteen. . . . In my house-to-house canvass, I found young children whose mothers had gone to work, leaving them alone, sometimes locked inside, frequently in the care of an older child" (Ibid., 105-6, 108).

responsible for the oppressive poverty experienced by his Black parishioners. The charge against the latter—that the church was culpable because it remained "socially asleep"—is particularly illuminating for understanding the motivating force behind the ministry he was trying to rehabilitate at Trinity Church. So after convincing the owner of the building that housed Trinity Church on the first of three floors to rent the entire building to them, Wright opened a community day nursery for the neighborhood children on the second floor. Additionally, Wright was able to contract with a Black female physician, Dr. Anna Cooper, to come to the nursery frequently to check on the health of the children and to teach nutritional and basic health lessons for mothers. Volunteers associated with various women's clubs staffed the nursery. They also helped to subsidize the salary of the caretaker and provided such necessary supplies as milk, beds, chairs, toys, clothing and the like. Wright said that for him and the women who volunteered, "it was a great thrill just to see the smiles on the faces of mothers when they came to get their children, all bathed and clean, sometimes wearing new clothing."[101] The success of the nursery was encouraging for Wright, and it only increased his zeal for making Trinity into the kind of social ministry that would transform his parish, and perhaps also the rest of Black Chicago.

In the process of establishing the day nursery, Wright's mind changed about the nature of his ministry there. He began to envision more than simply the rehabilitation of a church but the establishment of a wide-reaching social ministry. After all, Wright learned a valuable lesson about himself in the early days of his ministry at Trinity, as Gary Dorrien puts it, "it taught him . . . that he was good at organizing things, and that he had the requisite feeling for ministering to the

[101] Ibid., 108.

poor and hurting."[102] So began the transformation of Trinity Church into the Trinity Mission and Culture Center.

While the care of the parish's children was perhaps the most successful project of the mission during Wright's brief tenure, a ministry that later came to include also adolescents and teenagers, he also launched several other ministries. In the back of the church (on the first floor of the building) he set up a reading room, which included his own personal library as well as donations from other churches and individual contributors. The majority of the books were "about and by Negro-Americans," and it included Black weekly newspapers, Bibles, and books on religion in particular. The reading room kept constant traffic coming into the mission as it was patronized by "many colored and a few whites."[103] He also taught classes at the mission throughout the week, mostly dealing with the Bible but also often on "Negro History."[104] Additionally, Wright also launched a women's club at the mission, a men's association, a bathhouse, and a correspondence bureau. He established the latter in order to help provide the mostly illiterate young Black adults in the neighborhood with skills to get better, more stable employment. Additionally, Wright served as a letter writer for those who could not write.[105] In

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[102] Dorrien, *The New Abolition*, 494.

[103] Largely because of the demand the reading room created in the mission, Wright moved from his dormitory at the University of Chicago to a room in the mission so that he could always be there to oversee the various ministries throughout the day and night (the building was open daily from nine in the morning until midnight).

[104] Wright, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain*, 108-10. It was reported that "His classes [were] well filled," and that both subjects were received well and with enthusiasm ("Trinity Mission," Illinois Writers' Project papers, box 18, folder 33, Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, Chicago). Wright believed that a crucial part of the project of racial uplift included learning and appreciating the history of African Americans: "I taught the Bible as a living book for today, also 'Negro History,' making my own textbook, as a means of building self-respect, and family life" (Wright, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain*, 107).

[105] "Trinity Mission," Illinois Writers' Project papers, box 18, folder 33, Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, Chicago.

just over a year at Trinity, Wright created an impressively diverse program of ministries, both reflecting Ransom's ICSS and yet addressing the specific needs of his own "parish."

Wright quickly realized that such ministry required support and cooperation. While he became frustrated by the lack of support from the AME leadership, he developed a network of like-minded social gospelers in the Windy City who became an indispensable resource for him. In addition to his mentors, Mathews and Ransom, he cited especially his relationships with two women who had established successful social ministries in the city—Jane Addams and Mary McDowell—as models and lifelines of support.[106]

Wright's encounter of the circumstances of African Americans in the Black Belt had a profound effect on his thought and practice of Black social Christianity, particularly as it helped him think about the church's role in solving the "problem of race." In his ministry with Trinity, he discovered that the theological tools he had received for Christian ministry were woefully insufficient for addressing the social situation of his "parishioners." Instead, he found his training in sociology far more useful. Thus his focus shifted from theology to sociology on the question of "Negro religion," a subtle but important distinction crucial for understanding his formulation of Black social Christianity.

Wright is representative of a methodological shift within Black social Christianity as he found the analytical tools of sociology far more useful than the theological ones he had sought in coming to the University of Chicago. He discovered a more pressing need to read and interpret social realities, more so than sacred texts, in order to do the kind of religious work necessary to

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[106] Reflecting on his time in Chicago toward the end of his life, he said concerning his time directing the Trinity mission, "I started to concentrate on the subject of the improvement of social conditions surrounding my church. Such people as Miss Jane Addams, founder of Hull House, Chicago; Miss Mary McDowell of the University of Chicago Settlement . . . came to my aid" (Ibid., 47, also 106).

wake up a church "socially asleep," and his ministry with Trinity played a significant role in what he called his "conversion" in this regard. Having been bred more for the likes of Harvard or Yale, Wright admitted he had never known the kind of poverty experienced by those to whom he ministered at Trinity (and ICSS), but in the process of working among them he testified, "I perhaps was my own greatest convert, for I experienced . . . the practical value of the redemptive love of Jesus as I had never before. . . . I no longer preached merely theory learned in a theological seminary, but tried to make it live."[107] He confessed, "This pastorate completely shifted my interest from the theological to the sociological point of view." Thus Wright began to draw more on his training in sociology, assuming the vocation of a sociologist of the Black social gospel, rather than a theologian proper. While Wright attributed this vocational shift to the entire experience of his Trinity ministry, he pointed to one moment when his mind was clearly changed on this matter. He was listening to a sermon on John 10:10 by Albion Small, who was then head of the sociology department at the University of Chicago, in which Small interpreted Christ's "more abundant life" to include the things necessary for living in this life: physical health, steady employment, education, a political voice, and not just spiritual health. At that point he said, "Now I saw plainly that the church must devote more time to the social without of course neglecting the theological. . . . Now that my work every day put me right up against practical social problems, I decided to devote more time to the study of that side of church work."[108]

Perhaps the fullest expression of Wright's vocation as a sociologist of Black social Christianity is demonstrated by an article he published dealing with the place of social work in

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[107] Wright, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain*, 106. He found that higher criticism, with which he had had a kind of love affair that had taken him around the world to Germany, was of little "practical" use in tackling the problems faced by the poor Black communities to which he felt himself called.

[108] Wright, *87 Years Behind the Black Curtain*, 114-15. Cf. Dorrien, *The New Abolition*, 495.

the "Negro Church" less than two years after he left Trinity in Chicago for the University of Pennsylvania. The article, titled "Social Work and Influence of the Negro Church" (1907), was published in the *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, and it was based largely on research he had published a year earlier in the same journal.[109] In the article, Wright considered the possibilities and limitations of social work in the "Negro Church" on both the general and local levels, and he considered especially the challenges facing this kind of socially conscious ministry in urban contexts. He also offered his own ideas about how this kind of ministry could succeed.

Wright began the article by specifying that the focus of his study was "the Negro Church," a term he used to designate that "portion of organized Christian teaching which is conducted exclusively by Negroes among the members of their race." He suggested that in their religious life, the "Negro race is perhaps more distinctly separate from the people at large than in any other important social relation," and he believed that it was precisely the distinct experience of Black Americans, deriving mainly from their experience of racial oppression, that warranted such a study.[110] Wright understood the "Negro Church" as the institution with the greatest potential for leading in the social and racial uplift of Black Americans in the North and South,

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[109] R.R. Wright, Jr., "Social Work and Influence of the Negro Church," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 30 (Nov 1907): 81-93. Idem, "The Migration of Negroes to the North," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 27 (May 1906): 97-116. This study was also reprinted with the same title in *The Industrial Condition of the Negro in the North* (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1906), 559-78. Readers familiar with Wright's background with Institutional Church and Trinity Mission in Chicago would have quickly recognized that many of the concerns expressed and lessons he offered drew directly from his own experiences of ministry in Chicago. In fact, when discussing the possibilities for social ministry in the city context, Wright used Ransom's Institutional Church as a model (89).

[110] Wright, "Social Work," 81. Wright elsewhere articulated this notion of the "distinctly separate" experience of the "Negro Church" and of the nature of Black Americans generally. See R.R. Wright, Jr., "President Harding on the Negro," *Christian Recorder* 69.33 (Nov 3, 1921): 4.

but he also recognized that serious obstacles existed to prevent the flourishing of a socially-engaged "Negro Church."[111] In the past, the "Negro Church" had been particularly effective as a social uplift institution in terms of the role it played in the education of the race through its Black colleges, and in terms of its political influence as the largest and most powerful political institution in Black communities, particularly in rural contexts.[112] The urban context, however, and the ever-rising flood of Black southerners migrating north, presented new challenges for the "Negro Church" in terms of its social work.[113]

The problems posed by the urban setting for the "Negro Church" and its social ministries constituted the main focus of the article. Wright was convinced that up to that point the two largest African American denominations (the AME church and the Baptists) had failed in establishing successful social ministries in northern cities on the general level, though for different reasons. The AME church was too focused on creating a strong central organization to the neglect of social work, while the very "independence and isolation" of Baptists "retard[ed] their social work."[114] On the local level, however, Wright observed more success in this regard, but only in more rural contexts. He argued that "small town" Black churches were the strongest

[111] Ibid., 88. Cf. R.R. Wright, Jr., "Race Leadership," *Christian Recorder* 69.5 (Apr 14, 1921): 1.

[112] Ibid., 82-83, 85-86. On the role of education in the uplift of the race, Wright elsewhere made the case that the Black church must continue to focus on education, "one of the most vital forces in human life," in the work of bettering the social and political status of Black Americans. See R.R. Wright, Jr., "Ministering to Our Expanding Life," *Christian Recorder* 68.27 (Sept 16 1920): 1.

[113] It should be noted that upon his arrival at the University of Pennsylvania, Wright began publishing quite prolifically regarding the migration of Black southerners to northern urban centers. E.g., Wright, "The Migration of Negroes to the North," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 27 (May 1906): 97-116; idem, "The Migration of Negroes to the North," in *The Industrial Condition of the Negro in the North* (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1906), 559-78; idem, "The Negro in Unskilled Labor," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 49 (Sept 1913): 19-27.

[114] Wright, "Social Work," 86.

Black social institutions, because they necessarily addressed every facet of the lives of African Americans. They functioned as a kind of "general social club," and the church served "as a kind of bureau of charities." In small towns, the "Negro Church" responded to the social, political, physical, as well as spiritual needs of its Black citizens. However, the reason the church was socially effective in these small towns was because of its "monopoly" there, according to Wright's research. In large cities things were different.[115]

In Wright's estimation, the most prohibitive factor in the advancement of the race in the urban North had to do with the "great mass of migrants" coming to the cities from the rural South. He called this the "problem of the city Negro," recognizing that most "city Negroes" had migrated from rural areas and mostly from the South.[116] At first, he argued, there appeared to be no problem with the "great mass of Negroes who are migrating to the largest cities" precisely because they were drawn to the church, which had been so much a part of their former lives in the South. However, as they became accustomed to city life, they began to "fall away," and Wright judged, "they are not missed," because as soon as they leave a newly arrived migrant takes their place in the pew.[117] He argued though that it was just these people—Black southern migrants—who most needed the social work the churches could provide, and yet the "church is closed tight." Wright's research revealed that southern migrants especially felt the burden of poverty that ran along the "color-line" and affected most Black urban dwellers, and he concluded

[115] Ibid., 87.

[116] To be clear, Wright believed that Black migration north was on the whole good for the race. Elsewhere he argued, "The North has taught the negroes the value of money; of economy; it has taught more sustained effort in work, punctuality and regularity; it has taught negroes even a greater race respect and race loyalty. . . . I think I can safely say that the North is indeed the great and hard school for them, where they are learning their best and often their first lessons in American thrift and industry, and the true dignity of American citizenship" (Wright, "The Migration of Negroes to the North," 116).

[117] Ibid., 89.

that the systematic funneling of migrants to the lowest rungs of poverty was particularly damaging for the race as a whole. In order to uplift the race, Wright argued that "Negro Churches" needed to "wake up" socially and focus their attention on the plight of newcomers to the city. He offered as a solution,

> [H]aving the ear and heart at least of the newcomers, the Church, with its leaders, who have the confidence of these people, can do much to better conditions. It can do so first by realizing its situation in a great city and the transition through which it and its members are going, by always holding up and contending for the highest religious and social ideals, by helping the municipal government to see its social duty and creating a desire for higher things in their communicants.[118]

There were many obstacles that could prevent the successful implementation of an "active, systematic city social missionary work" that focused its efforts on newly arrived Black southerners, not least of which included having to overcome the "emotionalism" and "otherworldliness" of the religious ideals of the Black masses. Yet Wright remained optimistic, though he was hardly naive. He remained ever the realist concerning the shackling forces of poverty and race.

Wright's experience of ministering to the poorest Black Chicagoans in his Trinity parish revealed to him the crushing burden poverty placed upon Black urbanites, and his keen sociological perceptiveness helped him see how the interweaving of race and poverty created a seemingly insurmountable barrier for the advancement of his race.[119] Black social Christianity

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[118] Ibid., 92.

[119] For example, Wright wrote on more than one occasion about how crime, poverty, and race together contributed to the systemic oppression of the Black race: "Historically, Negroes have had to prove their innocence and not their prosecutors their guilt. . . . The crimes of the poor are generally their vices, which affect them more than they affect the other part of the community. The vices of of the well-to-do, on the other hand, are seldom called criminal, unless they become of great social concern. . . . Then there is the matter of the trial after arrests. Even before justice, poverty suffered." Poverty was the key to criminality, a problem compounded by race. R. R. Wright, Jr., "Negroes in the North: the Northern Negro and Crime," *The Southern Workman* 39.3 (March 1910): 140-42.

needed to interrogate the complex questions about how race, poverty, and the urban setting worked together to systemically oppress Black people. Wright knew all too well that his people were the victims of injustice, and he believed this knowledge was not cause for inaction but rather the very motivation to fight for freedom. As Gary Dorrien has suggested, "The black social gospel arose from churches where preaching about the cross was not optional, because black Americans experienced it every day as a persecuted, crucified people"[120] Still, Wright's optimistic pragmatism and recognition of the complexity of the problem of race convinced him that preaching the cross and even a robust theology of the social gospel were still insufficient to overcome the racial and economic shackles binding Black people in the urban North.

Despite Wright's best efforts and the support of others, however, his ministry was destined to fail without the backing of the AME church. When he asked Bishop Shaffer and his other AME colleagues in Chicago for support he was flatly rejected, and it had little to do with him or his ministry.[121] The lack of support from the AME church spelled the certain failure of his social ministry in Chicago, and he was discerning enough to see the writing on the wall. Facing the reality that he was going to have to shut down the mission, he accepted an offer in 1905 to study for the Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, continuing the work of W.E.B. Du Bois there. The failure of the Trinity mission convinced Wright that AME churches needed to reexamine their approach to southern Black migrants, especially as they transitioned

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[120] Dorrien, *The New Abolition*, 3.

[121] According to Wallace Best, "Wright remained dissatisfied with the level of support the AME denomination rendered to urban ministry among southern migrants generally. His own ministry served as an example." Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 132.

into northern urban centers like Chicago, and he worked toward this end for much of the rest of his life after leaving Chicago.[122]

VI. Conclusion

ICSS and Trinity proved to be two of the most ambitious ecclesial projects of Black social Christianity in Chicago in the pre-migration era. And while they certainly had a positive impact by addressing the needs of Black Chicagoans who benefitted from their services, the struggles that Wright and Ransom both encountered, and which led to their respective departures from Chicago, reveal cracks in the social program of the AME Church at the denominational level. While Chicago's AME churches continued to pursue social gospel initiatives in the years following the Ransom and Wright's departures (e.g., Archibald Carey Sr., see below), they met constant resistance from the leadership of the AME Church who failed to provide adequate support to the Chicago churches and settlements, a denominational crisis that was heightened by the streams of southern migrants arriving in Chicago in increasing numbers every year.

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[122] Cf. Dorrien, *The New Abolition*, 494-95.

CHAPTER 2

Welcoming the Stranger: The Great Migration and the Test of Black Social Christianity

I. Introduction

The Great Migration was a "demographic watershed" that transformed the urban North, and the situation in Chicago was no exception.[1] The highest rate of migration occurred in the years between 1915 and 1918, but a focus on these years obfuscates the significant southern migration that was already happening. The Black population of Chicago grew 148.2% in the time from 1910 to 1920, and it had been growing steadily since the 1890s.[2] As Charles S. Johnson described the migration during the second decade of the century, "The lure of no Northern city was as irresistible for the black hordes from the South as Chicago in the West, known far and wide for its colossal abattoirs, whose placated warehouses, set close by the railroad, dotted every sizable town of the south, calling for men; Chicago remembered for the fairyland wonders of the World's Fair; home of the fearless taunting 'race paper,' and above all things, of the mills clamoring for men."[3] The situation most migrants found, however, was hardly a "promised land" flowing with milk and honey, but instead an increasingly crowded Black Belt where migrants

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[1] Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 1.

[2] Robert Lee Sutherland, "An Analysis of Negro Churches in Chicago," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, 1930, 14. Some of the most helpful data for the migration, along with helpful analysis of the factors motivating southern migration in this moment, was produced by the Chicago Commission on Race Relations, which was convened following the 1919 race riots in Chicago. See *Report of the Chicago Commission on Race Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922).

[3] Quoted in Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land,* 154.

were forced to compete for spaces to live and for jobs that often never materialized, all as crime and vice proliferated in the Black Belt in these years. Often leaving equally-difficult-if-different circumstances in the Jim Crow South, they came to Chicago and other northern urban centers as "refugees," lacking the basic material needed for survival.[4] When they arrived, migrants often looked first to the churches for help.

Like most things in Black Chicago, the mass migration event in the second decade of the new century transformed Black social Christianity. Most importantly, the Great Migration expanded social Christian practice among the churches. In the preceding decades, the AME churches in Chicago had been the primary (though not exclusive) home for Black social gospel practice and innovation. However, with new social problems posed by the Great Migration, churches across the denominational spectrum in Black Chicago experimented to one degree or another with the applicability of their Christian faith for solving the social and racial problems that confronted them.

The Great Migration might have caused an "awakening of the church to her social mission," as one Chicago clergy member put it, but it also revealed institutional shortcomings in the social programs of Black churches, none more so than the AME Church.[5] AME churches in Chicago experienced a regression in their social program as the mass migration stressed institutional frameworks and revealed a resistance at the upper levels of leadership to their

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[4] Sernett, B*ound for the Promised Land*, 130. Their situation was even more dire than that of Black migrants who had made the trek northward over the previous half century since Emancipation, about whom Du Bois had written, "the history of the Negro in northern cities is the history of the rise of a small group growing by accretions from without, but at the same time periodically overwhelmed by them and compelled to start again when once the new material has been assimilated." W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Black North in 1901* (New York: Arno Press, 1969 [1901]), 39.

[5] Perry Stackhouse, *Chicago and the Baptists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 180.

visions for social Christian ministry in the urban context. The polity and leadership issues that hindered the social gospel agenda of the AME churches are observed especially when their struggles are examined alongside the flourishing of Black social Christian ministry among the Baptists—especially Olivet Baptist Church—and the burgeoning Black Community Churches during the migration era.

II. Strangers in the Promised Land

When southern migrants arrived in Chicago, the first place many of them went were the Black churches, and they went for more reasons than just material needs, because for many the migration itself was a deeply religious experience and sometimes just as important a reason for moving northward as were any political or economic ones. Beyond the conventional push and pull factors that historians have tended to rely on in explaining the Great Migration, religious motivations were as often cited by migrants as much as any other, something that early observers of the migration recognized. Just a few years after the Great Migration, Miles Mark Fisher noted that "they [i.e., migrants] came for religious reasons."[6] It had "salvific importance" to those who set their visions northward, as Milton Sernett has suggested, "the exodus from the South during the Great Migration years was tantamount to a religious Pilgrimage out of the Wilderness into the Promised Land."[7] The White pastor of First Baptist Church in Chicago, which eventually sold its building to Olivet Baptist Church during this era, shared how he had heard southern migrants talk about their journey: "Chicago was the Promised Land to the plantation Negroes

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[6] Miles Mark Fisher, "The Negro Church and the World War," *Journal of Religion* 5 (September 1925): 485.

[7] Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land,* 56.

and the Mississippi was the River Jordan which separated them form a city which flowed with milk and honey. … Little by little they entered into their Promised Land driving out the whites even as the Children of Israel drove out the Canaanites in the days of Moses and Joshua."[8]

The arrival of tens of thousands of African Americans from the southern states in Chicago radically transformed the religious landscape of the Black Belt. As Allan Spear explained in *Black Chicago*, "religious activities were most profoundly changed during the migration," so that by the end of the Great Migration the religious life of Black Chicago was enduringly changed.[9] Robert Sutherland, who conducted one of the earliest studies of Chicago's Black churches after the migration, noted that "When the Negro migrated North his [religion] came with him."[10] In many ways, the Great Migration created a "religious diaspora" for African Americans, as southern migrants either sought out churches that provided them some sense of "home," or they established new churches that resembled their religious lives in the South. St. Clair Drake explained how the encounter of migrants with the church was dynamic and mutually transformative: "On the one hand the existing churches tended to impose the pattern of city life on the migrant, but on the other hand, the migrants also modified the church and associational structure by causing adjustments within existing units and by the addition of new ones. The interplay of forces helped to produce the present [i.e., post-migration era] church and associational pattern among Negroes in Chicago."[11] The encounter of migrant religion with the

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[8] Perry Stackhouse, *Chicago and the Baptists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 180, 184. This pastor would have more to say about the migration, much of which revealed the racist attitude of some White Christians in the city toward the "invasion of Negroes." See below.

[9] Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 174.

[10] Sutherland, "An Analysis of Chicago's Negro Churches," 44.

[11] Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations,* 147.

established religious structures of Black Chicago's "Old Settlers" was the source of significant tension in and around the Black Belt and contributed to hardening class divisions within Chicago's African American churches. A growing anti-migrant bias among Chicago's Black elites (also in the pages of the *Chicago Defender*) turned many migrants away from the established churches where they were often made to feel unwelcome.[12]

Most of the new churches migrants established were "storefront churches," small independent Christian communities who worshiped in temporary spaces and shared their religious lives together in the ways that resembled southern church life. St. Clair Drake, Robert Sutherland, and other Chicago School sociologists in fact described the storefront churches as "islands of southern culture" in the urban North.[13] The Chicago Commission on Race Relations explained how storefront churches were most often not "new" as much as they were southern churches that were transplanted to northern cities as it was often the case that "a minister formerly in the South has come with or followed his migrant members and has re-established his church in Chicago."[14] Recent scholarship has detailed the religious transformation(s) of Black

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[12] As discussed below, some of Black Chicago's churches (e.g., Olivet Baptist) were better at making migrants feel welcome and at home than others.

[13] Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 63.

[14] *Report of the Chicago Commission on Race Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 144. In his report on Chicago's Black churches during the migration, St. Clair Drake included an interview he conducted that demonstrated how storefront churches formed. According to a Missionary Baptist pastor who had migrated to Chicago from Georgia, "About 12 years ago [c. 1915] quite a number of people emigrated in Chicago from Wilkes County, the State of Georgia, there was any number of these Persons that was acquainted in the South. A group numbering about (18-20) formed themselves in what was known as 'The Drexel Club,' they increased rapidly, through acquaintance, as often as one member would see one he knew from the South he inform him about the Club, and invite him to their meeting. Usually they became members on their first visit. Dr. ______, formerly pastored 95% of this group in the southland. He came to Chicago on a vacation, while being here this club gave him some to [*sic*] or three gifts, these were some of the means of which was used in persuading [him] to stay here and join the club. Shortly after this, which was Eleven years ago [c. 1916], the _______ Missionary Baptist Church was organized, and Rev. ______ was chosen Pastor." The church moved around from storefront to storefront until they were finally able to purchase their own building in 1925. Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations*, 149-50, f.n.

Chicago during the migration, and none more so than Wallace Best in his book, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine.* Best shows how the migration initiated a "new theological orientation" for Black Christianity around themes of exile, sojourn, deliverance, as well as the moral obligation of Black Christian churches to the Black community. It is not in the interest of this chapter to provide an exhaustive study of the religious transformations that occurred in Black Chicago as a result of the migration. However, I should note that Best's claim that the "new sacred order" of Black Chicago following the migration included a new emphasis on Christian social work/reform is of central concern for my study in this chapter. That is, I hope this chapter (and those that follow) offers a corrective to Best in recognizing that Black social Christianity in Chicago was not initiated by the circumstances of the Great Migration, but rather was already very much part of the "old sacred order" of Chicago's churches, even if it was—like everything else in Black Chicago—transformed by the mass migration event.

White Church Flight

The Great Migration also reshaped Black-White Christian relations in and surrounding the Black Belt, eliciting strong reactions on the part of White Christians and churches in Chicago, often to the disadvantage of their Black coreligionists. Sociologists noted early on during the migration era that a common practice was the sale of non-business properties by White individuals and organizations to Black groups in neighborhoods where migrants settled, followed by the subsequent relocation of those White institutions to other neighborhoods.

Among the “non-business” institutions to engage in what scholars would later come to designate “White flight,” White Protestant churches were the quickest to sell and relocate.[15]

The White flight response to the Great Migration by White Protestant churches practicing the social gospel is observed in how one White Baptist pastor described the “trials and tribulations” of Chicago’s First Baptist Church (White) during the migration era. Rev. Perry Stackhouse, who became the pastor of First Baptist Church in 1921 and wrote a history of (White) Chicago Baptists, stated (as quoted above) that the Great Migration was a moment of “awakening” for the church to its social mission. However, his narrative of First Baptist Church’s “ordeals” amidst the migration and changing demographics betrays a much different story about White social Christianity. First Baptist Church, established more than eight decades before the Great Migration, was a thriving church community that had fully embraced the social gospel around the turn of the century and operated a number of ministries in its building on 31st Street and South Park Avenue. As late as 1914, the church reported to its Association, “We minister to an increasing number of nationalities and in increasingly varied ways.” The church listed as many as twenty-five nationalities that they served through their various ministries, the majority of which were European immigrants. Among their ministries, one of the most successful was their day nursery and kindergarten, which enrolled several hundred children daily from the surrounding neighborhood. They also ran several youth programs, as well as a number of clubs and classes for young women and mothers. Stackhouse described the ministry of his predecessor

[15] Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations*, 154. It is important to note that the Catholic Church took a different approach, adopting instead for a “race-based parish model” in 1917, designed by Archbishop George W. Mundelein. This strategy resulted in the creation of a Black parish centered around St. Monica’s, which had been founded by Father Augustine Tolton, the first Black Catholic priest in the U.S., and contributed just as much to the racial segregation of the city as Protestant White flight. For more, see Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 158-59.

at First Baptist on the eve of the Great Migration: "Myron Adams with his love and enthusiasm for humanity tried in so many ways to apply through the ministry of the church *the social gospel of Jesus* to the colorful and highly complex life of the community."[16]

However, this era of successful ministry of "the social gospel of Jesus" is followed in Stackhouse's historical account by a chapter titled "Dangerous Years" in which the church "struggl[ed] against adverse forces threatening the church … existing in an environment that was increasingly hostile." These "adverse forces," of course, were the growing Black migrant community in the blocks surrounding the church. He wrote, "If the community had remained white, the social program which included various other features might have given to the church a new lease of life and new opportunities to leaven the community with the ideals of the kingdom of God. But in 1915 the cry was heard, 'The Negroes are coming' and Mr. Adams in October of that year reported, 'Our Negro brethren will soon have a large majority in our community.' … Social Christianity was failing to fill empty pews … and save [First Baptist] from extinction.'"[17] In the waning days of 1915, Rev. Adams resigned his pastorate and the leadership of First Baptist began to make plans to escape the neighborhood as "Negroes coming from the South by tens of thousands … swarmed to the blocks surrounding the church building." (Stackhouse would use other vivid descriptors for the migration such as "invasion," "flood," and "conquest.") In 1918, the church wrote to its Baptist Association that they were "greatly handicapped" in carrying out their ministries that year because of the "invasion of colored people" and simultaneous "removal" of White people from the neighborhood.[18] It was at that point, in Stackhouse's telling,

[16] Stackhouse, *Chicago and the Baptists*, 199-201. My emphasis.

[17] Stackhouse, *Chicago and the Baptists*, 200-1.

[18] Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations*, 156.

that First Baptist leaders realized that their church "was face to face with catastrophe," and that "no eloquent preaching, no social service, could save a church in a community that was nearly 100 per cent Negro." They resolved to sell their building and relocate "farther South," out of reach of the "invasion." For the price of $80,000, they sold the building to Olivet Baptist Church, which had outgrown their facilities on account of the migration, a transaction that Stackhouse described as one of the greatest examples of "Baptist Missionary endeavor" in the city.[19]

Until the war ended, First Baptist was invited to join Memorial Christian Church, a Disciples of Christ congregation pastored by Herbert L. Willett, for worship services. For a time, the two churches considered joining their congregations, but as Stackhouse explained, "the Memorial Church building was not far from the colored section and the tide was still flowing southward and the church was fearful of the permanence of the community as a white community. The First Church people felt that they must go still farther South."[20] In 1919, they found their new home in the particularly affluent Kenwood neighborhood, near Hyde Park and the University of Chicago. They purchased their new building at 935 East 50th Street and Drexel

[19] Stackhouse, *Chicago and the Baptists*, 205-6.

[20] Stackhouse, *Chicago and the Baptists*, 207. Stackhouse validated their concerns by sharing the fate of Memorial Christian Church: "How well justified their fears were is evident in the fact that less than ten years later the neighborhood of the Memorial Church was captured by the Negroes, their building sold to a colored church, and the membership so scattered that the church became extinct."

Boulevard, “said to be one of the finest examples of pure English Gothic architecture in the city,” for $28,700, using the initial downpayment from Olivet to payoff their new building.[21]

The migration reveals the lines of division between social Christianities that had developed over the previous decades, particularly between one which centralized racial reform and justice and another which significantly restricted its resources and services to European immigrants and away from Black Chicagoans. The example of First Baptist Church demonstrates how one of the flagship White social gospel congregations in Chicago did not envision its social mission to extend to its African American neighbors, especially when those neighbors were poor migrants, and they were hardly the only White church to do so. In his 1930 University of Chicago dissertation on churches in the Black Belt, Robert Sutherland documented numerous White churches in the years surrounding the Great Migration that sought to resist the “Negro invasion,” as one White minister phrased it. For instance, in 1920, Washington Park Congregational Church (another church practicing the “social gospel”), located at 5347 S. Michigan Avenue (i.e., on the southern end of the Black Belt), tried to discourage Black visitors from attending by printing in large letters on its bulletin board in front of the church, “A White Congregation Worships Here.” Churches not only tried to exclude Negroes from their services, but they often actively organized to protect their neighborhoods from being “captured” by

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[21] It should be noted that Olivet continued to pay the additional $50,000 to First Baptist (which at that point was profit for First Baptist) over the next decade, a debt that certainly weighed on Olivet as it attempted to conduct its own program of social gospel ministries for newly arrived migrants (see below). The *Chicago Tribune* reported at the time of the sale that the building was originally worth $125,000, a valuation that certainly was lower as a result of the Great Migration, and that First Baptist sold it to Olivet Baptist for $85,000. The Baptist Home Missionary society subsidized $5,000 of the cost for Olivet, which is how Stackhouse probably arrived at a price tag of $80,000. (See “Negroes Acquire Fine Church on the South Side,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 13, 1918). Robert Sutherland explained that “the purchase of expensive buildings from white congregations creates a tremendous burden for black churches, the majority of whom are still in the laboring scale of society.” See Sutherland, “An Analysis of Negro Churches in Chicago,” 87.

African Americans, using their buildings as meeting places for neighborhood protective associations, whose sole purpose was to prevent Black folks from moving into their neighborhoods. In fact, one minister that Sutherland interviewed in the early 1920s, who boasted of social gospel ministries that served African Americans in their neighborhood during the week, said, "I have no particular prejudices against the Negroes, but if I welcome them into our church I know very well that the white members would leave. Consequently, to preserve the unity of our congregation I must follow this policy [of segregation]."[22] The tendency of White Protestant churches to relocate out of neighborhoods that were increasingly becoming populated by African American migrants is an indicator of anti-black racism within White social Christianity. It also reveals how White social gospelers who believed themselves to be progressive reformers and friend to the African American in fact responded to the changing demographics of Chicago in racist ways, especially in contributing to the city's de facto segregation between White and Black residents and neighborhoods.

Migrants and the Expansion of Black Social Christianity

Facing many of the same challenges—overcrowding, poverty, crime, vice, and racial tension and marginalization—they had encountered in the pre-migration era, though now at increased scale, Chicago's Black churches experienced a reawakening to the church's mission for social redemption. Like most things in Black Chicago, the mass migration event in the second decade of the new century transformed the Black social gospel practice of the churches. Most importantly, the migration and its impact on virtually every aspect of social and economic life in the Black Belt expanded social Christian practice among the churches. In the preceding decades,

[22] Sutherland, "An Analysis of Negro Churches in Chicago," 34-35.

the AME churches in Chicago had been the primary (though not exclusive) home for Black social gospel practice and innovation, drawing from their heritage as an abolitionist and socially-engaged institution in nineteenth-century African American life as well as their willingness at the turn of the century to experiment with new institutional forms. However, with the new magnitude of the social problems posed by the Great Migration, churches across the denominational spectrum in Black Chicago experimented to one degree or another with the applicability of their Christian faith for solving the social and racial problems that confronted them. However, at the same moment that Black social Christianity was being practiced more widely among the churches in Black Chicago, its ecclesial incubator—the AME churches in Chicago—experienced a regression in their social program as the mass migration stressed institutional frameworks and revealed a resistance at the upper levels of leadership to the kind of local autonomy and grassroots organization that was required for effective social Christian ministry in an urban context. The polity and leadership issues that retarded the social gospel agenda of the AME churches are observed especially when their struggles are examined alongside the flourishing of Black social Christian ministry among the Baptists (especially Olivet Baptist Church) and the burgeoning Black Community Churches during the migration era.

By the early 1920s, Black social Christianity was being preached from many of the pulpits of Chicago's Black churches. In his study of Black churches in the years just following the Great Migration, Robert Sutherland conducted surveys of twenty churches across the denominations. The following is a sampling of responses he received from pastors and lay folk about the need for a socially-engaged ministry in their churches:

> "Religion must be practical. In this day we must minister to the human as well as the spiritual needs."
>
> "We haven't had the perfected organization to adjust the people to the new city environment. There is much opportunity for actual service, such as finding jobs, stressing morality, and teaching common honesty. If it is a matter of charity among our people the ministers are called. No one would ever think of calling a white minister but would direct the cases to the many white relief agencies. But we have few such means of relief. The church is looked to first of all. I have any number of calls to find jobs, to keep people from being put out of their homes, to help those who are buying houses and can't carry the burden."
>
> "Saving souls is not enough; we need a more practical religion. We are now emphasizing religious education, social activities, and even recreational opportunities. We must build the body as well as the mind. These activities can be carried on in the church under more wholesome influence than if the youth were left to discover his own means of entertainment."
>
> "In the new approach the church must develop the social life of its people, We need clubs, reading rooms, and social service work. Instead of condemning the practices of young folks we should give them these means of expression."
>
> "Our people are deficient in education, social training, even hygiene and sanitation. the church must help train to higher standards."
>
> "I like _______ Church because the preacher has such practical sermons. He gives my people the kind of instruction they need."[23]

Sutherland gathered these statements from a variety of churches, including Bethel AME, Olivet Baptist, Metropolitan Community, Bethesda Baptist, and Pilgrim Baptist. However, he noted that among these it was Olivet and Metropolitan who had been developing the most extensive and successful social programs among the churches in the first years following the Great Migration.[24]

Sutherland also recognized that the Holiness churches that were formed as a result of the migration were more prone to practices of the Black social gospel than scholars of social

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[23] Sutherland, *An Analysis of Chicago's Negro Churches*, 131-32.

[24] Sutherland, *An Analysis of Chicago's Negro Churches*, 134. Other churches who Sutherland notes were making progress in the early 1920s included: Good Shepherd Baptist, Lincoln Memorial Congregational, Bethesda Baptist, Berean Baptist, St. Thomas Episcopal, St. Mark's AME, and St. Paul's Episcopal. It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list, as Sutherland's study was limited to twenty churches, albeit twenty representative ones.

Christianity have noted, challenging descriptions of being merely "escapist" or "otherworldly." Their social engagement stemmed from a conviction in the "fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man," a staple of social gospel theology, which for them meant that "there are no differences in the Lord … [which] leads to a leveling all classes, races, ages, and sexes." He interviewed Mrs. Ella Allensworth, the pastor of Full Gospel Mission, who shared her belief that salvation and the removal of racial hatred and bias are tied up together: "When people are really saved all color prejudice is blotted out. I have just as much love for white as black. If you were down in the gutter I would come to help you just as quickly as the black man. If a person still has prejudice, it's a good sign he isn't saved."[25] This connection of the theological terms of "brotherhood" and "salvation" with racial justice is compelling evidence of Black social gospel theology at work within Holiness churches, at least some of them.[26] Sutherland's study provides evidence of a shifting center for social Christian practice within Chicago's Black churches as a result of the Great Migration, notably away from the AME churches and toward the Baptists and Community Churches, but also not limited to them alone. Historian Christopher Reed explains how churches across Black Chicago integrated practices of social Christianity alongside their emphases on worship and spiritual salvation during the migration era: "Overall, religious belief and practice promoted a spirituality that allowed the African American faithful to overcome

[25] Sutherland, *An Analysis of Chicago's Negro Churches*, 71-72.

[26] One of the ways that early sociologists studying religion after the Great Migration (especially in the Chicago School) differentiated Black churches in Chicago was through a theological test of sorts: how do they understand "salvation"? They would divide them into two types—"spiritual salvation" (escapist and otherworldly) and "physical salvation" (instrumentalists). Sutherland's example of the social concern (and developed Black social gospel theology) of Holiness Churches complicates this dichotomy. Wallace Best's study, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, also disrupts this dichotomy, demonstrating how holiness and pentecostal churches emphasized both physical and social salvation in Chicago's churches during and after the migration era.

hurdles of identity and material needs and provided comfort in countless adverse circumstances. Within the church sphere the migrants were changed and in turn altered the direction of religious life. Led by the protestant churches, the Black Belt engaged in a never-ending struggle against sin and faithlessness while elevating philanthropy, social service, and caring."[27]

As much as Black churches were awakened to the need for social ministries and desired to help the waves of southern migrants landing in their city, they often encountered roadblocks and were quickly overwhelmed when they tried to institute social programs. A church historian from the Bethlehem Baptist Association (Olivet Baptist) recounted in 1938,

> Along came the World War. The migrating Negro from the South came to fill vacancies of the white foreigner who went home to fight. Many things started; among them the storefront churches. We put an ad in the paper to help the needy. Oh! was I sorry. I went down to the Union Station to meet them and there was a twenty-car train full, young men, old men, women and children. Olivet and every other church was overrun. … Chicago became so congested with the population increasing that the people sought tenement places and any other available place to hold services.[28]

Pretty much every established congregation in Black Chicago was overwhelmed by the migration, but some responded better than others and were able to adapt their social programs to meet the needs of the swelling migrant population. The AME churches struggled most significantly.

III. The Limits of AME Social Gospel Ministry

Since Ransom and Wright had been forced to leave their ecclesial experiments in Black social Christianity a decade prior to the mass migration event, the mantle of Black social Christianity among Chicago's AME churches was carried by Rev. Archibald J. Carey Sr., who

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[27] Reed, *Knocking at the Door of Opportunity*, 137.

[28] Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations*, n.p.

ironically was a rival of Ransom throughout his tenure in Chicago (and beyond).[29] Carey had come to Chicago from Georgia in 1898. He held pastorates at Quinn Chapel (1898 to 1904), Bethel AME (1904 to 1909), and then ICSS (1909 to 1920), before being elected to the AME episcopacy as the "ambassador from the Black Belt."[30] While Carey continued to lead ICSS as a social gospel institution for the AME Church, his approach to the Black social gospel differed significantly from that of his predecessor, Ransom. As Carey's biographer, Dennis Dickerson explains,

> Ransom channelled greater energy into the Social Gospel as the best method to energize ministries to southern black migrants. Carey imitated Ransom's Social Gospel initiatives but believed that political power yielded greater gains for church members and community residents. … Ransom used political involvement to eliminate vice from the neighborhoods surrounding his church and to forge alliances with elected officials committed to black civil rights. Politics, however, remained ancillary to his primary focus on the Social Gospel. Carey, conversely, made politics intrinsic to his ministry, the praxis for his commitment to black advancement. Whereas Ransom saw public theology as an occasional means to invigorate the Social Gospel, Carey perceived it as the essence of his ministry.[31]

The consummate "preacher politician," Carey's reputation was controversial among Black Chicago, but he helped to lead ICSS during the years of the Great Migration, and he grew the

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[29] For the section that follows on the AME Church's regressive tendencies in regard to Black social Christianity in the migration era, I rely heavily on Wallace Best's study of the AME Church's experience during the Great Migration in his chapter, "The AME Church in Crisis" (Chapter 5), in *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 118-46. Best's study of the AME church is really helpful for understanding the institutional stresses that occurred as a result of the mass migration event. That said, I do challenge Best's analysis on certain points, and especially on what I consider his tendency to conflate the experiences of Chicago's AME churches and pastors with the denomination and its leadership. More below.

[30] For more on Carey's ministry in Chicago, see Dennis C. Dickerson, *African American Preachers and Politics: The Careys of Chicago* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 26-60.

[31] Dickerson, *African American Preachers and Politics*, 32.

membership during the peak years of the migration by more than one thousand members, a growth rate that eclipsed Institutional's sister AME churches in the city.[32]

While much of Carey's tenure in Chicago prior to ICSS had been engaged in politics, ecclesial and local, his appointment to ICSS marked a significant shift in his activity to address the problems presented by the migration, looking to care especially for "strangers and southerners."[33] Carey added several new services and ministries to ICSS, including hiring a full-time social worker, but his greatest innovations came in meeting the needs of newly-arrived migrants. For instance, in the fashion of the highly successful and publicized "Sunday Night Meetings" put on by White Christian businessmen in the city's business district, Carey started a Monday night lecture series designed specifically for southern migrants to help them adjust to life in the city, which he described as "welcoming new members into the fold."[34] With Carey at the helm, ICSS developed several new ministries and services that catered specifically to southern migrants. Carey expanded the kindergarten and nursery Ransom had established to provide childcare for working mothers, along with an employment agency that helped to place significant numbers of migrants with the Pullman Company and the Chicago stockyards. Many of the migrant women who came through ICSS found employment as domestic workers in White households on the West and South sides.[35] Carey's leadership of ICSS—which dropped "Social

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[32] "Dr. Archibald J. Carey," *Half Century Magazine*, September 1919. Contrary to Allan Spear's claim that ICSS died out after Ransom left, the institution and many of its initiatives actually continued into the Great Migration era, even if it was guided by a different theological vision than Ransom's. Spear, *Black* Chicago, 96. See Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 130.

[33] Ibid.

[34] *Report of the Chicago Commission on Race Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 147-48.

[35] Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 130-31.

Settlement" from its name and came to be known simply as Institutional Church AME during Carey's tenure—differed significantly from that of Ransom (and Wright), as outlined above, and yet he encountered the same resistance from the AME episcopacy he would soon join (along with Ransom and Wright).

The official response to the Great Migration from the AME episcopate came two years after the mass migration of Black southerners had begun, and as Wallace Best has suggested, it showed that "AME officials were without a comprehensive strategy for handling the migration," and that the reason for their ambivalence was precisely because many southern bishops viewed the migration negatively.[36] In their 1917 "Address on the Migration," the AME bishops dealt with the migration only through vague biblical allusions instead of trying to understand the realities of what was happening on the ground. Rather than encouraging ministerial strategies for addressing the problems related to migration, the address conveyed their anxieties and cautioned those who might be "tempted to experiment" with social programs to alleviate the suffering of migrants without consulting the "wisest council" of the church.[37] For the AME bishops, the migration was not primarily a problem for the church to address with the theological and material resources at its disposal, but rather it was an institutional threat. As Milton Sernett has suggested, "[T]he AME Council of Bishops recognized that the Great Migration was of historical import and posed a challenge to its institutional vitality."[38] A year later, in 1918, the bishops

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[36] Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 122.

[37] "Address of the Council of Bishops, A.M.E. Church," *Christian Recorder* (August 16, 1917), in Milton C. Sernett, ed., *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*, 2d ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 359-63.

[38] Milton C. Sernett, "If Not Moses, Then Joshua: African American Methodists and the Great Migration of 1916-1918" (unpublished paper), quoted in Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 10.

would adopt a plan proposed by Wright to establish a denominational commission to study the problems related to the migration such as "organized labor, prohibition, women and industry, home life, industrial life, education, morality, housing, sanitation and public comfort."[39] However, their response to the commission, as with the migration, was ambivalent at best.

The struggle of Chicago's AMEs reveals a disconnect between their "on the ground" vision for social Christianity—driven by a belief that caring for "the least of these" (Matthew 25:40) was the responsibility of the church—and the will or efficacy of the denomination and its institutions to actually carry out that work. This is particularly evident in the failed social settlement ministry of Wright with Trinity mission, a decade prior to the Great Migration. The irony is that the same thing that gave the AME church its local and national influence in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth—its centralized episcopal structure—became a stumbling block that limited its churches, pastors, and laypersons from realizing the social and racial reform projects they pursued. It was not the AME church members or even the local pastors who saw the Great Migration as a threat but it was traditionalists within the episcopacy who were troubled by the migration and used their bishropic powers to stifle grassroots attempts of Chicago's churches to respond to the migration, efforts that had been underway since the 1890s. David Wills has also noted that there was a regional bias at play here, such that part of the reason for the hesitancy of the AME leadership to embrace a full-fledged social Christianity was its uneasiness with regard to the industrialized city. He says, "The ambivalence expressed toward the city [among AME bishops] was a carryover from an ascetic

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[39] Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 137.

Protestantism among AMEs that was unable to come to terms with industrial America."[40] In some ways, the instinctive resistance to social gospel ministries was a growing pain as the AME church's seat of influence migrated from the rural South, where it had developed during the previous century, to a new urban and industrialized home in northern cities.

One of the findings of this chapter is that the ability of institutions to adapt to changing circumstances matters for the development of Black social Christianity. The test of the Great Migration showed that the AME Church was in fact resolutely inflexible, especially compared to their Baptist counterparts. While the AME leadership exhibited ambivalence toward the migration, it is important to note that the AME divines who were most vocal in support of an AME position of care for migrants during the height of the Great Migration and in the years following had spent time in Chicago in the earliest years of increased migration (i.e., the first decade of the century): Reverdy Ransom, Archibald Carey Sr., and Richard R. Wright Jr. While the denomination may have been ambivalent toward the Great Migration, Chicago's AME churches, who experienced the plight of migrants firsthand, were decidedly in favor of a social Christian mission for their churches. Ransom, Wright, and Carey may have been "outliers" within the AME bishropic, but they were in fact representative of the Chicago AME churches' position on the migration question.[41] For instance, Wright, who served as editor of the *Christian*

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[40] David W. Wills, "Aspects of Social Thought in the African American Episcopal Church, 1884-1910" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1975), 233. Quoted in Best, *Full Human, No Less Divine,* 124.

[41] Wallace Best suggests that ICSS and Trinity were "exceptions" to the AME's ambivalence toward migration, but I'd argue that at least in the case of Chicago Best constructs the AME position by conflating the pre-migration and migration eras, not recognizing change over time in the AME position. It was the magnitude of migration in the second decade that ignited a crisis. Therefore, the experiments of ICSS and Trinity are actually more representative of the late 19th century position of the AME church on the issue of migration than they are exceptions. Here, I think one has to pay less attention to broader denominational discourse and more attention to the collection of AME churches in Chicago. There is still a denominational dimension, but it recognizes there is a locality and regional distinction even among a national denomination. See Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 130-31.

Recorder during the years of the Great Migration (he was elected editor of the denominational journal in 1915) and later became a bishop, became one of the fiercest advocates for black migration as a focus of the church's (expanded) social ministries. He believed that migration was good for the church—not a problem as it was so often posed—in that it would help the denomination restructure its missional priorities, ultimately pushing it to fully embrace social and racial reform as core tenets of the Christian gospel. In a 1916 *Christian Recorder* editorial, he wrote, "We stand for Negro migration and throw out our arms of welcome to every Negro who desires to come. … Get these Negroes in your churches, make them welcome; don't turn up your noses and let the saloon man and his gambler do all the welcoming. Help them buy homes, encourage them to send for their families and to put their children in school. Welcome them, welcome them; yes bid them thrice welcome."[42] The tension between the AME churches in Chicago and the bishropic on the migration question, as well as a more comprehensive strategy for social ministry, is revealing of the institutional factor in developing broad Christian social and racial reform ministries, especially when set in comparison to two other ecclesial institutions that responded very differently to the Great Migration—the Community Church Movement and Olivet Baptist Church.

The rapid rise of the Community Church Movement in the midst of the Great Migration was due in no small part to the frustrations of ministers and laity in Chicago's AME churches concerning the denomination's uninspired response to the migration question. These frustrations reached a tipping point in 1920 during the annual conference of the Fourth Episcopal District of the AME Church, which included Chicago. At the meeting in Des Moines, Iowa, AME leaders

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[42] Wright, "Should the Negroes Come North?" *Christian Recorder,* August 31, 1916.

announced a series of ministerial exchanges, as might happen at any annual conference. However, the reassignment of certain Chicago ministers ignited a fury of lay protest and eventually split one of Chicago's most influential AME churches.

Dr. William Decatur (W.D.) Cook had been appointed to Bethel AME Church, Chicago's second-oldest AME Church, in 1916, as the waves of migrants from the southern states were rapidly growing. In his time at Bethel, Cook had implemented a robust ministry that included various social and racial reform initiatives, especially in response to the arrival of southern migrants. During his four-year tenure at Bethel, the church thrived, both in numerical growth but also and especially in developing new ministries to meet the needs of a ballooning Black migrant population.[43]

However, in an apparent attempt to tighten their control over reform-minded churches (especially in Chicago), the bishop of the Fourth Episcopal District, Levi J. Coppin, decided to reassign a number of Chicago's AME pastors, including WD Cook, who was to be sent to a church in Des Moines.[44] Cook protested his reassignment, arguing that he was just getting underway with projects in Chicago that were in the best interest of the AME Church. In fact, Bethel, along with other Chicago AME churches, sent a delegation of lay representatives to the annual conference to plead for Cook to remain at Bethel.[45] However, the bishop was not swayed by the delegation's presence or Cook's reasoning, and followed through with the reappointment of Cook to St. Paul's AME in Des Moines. Best, in his analysis of the challenges that the Great

[43] Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 135.

[44] Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 165.

[45] The delegation took a petition with them to Des Moines that contained "five thousand signatures" of church members and civic leaders from the neighborhoods surrounding Bethel that asked for Cook to stay. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 135.

Migration posed for the AME as a denomination, notes that this decision to deny Cook to remain in Chicago confirmed for him and other like-minded ministers and laypersons that "the AME episcopal structure existed to the detriment of broad-based cultural and religious change."[46] Cook and his Bethel faithful came to understand what others in Chicago's Black churches had learned in the years leading up to the Great Migration, that is, success in pursuing Black social gospel projects would have to be found outside of the AME church, not through it.

Bethel AME split as result, as Cook and his followers left for greener ecclesial pastures—the nascent Community Church Movement—landing in a church association that allowed more autonomy for ministers to pursue social reform ministries.[47] When he left the AME Church, the *Chicago Defender* reported, "The purpose of the new movement [i.e., Cook's new Community Church] is for the improvement of the religious, moral, industrial and civic conditions of the Race."[48] Cook's commitment to a ministry of Black social Christianity continued with his new church, Metropolitan Community Church, the first of several African American Community Churches established in the wake of the Great Migration. In one sermon at Metropolitan he proclaimed, "The church is still the greatest institution among the Negroes. … The old conception of the task of the church was to prepare people for death. Today we are coming to

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[46] Ibid., 135-36.

[47] Robert Sutherland suggests that Cook departed in protest of the bishop's "tyrannical control," but this is only part of the reason. Cook sought space where he was free to pursue the kind of social gospel ministries he believed that Chicago needed. Sutherland, "An Analysis of Chicago's Negro Churches," 69.

[48] "W.D. Cook Leaves Bethel," *Chicago Defender*, October 9, 1920. Quoted in Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 166. Beyond freedom to pursue the social gospel initiatives in which he believed, Cook was also drawn to the Community Church Movement (and away from the AME) because he was convinced that denominationalism was in fact hindering churches from achieving true social transformation. The Community Church Movement's commitment to the goal of Protestant Unity, shaped in the golden age of ecumenism, was tied for up someone like Cook in the goals of the Black social gospel.

find our biggest task is to fit people to live here and now." The Bethel AME split highlights the extent to which the question of migration, and the larger issue of the church's social mission, was a point of disagreement between denominational leaders and the Chicago churches. As Wallace Best has argued, "As far as some reform-minded AME churches [in Chicago] were concerned, AME officials were tightening the bureaucratic rule of the church at precisely the time when they should have shared ecclesiastical control more democratically."[49]

W.D. Cook was not the only Chicago AME pastor who left for the Community Church Movement in order to pursue a ministry of the Black social gospel. Rev. John R. Harvey was the pastor of St. Paul's AME (since 1919) and was slated for reassignment in 1923. However, before the bishop could relocate him, Harvey left the AME to form Cosmopolitan Community Church. The *Chicago Defender* had celebrated Harvey's ministry at St. Paul's, especially for what they described as his "practical programs" in caring for the social and economic needs of southern migrants. Harvey joined the Community Church Movement so that he could have the freedom to pursue ministerial ventures of social reform; or, as he put it, "doing something to help the members of his church, the community and the Race."[50] Those within Chicago's AME churches who held to a progressive vision of Black social Christianity for the church realized that they

[49] Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 134.

[50] Quoted in Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine*, 138. Best notes that Harvey gave insurance policies to members of the church and secured benefits for those in the community who suffered prolonged sickness. He also set up a relief fund to help migrants and helped St. Paul's establish an employment agency similar to the one that Olivet Baptist was running. He had also pushed Chicago's AME churches to help raise funds for more children's homes and day nurseries.

would have to pursue projects of social and racial reform through alternative means and notably outside of the churches. [51]

IV. The Baptist Moment

While the social programs of the AME churches in Chicago largely suffered as a result of the Great Migration, Chicago's flagship Black Baptist church saw the mass migration of Black southerners as an opportunity to reimagine and expand its social mission. Olivet Baptist, which had been one of the largest and most influential churches throughout Black Chicago's history, not only grew its membership ranks significantly as a result of the migration (for a time becoming the largest congregation in the country), but it also constructed a massive social gospel ministry in its response to the needs of the migrants in its midst. The architects of Olivet's Christian social program were two women, Mattie Fisher and Jessie Mapp, and its program was orchestrated by Olivet's pastor during the migration era, Rev. Lacey Kirk Williams.

Olivet had its own history of practicing Black social Christianity, going back to the social and racial reform efforts of one of its first pastors, Rev. Richard de Baptiste, but Chicago's Baptists had not always embraced social gospel theology or programs quite as readily as Chicago's AMEs had in the nineteenth century. In fact, one Baptist pastor was more or less run out of his pastorate at Bethesda Baptist in the 1880s in part because of his endorsement of

[51] It needs to be stressed that while the need to pursue projects of social and racial reform outside of what was once the home for social Christianity in Chicago (the AME Church) becomes clear during the Great Migration, certain members of these churches recognized the inhibiting force of their ecclesial contexts long before this era. The next chapters will document how African American women in these churches recognized the limits of churches to undertake social reform projects and pursued social-gospel-inspired initiatives by establishing extra-ecclesial institutions.

socialism as compatible with the Christian gospel.[52] It was not until after the turn of the century that Olivet really began to embrace Black social Christianity.

In 1902, Elijah J. Fisher was a 40-year-old visiting student from Nashville at the University of Chicago Divinity School studying Greek and Hebrew when he came into contact with Olivet Baptist Church. The next year he accepted a call from Olivet to join them as their pastor, a position he would hold until his death in 1915.[53] Fisher was a skilled administrator and leader, helping Olivet to pay down its debts and move into a new building, among other projects. He also embraced a moderate version of Black social Christianity, establishing a literary society (The Standard Literary Society) and sponsoring youth recreational activities and programs. In 1908, Olivet formally initiated a program of social gospel ministry. Organized and supported primarily by women of the congregation, Olivet began to provide food, lodging, and employment assistance, especially for recent migrants to the neighborhood.[54] Fisher's ministry, particularly in its social emphasis, was more akin to that of AME church leaders like Ransom and Wright, with whom he was a contemporary in Chicago, than it was to other Baptists.[55] He even modeled certain aspects of Olivet's social program after ICSS. Christoper Reed notes, "Beyond meeting the spiritual needs of the community, Olivet followed the trail blazed by Institutional AME. … After witnessing AME successes under the aegis of the Social Gospel, black Baptists could now point with pride to their denomination and to Olivet's efforts." By the time of the Great

[52] Rev. Bird Wilkins was essentially forced out of Bethesda in 1887 because of his liberal theological leanings, which included his belief in Christian socialism, but also his questioning of other orthodox doctrines like the trinity. See Reed, *Black Chicago's First Century*, 318-20.

[53] Reed, *Knocking at the Door of Opportunity*, 128.

[54] *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 8, 1908.

[55] Reed, *Knocking at the Door of Opportunity*, 119.

Migration the *Chicago Defender* observed, "Olivet was rounding into a machine running seven days a week, providing free employment [services] for hundreds, a comfort station for the weary and divine worship for thousands."[56]

Some of Fisher's most successful projects while at the helm of Olivet involved fighting against the gambling syndicate and shutting down saloons that surrounded the church. Fisher's biographer, his son Miles Mark Fisher, noted that one of his crowning achievements was the conversion of the notorious gambler Bob Motts, who he also convinced to turn his saloon into the Pekin Theater in 1905, the first theater owned by African Americans nationally. In Black Chicago, the Pekin became a center of culture and education throughout the following decades. Fisher's conversion of Motts highlights the unique Baptist method of social Christianity that wedded evangelism to social reform, a practice that would be perfected by Rev. Lacey Kirk Williams at Olivet over a decade later.[57]

Baptists grew significantly more than other established churches (especially in comparison to the AMEs) during the migration. It was not only that existing churches grew, but the years between 1915 and 1919 saw a drastic increase in the number of congregations in Black Chicago. More than twice as many African American churches were established in those four years than had existed in the previous eighty in Chicago. The Baptists far outpaced the other denominations, accounting for well over half of all new churches and nearly three times more than all the African Methodist churches combined.[58] By the early 1920s, 133 (47.6%) of the

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[56] Reed, *Knocking at the Door of Opportunity*, 128.

[57] Miles Mark Fisher, "History of Olivet Baptist Church," 71-81.

[58] *Report of the Chicago Commission on Race Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 145-46.

African American churches in Chicago were Baptist (98 Baptist, 30 Missionary Baptist, 5 Primitive Baptist), while 35 (12.6%) were Black Methodist Episcopal (24 AME, 5 AME Zion, 6 CME).[59] While 65.9% (87) of the Baptist churches were of the smaller storefront, they also had the largest ones, with seven congregations with memberships over one thousand.[60] According to sociologists of the Chicago School who studied the Great Migration, one of the chief functions of the Black churches was to provide "a sense of home" for the newly arrived southern migrants, and while nearly all churches saw their memberships expand as a result of the Great Migration, the disparity of growth rates between churches reveals that migrants felt more at home in some churches than in others.[61]

A comparison between Black Baptist and AME churches during the migration era reveals that one of the most important factors in determining not only the growth of the churches but the success for their social programs in ministering to southern migrants was the degree to which they were institutionally adaptable and congregationally autonomous. Sutherland stressed the importance of congregational autonomy: "The Baptist associations differ widely from Methodist bodies in that the separate churches are relatively independent of any centralized authority."[62] The Baptists were also willing and able to go to the least desirable areas of the Black Belt. In his survey of Black Chicago churches, Sutherland ranked all of the streets of the Black Belt, and on six of the most undesirable streets (State, Dearborn, and Federal on the south side, and 13th, 14th, and Lake Streets on the west side), one could not find a single White church or Community

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[59] Sutherland, "An Analysis of Chicago's Negro Churches," 55.

[60] Sutherland, "An Analysis of Chicago's Negro Churches," 66.

[61] Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Associations*, 142-43, 147.

[62] Sutherland, "An Analysis of Chicago's Negro Churches," 70.

Church, and only several Methodist churches, yet there were 46 Baptist churches on those six streets.[63]

While a variety of factors contributed to the success of the Baptists over their AME counterparts during the migration era, perhaps the most important was the attitude with which they faced the migration, exemplified by Olivet Baptist and its pastor as one which embraced the migration not as a threat to institutional vitality (cf. the AME bishops) but as an "opportunity" to "preach the gospel" and "save the whole man."[64] Olivet was quick to restructure its church and ministries to meet the needs of the hundreds of migrants who arrived in Black Chicago daily.

This effort of ecclesial reorganization was led in the peak years of the migration by two women members of Olivet, S. Mattie Fisher, the daughter of Elijah Fisher, and Jessie Mapp. Although often overshadowed by their pastor in the newspapers and church reports, Mapp and Fisher were the architects of Olivet's social program during the Great Migration. Starting in 1917, Fisher and Mapp helped to transform Olivet from "a church [in]to a religious center."[65] Fisher, one of the first African American women social workers, and Mapp conducted an eight-month-long study of the neighborhood surrounding Olivet with the idea of establishing a "community center" at the site of Olivet's new church building (formerly First Baptist Church) at the corner of 31st Street and South Park Avenue. They explained that they wanted to "understand the conditions as they existed among the people who were coming among us, and have definite

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[63] Ibid., 65.

[64] L.K. Williams, "A History of Olivet Baptist Church," Pages 33-34, Olivet Baptist Church (Chicago, Ill.) records, Chicago History Museum, "A History of Olivet Baptist, Celebrating Seventy-Two Years, Six Years Pastorate of Dr. L.K. Williams," 1922, Box 2, Folder 2.

[65] S. Mattie Fisher and Jessie Mapp, "Social Work at Olivet Baptist Church," in Sernett, *African American Religious History*, 368. They used the language of "community center" and "religious center" interchangeably, in both instances denoting the social program of the church.

material and information on which to work. Mapp and Fisher visited every residence between 28th and 39th Streets and between State and Lake Streets.[66] Altogether they conducted 5,082 survey visits, which served as the basis for the social programs that Olivet would institute over the next several years. Importantly, their findings highlighted the needs of women and especially children, both of which became central foci of Olivet's social program.

Guided by the sociological findings of Mapp and Fisher, L.K. Williams helped to marshal Olivet's available resources to provide for the needs of migrants in the neighborhood surrounding Olivet. Williams arrived in Chicago from Fort Worth, Texas, just as the first waves of the mass migration from the South were beginning to hit Black Chicago in 1915, and he instantly became aware of the difficult situation they encountered when they arrived: "These new migrants do not find in the cities what they anticipated, but instead they find new, difficult, depressing problems they are not prepared to solve. They soon discover strenuous economic and complex social conditions."[67] From the beginning of his pastorate, he believed that the church had a moral duty to help migrants adjust to the city and provide for them. An Olivet report on Williams's "social program" stated,

> The pastor of Olivet is a man with a broad vision. The World War started a literal influx of Negroes from the South to the North. They came, and found it hard to adopt themselves to their new environment; in the North as in the South, they turned to the church for aid in guidance. Dr. L.K. William saw as perhaps no other man did that this industrial and social extremity of the Negro was the church's opportunity. Not only did he see the opportunity, but had the courage to grasp it even at the cost of being misunderstood and criticized. In order to meet this new and unusual situation, then confronting our people in the North, the pastor of Olivet committed himself and his entire

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[66] Ibid., 368-70.

[67] Williams, "The Urbanization of Negroes; Effect on Their Religious Life," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, January 13, 1929, in Sernett, *African American Religious History*, 372.

> church to a big social program, with the determination to save *the whole man*, mind, body and soul.[68]

In Williams's mind, the migration presented an opportunity for the church to live into her social mission to help to "save the whole man."

Williams formulated a version of Black social Christianity that was uniquely Baptist, wedding his emphasis on evangelism with "everything that makes for social righteousness and the promotion of the Kingdom of God."[69] He described the social gospel as having a dual orientation—at once "heavenward" and "earthward." Williams explained this orientation in a statement of faith that guided the ministry of Olivet:

> Being or striving to be a New Testament Church, Olivet accepts Christianity as an audacious adventure, an aggressive, age-long warfare, having a certain destiny and a glorious victory. It labors assiduously to help promote the work of Christian Missions, for it holds that this enterprise is the world's greatest need, the Church's imperative task and the most important requirement that heaven makes of the saved on earth. Olivet helps to proclaim a world-wide, "red-hot" evangelical gospel. It has witnessed the results of such and contends that even now the Gospel of Christ "Is the power of God unto Salvation unto every one that believeth." Olivet works to have individual souls regenerated, converted, and their complex beings wholly consecrated to God and the uplift of mankind. *It has a heavenward and an earthward program*; it is set for the glory of God, but for the weal of mankind as well. It worships God and it works for the betterment of humanity. It contends that uplifting and serving a community is the essential, reasonable, counterpart of acceptable divine service. Jesus Christ taught that the Church was the "salt of the earth."[70]

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[68] "Social Program," Page 34, Olivet Baptist Church (Chicago, Ill.) records, Chicago History Museum, "A History of Olivet Baptist, Celebrating Seventy-Two Years, Six Years Pastorate of Dr. L.K. Williams," 1922, Box 2, Folder 2. My emphasis.

[69] "Bio of L.K. Williams," Pages 12-13, Olivet Baptist Church (Chicago, Ill.) records, Chicago History Museum, "A History of Olivet Baptist, Celebrating Seventy-Two Years, Six Years Pastorate of Dr. L.K. Williams," 1922, Box 2, Folder 2.

[70] Williams, "Faith Statement," Page 9, Olivet Baptist Church (Chicago, Ill.) records, Chicago History Museum, "A History of Olivet Baptist, Celebrating Seventy-Two Years, Six Years Pastorate of Dr. L.K. Williams," 1922, Box 2, Folder 2.

His criticism of so many "city churches" in the 1920s was that they "offer a Godward and heavenward gospel, and too little of the manward and the earthward. City churches must offer the people and carry through a religious program that will be passionately human, but no less divine. It must be a program dealing with the life and every day problems of the people."[71]

With this vision for Olivet's social mission, Williams and his lay workers (mostly women) built the most comprehensive Black social gospel program of any of Chicago's churches. A 1922 report of Olivet's "Worship and Work" listed some twenty-nine different social ministries that the church was operating under the auspices of the church or the Bethlehem Baptist Association, a parachurch organization housed at Olivet and founded specifically to offer "services to the race coming from the south."[72] The social ministries included: a social services department with 150 volunteers, a young women's league for training in social service, a day nursery and kindergarten with 125 children daily, a community club for youth, an employment bureau, a health bureau with ten doctors, three dentists, six nurses, and three social workers, a children's clinic, a housing bureau for migrants, a working girls home (next to the day nursery), and a library branch of the Chicago Public Library, among other services.[73]

Williams's unique combination of evangelistic fervor and Black social gospel theology was a match for the migration moment, striking a chord with the religious yearnings of many southern migrants while also helping them adjust to life in the urban and industrialized North.

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[71] Williams, "The Urbanization of Negroes; Effect on Their Religious Life," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, January 13, 1929, in Sernett, *African American Religious History*, 374.

[72] "Worship and Work," Pages 18-26, Olivet Baptist Church (Chicago, Ill.) records, Chicago History Museum, "A History of Olivet Baptist, Celebrating Seventy-Two Years, Six Years Pastorate of Dr. L.K. Williams," 1922, Box 2, Folder 2.

[73] Ibid.

While the Black social gospel took root in other forms and congregational contexts in the churches of Black Chicago in the decades of the migration era, Olivet's social programs and Williams's formulation of the Black social gospel proved effective in helping to reshape the social and religious landscape of post-migration Chicago.

V. Conclusion and Looking Forward

These two chapters have traced the history of Black social Christianity in Chicago's churches from the earliest days of church life in Black Chicago through the Great Migration. In the decades surrounding the turn of the century, Black social Christianity in Chicago came into its own as a religious movement and had a denominational identity in the AME Church. While churches of almost every denominational affiliation engaged in projects of Black social Christianity during this era (the vast majority of which were Baptist or AME), it was Chicago's AME churches that carried out the work of social and racial reform by remaking their churches and parachurch organizations into centers for Black social gospel work in the city. However, the Great Migration transformed the Black social gospel practice of the churches. Most importantly, the migration and its impact on virtually every aspect of social and economic life in the Black Belt expanded social Christian practice among the churches. Chicago's AME churches, however, experienced significant setbacks in their social and racial reform efforts during the migration era, encountering resistance at the upper levels of leadership to their visions for social Christian ministry in an urban context. The congregational autonomy of the Community Churches and the Baptists, however, allowed them to embrace the mass migration of Black southerners as an opportunity to expand their churches and to restructure their social ministries to meet the evolving social needs of the Black Belt.

It is not insignificant that the first and final projects in the above history of Black social Christianity in Chicago were made possible because of the leadership and labor of African American women. From the Big Four at Quinn Chapel AME in the middle of the nineteenth century to S. Mattie Fisher and Jessie Mapp at Olivet during the Great Migration, women were instrumental in shaping Black social gospel ministries in the churches of Black Chicago, even if their names escaped the press and church records.[74] However, the freedom and authority Mapp and Fisher experienced in their project at Olivet was an exception, as many church women encountered limits to what they could do in the churches. In the years following the turn of the century, Black Christian women increasingly pursued such projects outside of their churches, and yet they did not distinguish this work as "secular" in nature but actually quite the opposite. They understood their social and racial reform activism as the "application" of their Christian faith in an industrialized urban context shaped significantly by racial (and racist) prejudices and systems. They pursued this work in the churches when they could, such as with Mapp and Fisher at Olivet, but they often ran up against patriarchal expectations and hierarchies in their church contexts that complicated the execution of their social projects.

African American church women in Chicago in this era lived with the constant tension that they were the soul of most Black churches, the primary drivers of its ministries and

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[74] While there is often a source problem for understanding the significance of women's thought and work in church histories, one can find clues. For instance, in one of the richest archival sources that this chapter draws on—a 1922 history of the social ministries of Olivet Baptist Church—one can observe that over 85% of the names listed for leading the church's nearly thirty social ministries belong to women. Furthermore, there are multiple "Needed" posts in an Olivet church pamphlet listing their ministries calling for more men to help lead ministries for young boys, indicating that there was a gender imbalance in leading social ministries, especially when it is considered that the church offered nearly twice as many ministries for women and girls. L.K. Williams, "A History of Olivet Baptist Church," Pages 33-34, Olivet Baptist Church (Chicago, Ill.) records, Chicago History Museum, "A History of Olivet Baptist, Celebrating Seventy-Two Years, Six Years Pastorate of Dr. L.K. Williams," 1922, Box 2, Folder 2.

fundraising efforts, and yet it was men who "led" the churches. As Linda Faye Williams puts it, "the Black church remained a female space dominated by men."[75] Even some of those Chicago pastors who were most instrumental in helping advance the roles of women in their churches—like Lacey Kirk Williams at Olivet Baptist—sometimes contributed to the reification of the patriarchal structures that benefitted them and helped them maintain their authority.[76] Yet, despite their internal frustrations with their churches, they publicly remained committed to them, even when they pursued extraecclesial projects of reform, precisely because they recognized the church's institutional importance for advancing the race. They gave their time and energy to support their churches to ensure their viability and influence within the city, even when that meant capitulating to the men who held the reigns of power. They were often willing to put their issues and concerns on the back burner, accepting incremental change and progress, in order to help their institutions survive and grow.

It is a mistake to say that Black women were powerless in their churches though. However limited their formal roles were, their fundraising efforts and organization (missionary societies and women's conventions) undergirded Black churches. Their "power" resided in their numbers and their ability to fundraise. The money they raised (especially in the context of their missionary societies) helped them accrue a significant amount of social and political capital within their churches that they could use to leverage their positions and advocate for gender equity, albeit only ever incrementally. However, this was also a source of frustration for Black

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[75] Linda Faye Williams, "Power and Gender: A Glass Ceiling Limits the Role of Black Women in the Civil Rights Community," *Emerge* (December-January 1995): 63-65. Quoted in Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 119.

[76] In his role as NBC-USA president, Williams stymied the efforts of Black Baptist women, led by Nannie Helen Burroughs, in their attempts to raise the profile and influence of the Women's Convention among Baptists. See Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 135.

church women, as it was "taxation without representation," as historian of African American church women Betty Collier-Thomas describes it.[77] This is to say they became frustrated with the fact that though they were responsible for collecting and managing most of the church's finances, they were were not represented in its leadership. Fannie Barrier Williams, a leading club woman in Chicago, expressed this frustration in 1895:

> The ministers among us who are unworthy of their calling, are largely responsible for the fact that our church women generally take less interest in the large field of practical religious work outside of their particular churches than any other class of women. Our women in the churches are organized, for the most part, only for one purpose, and that is to raise money for the churches. Thousands of our women never rise higher in their zeal for good works that the groveling aim of money-getting for the Trustees. … Thousands of young girls who need moral protection of the church as much on Monday as on Sunday, who need instruction in the sacred responsibilities of womanhood and in all things that make for the moral integrity of women, are deprived of them all because so many of our women are to the stern necessity of money-getting to pay church debts. If our women could be released partially from this one narrow aim, and see the possible church in the neglected fields where the King's Daughters are garnering such rich harvests of good to humanity, our importance as women of worth in moral work would be wonderfully advanced.[78]

Black church women recognized their potential for social gospel ministry, but they found they could not fully exercise it in many of their church contexts.

By the turn of the century, African American church women increasingly split their time and energy for Christian activism between their churches and women's clubs. Although this shift was already well underway, a 1921 Federal Council of Churches (FCC) report on women's roles in the church confirmed it: "The Commission must gather up the experiences of the cities in which the women are taking a more active part of the work." As Bettye Collier-Thomas explains,

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[77] Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 32, 78.

[78] Barrier Williams, "Opportunities and Responsibilities of Colored Women," in *Afro-American Encyclopedia or, the Thoughts, Doings, and Saints of the Race* (ed. James T. Haley; Nashville, TN: Haley & Florida, 1895), 155-56.

"The FCC was concerned that church women, who were traditionally restricted to missionary work, were devoting more of their time to organized club work because their talents were not recognized by the church."[79] Indeed, women were finding freedom to do their work outside of their churches. Many Black church women considered the line from the gospel of Mark, "She hath done what she could" (Mark 14:8), as a kind of mantra for their work in the churches. They knew they were capable of doing more in the way of Christian activism and reform, and as the FCC statement suggests they began to seek sites beyond their churches to live out their sense of Christian "mission" and put their faith to work.[80]

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[79] Quoted in Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 330.

[80] The primary focus of women's organization within the churches in the era prior to Migration was domestic and foreign "missions," which brought together their interests in Christian evangelism with their interest in racial and social reform. It is a mistake to assume that they were exclusively (or even primarily) interested in foreign evangelistic efforts, even though this was part of it. Rather, their primary focus was always on the domestic field, which originally signaled the South, but increasingly came to include Northern urban centers as migration increased in the first decades of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER 3

Homes for the "Least of These": The Christian Social Activism of African American Women's Clubs

> *Homes, more homes, better homes, purer homes is the text upon which sermons have been and will be preached.*
>
> –Mary Church Terrell (1895)[1]

This chapter explores how the organization, activism, and social reform work of Chicago's African American women's clubs at the turn of the century was at once an extension of the ministry of Chicago's Black churches (see previous chapter), as well as a critique and reformulation of the theology and activism of Black social Christianity. In an ecclesiological context which afforded only limited possibilities for women to create and lead church-ordained social reform initiatives—that is, within the Black social gospel churches of the AME and Baptist churches—Black Christian women sought out alternative sites and spheres of influence to "apply their faith" in the context of Black Chicago. Upper- and middle-class Black women did this primarily through participation in the burgeoning Black women's club movement, and especially through various club projects that focused on caring for the most vulnerable in their midst.[2] This chapter focuses on one particular line of social reform work in which Chicago's

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[1] Quoted in Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *Lifting As They Climb* (Boston, MA: National League of Afro-American Women, 1895), 86.

[2] In addition to my own archival research, my understanding of Chicago's Black women's clubs is informed significantly by Anne Meis Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), whose thorough and illuminating study of Chicago's African American women's club laid the groundwork for this examination of the religious imaginations and practices of these club women.

African American women's club engaged—the founding of homes for African American children, women, and the elderly.

Although not official parachurch organizations, Chicago's Black women's clubs provided realms for leadership and creativity in social work and racial reform efforts motivated by the religious convictions of Black Christian women in which they were significantly less restricted by double burden they carried, that is, facing limitations in their initiatives for social and racial reform not only on account of their race but also their gender. In the world of their Black club work, they acted like missionaries or clergy (albeit not officially ordained) of Black social Christianity: preaching the good news of social salvation, protesting racialized and gendered prejudice and discrimination, and especially caring and advocating for the "least of these" (Matthew 25:40).[3] Even more, in the context of their club work these women rearticulated social gospel theology in response to the experiences, concerns, and struggles unique to African American women. It was a critique and refashioning of the theology of the Black social Christianity that had up to that point been primarily articulated—formally at least—by Black male clergy. However, through their speeches, writings, social activism, rescue work, and institution building, these African American club women articulated and lived out a distinct theological vision of the Black social Christianity, which I describe in this chapter and more in the next as a "theology of collective kinship."

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[3] I am indebted to Joseph Thomas Williams for the argument that the religious activism of Black club women centered on this passage, which certainly was a central text for the social gospel movement generally but had particular resonance and meaning for African American women (discussed more below). See Williams, "'The Least of These': Black Club Women and the Social Gospel," DePaul University, College of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences Theses and Dissertations (2015), 2-3, 33-6.

While certainly concerned with issues of labor and class, which historians have tended to recognize as the central issues of the social gospel movement, Black club women's "theology of collective kinship" shifted the focus of social Christianity's gaze to issues of race, in a similar fashion as male pastors of the Black social gospel, exemplified in the Black social gospel's "theology of brotherhood" (see Chapter One). However, Black women further expanded this focus to include concerns specific to African American women, such as gender discrimination, sexualized violence against Black women, discrimination in the workplace, and especially the welfare of Black Chicago's most vulnerable citizens, namely young women and mothers, children, Southern migrants, and the elderly. Drawing on the African American women's tradition of "other mothering," in combination with various gender ideologies at the turn of the century, these club women developed a theological vision that centered on caring for the "least of these" and a plan for racial uplift that leveraged their club members' mostly middle- and upper-class status—respectability politics—to both reshape White perceptions of Black Chicago and provide significant-yet-attainable means of social uplift for Black Chicagoans. I describe their strategy for racial uplift in terms of "racial pragmatism" (see chapter five), which was a consistent and efficient mechanism of the clubs for pursuing racial progress even while it required them to depend on respectability politics and make considerable concessions along racial and gender lines. Driven by a theology of collective kinship and following a strategy of racial pragmatism, Chicago's Black club women led an effort to better the race and protect and uplift the most marginalized and powerless citizens in Black Chicago.

I. "Doing Christianity": Clubs and Christian Social Reform Work

Chicago's African American women's clubs emerged around the turn of the century as institutions established to address the two closely related projects of racial uplift and gender equality for Black women. The establishment of Chicago's clubs predated the founding of the national organization for Black women's clubs, the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACW), in 1896, though their influence in the city increased concurrently with the NACW's establishment. The Black women's clubs also followed the establishment of the city's leading White club, the Chicago Woman's Club (CWC), by nearly two decades (est. 1876). The CWC's exclusion of African American women was part of the reason for the establishment of local Black women's clubs. Composed mostly of middle- and upper-class, reform-minded women, Chicago's Black women's clubs became a second institution, along with the Black churches, in which Black Christian women pursued and in many instances achieved social and political uplift.

Black women's clubs in Chicago developed a significant and multilayered network, sometimes working collaboratively with other African American institutions like the Black churches, while maintaining their independence as a separate social world in which Black women exercised their creativity and leadership in applying their Christian faith to the most pressing questions facing Black women and families. The women's clubs served as one of the most vibrant and successful arenas of social gospel activity, both within or beyond the walls of the institutional churches. By 1905, there were at least fifteen clubs without denominational affiliation, which was one year before to the founding of the City Federation of Colored

Women's Clubs.[4] The majority of these clubs were formed during a fifteen-year period—between 1895 and 1910—in which Black women's clubs flourished, not only in Chicago but around the country. In this era, Black women discovered new forms of leadership and activism through their organization of clubs. As prominent club leader, Fannie Barrier Williams, writing at the beginning of this peak period of club formation, noted,

> The young colored women of this generation are emerging from obscurity in many interesting ways that will happily surprise those who have never known them by their womanly qualities and graceful accomplishments. Such women seem to have no relationship to slavery conditions of the yesterday of history. In a surprisingly brief period of time they have been completely lifted out of the past by the Americanism which transforms and moulds in the higher forms all who come under the spell of American free institutions.[5]

By 1915, the number of clubs affiliated with the Chicago Federation of Colored Women's Clubs had grown to more than seventy.[6]

The Black women's clubs distinguished themselves from those of their White counterparts in the city (which were more established and better resourced financially and in terms of political connections) by focusing on the needs specific to the experiences and struggles

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[4] "Fifty Year History of the Chicago and Northern District Association of Colored Women, Inc.," 7, Illinois Association of Club Women and Girls, Inc. Paper, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield, Illinois.

[5] Barrier Williams, "The Colored Woman of To-Day," *Godey's Magazine,* vol. 135, no. 805 (July 1897): 29. Writing for a primarily White audience, Barrier Williams's aim in this essay is to distinguish "respectable" Black women of the turn of the century (e.g., club women) from the image of the Black slave woman, which she believed still shaped White conceptions of Black womanhood. She begins the essay with the statement, "A little over a century ago colored women had no social status, and indeed only thirty years ago the term 'womanhood' was not large enough in this Christian republic to include any woman of African descent. No one knew her, no one was interested in her. Her birthright was supposed to be all the social evils that had been the dismal heritage of her race for two centuries. This is still the popular verdict to an astounding degree in all parts of our country" (28).

[6] Knupfer, *Toward a Tender Humanity and Nobler Womanhood*, 36. The growth of these clubs is even more impressive if one accounts for the numerous lyceums, church clubs, and clubs founded for children and youth, which together totaled more than 150. See St. Clair Drake, *Churches and Voluntary Societies in the Chicago Negro Community* (Chicago: Works Projects Administration, 1940), 141-2.

of Black women. Again, Barrier Williams articulated this goal of the clubs by pointing out the shortcomings of several of the Black clubs: "Most of our clubs are mirror imitators of white women's clubs in their organization and program of work. Their plan of work is not made responsive to the peculiar conditions that surround colored women who organize themselves for club work." She went on to set out a unique agenda for the club work of Black women in Chicago, one which she argued must necessarily differ from that of their African American sisters in other regions of the country, precisely because "a woman's club in Chicago will find its self confronted with a very different sort of problem and work than the club in Alabama, Mississippi or in Ohio, where the needs of the colored people are not so obvious."[7]

The importance of defending and redefining Black womanhood for these Black women's club work is reflected in the narrative they would retell as a kind of origin story for their organization. In 1895, the year before the NACW was founded, John Jacks, the president of the Missouri Press Association, sent a letter to the British Anti-Slavery Society after hearing about Ida B. Wells-Barnett's anti-lynching crusade throughout England. In the letter, he stated his belief, which he also assumed as the majority opinion of White Americans, that Black women "were prostitutes and all are natural liars and thieves."[8] In turn, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, an early Black club leader, disseminated the letter to influential Black women around the country, and it became the catalyst for immediate organization to deal with what they viewed as not only

[7] Barrier Williams, "Work Attempted and Missed in Organized Club Work," *Colored American Magazine*, vol. 14, no. 5 (May 1908): 282, 285.

[8] Charles Harris Wesley, *The History of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs: A Legacy of Service* (Washington, DC: Mercury Press, 1984), 28-32. Quoted in Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 107.

an “insult to Negro womanhood” but as a threat to the progress of the entire race.[9] According to Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, the first historian of the Chicago clubs and a club leader herself,

> In 1895 an obscure man in an obscure Missouri town sent a letter broad-cast over this Country and England, reflecting upon the character and morals of our Women. So utterly false were the vile statement [*sic*], that the women were aroused as never before and when Mrs. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, president of the New Era Club of Boston, called a meeting of protest in July 1895, indignant women from North, South, East, and West flocked to the ’Classic Hub,’ and in no uncertain terms vindicated the honor of the Race. The National Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs was the results of that meeting.[10]

That club leaders repeatedly pointed to the “Jack’s letter” as the origin for the organization of Black club organization (Ida B. Wells-Barnett would even recall it in these terms later in her life) points to the central role that defending Black womanhood—as a means for racial uplift—played in the world of Black women’s clubs in Chicago.[11]

As they sought to “apply” their Christian faith to the social problems facing Black Chicago, African American club women focused their efforts on founding and supporting homes to serve three of the most vulnerable demographics in Black Chicago: children and youth, young working women and mothers, and the elderly. The situation facing Chicago’s most vulnerable citizens, regardless of race or ethnicity, was made worse in these decades by the rapid spread of industrialization in the city, especially in the years just before the turn of the century. African Americans in Chicago experienced these compounding hardships as increasing numbers of Black southerners migrated to the city, most of whom came with dreams of a better life only to

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[9] Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 107.

[10] Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs* (Chicago, IL, 1922), 8.

[11] For Ida B. Wells-Barnett’s reflections on the “Jack’s letter” controversy, see Alfreda Duster, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 242. See also the next chapter.

encounter poverty and racial prejudice.[12] Barrier Williams spoke at length about the situation that drew the attention of Black club women in a 1904 article:

> A large American city of the commercial and manufacturing sort like New York or Philadelphia or Chicago, is a tremendous aggregation of human problems. In such a community all the extremes meet in a more or less frantic struggle for adjustment. In the midst of enormous wealth there are thousands who are on the edge of starvation; with hospitals in large numbers, and the more or less perfect system of sanitation, thousands of infants and adults are threatened every moment with disease and death. … When human life is so full of perils as well as opportunities, how great is the need for organized kindness to save men, women, and children from the effects of man's inhumanity to man! … A large proportion of the [African American] people who flock to our large cities are utterly incapable of adapting themselves to the complex conditions of city life. Fancy yourselves standing at the gateway of Chicago, through which a steady stream of colored people comes from the South, seeking freedom, liberty, opportunity, protection of the law, and education for their children. How various the throng of seekers for better conditions of life and living! How high their hopes and how ignorant they are of the disappointments that await them within the gates! They come for more liberty, and, alas, many of them find it all too soon and on to their lasting sorrow. They come for better homes, only to find unsanitary tenements in the black belts of the city. Some of the more competent come with high hopes of easily securing employment in some of the higher class of occupations, but they find themselves shut out by a relentless prejudice, drifting at last into the easy path of immoral living. Hundreds of young women who have been trained for something better than menial service, failing to find such employment, fall easy victim to the flattering inducements of a well-dressed idleness, the handmaids of shame.[13]

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[12] See Christopher Robert Reed, *Knock at the Door of Opportunity, Black Migration to Chicago, 1900-1919* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2014), 1-20, for a discussion of the social, political, and economic situation facing Black Chicago in these decades. Reed, while acknowledging the poverty and joblessness that faced many migrants when they arrived in the city, which has been the focus of most of the historiography of the Great Migration and Chicago, helpfully turns attention to the creative and successful ways that Black Chicagoans turned difficult despair and dysfunction into opportunity (pp. 2-3). By focusing on the work and achievement of women's clubs in this era, this project follows Reed's historiographical intervention.

[13] Barrier Williams, "The Need of Social Settlement Work for the City Negro," *Southern Workman* 33 (September 1904): 501-2. See also, idem., "Social Bonds in the 'Black Belt' of Chicago," *Charities* 15 (October 7, 1905): 40-2; idem., "A Growing Negro Center," *The Colored American* (October 4, 1902): 13.

The burden of caring for these newly arrived migrants "was left entirely to the colored citizens of the city, who are, in the mass, already over-burdened, hard working, people with little accumulated surplus among them."[14]

Club leaders recognized that racial segregation in the city, whether official or not, significantly exacerbated the social problems southern migrants encountered, an especially heavy burden for women and children. Barrier Williams, speaking about the work of women's clubs, stated in no uncertain terms that the "real problem of the social life of the colored people in Chicago, as in all northern cities, lies in the fact of their segregation."[15] Women's club members thus began to found and support homes to care for those suffering in these conditions, and they most often explained their work with homes and settlements for women, children, the elderly, and migrants in terms of "caring for their own," a statement that spoke certainly to their role as "other mothers" but also as caretakers and uplifters of the race.[16] In the course of their work with the homes, club women, through their activism and writing, developed a theological vision that combined their self-understood duty as "other mothers" with the social gospel mandate to care for the "least of these," even if they were not their own kin.

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[14] Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (Chicago, 1922), 45.

[15] Barrier Williams, "Social Bonds in the 'Black Belt' of Chicago," *Charities* 15 (October 7, 1905): 41. She also explained, "This increase of Negro population has brought with the problems that directly affect the social and economic life of the newcomers. Prevented from mingling easily and generally with the rest of the cities population, according to their needs and deserving, but with no preparation made for segregation, their life in a great city has been irregular and shifting, with the result that they have been subject to more social ills than any other nationality amongst us" (40).

[16] Quoted in Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 65.

Working with the Juvenile Courts

A significant amount of club work was devoted to supporting homes for children and youth. In fact, nearly every Black women's club participated to some extent in supporting, if not also establishing, homes for delinquent and dependent children. Their support of these homes initially grew out of their involvement with the juvenile court system in Cook County, especially as volunteer probation officers.[17] White club women, mostly members of the influential Chicago Woman's Club, had been doing similar work for several years, although their probationary and rescue work almost entirely neglected African American delinquent and dependent children, which in turn drew Black club women to care for overlooked Black children in the system.

The rise of the juvenile court system in the Progressive Era was marked especially by a shift in judicial thought that both recognized that children should be treated differently than adults but that also intended to mold (or assimilate) delinquent and dependent children into "worthy citizens." Recent scholarship has shown that these early juvenile courts, comprised primarily of White judges, caseworkers, and probation officers, demonstrated an overwhelming preference for White and European immigrant children over Black children.[18] This prejudice resulted in disproportionate cases of Black children being sent to prison-like institutions, whereas White children were more likely to be sent to more rehabilitative institutions.[19] In Chicago, White probation officers of these "progressive" courts, many of them women and volunteers,

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[17] Several scholars have shown that the juvenile court system, for children of all races, was dominated by a maternalistic rather than paternalistic influence. For example, see Steven L. Schlossman, *Love and the American Delinquent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); Mollie Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 66.

[18] Barry C. Feld, *The Evolution of the Juvenile Court: Race, Politics, and the Criminalizing of Juvenile Justice* (New York: NYU Press, 2017), 19-41.

[19] Feld, *The Evolution of the Juvenile Court*, 19-41.

employed different strategies in predominately White neighborhoods than they did in those that had a significant Black population. Whereas White probation officers primarily worked independently in White neighborhoods, they often worked in cooperation with police when they entered Black neighborhoods, which resulted in the arrest and incarceration of Black youth at high rates, typically on charges of gambling or prostitution.[20] Despite being the first city in the U.S. to establish a separate justice system designed to rehabilitate, rather than punish, delinquent children (1899), Chicago's juvenile courts only lived up to this ideal in their treatment of White children, either neglecting the plight of Black children or subjecting them to punishment rather than rehabilitation.

Black club women were thus motivated to do this work because of the racial prejudice they observed in the system. Among other moralistic restrictions against mothers that guided the juvenile courts to judge the adequacy of a mother's care of her children—a decision which had material consequences in terms of the issuance of "mothers' pensions"—was the issue of race. Chicago court records, not unlike those of other cities in the U.S., indicate that African American mothers were significantly less likely to receive pensions from the courts than their White counterparts.[21] This imbalance of justice for children and youth drove a number of Black club women to work as probation officers or aids to the juvenile courts. They were hardly ever compensated for their work. A spirit of volunteerism helps in part to explain their commitment to this work, not unlike their counterparts in the White clubs, but even more than that it was the

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[20] Tera Eva Agyepong, *The Criminalization of Black Children: Race, Gender, and Delinquency in Chicago's Juvenile Justice System, 1899-1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 53ff.

[21] For instance, of the 573 applications for mothers' pensions granted in 1920, only 24 were issued to African American mothers. Crawley, "Dependent Children in Chicago in 1926," 58. Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 67.

duty they felt to intervene in public affairs that had a direct impact on domestic and household affairs. In this way, they combined a concern for neglected African American children in the court systems and correctional facilities with the ideologies of "municipal housekeeping" and "other mothering" in their work with the juvenile courts. Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, in her 1922 historical account of Black women's club work in Illinois, cited the club "women [who] are found in the courts, looking after dependent and delinquent children, investigating criminal conditions and unjust discrimination," as an important part of the early development of the social agenda for Black women's club work in Chicago.[22]

The coalescing of the maternalistic spirit of the probationary and correctional work of Chicago's Black club women with their social gospel concern for caring for the "least of these" was articulated by Barrier Williams early on in Chicago's Black women's club movement, in 1895, in an article titled, "Need of Co-operation of Men and Women in Correctional Work."[23] Reporting on the correctional work of her fellow club women in Chicago, she immediately signaled the religious significance of their correctional work, appealing to "our humanity" and "our religion" as the basis for the kind of work that seeks to "reach and lift up toward the most

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[22] Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (Chicago,1922), 11. The connection between club women's sense of motherly duty and their work with the juvenile courts, especially as probation officers, is often noted in Davis's biographical sketches of Chicago's Black club women in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs*. See "J. Snowden Porter," who served as officer in the "Juvenile Protective Ass'n" (64); "Irene McCoy Gaines," who worked with the Cook County Juvenile Courts for almost five years and was actually hired officially as a probation, which was a rare appointment for Black club women (63); "Ella G. Berry," who assisted with juvenile welfare work (87); Bertha L. Hensley," who Davis notes "is particularly interested in juvenile welfare and spends a great deal of her time in caring for unfortunate children in the city courts" (80); and "Minnie A. Collins," who, after moving from Chicago to Arkansas, began encouraging other club members to engage in the same kind of work with the juvenile courts that she had done in Chicago (101).

[23] Barrier Williams, "Need of Co-operation of Men and Women in Correctional Work," *The Woman's Era*, vol. 2, no. 2 (May 1895): 3-4. Barrier Williams had been commissioned to report on Black women's club happenings in Chicago for *The Woman's Era*, a new national magazine intended to unite Black women's clubs around the country.

perfect citizenship all whom fortune and nature have illy favored." She went on to diagnose the problem with the correctional system, highlighting that Cook County's correctional institutions are "not what they out to be largely because man alone has been the stern master." What these correctional facilities needed was a mother's care. They needed to be "less of a prison," and more of a place where neglected children could find a home. Specifically, "The supreme need of our correctional institutions is a larger *baptism of the home spirit* in the management, and women, we believe, can bring this needed influence."[24] As caretakers of the home and family, she argued, women should be entrusted with any domestic matters that arise in public life, including and especially the correction and rearing of children.

One of the most significant outcomes of the volunteer work of Black club women—who were primarily middle and upper class—as probation officers and assistants to the juvenile courts was that it brought them into intimate contact with the struggles of Black Chicago's most impoverished citizens, struggles which they learned were only exacerbated by the discrimination they experienced in the juvenile courts. As probation and truant officers, club women developed a variety of strategies for their work. They engaged in crime prevention efforts by forming committees that canvassed the streets to draw youth away from the lures of vice, and they advocated for clean and safe recreational areas in their neighborhoods. They spent the majority of their volunteer hours inspecting the living conditions of families that had been flagged by the

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[24] Barrier Williams, "Need of Co-operation of Men and Women in Correctional Work," 4. My emphases. She went on to argue, "It should be the mission of woman, with her warmer heart and finer instincts for home training, to make the great body of society absorb into its home life every dependent child susceptible to tender influences. I have faith enough in human kindness to believe that there's somewhere a home for every homeless child. … We would establish a direct line of interest between every child of misfortune in the heart of every home in the land. We would increase the importance of every child and diminish the institutional features of every reformatory."

courts, as well as reporting on the general state of the tenements.[25] It was also in the course of this work with the juvenile courts that some club women began to recognize the limits of state cooperation and began to seek out independent strategies for protecting and caring for children and aiding needy families.[26] The very same women who volunteered as probation officers for the courts also helped establish clubs for mothers and children. While most clubs included child welfare work in their activities, or supported such work financially, several clubs were founded specifically for this work, including the Children's Aid Society, the South End Children's Aid Society, and the Giles Charity Club. The latter's executive committee included several women who served as probation or truant officers.[27] Recognizing the difficult economic situation facing many of the young mothers who they encountered in their work with the courts, these same clubs began to establish kindergartens, day nurseries, and healthcare facilities (often in collaboration with Black churches) to support young working mothers, many of whom had recently migrated to the city. In large part because of their work with the juvenile courts, club women came to recognize more fully the risks and discrimination that poor African American mothers, young women, and children faced, and they came to realize the real limits of cooperating with the courts and city officials to solve these problems. If the city would not care for the "least of these" in Black Chicago, then they would.

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[25] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 68-9.

[26] There was also an irony to their work with the juvenile court system as Black women served as probation officers, implicating themselves in system that developed a pattern of establishing segregation along racial lines.

[27] See Davis, "The Giles Charity Club" (36) and "J. Snowden Porter" (64), in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (Chicago,1922); also, Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 69-70.

II. Homes for Children, Women, and the Elderly

Chicago's Black club women did not always put words to their theology of collective kinship, but they consistently lived it out, caring for "their own" in Black Chicago, and they did this most fully—and with the most success—in their work of establishing and supporting homes for African American children and youth. Their earliest work in this regard grew directly out of their work with the juvenile courts, establishing and supporting several homes that primarily cared for African American boys and girls, even while they advertised that children of "all races and ethnicities" were welcome in their homes. The two most successful of these were the Louise Juvenile Home for dependent and orphaned boys and the Amanda Smith Home for dependent and orphaned girls, both of which eventually became affiliated with the state.

Elizabeth McDonald and the Louise Juvenile Home

Elizabeth McDonald, who would become quite involved in Chicago's Black women's club world and who also was the first African American woman in the nation to serve in an official capacity as a probation officer (albeit unpaid), founded the Louise Juvenile Home in 1907, a project that grew out of more than a decade of work with the juvenile courts in Chicago, as well as her club associations. In the course of her probationary work, McDonald—who complemented her official work with "rescuing" children—came to recognize the need for a home for dependent and orphaned children.

McDonald's work, both her personal project of rescue work and her official work with the juvenile courts, had deep religious motivations. As a child and young woman, she had

imagined that she would become a foreign missionary.[28] However, her lack of schooling and the premature death of her first husband ultimately prevented her from living out her missionary dreams. Instead, she redirected her "missionary spirit" into other avenues of service, particularly probationary and rescue work. In an autobiographical essay, McDonald shared that in 1895, nine years after moving to Chicago and remarrying, "the longed for opportunity to do missionary work came, and being called and anointed by God's Holy Spirit to go into the highways and hedges and compel men and women to come in, I answered—yes, Lord. I will." The religious significance of this work for McDonald is indicated in the same article in the way she described her "missionary" work—rescuing young orphaned and delinquent children, often connecting them with other homes like Amanda Smith's (below)—against her "secular" work with the juvenile courts, the latter which she viewed mostly as a means to do the former.[29]

Part of McDonald's rescue work, which she confessed, "grows out of my duties as a member of the church," was evangelistic in its focus. She often visited young men and women in the Cook County jails and ministered to them, in addition to providing aid and counsel. For instance, in her 1903 report, she claimed to have rescued thirty-six young people who "have turned from their wicked ways, confessed their sins and declared their determination to lead better lives." Of these, over half of them had been in the state penitentiary system or the Cook County jail when she "rescued" them.

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[28] Julius F. Taylor, "Report of Her Rescue Work and Life: [Interview with] Mrs. Elizabeth McDonald," *The Broad Ax,* vol. 9, no. 10 (January 2, 1904): 3.

[29] Taylor, "Report of Her Rescue Work and Life: [Interview with] Mrs. Elizabeth McDonald," 3. McDonald confessed that her "official" work prevented her from doing more of the rescue work to which she felt called, "I have made constant effort to reach the hearts of the needy people by services in their homes. My time is so much employed in my official duties that I cannot do as much in this direction as I desire…"

However, the greater part of her “missionary” work focused on rescuing African American women and children from dangerous living conditions.[30] She became especially concerned with the plight of young women (many of them recent migrants) in the city, a concern shared by other club women including Barrier Williams. She wrote,

> During the year [1903] much time has been spent in rescue work, in the effort to save our young girls from the temptations of a great city. Few understand the danger which threatens the girl who grows into womanhood under our eyes, and few know until too late what traps are set to ruin our young girls by men and women old in years but deeply dyed in crime. It has been my duty to follow many of these girls into the dens which start them on to ruin. I have succeeded in rescuing eighteen from lives of shame.[31]

The line between her “secular” work with the courts and her private “rescue” work was often blurred, and she eventually began to see that there was more she could accomplish outside of her official role as a probation officer to help the courts and provide a much needed home for Black children in the system.[32]

McDonald’s vision for a home for orphaned and dependent African American boys—another home had already begun caring for girls (below)—shaped considerably by her rescue work and service as a probation officer, was finally realized in 1907 when she established the Louise Juvenile Home, just west of Hyde Park in the Englewood neighborhood. Although the

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[30] For example, McDonald reported that in 1903 she used her position as a probation officer to rescue several “babies from disreputable homes to places where they would be some from criminal surroundings,” and outside of that work she also helped to several mothers who “were rescued from resorts where the name ’mother’ is hear only to be scoffed at” (Taylor, “Report of Her Rescue Work and Life: [Interview with] Mrs. Elizabeth McDonald,” 3.).

[31] Taylor, “Report of Her Rescue Work and Life: [Interview with] Mrs. Elizabeth McDonald,” 3.

[32] Although there is not a detailed record of McDonald’s “rescue work” between 1895 and the *Broad Ax* biographical sketch quoted above (1904), the first annual report of the Chicago Juvenile Court (1900) mentions that in addition to the work of many club women, mostly associated with the (White) Chicago Woman’s Club, there was “one colored woman who devotes her entire time to the work, free of charge, and whose services are invaluable to the courts as she takes charge of all colored children.” As Knupfer asserts, this “colored woman” was almost certainly McDonald. Quoted in Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 71.

home was open to children of any race or nationality, it became a haven especially for African American boys. (While the house advertised itself as a home for dependent and delinquent boys, McDonald took in numerous girls and young women as well.) Run by McDonald and another unsalaried staff member, Elizabeth Scott, the home began caring for fifty-six children and two mothers. In her second annual report, she recorded, "49 conversions, 250 home visits that included prayer meetings. 40 visits to the jail, paroled 3 prisoners. Cared for 89 children and 1 mother. Got employment for 7 persons."[33] By 1911, the number of children for which the home cared topped one hundred annually.[34] In the early years, McDonald and Scott cooked and cared for the children and provided them with an "industrial education," in addition to the schooling that the children received at the nearby school.[35]

McDonald's annual reports during the first six years of the home's existence reveal that finances were a constant struggle.[36] The home relied primarily on gifts and supplies provided by Black churches, Black women's clubs, as well as a few generous White donors, including some financial support from the Chicago Women's Club, and most of McDonald's reports included

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[33] Quoted in Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 73.

[34] Elizabeth McDonald, "The Yearly Report of the Louise Jevenile [*sic*] Home," *The Broad Ax*, vol. 16, no. 14 (January 7, 1911): 1; "Mrs. Elizabeth McDonald, Founder and Manager of the Louise Juvenile Home, Annual Report," *The Broad Ax,* vol. 17, no. 13 (December 30, 1911): 6.

[35] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 72.

[36] McDonald was not a stranger to operating on a tight budget. She claimed that she did not do any of her previous work "as a job" but as a passion and calling, not taking "one cent of salary," which is perhaps not entirely true. Just prior to opening the home, as she was pursuing her rescue work on a shoestring budget, she decided to sit for an examination to become a salaried probation officer. However, likely due to her lack of formal education, she did not pass the exam. But this did not stop her from her work; in fact, if anything it propelled her to establish another institution to support her mission. See Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 72-3.

solicitations for additional funds to cover debts incurred over the previous year.[37] Recognizing the financial situation of the home, Black club members offered their support, both in terms of finances and voluntary service, which helped to sustain the home during these years. For instance, the Volunteer Workers Charity Club, who lived out their motto of "Not For Ourselves, But For Others," by supporting a number of homes and settlements for Black Chicagoans, provided consistent financial support for McDonald and the home with a sizable annual donation, which McDonald regularly mentioned in her yearly reports.[38] In addition to financial support, the club developed creative strategies to help support their fellow club sister's work. For example, they made it a practice of regularly holding their club meetings at the home, spending time with the children, mending their clothes and teaching them how to sew, and leading various activities and trips for them.[39] Club records note that members served on the board for the home and that their participation in the activity of the home increased over the years.[40] Substantial financial support was also provided by the Cornell Charity Club, and the Northern District Federation of Black women's clubs, which was the organization of Chicago clubs that were part

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[37] For example, see Elizabeth McDonald, "The Yearly Report of the Louise Jevenile [*sic*] Home," *The Broad Ax*, vol. 16, no. 14 (January 7, 1911): 1; idem., "Mrs. Elizabeth McDonald, Founder and Manager of the Louise Juvenile Home, Annual Report," *The Broad Ax,* vol. 17, no. 13 (December 30, 1911): 6.

[38] Elizabeth Davis noted that the Volunteer Workers Charity Club was one of the most generous of the Black women's clubs in Chicago that focused on philanthropy, and she identified the Louise Juvenile Home as one of the primary beneficiaries of their charity. Davis, "The Volunteer Workers Charity Club," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 38.

[39] McDonald, "Mrs. Elizabeth McDonald, Founder and Manager of the Louise Juvenile Home, Annual Report," *The Broad Ax,* vol. 17, no. 13 (December 3, 1911): 6.

[40] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 75.

of the Illinois State Federation and affiliated with the NACW, also made sizable annual donations to the home from their collective fund.[41]

Club women also came to McDonald's rescue when she and the home faced one of their greatest challenges beyond their constant financial struggles. In December 1911, McDonald was put on trial before the Civil Service Commission for accusations that she and her staff at the home had mistreated some of the children in their care. The court eventually found that the "charges of cruelty and indifference were without the slightest foundation in fact," based on the testimony of more than a dozen people, including several club members. The club women who were witnesses were regarded by the court as "women of high character" who "had visited the home day and night and knew whereof they spoke," testifying on behalf of McDonald as nothing other than "a kind, motherly, sensible woman to these children" that were taken into the care of the home. Club women who had spent time working at the home thus leveraged the public reputations they had built to save McDonald and her home from "conspiracy and ruin."[42]

Like other African American institutions that lacked the resources and networks of financial support on which many similar White institutions in the city could rely, financial struggles continued to plague the home despite the support of Black women's clubs and other donors. In the annual reports, McDonald usually noted budget shortfalls of around $1,000

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[41] Davis, "Cornell Charity Club," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 17; idem., "The Northern District Federation," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 15-16.

[42] Julius F. Taylor, "Mrs. Elizabeth McDonald Vindicated in Her Trial for Mistreating the Unfortunate Little Children Left in Her Care," *The Broad Ax*, vol. 17, no. 12 (December 23, 1911): 1. While much of her defense was made by Black club women (and possibly even some White club women), it should be noted that her connection with the juvenile courts in her work as a probation officer also helped to absolve her in this case. A judge in the juvenile courts, Richard S. Tuthill, was called to testify and defended McDonald as "a very capable and efficient women of kind heart and good disposition and good sense."

annually and by 1913 the debt topped $1,400. The home's failing financial situation forced McDonald to seek out other sources of funding. She ultimately found an answer to her problems through state affiliation with the juvenile court system, a deal she was able to make happen largely because of the relationships she had developed there and the reputation she had achieved as a probation officer. In July of 1913, the home was officially incorporated and became the Louise Juvenile Industrial School for Colored Boys.[43] Following the home's affiliation with the state, club women actually increased their financial giving, even while their volunteer work at the home decreased. The close involvement of the clubs with the home and industrial school especially fell off when McDonald made the decision to move the home to the town of Glenwood, about twenty-five miles outside of the city of Chicago, in 1917.[44] Little is known about club interaction with the home following the move to Glenwood, but they continued to support McDonald and her work financially at least until the state decided to close the home in 1920. McDonald and her husband moved to California where she continued her social welfare work.

The home's affiliation with the state marked a noticeable change in McDonald's "missionary" approach to her work with the home, or at least the way she publicly articulated it. At the close of her 1911 annual report, two years before state affiliation and six years before

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[43] Julius F. Taylor, "Another Big Boost for the Louise Juvenile Home, 6124 Ada Street Chicago," *The Broad Ax*, vol. 18, no. 34 (May 24, 1913), 2. Also Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 74.

[44] "The Louise Training School for Colored Boys has removed from 6130 Ada Street to a Lovely Thirty Acre Farm Near the Glenwood Training School," *The Broad Ax*, vol. 22, no. 32 (April 28, 1917): 4. The move to Glenwood also fulfilled a dream of McDonald to locate the home for children on a farm outside of the city. The end of this article reports, "There are all varieties of fruit trees on [the farm] and plenty of ground to raise potatoes and other garden truck. Also a large house, steam heated, polished hardwood floors and other modern improvements. There are also several cottages that can be used for housing the boys, a large dairy or creamery house and a barn which will hold fifty to sixty head of horses and cattle."

relocating the home outside of the city, McDonald provided the theological frame through which she wished her audience to understand the work the home had accomplished in the previous year:

> God has given us light not for ourselves alone, but to shed upon others, for the greater part of the Saviour's life on earth was spent in patient trial in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth. Ministering angels attended the Lord of Life as he walked side by side with peasant and laborers unrecognized and unharmed. He was faithfully fulfilling his mission while working at his humble trade as when He healed the sick or walked upon the storm-tossed waves of Galilee. So in the humblest duties and lowest positions of life we may walk and work with Jesus, and our own souls will be growing more and more into the likeness of Christ. We are workers together with God in this life, and are thus fitting for the higher work and the unshadowed joys of the life to come. Yours in His Name, Elizabeth McDonald.[45]

After affiliating with the state's juvenile court system, however, McDonald discontinued her annual practice of including evangelistic statistics (e.g., conversions, bible studies, families returned to church) and other religious commentary in her annual reports. She also no longer signed, "Yours in His Name, Elizabeth McDonald," but instead, "Sincerely, Superintendent." Despite this apparent professionalization, the "missionary spirit" that so thoroughly characterized McDonald's work and activism—"educating young boys to be good Christians and good workers"—persisted, even if less explicitly stated.[46] As a *Broad Ax* report of the home's move to Glenwood noted, "Mrs. McDonald and the boys feel that just as soon as they get everything

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[45] Elizabeth McDonald, "Mrs. Elizabeth McDonald, Founder and Manager of the Louise Juvenile Home, Annual Report," *The Broad Ax,* vol. 17, no. 13 (December 30, 1911): 6.

[46] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 75-6. Rather than understand this as an instance of "secularization" of the home or McDonald's work or worldview, I think that is rather more along the lines of what C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya describe in terms of institutional "partial differentiation," which I discuss more in the Conclusion. See C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 29-30.

straightened out in their new home, that *they will be right up to the very gates of Heaven on this earth*."[47]

The Amanda Smith Home

A theological (and even evangelistic) vision similar to McDonald's motivated the establishment of the primary home in Chicago dedicated to the care and training of Black dependent and orphaned girls—the Amanda Smith Home.

Amanda Smith, who became revered in the world of African American women's clubs, was described by the *Chicago Defender* upon her death as "one of the Race's foremost evangelist[s] who spent [her] life and fortune in temperance, religion, and charitable work."[48] Having been born into slavery, Smith's father purchased her freedom in the years just preceding the Civil War. As a young woman in the 1870s, she was authorized as an evangelist in the Methodist Episcopal Church—affiliating with the burgeoning Holiness movement in the Methodist church—even though she had no formal theological training (or very little formal schooling at all). She then embarked on a global mission of gospel preaching and social reform. Invited and sponsored by a wealthy Quaker woman, Smith traveled to England, Ireland, and Scotland on a series of evangelistic and temperance tours. In 1879, she would undertake similar gospel-inspired journeys to Bombay and Calcutta, India.[49] From India, Smith then journeyed to

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[47] "The Louise Training School for Colored Boys has removed from 6130 Ada Street to a Lovely Thirty Acre Farm Near the Glenwood Training School," *The Broad Ax*, vol. 22, no. 32 (April 28, 1917): 4. My emphasis.

[48] "A Tribute to Amanda Smith," *Chicago Defender*, March 6, 1915.

[49] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 76.

Liberia where she remained for the next eight years conducting missionary and reform work.[50] While in India, she was invited one day to give a speech on the importance of temperance for spiritual growth, and in the course of lecturing Smith reported hearing a voice speaking to her, asking her that despite all the work she had done around the globe "what have [you] done for [your] own people?" It was at that point, prompted by a divine urging, that Smith began to envision founding a home for abandoned and delinquent children in the U.S.[51]

Returning to America and settling in Chicago in 1895, Smith (then 60 years old) purchased property for a home just outside of the city in Harvey, Illinois, an experimental temperance town, investing "10,000 [dollars]—every cent of her life savings."[52] However, the home would not be built for several years. Smith finally opened the home in 1899, with five children under its care. Four years after opening, in 1903, she reported that thirty children were being cared for in the home. Smith's early success was due in large part to the relationship she was able to develop with the juvenile courts, not unlike the one that the Louise Juvenile Home would also establish. Even though the home never had facilities or programs on par with many of the homes that cared for White children in Chicago, the state continued to support it through the juvenile courts because it was the only working and "Satisfactory" home for African American

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[50] Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, "Amanda Smith," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 81-2.

[51] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 77.

[52] Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, "Amanda Smith," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 81. Smith's choice of Harvey was significant, as she had been committed to the temperance movement for several decades. She was a charter member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1874, and she often included temperance speeches in her preaching both domestically and abroad. See Amanda Kemp and M. Alison Kibler, "God's Image Carved in Ebony: Race, Religion, and Performance," *Baylor Journal of Theatre and Performance* 4.2 (2007), 33-4.

girls in the state. For this reason, the state would continue to support it along with the Louise Juvenile Home.[53]

Black club women in Chicago viewed Smith, whose reputation as an evangelist and missionary was widely known, as a model for combining religious devotion with social welfare work. In fact, they treated her almost like a female saint of the Black social gospel, a reverence reflected in the way many described her later in life—"God's image carved in ebony."[54] In part because of their commitment to caring for dependent and delinquent children, but also significantly because of Smith's reputation and personality, the clubs worked hard to support the home and often made pilgrimages to Harvey to help around the home and spend time with Smith and the children. This devotion proved fortuitous for Smith, as she constantly struggled to finance the home's work.

The reliance of the Amanda Smith Home, like other homes for Black children, on the Black women's clubs was on display in Smith's 1905 fundraising effort (one of many) in a moment of particularly acute financial stress for the home. Because the home was located some distance from the city, Smith planned a special event, a "Grand Basket Meeting," hoping to raise "$1,000 … money for bills now pressing us, such as printing, fuel, lumber, hardware, groceries, and plumbing. … Come and help us with your nickels, your dimes, your dollars. Help us with

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[53] Julius F. Taylor, "State Charter Issued to the Amanda Smith Industrial School. New Corporation Enters Upon a Good Work," *The Broad Ax*, vol. 18, no. 45 (August 9, 1913), 2. It is important to note, as Knupfer does, "This appraisal not only demonstrated the state's willingness to dismiss substandard conditions for dependent children but also indicated the state's and willingness to assist in the homes improvement." The home constantly struggled financially. For more on the home's financial struggles, which were sometimes alleviated by the state and sometimes by Black women's clubs, see Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 77-9.

[54] David C. Bartlett and Larry A. McClellan, "The Final Ministry of Amanda Berry Smith: An Orphanage in Harvey, Illinois, 1895–1918," *Illinois Heritage* 1.2 (1998): 20-25. For a helpful discussion of Smith's reputation and reception among African American women, see Kemp and Kibler, "God's Image Carved in Ebony: Race, Religion, and Performance," 31-46.

your presence, your songs and words of cheer." She called on "the pulpit and press, the political, business, legal and social clubs … the secret orders, benevolent societies, our boys and girls, juvenile circles, one and all, [to] unite in making this a grand festival day for our work. — Yours for God and Humanity, Amanda Smith."[55] The event was reported as a success, but it was not because a grand coalition was formed uniting the church and other secular institutions, but rather because of the significant turnout by the clubs and their financial pledges.

The success of the home in these early years was due in large part to the support of the clubs, who also made it a habit of spreading news of the home and its work in their addresses and publications. As Barrier Williams reported, news of the home and its growing reputation as a model for the care and instruction of African American juveniles reached the likes of Booker T. Washington, who saw in it promise for its adoption of his industrial model for education. In 1908, "accompanied by a few personal friends, [Washington] made a visit to Harvey, Ill., for the purpose of paying his respects to Amanda Smith, the noted evangelist, and inspecting the institution founded by her for the care and training of orphans and homeless children. This visit and show of interest in Mrs. Smith and her work was a most gracious act on the part of Dr. Washington and will be long remembered as one of the most interesting and perhaps most important event[s] in the history of this worthy institution."[56] The home survived its first decade of work largely because of the financial support and active participation of Chicago club women, efforts that were often reported in the local papers. In fact, the editor of *The Broad Ax*, Julius F. Taylor, whose paper covered the activity of Chicago's Black women's clubs more closely than

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[55] Amanda Smith, "An Appeal for Help for the Amanda Smith Orphanage," *The Broad Ax*, vol. 10, no. 49 (September 30, 1905): 1.

[56] Barrier Williams, "Dr. Washington in Chicago," *New York Age* (February 20, 1908): 8.

other local papers including the *Chicago Defender*, routinely sang the praises of the club women for their support of the Amanda Smith Home and criticized other Black institutions in the city for not following their lead.[57]

The fortunes of the home took a turn for the better in the second decade of the new century as Smith happened upon some financial independence and security for the home. She had been longtime friends with the well-known African American educator, elocutionist, and reformer, Hallie Quinn Brown, who in fact had served as an intermediary for Smith with her friends across the Atlantic, especially in England. In 1910, Brown was commissioned to represent the women of the A.M.E. Church at the historic World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland. While there, she shared news about the work of those institutions at home she felt most deserved international support, namely Wilberforce University along with some other causes including the Amanda Smith Home. Just before she was about to sail back to the U.S., she was approached by a British woman who was moved by Brown's words and passion for building African American institutions in America. The woman gave Brown $20,000 to take back with her—$13,000 to build a dormitory for women at Wilberforce and $7,000 for the Amanda Smith Home.[58] In addition to providing financial stability for the years to come, the gift also funded the building of a much needed dormitory building to house more girls at the home, a

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[57] Julius F. Taylor, "Those Claiming to be the Leaders of the Representatives of the Race Fail to Heartily Support the Old Folks and the Amanda Smith Homes," *The Broad Ax*, vol. 15, no. 19 (February 12, 1910): 1; "The Eleventh Anniversary of the Amanda Smith Industrial home, 147th Street, Harvey, Illinois," *The Broad Ax*, vol. 14, no. 38, (June 26, 1909): 2.

[58] Julius F. Taylor, "Miss Hallie Q. Brown Put in Some Licks for Wilberforce University and the Amanda Smith Home While Visiting Great Britain," *The Broad Ax*, vol. 16, no. 12 (December 24, 1910): 2.

project that Smith oversaw despite her advanced age (seventy-four years old) and failing health.[59]

With the home's financial future more secure, Black women's clubs began to explore new ways to support the work of the home. In fact, one of the most significant developments for the home occurred during these years because of an initiative of the West Side Woman's Club. At a 1910 meeting of the club, attended by some 100 or so members and some prominent social reformers along with leaders of other prominent Black women's clubs in the city, plans were introduced to establish a new home for young African American girls (four to fourteen years old). Two years later, in 1912, the West Side Women's Club opened a three-story home on Chicago's Near West Side, directed by West Side club member, Ida D. Lewis.[60] However, the following year, and following the unexpected death of Lewis, the club decided to merge it with the Amanda Smith Home, thus creating the Amanda Smith Industrial School for Girls.[61]

The decision on the part of the West Side Women's Club, in consultation with other Black clubs and reformers in the city, to merge their newly established home for young Black girls with the Amanda Smith Home was a strategic one rooted in their role as "other mothers," which was linked to their Protestant identity. In their work with the juvenile courts, they had become increasingly concerned about the institutions to which the courts sent dependent and delinquent African American girls, who they felt a particular responsibility to protect and to provide for.

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[59] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 78.

[60] Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, "Mrs. Ida D. Lewis," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 57.

[61] Julius F. Taylor, "The Problem is Being Well Solved. Splendid Work Assured for Dependent Colored Girls—West Side Home Girls to go to the Amanda Smith School at North Harvey," *The Broad Ax*, vol. 19, no. 12 (December 20, 1913): 2.

There was only one school funded by the county where the courts would send African American girls who went before the courts—the Illinois Technical School for Colored Girls—which drew criticism from many in Black Chicago. An editorial in *The Broad Ax* captured their frustration: "Our people insist that if our girls are to be 'Jim Crowed' at all we prefer to have them sent to an institution organized, maintained and controlled by our people, who are directly interested in the welfare of these unfortunates. If we must be segregated, we want to segregate ourselves; we do not want to be 'Jim Crowed' by white people and then pay them for doing it."[62] In addition to their concerns of the quality of care and instruction of the girls at the school, Black club women were also motivated to provide alternative housing and education for the girls on account of their sense of duty as Christian (Protestant) mothers. The Illinois Technological School for Colored Girls, while receiving state funding, was placed under the care and direction of the Catholic Church, a concern for Black social gospelers (Protestants) that was perhaps as operative in the statement of "our people" in the above quote as race. While likely fueled in part by anti-Catholicism, which is entirely possible but difficult to demonstrate, the strong stance of club women against the (White) Catholic run school at the very least suggests the significant religious valance of public motherhood in the club women's efforts of racial uplift. The reconstitution of the Amanda Smith Home as an Industrial School for Black girls demonstrates that religion not only motivated the "other mothering" of Chicago's Black women's clubs, but that a specific religious identity—Protestantism—was also a core concern of public mothering. While some

[62] "State Charter Issued to the Amanda Smith Industrial School. New Corporation Enters Upon a Good Work," *The Broad Ax*, vol. 18, no. 45 (August 9, 1913), 2. Quoted in Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 79, n. 61.

social reform work among African Americans stressed the need for the general influence of religion, club women insisted on the need for *right* religion, in this case at least.[63]

Using the influence they had built up with the juvenile courts, club women also led the effort to establish the home as an industrial school for Black girls. After opening in September 1913, a committee was formed by the West Side Women's Club to look after the home and school and to develop new means of support.[64] Among other initiatives, they organized donation centers throughout the city to collect necessary items for the home and school.[65] They also partnered with a number of other women's clubs and likeminded organizations. According to Elizabeth Davis, the first historian of Black women's clubs in Chicago and Illinois, the Amanda Smith Home and Industrial School was among the top three institutions to whom Black women's clubs donated, along with the Phyllis Wheatley Home and the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People.[66] Among the inter-club partnerships the committee from the West Side club established to help support the home, the most significant was with the Inter-racial Circle, directed by White settlement worker Mary McDowell.[67] The Inter-racial Circle even created a

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[63] Here I think Judith Weisenfeld's concept of "religio-racial identity" is helpful to highlight how racialized groups resignified their racial identities and the boundaries imposed by race by insisting on distinctive religious projects. See *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 5-8.

[64] The West Side Women's Club's leadership in respect to the Amanda Smith Home coincided with Smith's own relinquishing of administrative responsibilities at that time on account of her age and diminishing health. Though her health continued to deteriorate, she remained active and committed to the Home until her death two years later, in 1915. Davis, "Amanda Smith," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 81-2.

[65] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 80.

[66] See Davis, "Chapter Three: Clubs and Their Activities," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 13-41. For instance, the Volunteer Workers Charity Club began making a sizable annual donation for the Amanda Smith Home around this time, in addition to their primary charity, the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People. Davis, "The Volunteer Workers Charity Club," 39.

[67] Julius F. Taylor, "United Rally for the Amanda Smith Industrial School. White and Colored Citizens Working Together*," The Broad Ax,* vol. 19, no. 27 (March 28, 1914): 2.

position for one of their Black leaders, Sadie Lewis Adams, to focus specifically on work related to the home and school, regularly reporting on the home and its work to the women of the Inter-racial Circle.[68] The club women also took it upon themselves to inspect the home and grounds and report on conditions down in Harvey. Although the state conducted "official" inspections, the club women and Black newspapers rarely trusted them, relying instead on the reports of club leaders.[69]

The work of the Amanda Smith Home and Industrial School sadly ended in tragedy. Three years after Smith's death in 1915, a fire destroyed the building in 1918, claiming the lives of two of the children under its care.[70] While the specific cause of the fire is uncertain, criticism from both Black and White friends of the home suggest it might have been prevented if not for the negligence and oversight of the inspectors assigned to the home by the state. In fact, Sophonisba Breckenridge, a White social worker at the University of Chicago, charged that the state had blood on its hands because of the two children who lost their lives in the fire, shining a light on the unfair treatment of segregated state-sanctioned facilities for African American children in the city.[71] In the years that followed the fire, attempts were made by club women to resurrect the home and its work. Elizabeth Davis wrote in 1922, "The New Amanda Smith Industrial Home has risen out of the ashes of the old home founded by Amanda Smith … Mrs. Eliza Hallida, chairman and former President of the North Side Woman's Club, and her excellent

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[68] Davis, "Sadie Lewis Adams," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 91-2.

[69] "Amanda Smith Industrial School—Anniversary Exercises by Ideal Woman's Club," *The Broad Ax*, vol. 19, no. 41 (July 4, 1914): 2. This particular celebration and inspection included Ida B. Wells-Barnett, who applauded the condition of the home and spoke about its importance for uplifting Black Chicago.

[70] "The Death of Mrs. Amanda Smith," *The Broad Ax*, vol. 20, no. 24 (March 6, 1915): 4.

[71] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 81.

committees are working hard to erect the new building at Harvey during the present year."[72] Their efforts proved largely unsuccessful, however, as the home never became fully operational, due in no small part to the state's unwillingness to reestablish its support.

The Old Folks' Home

While the work of the Amanda Smith Home ended tragically with a fire, another home established and supported by Black club women—the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People—was born from a fire. In 1897, seven elderly black Chicagoans were driven from the home they inhabited together when it was destroyed by a house fire. They were temporarily taken in by one prominent club member, Gabriella Smith, who cared for the four elderly "inmates" with the financial support of two other prominent Black club women, Mrs. J.C. Stewart and Joanna Snowden.[73] In the following months, club women were able to secure significant financial support and volunteer commitments from several Black women's clubs and other like-minded institutions in the city to purchase a building and establish the home, which many club women often referred to affectionately as the "Old Folks' Home."[74]

Located on Fifty-Fifth Street next to Washington Park, the home faced unexpected racial opposition at the very outset. Situated on the edge of the Hyde Park neighborhood, White neighbors initially objected to the establishment of a home specifically for elderly African

[72] Davis, "The Amanda Smith Industrial Home," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 174.

[73] Davis, "Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 171-2.

[74] The home would later be renamed the "Jane Dent Home for the Aged" in the 1940s, and it remained active until its closure in 1970. See "Jane Dent Home for the Aged," Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

Americans. The superintendent (and a club member) of the home, Mrs. Fannie Mason, in addition to caring for the home's inaugural thirteen elders, "who had spent their lives in hard toil and deprivation," spent considerable time developing relationships with the neighboring White property owners and educating them about the work of the home.[75] Elizabeth Davis reported that Mrs. Mason's efforts to develop these relationships not only resolved the racial tension with the home's White neighbors, but it in fact convinced some of them to become avid friends and supporters of the home.[76] Efforts to quell racial tensions would become an important part of Black club women's work in Chicago, and it would significantly shape their strategy of pragmatism for racial uplift that is explored in the fifth chapter.

Within a few years of its founding, the Old Folks' Home had grown to care for more than twenty-five elderly "inmates," many of whom had experienced enslavement. The home was able to expand care to more poverty-stricken elderly in the first decade of its existence largely because of the financial support and fundraising efforts of the women's clubs.[77] While many women's clubs helped to support the home, Elizabeth Davis, in her early history of women's clubs in Chicago, noted that two clubs in particular led in supporting the home: the Woman's Aid Club and the Volunteer Workers Charity Club.[78] Of these two, the Volunteer Workers Charity Club, which organized its efforts in working with the home through the Chicago Federation of

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[75] Davis, "Mrs. Fannie Mason," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 67.

[76] Davis, "Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 173.

[77] See Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs*, 15, 35, 39, 83, 101, 173; "Union Charity Club. Turns efforts toward Home. Ida Lewis," *The Chicago Defender* (Jan 27, 1912): 4; "Baseball Game Benefits Old Folks Home," *The Chicago Defender* (Aug 16, 1913): 8.

[78] Davis, "Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 173.

Colored Women's Clubs, considered the home the primary focus of their organization and service.[79] Members of the club visited the home, doing chores (e.g., cleaning and gardening) and spending time with the residents (e.g., reading to them, planning holiday parties, and hosting banquets), and they also helped to raise funds for supplies and repairs to the building, which the newspapers constantly reported was rundown and insufficient.[80] In addition to general club support of the home, many individual women from a smattering of clubs spent time working at the home and often donated portions of their estate to help support the home financially.[81]

Women's clubs supported the Old Folks' Home to a greater degree than other homes in and around Chicago. The Great Migration put a strain on homes founded to care for African American women, children, and the elderly as churches and clubs alike began diverting resources to other organizations and charities, causing many homes to either close or seek state support. The *Chicago Defender* reported in 1915 that the Old Folks' Home was struggling and was in danger of being taken over by the city if improvements were not made to the home. Although not as often critical of the churches as *The Broad Ax*, the *Defender* ran an editorial that charged the churches of Black Chicago with "malpractice" for allowing the Old Folks' Home to fall into disrepair and run short on supplies, including food for the elderly.[82] In this moment of need, the women's club actually increased their financial support so that the home was in fact to expand its services and care during the peak years of migration. In fact, by 1921, the home

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[79] Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs*, 39.

[80] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 87.

[81] W.H. Jackson, "Christmas at the Old Folks' Home," *The Chicago Defender* (Dec 23, 1911): 2; "Club woman Evelyn M. Avery leaves 2000 from estate," *The Chicago Defender* (Oct 6, 1917): 12; "Club member Mrs Chinn leaves estate for Home," *The Chicago Defender* (Oct 9, 1915): 4.

[82] "Building in Poor Condition. Kitchen. Need Food," *The Chicago Defender* (Dec 18, 1915): 4.

outgrew its facilities and purchased a "quite larger and more modern home" several blocks to the north in the Bronzeville neighborhood.[83] The Old Folks' Home not only survived but thrived during the Great Migration precisely because they benefited from the continued support and collaborative fundraising efforts of Black women's clubs. Because the home was located within Black Chicago, club women felt a sense of ownership over and responsibility to the home in ways that they did not with other homes, like the Amanda Smith Home.[84]

Similar to the other homes discussed in this chapter, club work with the Old Folks' Home was driven by a deep sense of Christian mission to care for the needy and vulnerable from among "our people." As migration patterns during the first and second decades of the century reshaped and overpopulated the Black Belt—including increased racial segregation and heightened levels of poverty—upper- and middle-class Black Christians began to envision poverty-stricken areas of the Black Belt as a domestic mission field. This was true in the Black social gospel churches, as the previous two chapters demonstrated, but this sense of missionary work in the neighborhoods of Black Chicago also fueled the work of Christian women through their clubs. Some of the strongest evidence, in fact, for the sacralization of African American women's club work comes from reports of their work with the Old Folks' Home. It was quite common for articles in the *Chicago Defender* and reports from the Board of Directors of the home, which was made up of prominent Black businessmen and also club leaders, to cite the "missionary work" being done by club women in caring for the elderly "inmates" of the home,

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[83] Davis, "Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 173.

[84] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 89.

also noting the "Christian influence" of their activism.[85] It also was not uncommon for newspaper reports to praise the "missionary" efforts of club women in working with the home and in the same article criticize the churches for not doing more to support needy African American elders in the community. For instance, a little over a decade into the home's existence, the *Chicago Defender*, reporting on an estate gift of $2,439.69 for the home by club woman Mrs. Harriet Gilmore, praised the work being done by women for the home, caring for those who were otherwise "practically ignored by their own people—and this includes most of the churches."[86] Working through the clubs allowed many women opportunities to practice the kind of community care they had come to believe their Christian faith required of them, and it afforded them more freedom than their churches to "apply their faith" where they saw need for it.

Club women would even sometimes organize their work with the Old Folks' Home as an explicitly religious endeavor. Joanna (C. Hudlin) Snowden Porter, a prominent club leader and churchwoman (see chapter five), orchestrated this extra-ecclesial religious work with the home. Best known as the founder and president of the Northwestern Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, Snowden Porter was also one of three women who founded and financially backed the Old Folks' Home in 1897.[87] Snowden Porter remained one of the most active supporters of the home, and in the decades that followed she organized club support of the home through her position as chairwoman of the "religious department" of the Chicago Federation of Colored

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[85] "Announcing Annual Meeting of Support. Board of Directors," *The Chicago Defender* (June 25, 1910): 3; "Ladies Aid Club Meets at Home," *The Chicago Defender* (Sep 6, 1919): 17; "Old Folks' Home Board Makes Report," *The Chicago Defender* (April 22, 1916): 5.

[86] W.H. Jackson, "Christmas at the Old Folks' Home," *The Chicago Defender* (Dec 23, 1911): 2.

[87] "The Bi-Ennial Meeting of the Northwestern Federation of Colored Women's Clubs," *The Appeal*, June 7, 1919.

Women's Clubs.[88] Affiliated clubs, like the Volunteer Workers Charity Club and the Woman's Aid Club, would coordinate their efforts in working with the home and its inhabitants through Snowden Porter. The categorization of club work with the home under the auspices of the "religious department" of the Federation suggests that the distinction between Christian and secular social activism did not exist in the minds of Christian club women, or at least their practice did not suggest so.

The religious significance of the work of club women with the Old Folks' Home was observed by one of the home's early "inmates" in an 1899 *Broad Ax* report featuring the home and its work. The *Broad Ax* report described two of the elders in the home—"Grandma Job," reported to be 120 years old, along with "Grandma Stewart," who was supposedly 128 years old and "one of the best souls in this hard and cruel world"—living links to the era of slavery who were able to "relate many interesting events and facts concerning the Negro during that dark and dismal period." Commenting on the work being done at the home, mostly by club women, Grandma Job told the reporter that Christians who become obsessed with heaven in the afterlife, "transported many billion miles from this earth to some other world," are missing the opportunity to "be ushered into the presence of God" in this life. Gesturing toward the club women's work at the home, Grandma Job explained that "here upon earth is our heaven and here upon earth we come into contact with God everyday of our lives," and she stressed that humans can "come into intimate contact with Him" through the "wondrous acts of service and of love of fellow humans" in this life.[89] To return to the epigraph at the top of this chapter, quoting Mary

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[88] "Mrs. Joanna C. Snowden, Pioneer Chicagoan, Dies," *The Chicago Defender* (Oct 11, 1941): 7.

[89] "The Old Folks Home," *The Broad Ax*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Nov 4, 1899): 1.

Church Terrell, "Homes, more homes, better homes, purer homes is the text upon which sermons have been and will be preached."[90] Grandma Job, a late-in-life homiletician of sorts, seemed to know this to be true, giving articulation to the lived sacred text before her in the work of the club women who provided her with food, shelter, and company.

III. Conclusion

This chapter has told the story of African American women's clubs and their religiously-motivated work of establishing and supporting homes for the "least of these" in Chicago at the turn of the century.[91] Although not official parachurch organizations, Chicago's Black women's clubs provided realms for leadership and creativity in social work and racial reform efforts motivated by the religious convictions of Black Christian women. These women engaged their social reform activities—working with homes, caring for the sick and elderly, working with the juvenile courts—out of a conviction inspired by their Christian faith that they needed to care for "the least of these," and in doing so they reworked notions of "family" and "motherhood" to embrace the "least of these" in Black Chicago as if they were their own "kin." As will be explored more in the next chapter, this lived practice of embracing the "least of these" as one's own served as the basis for the club women's theology of "collective kinship."

One of the best summations of this theological orientation that motivated the social reform work of Chicago's African American women's clubs belonged to Elizabeth Lindsay

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[90] Davis, *Lifting As They Climb*, 86.

[91] In addition to these homes, there are several others that did similar work that I have not included in this draft of the chapter, including the Phyllis Wheatley Home and the Melissia Elam Home. The Phyllis Wheatley Home and the Melissia Elam Home. (The Elam House was founded a little later, 1921, but I found some personal papers of Elam at the Carter G. Woodson Library/Archives that detail her active church and club activity between 1890 and 1920.) Both homes served the needs of young women and working mothers. They provided childcare, housing, and employment services.

Davis, a prominent Chicago club woman who was tasked with writing the history of the first two decades of organized club life in Illinois.[92] The final chapter in Davis's history of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (1922) served as something of a homily on the theology of collective kinship, a reflection on the religious dimensions of Black women's club work and a charge to continue their divinely mandated task.

Taking the Federation's motto—"Loyalty to Women and Justice to Children"—as the inspiration for her reflections, Davis set out to show how Black women's clubs in Illinois understood these primary tasks of their organization to be ordained by God.[93] She explained how Black women's club work contributed to the building up of the "kingdom of God" on earth, a central theological principle of the social gospel. Playing on this theological theme, Davis explained, "There are, of course, in the world of organized effort, two classes of persons—the builders and the wreckers." Confident that the majority of her fellow club women were builders and not wreckers, she went to describe how such club women "are the only ones who are ever watchful, ever on the lookout to extend a helping hand to the needy, the suffering and the unfortunate; not for vainglory or self-reward, but in obedience to the divine command. To give a cup of cold water unto the least of these unfortunate ones is giving it unto Him."[94]

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[92] Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (Chicago, IL: Privately Published, 1922).

[93] For the Federation's motto as well as its place in Davis's "sermon," see Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (Chicago, IL: Privately Published, 1922), 3, 105-7.

[94] Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs*, 105. In contrast to the builders, Davis explained, "The wreckers, although in the minority, are not without their despicable influence; they are the ones who endeavor to tear down what the builders erect. These wreckers do not make good citizens and the greatest calamity that can befall any club is to have one or more wreckers to clog the wheels of progressive activity" (106).

At several points throughout the chapter, Davis made explicit mention of the religious motivations that propelled and guided the social work and activism of Black club women in Illinois during the first decades of the century, and, like her colleague Fannie Barrier Williams, argued that one of the responsibilities of the clubs was to continually demand a "better ministry" from their churches, that is, socially conscious (male) preachers who would tend not only to the spiritual but also physical wellbeing of their flocks.[95] And yet, the relationship of the women's clubs to the church should not be conceived of as adversarial, Davis went on to say, but rather cooperative in their struggle to lift up the race, urging that the "pulpit … must join hands with the club women and speak out in loud and no uncertain tones against all things which tend to drag us from the high pedestal of honor, integrity and sterling worth into the mire of corruption, vice and immortality in high places. If we would be strong, we must build from within and not from without."[96]

Davis believed that African American women's clubs were sites for Christian women to put their faith—learned and refined within the walls of the church—into practice. She wrote that club women "are the ones who weekly or monthly, when the doors [of the church] swing outward, wend their way hopefully to the club meeting, ever ready to join in unity, harmony and co-operation, to further whatever good work is presented for this consideration [in church]."[97] In this way, club work was an extension of their church lives, where they were also involved in

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[95] Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs*, 105.

[96] Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs*, 106-7.

[97] Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs*, 105.

various ministries and groups.[98] And yet club women recognized that there were limits to what they could to do and achieve in their activities within the walls of the church, almost always overseen by male church leaders.

Clubs, however, provided spaces of autonomy for African American women to more fully embrace and enact their theological visions for a socially-engaged Christianity, that is, African American women's clubs became spaces for the formulation and application of a theology of collective kinship. Davis, reflecting on the first two decades of women's club work in Black Chicago in the new century, and pivoting to imagine the future work they might do in the coming decades, highlighted the importance of the relationship between the clubs and the Black churches in this regard. Club work and its special task of caring for the "least of these" as one's own kin relied on the church and its ministers for inspiration and motivation, but it also required its independence from the church so that they could tend to the "peculiar duties" of Black women. They would certainly "support the church" in their independent organization, but they would not let the other interests and burdens of the church prevent them from their primary mandate to "build homes for the aged, the orphans and the wage-earning girl … [to be] ever mindful of the child in the slums, the girl in the kitchen, the woman in the alley."[99] Loyalty to Women and Justice to Children.

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[98] The brief biographical sketches in Davis's list of "Who's Who" among Black club women in Illinois (chapter six) almost always included their clubs affiliations in combination with their church membership and activity. Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs*, 41-94.

[99] Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs*, 105.

CHAPTER 4

Collective Kinship: Fannie Barrier Williams and a Theology for Club Activism

I. Introduction

This chapter, following closely on the previous one, spotlights the writings, activism, and work of one prominent club leader, Fannie Barrier Williams, in an effort to better understand the ways in which Black social Christian thought and the social and reform work of the Black women's clubs interacted.[1] Barrier Williams is at once a unique figure in the life of Chicago's African American women's clubs, and yet her writings and activism in the context of the Chicago clubs provides a helpful portal through which to view and better understand the everyday life, workings, concerns, and religious imaginations of Chicago's Black club women. Unlike the majority of club women, Barrier Williams had a national profile. She was involved at the highest levels of national organization for Black women's clubs. She conducted national speaking tours, where she gave lectures to women's clubs, churches, lyceums, and sometimes exclusively white audiences. She had close, personal connections with some of the most influential African American leaders and thinkers of the era, including Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and her fellow Chicago club leader Ida B. Wells-Barnett. While deeply committed to Christian social and racial reform, which she wrote quite extensively about, and sharing a similar experience in the churches of Black social Christianity

[1] The close reading of Barrier Williams's life this chapter undertakes is made possible by a significant archive of her written materials—over seventy documents in all—as well as a recent biography by Wanda A. Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

(AME, Baptist, and Presbyterian), when she came to Chicago she chose to place her membership with an interracial Unitarian church, a religious association that set her apart from many of her club sisters but, as we will see, is also revealing of the emphasis on interracial cooperation for the club women's theology of collective kinship and uplift strategy of racial pragmatism. Yet, despite her elite status and national profile, Barrier Williams exemplifies (and writes about) as well as anyone the ethos and activism of the Black women's clubs in this era.[2] While involved in organizing at the national level, she was deeply committed to the local organization of Chicago's clubs and settlements, a commitment that intensified over the course of the first decades of the century.

Barrier Williams was a driving force in shaping Chicago's Black women's club life and activism in the decades surrounding the turn of the century, helping to develop and articulate the theological vision motivating their work and activism—a theology of collective kinship—and modeling a strategy for racial uplift that centered on Black women's domestic role, both privately and publicly (i.e., "other mothering" and "municipal housekeeping"), and that depended on respectability politics to function.

In 1899, *The Washington Post* described Fannie Barrier Williams as "one of the best known colored women on the continent."[3] Having moved to Chicago a little more than a decade

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[2] A really good example of the way that Barrier Williams leveraged her elite status and unique position as a nationally recognized club leader to shine the light on the racial struggles of other club women is in her fight that lasted several years to obtain membership in the influential (and exclusively White) Chicago Women's Club, becoming the first, and for some time only, Black member. For example, see "The Chicago Woman's Club Reject Mrs. Williams," *The Woman's Era*, vol. 1, no. 9 (December 1894): 20-1; Fannie Barrier Williams, "A Northern Negro's Autobiography," *Independent*, vol. 57 (July 14, 1904): 91-96.

[3] "Mrs. Fannie Barrier Williams to Lecture," *Washington Post*, March 28, 1899, 2. Quoted in Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 119.

earlier from Washington, D.C., Barrier Williams had established herself as a leader in the burgeoning Chicago Black women's club movement and among Chicago's Black elite. She had also gained national notoriety for her presentations at the 1893 Columbian Exposition and World's Parliament of Religions, which paved the way for several lecture tours around the country.[4] Her biographer argues that she was, among other things, "the most significant female architect in the Progressive Era to shape the direction of the discourse about the progress of the black community and the reform activism of club women."[5] Only recently have historians begun to recognize the significant place that Barrier Williams played in shaping the intellectual landscape of Black America around the turn of the century, discovering what one editor of *The Colored American Magazine* knew to be true a century before—that Fannie Barrier Williams was "one of the greatest thinkers of the black race."[6]

As active as any woman in the world of Black women's clubs in Chicago, and perhaps only second to Ida B. Wells-Barnett as the most prolific Black woman writer in the city at the turn of the century, Barrier Williams helped to articulate the lived theology of *collective kinship* that guided the social gospel activism of Black club women. This chapter turns from the previous one's treatment of the Christian social reform work and activism of the clubs—primarily through their support and participation in homes and settlements for the African American women,

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[4] "The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation," in *The World's Congress of Representative Women: 1893*, vol. 2 (ed. by May Eliza Wright Sewall; Chicago, IL: Rand and McNally, 1894), 487-503; "What Can Religion Do to Advance the Condition of the American Negro?" in *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893*, vol. 2 (ed. by John Henry Barrows; Chicago, IL: Parliament Publishing Co., 1893), 1114-15.

[5] Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 8.

[6] T. Thomas Fortune, "Industrial Education; Will It Solve the Negro Problem?" *The Colored American Magazine,* vol. 7, no. 1 (1904): 13.

children, and elders—to focus on the life, thought, and writings of one of those club members in an effort to better understand the theological motivations underlying the activism of Black women's club.

II. Life before Chicago

Barrier Williams's thought and activism as a Black women's club leader was shaped significantly by her upbringing in the Northeast and subsequent journey through the American South as a young woman before finding a home in Chicago. Frances "Fannie" Barrier was born and raised in Brockport, New York, which she described often as a kind of "racial utopia." Describing the intimate interracial relations she experienced growing up in Brockport, Barrier Williams wrote, "Ours was the only colored family in the church, in fact, the only one in town for many years, and certainly there could not have been a relationship more cordial, respectful and intimate than that of our family and the white people of this community." Attending school with her two siblings, Barrier Williams noted that the children's "associates, schoolmates and companions were all white boys and girls. These relationships were natural, spontaneous and free from all restraint. We went freely to each other's houses, to parties, socials, and joined on equal terms in all school entertainments with comradeship."[7] In fact, the extent to which Fannie and her two older siblings were sheltered from the racial turmoil that raged in other parts of the nation is evidenced by their school records, especially during the tumultuous years of the Civil War. Attending the Baptist-affiliated Brockport Collegiate Institute with her two older siblings and other children of the town, they were required each year to register their class status,

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[7] Fannie Barrier Williams, "A Northern Negro's Autobiography," *Independent*, vol. 57 (July 14, 1904): 91-2.

religious affiliation, family members, and residential location, but nowhere were they or other Black or mixed-race children required to list their race.[8] She admitted that she was neither raced as Black nor experienced the harsher realities of White supremacy until she left Brockport as a young adult.[9] As a result of this unsegregated childhood in western New York in the years surrounding the Civil War—an anomaly in an era marked by as much racial strife as any in American history—and her subsequent introduction to the full force and violence of racism and White supremacy upon her departure for the South, Barrier possessed a unique perspective on race relations in the U.S. As her biographer, Wanda Hendricks, puts it, "Beyond the legal enforcement of state and federal policies, race had little significance in the overwhelmingly white insulated northern community of Brockport. The egalitarianism of the village afforded her the ability to view race as a socially constructed entity that was formed more by class delineation than by skin complexion."[10]

Upon completing her schooling in Brockport, in 1875, Barrier decided to leave her hometown to teach in schools for African American children in the South. Her first assignment was in Hannibal, Missouri, and it was there that she discovered the burden of raced and gendered

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[8] *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of the Brockport Collegiate Institute, Brockport, N.Y., for the Year Ending July 1st, 1864,* 21-2, 24, 26, 33. See Wanda A. Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams: Crossing the Borders of Region and Race* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 21, n. 71. The Barrier children were raised in an unprecedented racial atmosphere in the middle of the nineteenth century. Most communities that had school systems, which were few in the first half of the nineteenth century, segregated their schools based on race. In nearby Rochester, for instance, it was not only White residents who wanted to segregate institutions of learning in their city, but Black activists also petitioned for the creation of Black-only schools as a remedy for the institutionalized racism their children experienced. Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 22.

[9] Fannie Barrier Williams, "A Northern Negro's Autobiography," 91-6. She wrote, "We suffered from no discriminations on account of color or 'previous condition,' and lived in blissful ignorance of the fact that we were practicing the unpardonable sin of 'social equality.' Indeed, until I became a young woman and went South to teach I had never been reminded that I belonged to an 'inferior race.'"

[10] Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 3.

constraints on Black women. She wrote, "It was here for the first time that I began life as a colored person, in all that term implies."[11] It was not long before she began to plan her escape to what she hoped was a better version of the South—Washington, D.C.—where she relocated in the fall of 1877, just two years after having arrived in Missouri.[12] Barrier secured a teaching job in the "Colored Schools of Washington" with the aid of her sister who had moved to the capitol to start teaching in the public schools two years earlier. More importantly, the move to Washington immersed Barrier Williams into a racially separate and cohesive community of Black people that was unlike anything she had experienced before. There she was initiated into an upper class in Black society that became known as the "Black 400," comprised of the intellectual and social elite of Washington's African American society.[13] And yet, despite the solidarity of the community she discovered there, she also came to realize the heavy toll of racial prejudice that persisted in a town that straddled the South and North. Later in life she would reflect on her experience there and comment that in that town "the shadow of the departed crime of slavery still abides to haunt the generations of freedom."[14]

The nature of the segregated schools in which she taught for ten years in Washington, as had been the case in Missouri as well, shaped her racial consciousness in significant ways, a radical departure from the integrated schools of her childhood. Recounting several of her own experiences of racism during her time as a teacher, Barrier came to understand the difficult and

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[11] Barrier Williams, "A Northern Negro's Autobiography," 91.

[12] Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 29-30.

[13] Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 32-4.

[14] Barrier Williams, "The Perils of the White Negro," *Colored American Magazine*, vol. 13, no. 6 (Dec 6, 1907): 423.

unfair plight of Black working women throughout the country: "[I]t is scarcely possible to enumerate the many ways in which an ambitious colored young woman is prevented from being all that she might be in the higher directions of life in this country."[15] While working as a teacher in the South, Barrier, who admitted to having some skill in painting, sought to add some art teaching credentials to her resume and asked permission from a fellow White teacher to audit one of her courses in that pursuit. Though hesitant, the White teacher granted her permission to join the otherwise all-White class. On her second day in the class, Barrier was working on her painting when she "chanced to look up suddenly to find that I was completely surrounded by screens, and when I resented the apparent insult, it was made the condition of my remaining in the class."[16] In fact, this experience so disturbed Barrier that she left the South on account on of it—taking up residency in Boston for a few months in 1874—but even then she could not escape the racist sentiments to which she was introduced during her tour in the South: "[A]t a great sacrifice I went to a New England city [Boston], but even here, in the very cradle of liberty, white Southerners were there before me, and to save their feelings I was told by the principal of the school, a man who was descended from a long line of abolition ancestors, that it would imperil the interests of the school if I remained, as all of his Southern pupils would leave, and again I had to submit to the tyranny of a dark complexion."[17]

III. Religious Biography

[15] Fannie Barrier Williams, "A Northern Negro's Autobiography," *Independent* 57 (July 14, 1904): 91.

[16] Barrier Williams, "A Northern Negro's Autobiography," 91-2.

[17] Barrier Williams, "A Northern Negro's Autobiography," 92.

Barrier Williams's religious biography can be traced back to the predominantly White Baptist church in which she grew up in Brockport, New York, a spiritual home that persisted in her mind as a kind of utopia throughout her life, and the place to which she would in fact return to live out her final days.[18] Situated in the heart of the "burned-over district," the site of major religious revivals in the first-half of the nineteenth century, an evangelical Christian piety fueled the people in her town, including her family. Her parents taught Sunday school classes for children and adults in their church, and religious instruction was a daily part of her schooling.[19] Her introduction to the diversity of Black Christianity occurred during the course of her tours in the South. Although we do not know much about her religious experiences during her two years in Missouri, she was introduced to Black social Christianity when she moved to Washington, affiliating with churches attended by the city's Black elite (e.g., Union Bethel AME, Fifteenth Street Presbyterian, Nineteenth Street Baptist, and St. Luke's Protestant Episcopal).[20] In fact, she ended up finally settling at Fifteenth Street Presbyterian, whose pastor was the Black social gospel preacher Francis Grimké. There she would teach children's Sunday school classes with her sister. She remained a member there until she left for Chicago in 1887. The years she spent at Fifteenth Street Presbyterian listening to the preaching of Grimké most certainly shaped her own social gospel thought and practice that would receive full articulation during her years in Chicago.

Barrier's time in the South, in Missouri and Washington, also revealed to her a different side of Christianity than she had known in her childhood, ultimately pushing her to reexamine

[18] Barrier Williams, "A Northern Negro's Autobiography," 91.

[19] Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 13-4, 19, 21.

[20] Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 34.

her faith. She wrote in her autobiography, “Plainly I would have been far happier as a woman if my life up to the age of eighteen [before leaving Brockport] had not been so free, spontaneous and unhampered by race prejudice. I have still many white friends and the old home and associations are still sweet and delightful and always renewed with pleasure, yet I have never quite recovered from the shock and pain of my first bitter realization that to be a colored woman is to be discredited, mistrusted and often meanly hated.” And she went on to confess, “My faith in the verities of religion, in justice, in love, and in many sacredly taught sentiments has greatly decreased since I have learned how little even these stand for when you are a colored woman.”[21] Barrier experienced a “crisis of faith” as a direct result of the racism she encountered as a young Black woman in the South.

Barrier’s racial awakening and consequent faith crisis also significantly contributed to her growing discontent with White Christianity. In an autobiographical essay published for a newspaper on the topic of the “negro problem,” Barrier Williams wrote about two instances—albeit “selected from many of like nature”—during this period in her young adulthood which revealed to her the apparent contradictions of White Christianity in their dealings with Black folks, and specifically with Black working women. In the first instance, Barrier Williams, after she had relocated to Chicago, sought out a “certain bank president, well known for his broad, humane principles and high-mindedness,” with whom she could discuss the plight and potential of the “ambitious and capable colored women” she helped to find professional work, a mission that she pursued throughout her life. They argued about whether it would work to have a Black woman work in his office, but she finally convinced him to give a chance to one woman she

[21] Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography,” 92-3.

knew and mentored and who “did not show much color” to work as a stenographer in his bank. He agreed to it, but when Barrier Williams circled back to him several months later she discovered that when the bank president informed the board of directors that the young woman had a “slight trace of Negro blood” they immediately rejected her application for the position, despite the fact that he admitted that she was “the most skillful and thoroughly competent young woman who had ever applied for the position.” When Barrier Williams inquired about the identity of these directors, who had in her mind so clearly acted racist in not hiring the young woman because of her race, she “recognized one of them as a man of long prayers and a heavy contributor to the Foreign Mission Fund” and “another’s name was a household word on account of his financial interest in Home Missions and Church extension work.” Although she did not state it, the implication was clear that these otherwise good and Christian men, who may have even believed themselves not to be racist, were just as prone to racist hiring practices as one might experience in other parts of the country.[22]

The other example Barrier Williams offered to demonstrate how her racial awakening reshaped not only her understanding of race and relation to White people but also her faith once again took place as she was advocating for White businesses to hire Black young women for professional work. It also highlighted more sharply the hypocrisy she was beginning to recognize among many White Christians in the North, even among those who professed themselves to be friends and allies of their Black coreligionists in their struggle against racism. In this instance,

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[22] Barrier Williams, “A Northern Negro’s Autobiography,” 93-4. Indeed, as will be discussed more in the next chapter, Barrier Williams would articulate throughout much of her commentary on race that the world of business was perhaps the place that White folks, even and especially “good” White Christians, reverted to racist tendencies and operated on the basis of White supremacist assumptions, whether they were aware of it or not. This incident was just one of many such examples she related on the topic.

Barrier Williams sought to partner with a White manager of a local business "who unwittingly committed himself to an overwhelming desire 'to help the colored people.'" She emphasized the pride with which this particular White businessman registered his support of African Americans: "He said that his parents were staunch abolitionists and connected with the underground railway, and that he distinctly remembered that as a child he was not allowed to eat sugar that had been cultivated by the labor of the poor slave or to wear cotton manufactured by slave labor, and his face glowed as he told me how he loved his 'black mammy,' and so on *ad nauseam*." Based on his apparent commitment to solving the "race problem," Barrier Williams suggested that he could help the cause of Black folks by committing to hire young Black women for professional jobs, since his company hired many young White women as clerks and stenographers. However, he immediately grew solemn at her proposal, admitting that if he were to do so his clerks would quit and that it would "cause a general upheaval in my business," to which she responded, "your clerks surely do not run your business!" The White businessman responded condescendingly and told her that "she could not understand" the complex economic reasons why hiring "colored women" would ruin his business. To this, Barrier Williams responded with an appeal to his Christian faith: "Knowing that he was very religious, my almost forgotten Bible training came to mind. I quoted Scripture as to 'God being no respecter of persons,' and reminded him that these young women were in moral danger through enforced idleness, and quoted the anathema of offending one of 'these little ones' whom Christ loved. But he did not seem to fear at all condemnation from that high tribunal. His only reply was, 'Oh, that is different,' and I turned away, sadly thinking, 'Is it different?'"[23] These experiences bolstered Barrier Williams's desire to

[23] Barrier Williams, "A Northern Negro's Autobiography," 94.

advocate for “these little ones whom Christ loved” through her reform and club work, but they also reshaped her relationship to White Christianity, which had developed since her childhood from a racial naivety to a heightened skepticism of White Christianity. However, as we will see, this did not at all deter her from forming deep and meaningful relationships with White Christians.

When Barrier Williams arrived in Chicago, she sought something that combined her experiences of growing up in a predominantly White (Baptist) church and then attending a segregated Black (Presbyterian) church in Washington. Her immersion in the “Black 400” culture of Washington significantly shaped her class and religious preferences to the extent that she, like many other Black elites, eschewed “traditional” Black churches, opting instead for churches that prioritized the social gospel and “are interested in science … no longer accept[ing] all the old ideas.”[24] Class distinction was not the only factor in her search for a new religious home in Chicago. The previous decade she had spent as a member of Francis Grimké’s church, sitting in the pews listening to him preach the Black social gospel and participating in various ministries of Fifteenth Street Presbyterian, Barrier Williams hoped to find a church home that focused its ministries on social reform work as well as racial justice. She was also becoming increasingly convinced of the need for interracial cooperation in African Americans’ struggle for equal social and political standing, a belief that would significantly shape her activism in the

[24] “Cultured Negro Ladies,” *Chicago Tribune* (October 28, 1888): 26. Hendricks notes, “like several black elites in Chicago, Fannie Barrier Williams eschewed traditional black religions. Most members of this group concentrated on passionate philosophical and scientific study rather than participating in the emotional religiosity the working class blacks viewed as integral to their lives.” Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 58.

Black women's club world in the following decades.[25] And despite her increasing criticism of White Christianity, a result of her experiences in the South, there were still many White Christians who she admired and envisioned being partners with in social reform work and projects of racial uplift.[26] All of these concerns led her to All Souls Unitarian Church in the Bronzeville neighborhood, just north of where she made her home with her husband, S. Laing Williams, in Hyde Park.

All Souls Unitarian provided Barrier Williams with an institutional home to undertake projects for advancing racial progress, and it also shaped both her racial and religious imaginations. The pastor of All Souls, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, had built the church into one of the most successful interracial religious communities in the city. In the decades leading up to the turn of the century, All Souls was preaching a version of the social gospel and had charted out a robust program of ministries. The vision of the church is communicated well in a sermon Jones preached as part of the church's founding in 1882, titled "The Ideal Church," envisioning,

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[25] As will be discussed more in the next chapter, Barrier Williams's close association with Booker T. Washington significantly shaped the racial uplift strategy she shared with other Black club women—"racial pragmatism"—which relied strongly on interracial cooperation to draw on the social (economic) capital of White allies.

[26] Not long after coming to Chicago, and speaking at the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893, she noted that Black Christians "are grateful to the American [White] church for their signifiant change in sentiment, as we are grateful to it for making our cause and needs popular at the fireside of thousands of the best homes in the country. The moral force that vouched for the expenditure of nearly $40,000,000, voluntarily given for educational and church work in the South during the last twenty-five years, a splendid testimony to the interest felt by the American people in the cause of the intellectual and moral development of the Negro race. … In justification of the [White] Church it must be said that there has always been a goodly number of heroic men and saintly women who believed in the manhood and womanhood of the Negro race, and at all times gave the benefit of the best religious teachings of the times. The colored people gladly acknowledge that, since emancipation, the churches of the country have *almost* redeemed themselves from their former sin of complicity with slavery." Barrier Williams, "Religious Duty to the Negro," in *The World's Congress of Religion*, ed. J.W. Hanson (Chicago: W.B. Conkey, 1894), 895-6. In another speech she gave at the Parliament, she was much more critical of White Christianity, see Barrier Williams, "What Can Religion Further Do to Advance the Condition of the American Negro?" in *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893*, vol. 2, ed. John Henry Barrows (Chicago: Parliament Publishing Co., 1893),1114-5.

> A free congress of independent souls. It is to lead in the campaign for more truth rather than to indolently stand guard over some petty fragment of acquired truth … it will be a thinker's home. The student of science will handle no discoveries and it will not prize and indulge in no guesses that it will not respect. … Over its portals no dogmatic test is to be written to ward off an honest thinker or an earnest seeker. This church must emphasize the Universal Brotherhood; it will stand upon a grand emphasis of the great word of the century, Unity. It will seek to welcome low and high, poor and rich, unbeliever and believer.[27]

Jones's vision for the church was that it would be a "homelike" institution, linking the church to the community in both its practice and theology. He argued that if the community "is the larger family," then the church "must be made the larger home." This way of defining the work and message of the social gospel in domestic terms appealed to Barrier Williams. While her own theology differed from many of her fellow Unitarians—she held more strongly to some "orthodox" Christian beliefs (e.g., the divinity of Christ) than some of her fellow Unitarians—in the following decades she too would frame the task of the social gospel in terms of the home and family, a theological framework constructed with other Black club women. The church welcomed intellectual inquiry, often challenging long-held Christian doctrines and beliefs, and they held numerous discussion groups, offered lectures on a broad range of topics, and put together a library and reading room.[28] By the early 1890s, the church had transformed itself into an institutional church, or as Jones imagined, a combination of a church and "settlement house." In addition to educational and religious facilities, the church operated a kindergarten, youth study clubs, a training school for manual and domestic labor, as well as a gymnasium.[29]

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[27] Jenkin Lloyd Jones, "The Ideal Church," November, 1, 1882, Chicago, Illinois. Quoted in Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 71.

[28] *Fifth Annual of All Souls Church* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1888), 1, 41-51.

[29] *Ninth Annual of All Souls Church* (Chicago: All Souls Church, 1892), 89.

Perhaps more than anything, Barrier Williams was drawn to Jones and All Souls because of his vision of the "Ideal Church" as multiracial. Speaking at the World's Parliament of Religions, just a few years after joining All Souls, Barrier Williams explained how the theological vision of Brotherhood (a central principle of the social gospel examined in the previous chapter) must be realized in the creation of multiracial church communities and interracial religious initiatives: "there is needed less theology and more of human Brotherhood … The Golden Rule of fellowship taught in the Bible becomes in practice the iron rule of race hatred. Can religion help the American people to be consistent and to live up to all they profess and believe in their government and religion? What we need is such a reinforcement of the gentle power of religion that all souls of whatever color shall be included within the blessed circle of its influence. It should be the province of religion to unite, and not to separate, men and women according to the superficial differences of race lines."[30] From the beginning, Jones envisioned All Souls as a "spiritual home" in which African Americans were equals with White members, and while the church did not always live up to this ideal, Barrier Williams and her husband were actively involved in the leadership and ministry of All Souls. All Souls was an institutional church in every respect, a religious body that was simultaneously committed to religion, education, social reform, and interracial cooperation. In All Souls and its pastor, Barrier Williams

[30] Barrier Williams, "What can Religion Further do to Advance the Condition of the American Negro?" in *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893*, vol. 2 (ed. by John Henry Barrows; Chicago: Parliament Publishing Co., 1893), 1114. Jenkin Lloyd Jones was also one of the architects of the Parliament of World's Religions, which almost certainly played a role in Barrier Williams's invitations to speak there.

found what her biographer described as a “spiritual paradise,” reminiscent of the Baptist church in which she had been introduced to the Christian faith in Brockport.[31]

Barrier Williams’s attraction to All Souls and the Unitarians was heightened also by their inclusion of women in leadership. For Barrier Williams, as one who would seek to redefine Black womanhood, the encouragement she received from All Souls and the relationships she cultivated there, provided a constant source of inspiration and backing for her as she worked “to make Negro womanhood a part of all that is best and most beautiful in the world’s conception of an ideal woman.”[32] Her initiation into the world of Chicago Unitarians also connected her to several influential White club women and reformers in the city, none more important for Barrier Williams’s future than Celia Parker Woolley. More than anyone else, Woolley, who was an ordained Unitarian minister, helped Barrier Williams succeed in her various reform and speaking careers. The two became lifelong friends and would eventually collaborate in founding one of the most significant institutions for interracial cooperation and social reform in the city, the Frederick Douglass Center (see Chapter Five).[33]

IV. Race and the Social Gospel

[31] Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 72. *Need to discuss the place of Unitarians in the social gospel movement.*

[32] Barrier Williams, “The Woman’s Part in a Man’s Business,” *Voice of the Negro*, vol. 1, no. 11 (1904): 544-5.

[33] In her eulogy of Woolley at her funeral, Barrier Williams said, “Mrs. Woolley, it seems to me that she preeminently stood the supreme test of love to God in that she loved her neighbor as herself, without exceptions based on the mere circumstance of complexion. … We should be able to see in Mrs. Woolley’s death the transfiguration of all our bitterness and despair into courage and hope, for she taught more by the life she lived and the death she died than is given even to those who have most enriched the annals of human greatness.” “Report of memorial Service for Rev. Celia Parker Woolley, April 7, 1918, at the Abraham Lincoln Centre, Chicago,” *Unity,* vol. 81 (April 18, 1918): 116-17.

When it was announced in 1890 that the World's Columbian Exposition would take place in Chicago in 1893, the city almost instantly began to be regarded as one of "the most representative of modern urban places" and the new model of a "perfect city."[34] The World's Fair, and especially the concurrent World's Parliament of Religions, proved to be a crucial moment in the development of social Christianity in the city, and it revealed the growing divide between the city's social gospels along racial lines. The World's Fair and Parliament also proved to be a defining moment in the life of many club women, including and perhaps especially Fannie Barrier Williams.

Barrier Williams, because of some of the connections she had made with White Chicagoans of influence like Jones and Woolley, was invited to participate in a number of leadership capacities. She was invited in 1891 by the National Board of Control of the World's Fair to represent Black women's interests in a series of planning meetings. However, her appointment caused some controversy as some of the more vocal African Americans in Chicago and beyond (Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Ferdinand Barnett, Irvine Garland Penn, and Frederick Douglass) suggested that her appointment, among other African Americans serving in "official" capacities, was not real inclusion but racial tokenism. They eventually published a pamphlet with the title *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition* (1893). Barrier Williams recognized the limits placed on her in her representative role—the most meaningful part she played was in helping evaluate some paintings that would be hung in the Palace of Fine Arts—but she persisted in the role believing that she could do some good nonetheless. In fact, just a month before the start of the Exposition, she was nominated to serve

[34] Quoted in Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 76.

as the "clerk in charge of colored interests" for the Board of Lady Managers, which amounted to being a liaison between the White women in charge and the Black women employed by the Exposition.[35]

While her appointments in planning the Columbian Exposition, and the ensuing controversy surrounding them, certainly provided some frustration and distress for Barrier Williams—she was incapacitated for several months in 1892 with an illness—they certainly helped to increase her public profile and she was rewarded with several prominent speaking opportunities during the festivities of 1893 as a result. She was invited to speak at the week-long World's Congress of Representative Women at the beginning of the Exposition. Her lengthy speech was titled, "The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States Since the Emancipation Proclamation."[36] Although touching on a number of topics pertaining to the lived experiences of Black women, at the core of her message was the claim that Black women had a central role to play in the social reform work in the coming century—"the power of organized Negro womanhood"—especially as it involved African Americans. She also spent considerable time discussing the struggles that Black women faced in finding employment, a cause that she championed throughout her career. In many ways, as her biographer notes, this speech transformed her from "a local figure to a national celebrity."[37]

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[35] For more on Barrier Williams's role in the Columbian Exposition, see Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 77-82.

[36] Barrier Williams, "The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women of the United States Since the Emancipation Proclamation," in *The World's Congress of Representative Women,* vol. 2, ed. May Eliza Wright Sewall (Chicago: Rand & McNally, 1894), 487-503.

[37] Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 82.

Several months later, and significantly because her speech at the World's Congress of Representative Women (May 1893) was so well regarded, Barrier Williams received an invitation to speak at the World's Parliament of Religions, a two-week conference connected to the Columbian Exposition in September 1893. Her relationships with Jones and Woolley, who helped orchestrate the Parliament, also proved beneficial in securing an invitation to speak. Speaking on the penultimate day of the conference, Barrier Williams gave her speech titled, "Religious Duty to the Negro."[38] In this speech, Barrier Williams articulated a robust understanding of the Black social gospel, notable in its critique of White Christianity and insistence on social Christianity's potential for redeeming the church and nation, echoing a homiletics of resistance not so different than one might encounter from the pulpits of Bethel AME or Olivet Baptist. However, Barrier Williams went beyond Chicago's Black social gospel preachers as she considered the importance of Black social Christianity with Black women in mind. She gave voice to the nascent "theology of collective kinship" that was shaping the work of Chicago's Black women's clubs.

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[38] There are two versions of this speech. The first, with the above quoted title, is longer and more likely the version she delivered for the Parliament. Barrier Williams, "Religious Duty to the Negro," in *The World's Congress of Religion*, ed. J.W. Hanson (Chicago: W.B. Conkey, 1894), 893-97. The other version, titled "What can Religion Further do to Advance the Condition of the American Negro?" was abbreviated for publication and wider dissemination. It was also likely a version of the speech that Barrier Williams gave following the Parliament. In the years that followed, when Barrier Williams was most active on the national speaking circuit, she gave versions of both her speech to the World's Congress of Representative Women and the one to the Parliament. Fannie Barrier Williams, "What can Religion Further do to Advance the Condition of the American Negro?" in *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893*, vol. 2 (ed. by John Henry Barrows; Chicago: Parliament Publishing Co., 1893), 1114-15. While the basic message of the shorter speech is similar to the actual speech, it is less direct and focused in its critique of White Christianity and more so of Black clergy. I make reference to both versions in what follows. Barrier Williams's biographer, Wanda Hendricks, attempts to treat her religious imagination by drawing only on the shorter, post-Parliament version, which glosses much of the theological depth of Barrier Williams's argument. As a result, Hendricks's portrayal of Barrier Williams as a religious figure is muted and lacking, something this chapter attempts to correct by treating her not just as a reformer and club woman who was religious, but in fact as a theologian for Black club women. See Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 83-4.

At the heart of Barrier Williams's message was the claim that issues of race must be addressed centrally in the "new ministry," that is, social Christianity. At several points she stressed the need for American Christians to seek "the corrective influence of true religion," pointing to core social gospel principles of "human brotherhood" and "the Fatherhood of God." However, she argued, unless this gospel addressed questions about race and sought to uplift African Americans, then it was incomplete. A fuller understanding of the social gospel would recognize that "there is too much potency in the sentiment of human brotherhood, and in the still higher sentiment of the Fatherhood of God, to allow a whole race of hope for men and women to remain long outside of the pale" of church and society.[39] She signaled from the beginning the need to redefine, or as she put it, "fill out," the social gospel so that its practice considered the lives, experiences, and struggles of Black Christians. In other words, she argued for a more holistic social gospel that affirmed Black humanity.

She began the speech with the proposition that White Christianity's treatment of and relation to African Americans was the surest test of its authenticity, and for most of its history it had failed:

> Religion, like every other force in America, was first used as an instrument and servant of slavery. All attempts to Christianize the Negro were limited by the important fact that he was property of a valuable and peculiar sort, and that the property value must not be disturbed, even if his soul were lost. If Christianity can make the Negro docile, domestic and less an independent and fighting savage, let it be preached to that extent and no further. Do not open the Bible too wide. Such was the false, pernicious and demoralizing Gospel preached to the American slave for 200 years. But, bad as this teaching was, it was scarcely so demoralizing as the Christian ideals held up for the Negro's emulation.[40]

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[39] Barrier Williams, "What can Religion Further do to Advance the Condition of the American Negro?" 1115.

[40] Barrier Williams, "Religious Duty to the Negro," 893.

Her condemnation of proslavery Christianity and criticism for White Christians who continued to leverage the spiritual burden of whiteness in the decades that followed Emancipation was strong. She described it as “evil” and a “sin,” and she noted that there were many “still worshipping under the old dispensation of the slave Bible,” a book which itself had been bound by white supremacy.[41] In her telling, White Christianity had weaponized the very “source” and “breath of life” into a tool to enslave and oppress Black people. She questioned if salvation was even possible for these sins, if Christianity could be redeemed.

Despite the dark narrative she shared, and the seriousness of the offense she charged, Barrier Williams believed salvation was possible, but it would come for White Christians not on their own account but from those to whom they had previously denied it. “Though the Bible was not an open book to the Negro before emancipation,” she declared, “thousands of the enslaved men and women of the Negro race learned more than was taught to them. Thousands of them realized the deeper meanings, the sweeter consolations and the spiritual awakenings that are a part of the religious experiences of all Christians. These thousands were the nucleus out of which was to grow *the correct religious life* of the millions.”[42] American Christianity’s salvation she claimed would come from Black churches, among which the AME Church was beacon, “an enduring monument to the righteous protest of Christians to establish the mean sentiment of caste in religion and degrade us to a footstool position at the shrine of Christian worship. The colored churches of all denominations in this country are not evidences of our unfitness for

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[41] In the shorter version of the speech, she decried, “It is a monstrous thing that nearly one-half of the so-called Evangelical church of this country, those situated in the South, repudiate fellowship to every Christian man and woman who happens to be of African descent.” Barrier Williams, “What can Religion Further do to Advance the Condition of the American Negro?” 1115.

[42] Barrier Williams, “Religious Duty to the Negro,” 894-95. My emphasis.

religious equality, but they are so many evidences of the Negro's religious heroism and self respect that would not brook the canting assertion of mastery and superiority of those who could see the Negro only as a slave, whether on earth or in heaven."[43] Barrier Williams used the Parliament's pulpit not merely to condemn the racist sins of White Christians, but also to preach a word of hope, remarking on the possibility of forgiveness and redemption that would come from the religious sentiments and leadership of Black Christians. True social salvation would be delivered by the preaching and practice of a social gospel that centered issues of race and recognized the leadership and contributions of African American Christians.

Barrier Williams believed that the "saving power of religion" would rescue American Christianity from "the reign of prejudice and injustice" over its pulpits and pews.[44] However, she did not want her listeners to confuse "the purifying power of religion" with the institutional structures and interests of the churches. In her mind, the conflation of these had contributed mightily to the social and racial ills plaguing the nation. She was critical of White churches for this, but she also reserved some of her harshest criticism for Black churches and their clergy, who often let their own "church work" hamper their ability to address social and racial problems. She argued that American Christians, whether Black or White, needed "more religion and less church … less theology and more of human brotherhood."[45] She believed that religion was one of the most powerful weapons against racism, suggesting that it was only through "the gentle

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[43] Barrier Williams, "Religious Duty to the Negro," 894-95.

[44] Barrier Williams, "Religious Duty to the Negro," 896.

[45] Barrier Williams, "What can Religion Further do to Advance the Condition of the American Negro?" 1114. In fact, she stated, "The tendency of creeds and doctrine to obscure religion, to make complex that which is elemental and simple, to suggest partisanship and doubt in that which is universal and certain seriously hinders the progress of the colored people of this country. Barrier Williams, "Religious Duty to the Negro," 896-7. On the limits of the church to solve racial issues, see also idem., "The Need of Organized Womanhood," *Colored American Magazine*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Jan 1909): 652.

power of religion that all souls of whatever color shall be included within the blessed circle of its influence."[46] The redemption of White Christianity would also require work on their part, specifically "unlearn[ing] religious conceptions" related to the "old dispensation of the slave Bible."[47] Indeed, this task of education (and unlearning) for White Christians, an interracial endeavor, would become for Barrier Williams one of the centrals projects of her social and reform work with the Black women's clubs, especially through the founding of the Frederick Douglass Center (see Chapter Five).

V. Club Work and the Theology of Collective Kinship

While the Black social gospel Barrier Williams described in her speech to the Parliament echoed many of the theological themes and social concerns of the Black social gospel preaching examined in Chapter One—the theology of brotherhood—she expanded its vision to include the concerns of Black women. For her, the home and family became central concepts for theological reflection on the long shadow slavery cast over American Christianity. Of all the evils inflicted by the "false, pernicious and demoralizing Gospel preached to the American slave," it was the sundering of Black families that was most damning to her about proslavery Christianity:

> In nothing was slavery so savage and so relentless as in its attempted destruction of the family instincts of the Negro race in America. Individuals, not families; shelters, not homes; herding, not marriages were the cardinal sins in that system of horrors. Who can ever express in song or story the pathetic history of this race of unfortunate people when freedom came, groping about for their scattered off-spring with only instinct to guide them, trying to knit together the broken ties of family kinship?[48]

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[46] Barrier Williams, "What can Religion Further do to Advance the Condition of the American Negro?" 1115.

[47] Barrier Williams, "Religious Duty to the Negro," 894.

[48] Barrier Williams, "Religious Duty to the Negro," 897; idem., "What can Religion Further do to Advance the Condition of the American Negro?" 1114.

Further, she depicted the auction block as the site not only of the greatest sin but of a level of hypocrisy unmatched in Christian history, where “mothers saw their babes sold by Christians … in order to raise money to send missionaries to foreign lands.”[49] This “cardinal sin”continued to plague African Americans in the South almost three decades following Emancipation. According to Barrier Williams, “We do not yet sufficiently appreciate the fact that the heart of every social evil and disorder among the colored people, especially in the rural South, is the lack of those inherent moral potencies of home and family that are the wellsprings of all the good and the human society.” What was most needed was for these African Americans, who had been robbed of the most precious social relations, was the “purifying power of religion,” so that they might come to know the “blessed meanings of … motherhood and family.”[50]

In redefining the Black social gospel with women in mind, Barrier Williams gave an early voice to the Black club women’s theology of collective kinship. This theology of collective kinship was sometimes articulated in speeches or writing but more often was lived out in the activism of the club women in establishing and running kindergartens, nurseries, homes for children, young women, single mothers, and the elderly. While their reform work both drew from and challenged the cult of true womanhood, their theologically-informed role as caretakers of the “least of these” among the race combined two distinct-yet-related gender ideologies around the

[49] Barrier Williams, “Religious Duty to the Negro,” 893.

[50] Barrier Williams, “Religious Duty to the Negro,” 897. She insisted that the religion that would cure this social ill was the “practical religion” of the social gospel: “Every preacher and every teacher in the south will tell us that preaching from the pulpit and teaching in the school house is about half done so long as the homes are uninstructed in the practical religion that can make pure and sacred every relationship it touches of man, woman and child.”

turn of the century: progressive maternalism and municipal housekeeping.[51] For the Black women's clubs, the images of motherhood, home, and family shaped their community ethos and strategies for social and racial reform.[52] However, it was the African American tradition of "other mothering" that most significantly informed their theology and practice in the realm of club work. This tradition was born out of the circumstances of slavery that Barrier Williams described above, in which familial ties were often broken by slavers and then reconstituted by enslaved women who took in separated children as their own. This maternal tradition, which Barrier Williams often refers to as a "motherly instinct" specific to Black women, continued after the end of slavery, and it took on new meaning for African American women in the final decades of the century, especially for middle- and upper-class women who came to see themselves as caretakers of the race, other mothers tasked with uplifting the less fortunate. For those that came to embrace the social gospel, or perhaps discovered a coherence between the social gospel and the socially conscious forms of African American Christianity they had always known, they began to reinterpret their role as other mothers in light of Jesus's command to care for the "least of these" (Matthew 25:40), a central tenet of the social gospel.[53] This theological tradition offered a more capacious vision than the relationships of the immediate family and the dyadic

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[51] I am here indebted to Anne Meis Knupfer for her analysis of the gender ideologies that informed African American women's club work. For an in-depth discussion of how these gender ideologies shaped Black women's club life, See Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and Nobler Womanhood*, 11-29. For the cult of true womanhood, see Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 152.

[52] On the tension between their conservative gender rhetoric and otherwise progressive social and racial reform, see Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and Nobler Womanhood*, 28.

[53] Walter Rauschenbusch, for instance, along with other social gospelers, frequently employed the phrase, "the least of these," to describe the most marginalized and oppressed segments of society. Rauschenbusch, *A Theology of the Social Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1917): 215.

mother-child relationship that dominated in broader society, rather opening out to include care of other children, as well as of the poor, abandoned, and elderly.

Black club women's theology of collective kinship was a constructive project responding to the experiences of Black women and the needs of marginalized Black Chicagoans, but it was also a critique of the Black churches, both for the restrictions they placed on women as well as for the failure of the churches in many instances to care for "the least of these." Barrier Williams repeatedly detailed how even the most robust institutional churches that preached the social gospel still left many children and mothers without the aid they needed. The church particularly failed in protecting and providing for "young colored girls" and young Black boys "educated in the streets" and "graduating from schools of crime," who when they turned to the church for "some salvation" found none.[54] In an article in 1904, arguing for the need for African American social settlements in the city, Barrier Williams made her case by pointing to the failure of the church to care for children and the homeless or unemployed because the churches "could not bring to the work an undivided and unselfish motive."[55] Although the clubs relied on the churches and partnered with them when they could—after all, almost all club women were faithful and active church women as well—Barrier Williams noted that they recognized that independence from the churches was absolutely necessary for the success of their clubs and their initiatives. The issue of independence was of utmost concern when it came to finances, as club leaders like Barrier Williams recognized that many clubs who maintained too close of ties with

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[54] Barrier Williams, "The Need of Organized Womanhood," 652.

[55] Barrier Williams, "The Need for Social Settlement Work for the City Negro," *Southern Workman*, vol. 33 (Sept 1904): 502-3.

the churches simply became fundraising mechanisms for them.[56] She even suggested that this was one of the reasons White women had become so much more involved in social reform work early on, "because we [Black women] have no time or interest outside church work."[57] It was only when Black women became aware of the gaps in the social ministries of the churches that this began to change. In fact, many of the Chicago clubs associated with the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs—whose motto was "Loyalty to Women and Justice to Children"—got their starts as they attempted to "fill in" the work the churches missed, especially in addressing what came to be regarded as the "kindergarten problem," providing childcare for

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[56] In 1908, in her most critical assessment of women's clubs, she wrote, "There are clubs that permit themselves to be dominated by church influence. Such influence ought not to be harmful, but it is frequently a hindrance. A woman's club must be free to carry out its own purposes, follow its on initiative and map out its own program of work. It cannot be a free, independent and successful club, and at the same time a money-raising adjunct to pay church debts." "Work Attempted and Missed in Organized Club Work," *Colored American Magazine*, vol. 14, no. 5 (May 1908): 282.

[57] Barrier Williams, "Opportunities and Responsibilities of Colored Women," speech delivered to the ladies' Auxiliary of the Whittier Association, Memphis, TN, 1895. Speaking to a gathering of church women at the beginning stages of Black club organization, Barrier Williams said, "Thousands of young girls who need the moral protection of the church as much on Monday as on Sunday, who need instruction in the secret responsibilities of womanhood and in all things that make for the moral integrity of women, are deprived of them all because so many of our women are to the stern necessity of money-getting to pay church debts. If our women could be released partially from this one narrow aim, and see the possibilities of church in the neglected fields where the Kings daughters are reaping such rich harvest of good to humanity, our importance as women of worth in moral work would be wonderfully advanced. Our good church women as well need to be saved from narrowness and its consequences, and the way to be saved his to know more of the resources and possibilities of one another."

young working mothers.[58] However, their efforts in partnering with the churches often failed not long after they started.[59]

For all of these reasons, Black women's clubs began to realize that they needed to move their Christian reform work and activism outside of the domain of the churches if they were to be successful. So Black women's clubs became the new home for the theology of collective kinship. In the nascent years of Black women's club organization, Barrier Williams was invited to give a speech to a gathering of church women in Memphis, Tennessee, and she used the opportunity to share her vision of organizing Black women's clubs as sites for enacting Christian social reform: "[Club] women have united to show by example, in an impressive way that it is not all of religion to pray and sing, and in soft pews listen to the Word. This *new mission* is to extend the meaning of the Christian religion so that [they] shall stand more for Love than doctrine, more for human worth than for church name, and be wider open more hours in the week for humanity's good than the saloon is open for humanity's woe. So that what women do, rather than what they say or profess, shall be the standard of religion." She went on to suggest that this "new mission" must take place as much "out of the church" as in it. She shared the story of one Black church woman from Chicago, Margaret Etta Creche, who observed the difficult plight of young working

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[58] Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 10.

[59] As will be discussed more in the next chapter, this same sense of the church's failure (and the failure of Black men more generally) to use the franchise to protect Black women and children also drove Black women's to fight for suffrage. Club Women began to see the ballot box as key for their reform work — they had a gendered understanding of the meaning of the ballot "other mothering." In 1913, a year before Black women earned the right to vote in Illinois elections, Barrier Williams wrote, "We believe that the franchise, if wisely and intelligently used, will enable them to do many things that the colored men with the ballot have not been able to accomplish. … We need an awakened interest in things that heretofore have been regarded as the concern of men alone. The questions concerning the well being of women and children offers a large field for women who have the power of the ballot to enforce their rights." Barrier Williams, "Suffrage in Illinois," *A.M.E. Church Review*, vol. 30, no. 2 (Oct 1913): 123-24. See also idem., "Mrs. Fannie Barrier Williams Speaks before the Progressive League," *The Broad Ax* (Nov 7, 1914): 2.

mothers in Black Chicago, who were forced to leave their children uncared for during the day. So she founded a day nursery for the babies and toddlers of working mothers, "provided with all possible baby comforts … supplying the caressing cares of mother during the day, while the mother is necessarily absent."[60] A decade later, and writing for a national audience about Black women's club work, Barrier Williams reaffirmed that the "purpose of colored women's clubs" was to be "the civic mothers of the race … establishing a special relationship between those who help and those who need help."[61]

The vocation of caring for "the least of these" as one's own—collective kinship—was one for which Black club women believed they were uniquely gifted spiritually. In 1887, Barrier Williams wrote an article for the *A.M.E. Church Review*, titled "The Awakening of Women," which considered the developments of club life within the City Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, which was associated with the NACW. Part of the article looked for inspiration from White club leaders and social settlement workers like Jane Addams, who Barrier Williams dubbed "that apostle of the new [social] gospel of good deeds in a naughty world." However, much of the rest of the article outlined in theological terms the task of Black women's clubs. She suggested that the clubs (referring to the NACW specifically) were perhaps best suited to engage the work of subduing "social evils" and responding "to every form of human suffering."[62]

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[60] Barrier Williams, "Opportunities and Responsibilities of Colored Women," speech delivered to the ladies' Auxiliary of the Whittier Association, Memphis, TN, 1895.

[61] Barrier Williams, "The Club Movement among the Colored People," *Voice of the Negro*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1904): 100-1.

[62] She wrote, "Our women, thus organized, have it in their power to supplement the blessed influences of the churches, the mouldering forces of the schools, and all the restraining powers of the official forces of our cities, to such an extent as to link their efforts with the best results of woman's work in these latter days of the nineteenth century." Barrier Williams, "The Awakening of Women," *A.M.E. Church Review*, vol. 13, no. 4 (April 1897): 393-94.

Women were equipped for this social and reform work because they had been blessed by God with an "untrammeled sympathy," which Barrier Williams explained, "is not that far-away, kid gloved and formal something that enables women merely to know those who need them, but that deeper and more spiritual impulse to helpfulness that will enable them to find delight in working with rather than for, the unfortunate … In social reforms we must see but one thing, and that is the vivid soul of humanity—that divinity which neither rags, dirt nor immoralities can entirely obscure."[63] One of the core beliefs motivating just about every aspect of Black women's club efforts was that the pressing social (and racial) problems required a "baptism of the home spirit" and a motherly care. Concerns about the destructive influence of vice and various "entertainments" on children and youth in the vice districts of Chicago motivated the earliest club organization in the 1890s.[64] Black club women understood "public housekeeping" as part of their responsibility within a collective kinship theological framework, which Barrier Williams observes was operative in the earliest days of their organization in Chicago:

> In this [club] association is found the reflection of civic pride and civic efficiency that overturn corrupt councils, banish to the penitentiary the corruptors of the ballot box the manipulators of the tax assessments, the bribers of the jury system, and those who grow rich by official complicity in the social evil. If it be asked who it is that protects the minor children from the cruelties of store keepers and factories, who it is that protects the unfortunate women of the slums from the blackmailing of the police force, the answer is that protection comes from the women's clubs of the city—voluntary organizations of noble women, whose culture is so broad and hearts so touched with the divine spirit of

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[63] Barrier Williams, "The Awakening of Women," 394.

[64] E.g., One Chicago club stated in 1889, "We are calling attention to the fact that a number of our girls and boys are on the road to ruin. The boys rioting in the Clark and 4th Avenue dives, laying the foundation for lives of thieves, thugs and murderers, and the girls walking the streets in gaudy attire…. How sad it is to see the girls we have known in their innocent childhood, change their lives, just when life's days should be the brightest, change from piety, virtue and happiness to vice, dissipation and woe. Mothers are you blind? Fathers are you deaf? Christians are you asleep? For the sake of God and Humanity, let some one rescue these young lives from dissipation's perpetual gloom." "Black Clubs Battle Vice," *Chicago Tribune (*Aug 11, 1889), 12.

> altruism that their nobility is increased by every effort to reach down the helping hand to lift up the helpless and disinherited.[65]

Out of this engagement with the social problems of Black Chicago, Black club women refined their theological vision of collective kinship that drove the organization of Black women's clubs in the city, manifesting especially in their work to establish and support homes for young women and mothers, children and babies, as well as the elderly. As Mary Church Terrell, the well-known Black women's club leader from Washington, D.C., put it, "Homes, more homes, better homes, purer homes is the text upon which sermons have been and will be preached."[66]

VI. Conclusion

In articulating a theology of collective kinship, Fannie Barrier Williams gave theological language and meaning to the lived religious experiences of African American club women who engaged the social problems they encountered in Black Chicago, believing their Christian faith obligated them to care for the "least of these" as if they were their own kin. One of the goals of this chapter is to help construct an intellectual history of African American women's theological contributions to social Christianity. I join with other historians who are working to expand the field of intellectual history to include individuals not formally considered "intellectuals." As Aaron E. Sánchez, a historian of Chicana/o intellectual history, explains, "the traditional emphasis of intellectual history on highbrow, elite, and scientific bodies of thought has privileged white males as thinkers, while the ideas of women and communities of color have

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[65] Barrier Williams, "The Awakening of Women," 393.

[66] Quoted in Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 19.

been reduced to 'experiences.' White men are not the only people who have thoughts and express ideas."[67] This chapters shows that Barrier Williams deserves recognition as a theologian within the tradition of Black social Christianity, and that her "theology of collective kinship" is an important contribution to social Christian thought.

[67] Aaron Sánchez, *Homeland: Ethnic Mexican Belonging since 1900* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2021), 3. See also Catherine E. Kelly, *In the New England Fashion: Reshaping Women's Lives in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 6-7.

CHAPTER 5

"Lifting as We Climb": Neighbor Love and Interracial Cooperation in Black Settlement Work

> *These settlements for colored people must not be narrow, or merely a Negro charity clearinghouse—a place to encourage complaints, not a Negro settlement as such, but a settlement in which the best men and women of both races shall unite their strength to extend the law of brotherhood, helpfulness, and good will to the colored race as well as to the foreigners for whom so much is being done. … By making the race problem a part of the human problem, in which all classes and races are vitally concerned; in trying to help the community by helping the Negro; in creating as much interest in the young colored man or woman, after they are educated and trained for life service, as before they were trained; in the broadening and deepening of human problems, this race question of ours can be lifted above the low plane of passion and partisanship, to the higher plane of human brotherhood.*[1]

I. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the racial reform efforts of Black club women through a study of their settlement work. In addition to the number of homes that African American club women founded, supported, and ran that served Black Chicago's most vulnerable residents (women, children, and elderly citizens), they also helped to establish and support several settlements that were established exclusively for African Americans. They modeled them on the highly successful settlement houses that primarily served White Chicagoans and European immigrants to the city (e.g., Jane Addams's Hull House and Graham Taylor's Chicago Commons). After surveying club women's work with Black settlements in Chicago, the chapter turns its focus to one of these

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[1] Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Need for Social Settlement Work for the City Negro," *Southern Workman* 33 (September 1904): 503, 505.

settlements in particular, the Frederick Douglass Center, not because it is representative of the work of the other settlements, but precisely because of the distinctiveness of its project to not only provide services and support for the needs of Black residents of Chicago but also and especially to help improve "race relations" in the city through interracial encounter and dialogue. In founding the Frederick Douglass Center, Chicago's Black Christian club women gave institutional form to their distinct strategy for racial advancement, which can best be described as a kind of racial pragmatism that relied on a program of interracial cooperation and was driven by Jesus's mandate to "love thy neighbor."

One of the most significant ways that Black women's social and racial reform activism in clubs diverged from the reform work they undertook in their church organizations was their strategy to achieve racial uplift and influence local and national politics around matters of race through strategic interracial cooperation with White women and their organizations. In their extraecclesial social and racial activism, these women followed a strategy for racial uplift that emphasized pragmatism, compromise, interracial cooperation, and focused primarily (but not exclusively) on issues related to women and children. They constructed a multilayered program for racial advancement that focused on Black women and emphasized a vision of racial solidarity—seeking to lift up poorer Black women—that at the same time relied on paternalism and necessitated the maintenance of class distinctions. This tension was embodied in the two-tiered motto of the national Black women's club movement (the NACW), "Lifting as We Climb." In other words, Black club women forged a two-pronged approach to racial advancement that combined interracial cooperation among middle- and upper-class Black and White women with an educative uplift program for lower-class Black women. This multi-layered strategy, which

relied heavily on respectability politics and class division, was not contradictory but complementary in their minds and corresponded with the theological ideas that drove their activism for racial reform in their club work: care for “the least of these” (uplift) and “neighbor love” (interracial cooperation).

II. Black Settlements

According to Thomas Philpott’s study, there were at least sixty-eight settlements established in Chicago in the decades surrounding the turn of the century.[2] Yet, as Anne Meis Knupfer has more recently noted, of the nearly seventy settlements in the city only five focused their efforts on the needs and support of Black Chicagoans—the Emanuel Settlement, the Negro Fellowship League, the Wendell Phillips Settlement, the Clotee Scott Settlement (also known as the Hyde Park Settlement), and the Frederick Douglass Center.[3] While the mainstream Chicago settlements (e.g., Hull House, Chicago Commons, and the university settlements) have been closely examined in studies since the 1940s, little attention has been paid to their lack of support for Black residents in the city and the struggle of Black-focused settlements that lacked the funding and support of the mainstream settlements. The racial divide in settlement work in Chicago, and the related struggle of those settlements that did focus on African Americans, was due not only to racist practices and discrimination but also to concerns about the connection of Black settlements (and missions) to Black churches.

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[2] Thomas Lee Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks, and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991 [1978], 79-81. Philpott also notes that two-thirds of these settlements had some Protestant affiliation, which demonstrates a broader religious undercurrent to social settlement in the city.

[3] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 91-92.

Segregation in Chicago settlements was sometimes obvious and deliberate, but most often it occurred when White settlement workers and philanthropists chose to focus their services in neighborhoods with higher European immigrant populations rather than neighborhoods in which significant numbers of African Americans lived. One of the goals of mainstream settlement work was to help in the "assimilation" of a neighborhood's residents, which happened to be mostly White European immigrants because of where they chose to locate their settlements. Many White settlement leaders and workers questioned whether or not African Americans could in fact be assimilated. To be clear, they did not necessarily believe African Americans were incapable of assimilating on account of any moral or intellectual deficiency—most of them would have understood themselves to be sympathetic to the plight of African Americans and were as conscious as any White people about what they considered the "negro condition"—but, as Steven Diner has described, "settlement workers argued that slavery had presented African Americans with such an indelible dilemma that the effects cannot be easily eradicated or dismissed."[4] Fannie Barrier Williams in fact wrote about the focus of settlement work on European immigrants to the exclusion of Black Chicagoans as early as 1904:

> Such being the spirit and practical helpfulness of settlement work, can it be made to serve the needs of colored people in our large cities? As a general rule these settlement institutions are located in districts where the foreign element predominates. Russians, Italians, Greeks, Jews, Hungarians, Poles and other nationalities constitute the strange admixture of life that surrounds these settlements. It is these people of foreign tongue and foreign customs who are seeking to adjust themselves to the freer and more responsible life of democracy in America that have the helpful agencies of Hull House and the Chicago Commons. What this class of newly-made citizens needs in the way of protection, guidance, and sympathy is needed even in greater degree by the throngs of native-born colored people who are swarming to our larger cities. … But the poor colored people who come to these cities of the North are the only people for whom no directing

[4] Steven J. Diner, "Chicago Social Workers and Blacks in the Progressive Era," *Social Service Review* 44 (Dec 1970): 393-410.

> agencies to save and protect them have been arranged. Those who belong to the churches find their way to them, but the churches can do but little for them in the way of economic and industrial benefits.[5]

Recognizing the obstacle that anti-Black racism posed for achieving "adequate assimilation," mainstream White settlements often opted to allocate their resources in neighborhoods and among demographics where they believed greater "progress" could be made. Jane Addams wrote about the importance of "feasibility," as well as the tension and guilt that accompany such compromise, in her approach to settlement work: "The man who insists upon consent, who moves with the people, is bound to consult the feasible right as well as the absolute right. He is often obliged to attain only Mr. Lincoln's 'best possible,' and often have the sickening sense of compromising with his best convictions."[6] As Thomas Philpott's study has shown, White settlement work leaders, such as Graham Taylor and Jane Addams, while persistent voices against racial injustice and allies in the racial uplift projects of Black Chicagoans, were "deeply implicated" in ensuring that their settlements remained segregated. Even Mary McDowell's "Inter-racial Cooperative Committee," which was itself integrated, did not work to integrate the clubs or settlements. While these leaders opposed racism (e.g., Addams and McDowell were both among the founders of the NAACP), they did not advocate integration

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[5] Barrier Williams, "The Need for Social Settlement Work for the City Negro," *Southern Workman*, vol. 33 (Sept 1904): 109. Barrier Williams not only called out White settlements for their exclusion of African Americans, but even the YMCA, which was often heralded for its interracial work, often followed strategies that resulted in their exclusion as well: "Where can [the 'young colored man'] go for recreation, rest, and association? … Go to the Young Men's Christian Association? That exists only for the benefit of white young men. … The only place, then, where he really finds welcome to its warm enclosure in the winter and to his cooling cheer in the summer is the saloon, and here he easily finds his way or is piloted by some vigilant runner for the place" (110).

[6] Jane Addams, "A Modern Lear," *Survey* 29 (Nov. 2, 1912): 136-37.

in their own settlements and homes.[7] Anne Knupfer has demonstrated that the predominately White settlements may not have categorically excluded Black citizens, but they did restrict their services to them by "establishing quotas or redrawing geographical boundaries for benefactors. For example, the Chicago Commons [Graham Taylor] drew prescribed boundaries for services to African Americans. When Hull House [Addams] opened a nursery in 1925 it established a quota for African American children and redrew the neighborhood lines to ensure the quota would be maintained."[8] Again, even the most outspoken White settlement workers in support of racial uplift were deeply implicated not only in the continued segregation of the city, but also in denying Black Chicago's most oppressed and marginalized individuals the resources and aid available to its White citizens.

By the turn of the century, Chicago had become one of the centers for settlement work in the U.S., and it was home to several nationally known settlements such as the Hull House, the Chicago Commons, and the University [of Chicago Social] Settlement. Black club women admired the work and leadership of White settlement leaders, especially Jane Addams, even while they might have protested the treatment of their Black neighbors. Indeed, in the first years of the century, Black club women set out to establish missions and settlements that would provide for Black Chicagoans the kinds of services White settlements were making available to their White and European immigrant neighbors. Many of these settlements lasted only a few

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[7] Thomas Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto. Immigrants, Blacks, and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1991), 295-315. As Philpott has shown, even the few multiracial settlements that existed in Chicago—e.g., the Abraham Lincoln Centre—and settlements that would hire Black workers—e.g., the University of Chicago and Northwestern University Settlements—only apportioned around one percent of their budgets to aid for Black Chicagoans, effectively working to keep African Americans segregated in their poorer wards of the city. (316ff.)

[8] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 94. See also Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, 316ff.

years, but they were distinct from the mainstream settlements in the ways they interweaved social, racial, political, economic, and religious issues into their work. Like mainstream settlements that served primarily European immigrants, the Black-focused settlements with which Black club women worked were also primarily concerned with such things as the welfare of children, providing safe and meaningful recreational activities and facilities, and teaching women in the ways of the domestic sciences and proper child rearing. However, as Knupfer's study has demonstrated, these settlements differed significantly in the ways they "interconnected social, economic, and educational aspects of the community."[9]

African American settlements often struggled to garner the necessary funding from White philanthropists because of concerns—fair and not—that Black settlement work was often too closely associated with church work. Although many of the White-led settlements had some religious affiliation, they operated largely independently of the churches and developed a strong identity based on their "social scientific" methodology that they believed required distance from ecclesial oversight. However, unlike their White social settlement worker counterparts, Black settlement work did not draw a hard line between secular "settlements" and their church-funded "missions." In fact, it was in the context of the missions that African American women melded Black social gospel thought with the social scientific approach of the settlement movement, a combination that was more pronounced with African American settlement work.[10] White settlement workers routinely and deliberately excluded "missions" (of White but especially Black churches) from the category of "settlement houses" because they believed such institutions

[9] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 91-92.

[10] See chapter one, and especially the sections on Institutional Church and Social Settlement and Trinity Mission.

promoted a “closed intellectual system,” which would default to dogma rather than scientific methods.[11] This exclusion not only overlooked or mistook the substantial social work that was happening in these ecclesial institutions, but it also failed to account for the diverse and unique role of Black churches in their communities (see chapter one).[12] The different regard with which White and Black Chicago club women (and settlement workers) tended to hold the “missions”—vis-á-vis settlements—helps to demonstrate how many Black club women’s social work and activism, specifically in their work of founding and supporting homes, settlements, missions, and organizations for the welfare and betterment of the “least of these” in Black Chicago, was driven and shaped by a distinct (from White club women) and more robust (as compared to their White settlement worker and club women counterparts) theological vision rooted in their sense of Christian social mission. Unlike many of their counterparts doing White settlement work, many Black club women who worked with and supported African American settlements and missions often did not disaggregate their religious motivations from their social scientific methods and work. It is worth noting that despite their differences of opinion regarding the relationship between missions and settlements, the actual services they performed were quite similar—they

[11] Mina Carson, *Settlement Folks: Social Thought and the American Settlement Movement, 1885-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 66-67.

[12] I would argue that this is an instance of whiteness shaping the spiritual, social, economic, and political realities of Black Chicago as White social settlement workers failed to provide support for Black social institutions simply because they did not align with their ethnocentric views of how religion ought to contribute to settlement work. Some recent scholarship has explored the social gospel roots of white settlement work. See, for example, Rima Lunin Schultz, “Jane Addams, Apotheosis of Social Christianity,” *Church History* 84.1 (March 2015): 207-19. It is also the case that Black contemporaries recognized the social gospel in their White settlement worker counterparts—Fannie Barrier Williams once labeled Addams as an “apostle of the new [social] gospel”—even if they did not claim it as such. See Barrier Williams, “The Awakening of Women,” *A.M.E. Church Review* 13.4 (April 1897): 394. However, as this chapter argues, for many Black club women who worked with these settlements and homes, the theological vision of the Black social gospel was the principle driving force for their work and activism, which was not necessarily the case for White settlement workers like Addams. For the difference between a “mission” and “settlement” for African American club women, as opposed to their White settlement worker counterparts, see Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 91-2.

established kindergartens, programs for early childhood learning, nurseries, reading rooms, alternative forms of entertainment for youth, as well as providing domestic training and employment services for young women and mothers.[13]

Despite these barriers and in direct response to the segregation of settlement work in the city, Black club women increasingly advocated for more and better settlements for Black Chicagoans. Barrier Williams, in a 1904 newspaper article titled "The Need of Social Settlement Work for the City Negro," laid out a plan for a new kind of social settlement, one that attended specifically to the material and social needs of African American residents and newcomers to the city and which centered "the race problem" in its plans for social reform.[14] In the article she narrowed in on the Chicago context to make a broader appeal for Black settlement work in urban centers in the North, especially in response to the increased southern migration that was occurring during the first decade of the new century. In her plea and plan for Black settlements, Barrier Williams laid the ideological and strategic groundwork for Chicago's most significant Black settlement in the decades surrounding the turn of the century, the Frederick Douglass Center (FDC). The Frederick Douglass Center (discussed in depth later in the chapter) was inspired by similar religious convictions of Black Christian women as explored in the previous two chapters—that is, a theology of collective kinship—but also by an interest in addressing the "race problem" through interracial cooperation. In the course of their settlement work, Black club women formulated and put into practice a two-pronged theory of racial uplift and race relations that was both pragmatic and theologically informed. Barrier Williams' 1904 essay on

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[13] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 92.

[14] Barrier Williams, "The Need for Social Settlement Work for the City Negro," *Southern Workman*, vol. 33 (1903): 500-5.

the need for social settlement work in Black Chicago is instructive for this study not only for her critique of White settlement work and its practice of excluding Black residents from many of the services offered to European immigrants in the city, but also because she provides a theological rationale for doing this work. In theologizing interracial settlement work, Barrier Williams combined Black club women's concern for caring for the "least of these" among their race—a theology of collective kinship—together with the Black social gospel "theology of brotherhood," which provided divine mandate for racial equality and envisioned harmonious relations among the races.

Although often supported or connected to churches or parachurch organizations, mainstream settlement work at the turn of the century for the most part sought to preserve a secular identity, emphasizing its reliance on social scientific methods in contrast to what they considered the religious charity work of "missions" and other church ministries. However, Barrier Williams stressed, along with some other club women, that the settlement work they proposed for Black Chicagoans in the first decade of the century was a religious mission, motivated and structured by a "spiritual impulse."[15] In fact, Barrier Williams understood the work in which club women would be engaged in Black settlements as an "extension of the conference spirit," suggesting a strong connection between Black settlement work and their sense of Christian social mission that was engendered in their denominational women's conventions.[16] She expounded a theological rationale in her plea for Black-focused settlement work that centered on the ideal of "neighbor love," and which brought together two theological

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[15] Barrier Williams, "The Need for Social Settlement Work for the City Negro," *Southern Workman*, vol. 33 (1903): 501.

[16] Barrier Williams, "An Extension of the Conference Spirit," *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 7 (1904): 300.

themes that dominated African American club women's discourse: African American "freedom" and the social gospel message of "social salvation." Although she was critical of White settlement workers exclusion of Black Americans from their services in Chicago and elsewhere, she did note one religious ideal that White social settlement workers had worked toward better than most churches—loving their neighbors. However, she challenged, honest consideration of Jesus's question in the parable of the good Samaritan, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29), ought to lead toward inclusion rather than exclusion in settlement work, as well as toward a more expansive understanding of who counts as one's "neighbor." She wrote, "There is a more kindly anxiety in this question [Who is my neighbor?] than there used to be. The difference between the answer given to this question today and that which would have been given one hundred years ago measures the whole range of man's progress in social consciousness. Our anxieties have become less selfish, and we are gradually approaching that ideal state of which Emerson speaks when he says, 'No one can be perfectly free until all are free; no one can be perfectly happy until all are happy.'" While progress may have been made, however, settlement work to date had not achieved this "highest of social virtues," precisely because White-run settlements continued to discriminate in the services they offered on the basis of race.[17]

Many club women who advocated for Black settlements certainly understood the service offered to the "least of these" through Black settlement work within terms of the lived faith—theology of collective kinship—but they also understood it as part of a larger project of social salvation. In her history of Chicago's Black women's clubs, Elizabeth Lindsay Davis described the work that club women did through their participation in settlements for Black Chicagoans as

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[17] Barrier Williams, "The Need for Social Settlement Work for the City Negro," 502-4.

not only salvific for the material and spiritual state of "the needy" but also for "the city," which was otherwise doomed because of its own "sins," which she explained primarily in terms of racial, social, and economic inequality.[18] Barrier Williams wrote similarly about the "social evil" permeating the city of Chicago in the first years of the new century, which made it almost impossible for Black newcomers to the city, most of them poor and uneducated, to advance in any meaningful way. Charity, as practiced by White philanthropists and churches, was useless against such "social evil." She argued that what was needed was a form of "socialized kindness" (she also sometimes used the term "organized kindness") to combat these social evils. Although she was critical of the exclusion of Black folks from the services of many White settlements, she believed their method of planting settlements in neighborhoods with high needs was exactly the answer and she hoped Black club women could engage in the same kind of work. Barrier Williams routinely lifted up Jane Addams and Hull House as a model for this kind of work. In making the case for a "Black Hull House" she wrote,

> [Settlement houses] are planted right in the midst of the people who are farthest removed from everything that is bright, beautiful, and uplifting. Where people are the poorest and most neglected, where the saloons are the thickest, sanitary conditions the meanest, and where there are the fewest churches, there you will find Hull House. I speak of Hull House in particular because it is regarded as the finest, the most typical, and the most complete example of *socialized kindness* to be found in the world. When you enter this homelike refuge from the open evidence of the degradation that environs it, you will be filled with an exalted sense of the beauty of human kindness. Here shines the gentle spirit of Jane Addams, that apostle of the newest gospel of 'good deeds in a naughty world.' … Jane Addams has taught the world a new conception of the divine element in humanity, which neither rags, dirt, nor immorality can entirely obscure.[19]

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[18] Davis was writing in the wake of the 1919 race riots which had revealed the deep racial divisions in the city for all to see, but she also suggests that this understanding of social sin (being tied to racial and economic inequalities) was operative in the minds and actions of the club women she was writing about two decades earlier. Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (Chicago, IL, 1922), 37-38.

[19] Barrier Williams, "The Need for Social Settlement Work for the City Negro," 503-4. My emphasis.

Barrier Williams would go on to explain that such a "refuge" did not exist for Black Chicagoans, but she believed and preached that such an institution of "socialized kindness" for the salvation of Black Chicago was indeed possible.

While Black club women's settlement work differed in multiple ways from that of their White counterparts—e.g., drawing from a variety of institutions in Black Chicago, especially the churches, NAACP, and the Urban League—the most distinctive one was the degree to which their religious imaginations, rooted in the Black social gospel, shaped their settlement ideology and strategy, especially as they prioritized race relations in settlement work. As Anne Meis Knupfer has suggested, "Unlike mainstream [White] settlement reformers, African American settlement workers often did not distinguish settlement from mission or charity work."[20] And while we will see that there was significant complexity and variety to the kinds of settlement projects in which Black club women engaged, this recognition that they were uniquely shaped by a sense of Christian mission on the part of many of the Black club women who supported them is important and very much part of the focus of this chapter. For Barrier Williams and other Black club women, race and issues related to race, especially as they affected women and children, increasingly became the focus of their efforts in relation to settlement work. They believed that the "race problem" should be at the center of the social work of settlements, which was not at all the case with the established mainstream settlements, and they understood their work in this

[20] While Knupfer does not focus on the religious motivations of black women's club work in Chicago, even to the point of sometimes missing its significance for their work and thought, she does highlight its importance on this point—"club women's and settlement workers' vision of womanhood and motherhood was often imaged in and sustained by a deep seeded Christianity." See Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 95-96.

regard as a form of Christian activism that was as interested in racial reform as much as they were involved in addressing other social problems.

This chapter does not intend to survey all of the settlement work that was undertaken by Black club women in Chicago after the turn of the century, but it will be helpful to briefly explain the variety and nature of work club women did before moving into a close study of one of those settlements (the Frederick Douglass Center).[21] During the first two decades of the century, five African American settlements were established either within or just on the borders of African American neighborhoods: the Wendell Phillips Settlement (West Side); the Clotee Scott Settlement (Hyde Park); the Frederick Douglass Center (adjacent to the Black Belt); and the Emanuel Settlement and Negro Fellowship League (both in the middle of the Black Belt). Although club women experienced significantly more freedom in the organization and leadership of their clubs than they did in the ministries and missions of their churches, they encountered similar obstacles in working with Black settlements. Even though most of the club women volunteers and settlement workers were women, Black and White men comprised the majority of the boards for the settlements, and on those boards (with the exception of the Frederick Douglass Center) the White board members assumed more authority as the settlements relied on their philanthropic connections for support. Beyond these obstacles in the highest levels of decision making, however, club women and women settlement workers were primarily responsible for

[21] For more on the work of the African American settlements in Chicago, see chapter five, "African American Settlements," in Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 90-107. The brief survey of settlement work that follows in the next few paragraphs relies significantly on her really insightful account of their work in the first two decades of the century.

developing and administering the programs for the settlements.[22] As such, the programs of the settlements generally reflected their own concerns and interests as Black women and "other mothers" (see chapters three and four).

With the exception of the Negro Fellowship League, which was founded by Ida B. Wells-Barnett after breaking with the Frederick Douglass Center, all of the settlements ran programs for young children. This was especially the case at the Clotee Scott Settlement in Hyde Park, where a *Chicago Defender* report stated, "The settlement is considered now as the living home for the children while the parents are at work."[23] Daytime childcare became especially important as southern migration increased after the turn of the century, as 43 percent of Black women in Chicago were breadwinners for their family by 1900.[24] In addition to programming for children, most of the settlements offered mothers' clubs that ran concurrently and offered domestic training and support for mothers and young women.

All of the African American settlements were especially focused on providing programming for African American youth in an effort to draw them away from vice and lives of crime by providing alternative forms of recreation and educational opportunities. Most of the clubs emphasized in their literature that they offered "wholesome" activities that included everything from drama and glee clubs to hiking, swimming, and golf, as well as reading rooms and study halls. However, despite their emphasis on programming for the youth of Black

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[22] African American women were accustomed to these kinds of patriarchal and White-centered institutional frameworks, even if they opposed them in principle. In fact, their willingness to compromise in these circumstances, and carve out other spaces for leadership and creativity, would carry into their approach to racial uplift, as explored later in this chapter. See Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 99.

[23] "Clotee Scott Settlement," *Chicago Defender* October, 18, 1913.

[24] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 100-1.

Chicago, they were keenly aware of the inequities in resources for their programs when compared to the mainstream (White) settlements. Prominent club woman Irene McCoy-Gaines noted that the resources available to the homes and settlements that served young girls and women, like the Phyllis Wheatley Home, paled in comparison to the "cozy clubrooms, well equipped gyms, and swimming pools … where a girl could profitably spend her time" in the White-run settlements.[25]

Finally, most of the settlements offered domestic training for young women and girls. As will be discussed later in the chapter, for the upper- and middle-class club women who volunteered their time and leadership with the Black settlements, helping train poorer Black women in keeping a good home and being a mother and a "respectable" woman in society was motivated not only by their genuine care and concern for their welfare, but it was also part and parcel of their strategy for racial advancement. At the same time they truly desired to help poorer women and mothers and provide them with skills and resources for a better life, they were also concerned that poor behavior by lower-class women was a poor reflection on all Black women in the eyes of White Chicagoans. Thus, respectability politics coupled with a genuine concern to help lift up poorer Black women drove club women to develop robust programs of domestic training. Two of the settlements, the Negro Fellowship League and the Frederick Douglass Center, also housed employment referral bureaus, recognizing a need for lower-class women to find dependable and respectable work in the city.[26] For many Black club women, including Fannie Barrier Williams, finding good work for young women and mothers was critical for their

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[25] Chicago Defender, February 28, 1920. Quoted in Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 103-4.

[26] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 105.

social and racial reform efforts and for redefining "Black womanhood" against the "cult of true womanhood," which they realized was increasingly unattainable for Black women who needed to work in order to provide for their families.[27]

III. The Frederick Douglass Center

As club women became increasingly involved in Black-focused settlement work, they saw a need for a settlement that would not only provide help and resources for their poorer Black neighbors but also address matters of race directly. More specifically, they began to imagine an institution that would be devoted to combatting what they knew to be the root cause of the racial discrimination they experienced in Chicago—the white supremacist mindsets of their fellow Chicagoans. By the turn of the century, Black club women increasingly believed that the settlement house model could benefit Black Chicago and address many of the social ills plaguing their neighborhoods, and their criticism of the settlement work being done in the city (e.g., Hull House, Chicago Commons) extended beyond the fact that poorer African Americans were often denied access to them. In fact, for as much as they believed mainstream settlement work was a successful model in the neighborhoods where they existed, club leaders like Barrier Williams believed that there was a fundamental flaw in their strategy—they neglected to consider "race" among the primary social problems their settlement programs addressed. More specifically, they believed that a focus on developing "interracial relationships" needed to become a central part of settlement work, precisely because they understood the "separating forces of race prejudice" to be at the core of the larger social problem. Barrier Williams explained,

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[27] See Barrier Williams, "The Woman's Part in a Man's Business," *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 11 (1904): 543-47; Idem, "The Colored Girl," *Voice of the Negro* 2, no. 6 (1905): 400-3.

> These settlements for colored people must not be narrow, or merely a Negro charity clearinghouse—a place to encourage complaints, not a Negro settlement as such, but a settlement in which the best men and women of both races shall unite their strength to extend the law of brotherhood, helpfulness, and good will to the colored race as well as to the foreigners for whom so much has been done. It is not alone the race problem that is to be solved, but the ever recurring human problem in which every class of suffering and ill-used humanity is concerned.[28]

Ida B. Wells-Barnett, one of the most respected Black female voices in the city (and the nation), made the case for such a settlement in a speech she gave in the winter of 1903 at a Hull House conference. Wells-Barnett argued that Black Chicagoans needed to be partners with White folks in settlement work, not merely recipients of their philanthropy. She argued that such a "movement" of equal participation and representation between the races in social work was necessary for addressing racism in the city.[29] It would not be long before the idea for such a settlement would be given institutional form, though the journey to realizing this dream of a settlement focused on "interracial cooperation" was not without its share of conflict and division.

Gathered at Hull House to hear Wells-Barnett's speech were a number of influential religious leaders in Chicago, including Rabbi Emil Hirsch, Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones (Fannie Barrier William's pastor at All Souls Church), and Rev. Celia Parker Woolley.[30] Woolley, a White woman, had been involved with Chicago's White women's clubs since the 1880s, and was a respected member of the Chicago Woman's Club, the most exclusive and influential women's club in the city. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Woolley became close with Barrier Williams through their connection with Jenkin Lloyd Jones and All Souls Church, and she had

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[28] Barrier Williams, "The Need for Social Settlement Work for the City Negro," 501-2.

[29] Alfreda M. Duster, ed., *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (2d edition; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020 [1970]), 233-36.

[30] Duster, *Crusade for Justice*, 234.

been instrumental in helping Barrier Williams break the color barrier, through much turmoil, by gaining acceptance to the Chicago Woman's Club.[31] Woolley had served as president of the CWC for two years (1888-1890), and her advocacy on behalf of Barrier Williams was in fact her first experience of leveraging her influence to promote racial advancement for Black Chicagoans, an experience that would shape her later activism as a woman clergy member and club woman.[32] In addition to being a leading club woman in the city, Woolley had also been an influential religious leader, notable among White women clergy in the city, having served a church in Geneva, Illinois, in the early 1880s and then participating in a number of Unitarian and interdenominational initiatives during her time in Chicago, most notably helping to establish and lead the Women's Western Unitarian Conference.[33] Woolley's participation in racial reform efforts was deeply shaped by her involvement with the institutional model of church that Lloyd Jones had built at All Souls, blending social reform, political activism, liberal religious teaching, and interracial cooperation.[34] So when Wells-Barnett spoke about the possibility of an interracial settlement project to address issues of racial justice in the city, her words fell on the listening and intrigued ears of Rev. Woolley.

It was several months after Woolley heard Wells-Barnett's speech at Hull House that the two of them were together in the same room again to take part in a reading group that had been arranged by Woolley and Barrier Williams. On a May evening in 1903, a group of Black and

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[31] Maureen A. Flanagan, *Seeing with Their Hearts: Chicago Women and the Vision of the Good City, 1871-1933* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 41.

[32] Koby Lee-Forman, "The Simple Love of Truth: The Racial Justice Activism of Celia Parker Woolley" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1997), 79, 94-96.

[33] Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 76.

[34] Lee-Forman, "The Simple Love of Truth," 91-93, 119.

White men and women gathered in Woolley's home for a discussion of W.E.B. Du Bois's recently published book, *The Souls of Black Folk*. The gathering included Barrier Williams and her husband, S. Laing Williams, Florence Lewis Bentley and her husband, Charles Bentley, Lloyd Wheeler, Wells-Barnett and her husband, Ferdinand Barnett, Monroe Work (a Black sociology student at the University of Chicago who would end up working with both Du Bois and Washington), Jenkin Lloyd Jones, and Woolley.[35] Considerable debate erupted in that book group as they discussed the chapter in which Du Bois took aim at Booker T. Washington (which foreshadowed future disagreements related to the Du Bois-Washington rift). As Wells-Barnett recalled it, she and her husband, Ferdinand Barnett, were alone in their support among the African Americans in the room of Du Bois's criticism of Washington: "The Barnett's stood almost alone in approving [Du Bois's views]. … We thought it was up to us to show them that … to sneer at and discourage higher education would mean to rob the race of leaders which it so badly needed."[36] As will be discussed more later in the chapter, Barrier Williams and her husband were staunch supporters of Washington, as he had helped provide her with a national platform and they routinely hosted him in their home, an unwavering commitment that sometimes drew scorn from her fellow club women and the newspapers. In fact, it is difficult to stress how closely aligned S. Laing and Fannie Barrier Williams were with Washington up to that

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[35] Lee-Forman, "The Simple Love of Truth," 238-41.

[36] Duster, *Crusade for Justice*, 237-38.

point.[37] And while this moment would be something of a turning point for Barrier Williams in her thinking about strategies for racial advancement, in that room at Woolley's home they defended Washington fervently. They were joined in their defense of Washington by Rev. Lloyd Jones, while others like Work and the Bentleys (the latter being close friends of the Williams but also acquaintances with Du Bois) tried to maintain some ground in the middle. Woolley, who for her part leaned toward Washington but was increasingly intrigued by Du Bois, left the debate that evening less concerned about the Washington-Du Bois rift but rather convinced that the kinds of encounters like the one that had taken place in her home that night—that is, interracial explorations and discussions of issues of racism and racial uplift—were needed for addressing race relations in Chicago.[38]

So with the memories of that evening of lively discussion in her mind, and still captivated by Wells-Barnett's Hull House speech on the need for interracial settlement work, Woolley began conspiring with Barrier Williams, as well as with Wells-Barnett, about the possibility of founding such an institution. By the end of the year, Woolley had drawn up plans for such a settlement center and enlisted Barrier Williams to help her and be the center's chief spokesperson, and she invited Wells-Barnett to help her begin forming a specific club to serve the center—the Frederick

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[37] Barrier Williams wrote numerous articles promoting his industrial education model, and had certainly benefitted from her association with him on account of his notoriety and financial backing. In fact, according to Barrier Williams's biographer, Washington trusted S. Laing and Fannie so much that he even employed them to help ghostwrite his biography of Frederick Douglass. See Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 146. See also Barrier Williams, "Industrial Education—Will It Solve the Negro Problem?" *Colored American* (July 1904): 491-95; Idem, "Dr. Washington in Chicago," *New York Age* (February 1908): 8.

[38] Lee-Forman, "The Simple Love of Truth," 242-43.

Douglass Women's Club, which would be officially established the following year, in 1905.[39] In the year leading up to its official opening, Barrier Williams and Woolley took their idea for the Frederick Douglass Center to several organizations, both Black and White, to workshop it and try to garner support for it from both sides of the racial line. In the spring of 1904, they took it to the Western Unitarian Conference, and presented that the "solution to the Negro question [in large cities like Chicago] could be found in the establishment of centers adopted on the plan of social settlements. It would place the race question upon a wise civic basis, and bridge over the difference between the colored race and our own with common sense."[40] Throughout the year leading up to the opening of the Frederick Douglass Center, Barrier Williams made national appeals to Black organizations, churches, and newspapers about the need for this kind of interracial project.[41] In one of her earlier appeals she wrote of the Chicago settlement venture, "Nothing has ever been attempted in Chicago, since my residence there, that has had back of it such splendid support as this effort to establish a *black Hull House* under the illustrious name of our great man—Frederick Douglass."[42] For several years following the Frederick Douglass Center's opening, she continued to speak and write for a national Black audience about its accomplishments and potential to solve the "race problem," which was in her view "mostly an

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[39] I will discuss the recruitment and involvement of Wells-Barnett more later, because it would become the source of division in the center's leadership and one of its downfalls as Wells-Barnett would eventually break ties with Woolley over perceived racial inequality in the leadership. See Duster, *Crusade for Justice,* 239-45.

[40] "For Social Settlements," *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 28, 1904, 1.

[41] Barrier Williams, "An Extension of the Conference Spirit," *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 7 (1904): 300-3; Idem,"The Need for Social Settlement Work for the City Negro," *Southern Workman*, vol. 33 (Sept 1904): 501-6; Idem, "The Frederick Douglass Centre: A Question of Social Betterment and Not of Social Equality," *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 12 (1904): 601-4.

[42] Barrier Williams, "The Need for Social Settlement Work for the City Negro," 503.

ethical and spiritual" problem.[43] The two also joined forces to present the idea to the Chicago Women's Club, where a decade earlier that had battled together to get Barrier Williams into the club, and gained the club's pledge for both financial and volunteer support for the center.[44]

Once the team of Barrier Williams and Woolley had gathered enough support from Black and White institutions, they moved to officially open the Frederick Douglass Center in late 1904. Woolley repurposed her family home on 44th Street to initially house the center until they were able to secure a permanent building.[45] At the opening celebration for the center, Woolley spoke about its purpose, drawing out the meaning of its motto: "With Malice Towards None, With Charity For All." She articulated their conviction that the center "is based first, in the conviction that, as Professor Du Bois says, 'the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line'; second, in the belief that, however named or to whatever class of suffering or ill-used humanity it is applied, the human problem is always the same." The charter was also read, stating, "The center is organized to promote just and amicable relations between the white and colored people, to remove the disabilities from which the latter suffer in their civil, political, and industrial life; to encourage opportunity, irrespective of race, color, or other arbitrary distinctions; to establish a center of friendly helpfulness and influence in which to gather useful information and for mutual cooperation in attaining to right living and higher citizenship."[46] It

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[43] For this quote, see Barrier Williams, "A New Method of Dealing with the Race Problem," *Voice of the Negro* 3, no. 7 (1906): 502-5; See also idem, "Social Bonds in the 'Black Belt' of Chicago," *Charities* 15 (Oct 7, 1905): 40-44; Idem, "The Frederick Douglass Center," *The Southern Workman* 35 (June 1906): 334-36.

[44] Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 141.

[45] Lee-Forman, "The Simple Love of Truth," 280-81.

[46] Quoted in Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 141; Also quoted in Williams, "The Frederick Douglass Center" (1906), 334, and in Lee-Forman, "The Simple Love of Truth," 247.

was thus that the Frederick Douglass Center embarked on a decade-long project of fostering interracial relationships among middle- and upper-class Black and White citizens of the city and pooling their combined resources to help uplift poorer African Americans.

During the first years, Woolley took an administrative lead, as her twelve-room, three-story home was fully taken over for the purposes of the center by 1906. Barrier Williams served as the primary spokesperson to Black Chicago and actively recruited "the best" of Black Chicago to serve as interlocutors and liaisons for the center's programming. An interracial board of trustees was appointed, which included prominent White businessmen and women club leaders, and prominent Black men, including Barrier Williams's husband, S. Laing, as well as several Black club women—Mary F. Waring and Elizabeth Lindsay Davis both served for several years on the board, and Louise Solomon Waller served as president of the board.[47] Notably, both Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois were honorary members of the center.[48] In 1906, a new three-story, gray-stone home was purchased (for $5,500) to house the center, finally moving out of Woolley's family home. The new building was located on Wabash Avenue and Thirty-first street, "adjacent to the 'Black Belt' in the rear, and the white belt of aristocracy and wealth on Michigan avenue in the front."[49]

A year after the center opened, the Frederick Douglass Center Woman's Club was formed, with "Mrs. George Plummer" (a White woman) as president and Ida B. Wells-Barnett as vice president.[50] The Woman's Club was the primary driver of the center's programming and

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[47] Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 68, 73.

[48] Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 142.

[49] Barrier Williams, "Social Bonds in the 'Black Belt' of Chicago," *Charities* 15 (Oct 7, 1905): 43-44.

[50] Duster, *Crusade for Justice*, 239.

directed most of the settlement services it provided for poorer African Americans. The club consisted of four departments: the Home Department, the Educational Department, the Philanthropic Department, and the Domestic Science Department. Although the leadership of the center was divided evenly between Black and White officers (though not necessarily of equal power), almost two-thirds of the women members were Black.[51] The home offered a variety of services for lower-class Black Chicagoans, as Barrier Williams described, "This home for social improvement is fitted up with an attractive assembly room for meetings, a club-room and workshop for boys, a reading room and offices and living rooms for the head resident. Arrangements are being made for mothers' meetings in the interest of the home, men's meetings, classes in manual training, cooking and dress making, club work for intellectual and moral culture, and domestic employment. Lectures are also being provided for under the departments of sanitation, neighborhood improvement and civics."[52] The center was also one of the more significant organizations, along with the Negro Fellowship League, for political mobilization around issues that concerned Black women. In 1912 and the years following, the Frederick Douglass Center became increasingly involved in fighting discrimination against Black women in employment and coordinated with a number of Black suffrage clubs, including Ida B. Wells-Barnett's Alpha Suffrage Club. Among the services the club offered, however, perhaps the most utilized was their employment referral agency, helping young Black women find respectable jobs, as well as helping them get into domestic training programs.[53]

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[51] Barrier Williams, "A New Method of Dealing with the Race Problem," *Voice of the Negro* 3, no. 7 (1906): 502-5.

[52] Barrier Williams, "Social Bonds in the 'Black Belt' of Chicago," *Charities* 15 (Oct 7, 1905): 43-44.

[53] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and Nobler Womanhood*, 105.

The primary work of the Frederick Douglass Center, however, was facilitating interracial encounters between White Chicagoans and middle- and upper-class African Americans. A year into the center's life, Barrier Williams wrote about the center's mission, "[The Frederick Douglass Center] is not organized to do slum work in what may be called the black belt of Chicago, but to be a center of wholesome influences to the end that well-disposed white people may learn to know and respect the ever increasing number of colored people who have earned the right to be believed in and respected."[54] As I will examine in more detail below, the center existed for the primary purpose of transforming White Chicagoan's perceptions of their Black neighbors through dialogue and encounter with "the best" Black Chicago had to offer.

When Celia Parker Woolley died in 1918, the Frederick Douglass Center died with her. The Chicago Urban League, which had been renting space from the center, took over many of the services it had been offering for more than a decade. Although the Urban League promoted programs of interracial cooperation and drew many of the most influential club and settlement leaders, its leadership remained mostly White, at least in the first years after the Frederick Douglass Center closed.[55] The "interracial experiment" of the Frederick Douglass Center ended when the Urban League subsumed it. As Wanda Hendricks put it, the closing of the Frederick Douglass Center "signaled the end of an era in the club movement" in Chicago.[56]

IV. Interracial Cooperation

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[54] Barrier Williams, "The Frederick Douglass Center" (1906), 334.

[55] "Chicago Urban League," The University of Illinois at Chicago Special Collections, Series 1, Box 1, Folders 1-3. Also, as Knupfer notes, most of its funding (ninety percent) in those early years was derived form White philanthropy, with one-third coming from Julius Rosenwald alone. Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and Nobler Womanhood*, 106.

[56] Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 170.

This close analysis of club women's engagement with issues of race through their settlement work with the Frederick Douglass Center reveals that they developed a distinct strategy for race relations that prioritized interracial cooperation and that was characterized by pragmatism and compromise. The chapter now turns to consider the implications of their organization and activism with settlements like the Frederick Douglass Center for understanding their distinct approach to race relations. By placing interracial cooperation—which emphasized equality over paternalism—at the heart of the Frederick Douglass Center's program and in its leadership, these club women helped to forge a new method and strategy of working for racial reform, one which in fact has significant implications for understanding the history of the Christian interracial movement in the twentieth century.[57] In their work with the Frederick Douglass Center, Black club women helped to create a new model for race relations that moved beyond previous efforts at "biracial" work (paternalistic and White-centric), pushing and organizing instead for more equitable "interracial" cooperation and partnership with White women.

I am indebted to Bettye Collier-Thomas for differentiating "interracial" from "biracial" work around the turn of the century. The historian's task of differentiating between these frameworks for race relations is difficult precisely because "interracial" was a term that was often used in this era to refer to what might be better considered "biracial" (i.e., White-centered) relationships and activism.[58] In this chapter, I use the term "interracial cooperation" to designate

[57] In the dissertation's conclusion, I will suggest that these early efforts at interracial cooperation in the extraecclesial context of their women's clubs have significant implications for the longer history of the Christian interracial movement, whose origins historians tend to attribute to the Federal Council of Churches' Department of Race Relations in 1919/20.

[58] Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 332-35.

that work which was consciously cooperative and attempted to provide equal representation and influence between White and Black women, even if true equality was rarely achieved.

In the decades prior to the founding of the Frederick Douglass Center, Black women in Chicago had worked with White women (and sometimes men) in various extraecclesial endeavors that we might describe as "biracial." Organizations like the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in Chicago envisioned biracial work, wherein White women led by organizing projects and committees to address social issues and then encouraged Black women to do the same by organizing "parallel" committees and projects. This strategy for "race work" had dominated in ecclesial contexts among women's organizations since Emancipation and continued to dominate many efforts to address race relations among Chicago's women's organizations, church-related and otherwise. This strategy of race relations was especially evident in two of the most dominant parachurch organizations that included Black and White women in Chicago, the WCTU and YWCA.

The WCTU is often pointed to as an organization where biracial activism took place prior to the 1920s. Indeed, in the decade prior to the turn of the century, the WCTU, which was headed by Frances Elizabeth Willard and headquartered just north of Chicago in the town of Evanston, had expanded its work beyond just the issue of temperance to include an array of social reform concerns and initiatives.[59] Around the turn of century, the WCTU was the largest and most influential organization for social reform in the nation, and many Chicago women, both White and Black, joined in the various reform efforts. Compared to other similar organizations, however, the WCTU actually engaged in relatively little work focused on racial issues or issues

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[59] Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 317.

related to African American life. Although Willard was one of the few women generally acknowledged as a social gospel leader toward the end of the nineteenth century who advocated for the true equality of women and men, the same cannot be said for her record on issues related to race in her organization.[60] Black women leaders, such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, regularly criticized Willard and other leaders of the WCTU for failing to denounce issues of racial violence such as lynching or rape against African American men and women. Wells-Barnett recollected later in life that "I could not truthfully say that Miss Willard had ever said anything to condemn lynching; on the contrary she had seemed to condone it."[61] Nonetheless, a number of Black church and club women in Chicago joined the WCTU in the late nineteenth century, although they were usually grouped in separate "colored" unions. Several of the women in this study worked with the WCTU prior to the turn of the century. Amanda Smith did foreign missionary work on behalf of the WCTU, and Barrier Williams gave more than one speech at their invitation and admired their militancy and organization for reform.[62] Black women, however, never experienced real equality in membership or leadership in their efforts with the WCTU, whether at the highest levels of its administration or in their local chapters.

The YWCA was another organization that brought together White and Black women in Chicago, as well as other urban centers like New York City, for reform work in a quasi-religious environment. As was the case with the WCTU, the YWCA included Black women in its work but

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[60] See Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, "The Woman's Cause Is Man's? Frances Willard and the Social Gospel," in *Gender and the Social Gospel* (eds., Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford; Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 21-34.

[61] Duster, *Crusade for Justice*, 97.

[62] Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs,* 81; "W.C.T.U.," *Brockport Republic*, July 7, 1898, 3; Barrier Williams, "Opportunities and Responsibilities of Colored Women" (1895), 146-61.

resisted integrating them into its leadership. Like many church or parachurch organizations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the YWCA developed separate work called "colored work," where African Americans were treated as a separate group from the rest of the beneficiaries of their services and typically worked in parallel organizations. Black women's clubs in Chicago founded more than one African American YWCA in the city and supported them, and many club women (including Barrier Williams) held memberships in the YWCA alongside their club memberships.[63] However, as Judith Weisenfeld shows in her excellent history of New York City's African American YWCA, "[In 1907] a new policy established by the recently formed National Board of the YWCA required new YWCAs in cities to affiliate as branches of existing YWCAs. In effect, this generally meant that African American YWCA organizations had to subordinate themselves and become branches of white city associations in order to receive recognition at the national level."[64] This was the case with the African American YWCA founded by several Chicago Black women's clubs in 1914, meaning that their board had to report to the local White association.[65]

Black women did not only experience these imbalances in representation and leadership in the national organizations like the WCTU and YWCA, but also in local institutions supposedly committed to work between the races. One place where this was the case was with

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[63] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 24.

[64] Judith Weisenfeld, *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York's Black YWCA, 1905-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 9.

[65] "YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago, Series II," University of Illinois at Chicago Special Collections, Box 58, Folder 1. In her history of Black women's clubs in Illinois and Chicago, Elizabeth Davis includes a letter from a White club woman, who was a member of the Chicago Women's Club, in which she discussed how she was impressed by the leadership of Black YWCA leaders in their separate YWCA, noting she had been present when they gave their reports to the White YWCA association in Chicago. Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs,* 38-39.

Mary McDowell's Inter-racial Cooperative Committee, which sought to "provide convalescent care for colored women and girls," among other initiatives. However, the club was overseen by an almost entirely White board of directors and led by McDowell, a White settlement worker.[66] By the turn of the century, it was the norm for Chicago's Black church and club women to experience imbalances in power and representation in biracial efforts with White women.

It was against this backdrop of a history of biracial work with White women that the interracial activism undertaken with the Frederick Douglass Center needs to be understood. The interracial cooperation proposed and pursued was deliberately "interracial," bringing Black and White women into equal participation (for the most part) for the cause of addressing the racial divide between Black and White Chicago. As Barrier Williams, Woolley, and other club women attested, this involved a major conceptual shift, reframing the problem no longer as the "Negro problem" but as a "human problem," which required work and attention on both sides of the racial line to eliminate the "spirit of caste" that structured race relations in Chicago.[67] Black club women approached this "experiment in race relations" with an aim to "change the minds" of White women, helping them to see the ways in which they contributed to racial segregation and discrimination in ways they might not have otherwise known. The club women who engaged in the interracial work of the Frederick Douglass Center recognized at the turn of the century what Nannie Helen Burroughs commented on in 1921: "The next long step towards the solution of the race problem must be taken by white women. … We will not get anywhere with our race relations program and interracial cooperation schemes until white women decide that this

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[66] Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs*, 46.

[67] Barrier Williams, "The Frederick Douglass Centre" (1904), 602.

roasting of human beings alive, this lynching and burning in America must stop. … [U]ntil [White women] speak boldly and bravely the white men who are working at this Race Relationship Program might as well spend their time counting stars by night and sweeping the sun out of their path by day to hold conferences to discuss how two races can develop more natural respect for each other."[68] Black club women needed to convince White women that the late-nineteenth-century model of biracial home mission philanthropy would no longer suffice as a means for addressing racial and social problems.

Interracial cooperation was only one part of a larger plan for racial uplift in the minds of many Black club women, as will be discussed below. They pursued it with a conscious pragmatism, recognizing the need for compromise and moderatism in their efforts to transform the racial imaginations of White women. The pragmatism of this strategy for interracial cooperation was forcefully articulated by the president of the Coterie Club in Hyde Park who wrote in the *Chicago Defender* in 1910:

> Would it not have been wiser and far better had we sought to reach our white friends from a humanitarian point of view? Rather than through racial agitation? We have been agitating and agitating year after year, and what has the Negro accomplished? We have not stopped the lynching of the Black man for every real or imaginary crime; we have not succeeded in either tearing down or cracking through the wall of prejudice that rears up so gloomily ahead and cast [*sic*] its shadows over us; we have listened to the most eloquent speakers, the most gifted orators, intellectual women tell of the great wrongs done to the African American race of people.[69]

They realized that working hand in hand with White women would require compromise on their part and that more radical plans for racial advancement (e.g., racial agitation and protest) would prevent them from achieving their desired ends. Some club women grew impatient with the

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[68] Quoted in Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 312.

[69] Quoted in Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 56-7.

gradualism and compromise of this plan for interracial cooperation—this was especially the case for Wells-Barnett—but many club women in the first decades of the new century saw a need for a more pragmatic approach.

For many Black club women who engaged in this strategy for racial advancement that relied on forging relationships with White residents of the city, their interracial activism had religious significance. We saw earlier in the chapter that Fannie Barrier Williams approached interracial settlement work with an emphasis on the theological idea of "neighbor love," drawing on Jesus's parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. On the one hand, Barrier Williams articulated "neighbor love" as a motivation in like terms with what has been described in previous chapters as the club women's theology of collective kinship, that is, their sense of Christian mission to care for the "least of these" among them in Black Chicago as their own. Thus the first meaning of neighbor love aimed to engender a concern for the plight of the less fortunate and motivate care for them. In this sense, Barrier Williams understood "loving one's neighbor" as "the supremest virtue … that deeper and more spiritual impulse to helpfulness that will enable us to find delight in working with, rather than for, the unfortunate about us."[70]

There was another sense, however, in which Barrier Williams used the idea of "neighbor love" when thinking about race and interracial activism. For Barrier Williams at least, as a Black club woman, she also hoped to convert White people to an understanding of "neighbor love" that included Black people. She wanted to redefine and expand who they understood their "neighbor" to be, in other words. Her hope in pursuing interracial activism and cooperation was that by getting to know Black people—or at least respectable middle- and upper-class Black people—

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[70] Barrier Williams, "A New Method of Dealing with the Race Problem," *Voice of the Negro* 3, no. 7 (1906): 500.

White Chicagoans would begin to see them as their "neighbors." She wrote, "When this Institution was organized, incorporated, and established one year ago, it was regarded as altogether a new departure in methods of dealing with the so-called race problem. It will be remembered, perhaps, that the Frederick Douglass Center was created … also to save white people from the soul-belittling effect of inherited and cultivated prejudices."[71] Philanthropy and social service alone would never be enough in her mind to solve the "race problem." Love of one another was crucial: "There is no such thing as human progress without a large ingredient of the love principle in human affairs; that kind of sympathy that knows no social lines, or race distinctions."[72] White folks, even those who were invested in solving social and racial problems in the city, needed to see themselves as part of the problem, she argued, recognizing that their inability to love their Black neighbors because of neglecting to even know them was the greatest barrier to realizing their social gospel visions of human brotherhood. This, Barrier Williams wrote, was precisely the purpose of the Frederick Douglass Center: "By making the race problem part of the human problem, in which all classes and races are vitally concerned; in trying to help the community by helping the Negro; in creating as much interest in the young colored man or woman, after they are educated and trained for life service, as before they were trained; in the broadening and deepening of human problems, this race question of ours can be lifted above the low plane of passion and partisanship, to the higher plane of human brotherhood."[73] The capacity

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[71] Barrier Williams, "A New Method of Dealing with the Race Problem," *Voice of the Negro* 3, no. 7 (1906): 502.

[72] Barrier Williams, "Opportunities and Responsibilities of Colored Women," in *Afro-American Encyclopedia or, the Thoughts, Doings, and Saints of the Race* (ed. James T. Haley; Nashville, TN: Haley & Florida, 1895), 158.

[73] Barrier Williams, "A New Method of Dealing with the Race Problem," *Voice of the Negro* 3, no. 7 (1906): 505.

for neighbor love was fundamental for this work that envisioned a new era of race relations based on interracial cooperation and care. For Barrier Williams, this capacious vision of "neighbor love" was what drew her to Woolley, who she regarded as a "saint" for her efforts to work alongside Black women for social reform. At Woolley's funeral in 1918, Barrier Williams eulogized her friend, "Recalling the characteristics of Mrs. Woolley, it seems to me that she preeminently stood the supreme test of love to God in that she loved her neighbor as herself, without exceptions based on the mere circumstance of complexion."[74]

Club women were critical of their churches for not doing this work of interracial activism. In fact, prior to the 1919 race riots, which spawned the Race Relations Commission—and their "Race Relations Sundays"—of the Church Federation of Greater Chicago, there was relatively little interracial work undertaken by Black or White churches.[75] The only real efforts among the Black churches to foster this kind of interracial cooperation and spirit had been undertaken by Reverdy Ransom and the Institutional Church and Social Settlement in the years just before the center was founded. Barrier Williams saw the work of the Frederick Douglass Center as doing what the churches were unable to do because "they could not bring to the work an undivided and unselfish motive."[76] However sincere and optimistic club women were in this regard, they found that the actual business of loving one's neighbor far more difficult than they might have imagined.

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[74] "Report of memorial Service for Rev. Celia Parker Woolley, April 7, 1918, at the Abraham Lincoln Centre, Chicago," *Unity* 81 (April 18, 1918), 116-17.

[75] "Church Federation of Greater Chicago," Chicago History Museum, Box 65, Folder 1.

[76] Barrier Williams, "The Need for Social Settlement Work for the City Negro," 108.

A lesson that Black club women learned in their efforts with the Frederick Douglass Center was that true interracial cooperation was in fact difficult to achieve, as the repeatedly encountered white supremacist logic even in an institutional framework designed to resist it. As much as Woolley intended to share responsibility for the leadership of the Frederick Douglass Center, her own paternalistic views sometimes interfered with the aims of the center. In 1904, when the center opened, she wrote a column for other (presumably White) settlement workers around the country, in which she shared that the Frederick Douglass Center aimed to "assist the hordes of colored people coming up from the South, the majority of whom are ignorant, dissolute and idle, falling easily into vicious and criminal ways. The rapid increase of such an element lowers not only the standard of the colored population in our midst, but of our common citizenship, and seriously threatens the well-being of the whole."[77] The inherent racism evidenced in Woolley's portrayal of southern Black migration was not limited to her views about poorer African Americans, at least according to some of her Black coworkers in the center's efforts.

Wells-Barnett, who was a partner in the center's early formation, expressed serious concerns that the Frederick Douglass Center, and Woolley in particular, did not live into its promises of equal representation. In her autobiography, Wells-Barnett noted that Black women were the force that drove the center in its thirteen year existence, providing the primary financial support as well as volunteer service, and yet she questioned whether they were fairly represented in its leadership. While the Frederick Douglass Center charter outlined that equal representation

[77] Celia Parker Woolley, "The Frederick Douglass Center, Chicago," *The Commons: A Monthly Record Devoted to Aspects of Life and Labor from the Social Settlement Point of View* 9, no. 7 (July 1904): 328-29. Quoted in Hendricks, Fannie Barrier Williams, 143.

(in terms of numbers) should be reflected in the makeup of every board and committee of the center, Wells-Barnett charged that priority for senior leadership positions was often given to White women. Although it is hard to verify this charge throughout the center's existence, Wells-Barnett offered one piece of evidence from her own experience. In 1905, when Woolley approached her about helping to form and lead the Frederick Douglass Center's Woman's Club, Wells-Barnett charged that Woolley never considered the possibility that she might want to be president of the club, and even resisted her petition for the role. Instead of restructuring the leadership to reflect the interracial aims of the center (e.g., co-presidents), Woolley offered Wells-Barnett the secondary position of vice president, which she accepted, though not without reservation. Wells-Barnett would eventually become disillusioned with the Frederick Douglass Center and leave to found the Negro Fellowship League, stating, "I came to the conclusion before our relations ended that our white women friends were not willing to treat us on a plane of equality with themselves."[78] Wells-Barnett's frustration with Woolley and the Frederick Douglass Center reflected her larger concern that African Americans conceded too much in working with White people, a sentiment which others in Chicago shared, and opted instead for strategies that took more direct aim at confronting and resisting racial discrimination and violence. Wells-Barnett and others grew impatient with the moderatism and compromise that the strategy of interracial cooperation required and worried that the center's emphasis on middle- and upper-class African Americans neglected the needs of most Black Chicagoans. Julius Taylor, the editor of the *Broad Ax*, echoed Wells-Barnett's frustrations with the Frederick Douglass Center. He criticized the center in a 1906 editorial, arguing that the center was "of the slightest benefit to the

[78] Duster, *Crusade for Justice*, 237-45.

mass of the Afro-Americans," on account of its inaccessibility in a middle-class neighborhood just outside of the black belt.[79] Despite these charges, many club women remained committed to the strategy of interracial cooperation. Yet, even they recognized that there were limits to what this strategy for racial advancement could achieve. They continued to pursue it pragmatically, understanding it as one tool among others to advance the race.

V. "Lifting as We Climb"

While some Black club leaders like Barrier Williams pursued projects for racial advancement that relied on interracial cooperation, they came to realize that it was not sufficient by itself to solve the racial problems in the city. They increasingly recognized the need for Black women to organize among themselves in addition to working alongside White women. Not long after the initial organizing efforts of the NACW, Barrier Williams spoke about how the "organizing of our women … possibly means more to the social order and improvement of the colored race in this country than anything yet attempted outside of the churches."[80] In Barrier Williams's mind, the obvious purpose of Black women's organizing was self-improvement, "calling attention to the fact that the Negro race has a good deal more intelligence and virtue than it uses for its own advancement."[81] Beyond that, however, and perhaps more important for Barrier Williams personally, was the potential effect of Black women's organization for redefining Black womanhood. Here, her advocacy of a pragmatic racial strategy (interracial cooperation) reveals a tension within her approach to racial uplift. It indicates that Barrier

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[79] *The Broad Ax*, June 23, 1906. Quoted in Hendricks, *Fannie Barrier Williams*, 143.

[80] Barrier Williams, "The New Colored Woman," *Sparkling Gems of Race Knowledge Worth Reading* (ed. James T Haley; Nashville, TN: J.T. Haley, 1897), 69-70.

[81] Ibid.

Williams, not unlike Wells-Barnett, believed that elevating Black womanhood—vis-à-vis the cult of true womanhood—could not be achieved by relying on White women. In some instances, Black women needed their own organization—the NACW—and to rely on the "cooperation of colored women everywhere."[82] Thus, in charting a path for redeeming Black womanhood—a "necessary step in uplifting the race"—that focused on Black organization, Barrier Williams signaled the limits of a strategy that relied solely on interracial cooperation.

Fannie Barrier Williams, who was one of the champions of interracial cooperation among the leaders of Chicago's Black women's clubs, emphasized the "pragmatism" of partnerships with White women and the need for caution. Fannie Barrier Williams wrote about the need for strategic alliances between Black and White women as crucial for "advancing the race," but she was not ignorant about the reality of these relationships. In fact, she instructed Black women to take care in choosing which White women with whom they might partner in political or social reform causes. She argued that they should approach interracial cooperation with White women with a dose of suspicion, because they "had always scorned our ambitions and held themselves aloof from us in all our struggles of advancement." She argued that Black women needed to focus on convincing White women to "relent their cruel opposition to our girls and women in the matter of employment and the enjoyment of civil privileges," recalling that the difficulties many Black women encountered in finding "respectable employment is due mostly to the meanness of American women."[83] This signals again the pragmatism of this approach to racial uplift that relied on interracial cooperation, because Black women realized that there were also drawbacks

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[82] Ibid., 71.

[83] Barrier Williams, "Illinois," *Woman's Era* 1.8 (Nov 1894): 12-14.

to working with White women and that interracial cooperation was not a panacea for solving the social or racial problems they experienced. For this reason, many Black club women who were involved with interracial projects like the Frederick Douglass Center also organized and devoted their time to clubs concerned exclusively with supporting their poorer Black neighbors, especially young girls and working women.

The Phyllis Wheatley Home

One of the chief organizations for this work in the first decades of the century was the Phyllis Wheatley Club, which often worked in concert with the Frederick Douglass Center. In fact, according to the club rosters in Elizabeth Lindsay Davis's history of Chicago's Black women's clubs, the most common combination of club memberships involved the Frederick Douglass Women's Club and the Phyllis Wheatley Club (more on this below). The Phyllis Wheatley Club was formed in 1896 with Elizabeth Lindsay Davis as its first president, and it was founded originally as a "neighborhood betterment organization," that began its work by "fighting saloons" and other institutions of vice that were in close proximity to the schools in the Black Belt.[84] In the several years following its inception, the club established a school focused on training young African American women in the "domestic sciences." Then, in 1904, the club opened a day nursery to care for the children of young Black working women at the Trinity AME Mission, which was located just to the north of the Black Belt in a high-density vice district. The mission had just come under the leadership of the young minister Richard R. Wright Jr., and the club worked with him to support and direct the nursery for the next two years. In the course of

[84] "Phyllis Wheatley Association Papers, 1908-1967," University of Illinois at Chicago Special Collections, Box 1, Folder 1. See also Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, "The Phyllis Wheatley Woman's Club," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 23.

their work with the nursery, and as migration from Southern states steadily increased, members of the Phyllis Wheatley club (comprised of many of the most prominent club women in the city) became increasingly concerned about the difficult circumstances which awaited newly arrived Black girls and young mothers from the South: "Many of these girls were going astray by being led unawares into disreputable homes, entertainment and employment because of lack of protection that strange girls of the other Races enjoy."[85] By 1906, the club had set its course to establish a home for young Black women and working mothers, giving over their other work and responsibilities to other clubs and organizations to focus their energy and resources solely to address the plight of migrant African American women. A building was finally purchased in 1908, opening its doors to its first three residents that had previously been staying in the homes of club members.[86] Because of the steady flow of migrants into the Black Belt, and the pressing need for adequate housing and employment among Black women, the home quickly filled and maintained a waiting list. Recognizing the need before them, the club quickly moved to form the Phyllis Wheatley Home Association, inviting members of other clubs to participate in the work at the home.[87] Although identified as a "home," historian of Chicago's Women's clubs, Anne Meis Knupfer, suggests that some homes (like the Phyllis Wheatley Home) actually functioned more like a settlement, offering a wide variety of programs focused on children, youth, and

[85] Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 23-24.

[86] "Phyllis Wheatley Association Papers, 1908-1967," University of Illinois at Chicago Special Collections, Box 1, Folder 1.

[87] Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 24.

young adults, like other settlements. The only difference being that the Phyllis Wheatley Home focused exclusively on girls and young women.[88]

When the home opened in 1908, club women stated in their application for endorsement by the Chicago Association of Commerce that their primary objective was "to maintain a home which will solve the problem of the colored girl or woman of good character who come to Chicago for the purpose of advancement, often without relatives, friends or money; to surround them with Christian influences, to elevate the standard of employment and to provide a social or community center."[89] Members of the Phyllis Wheatley Club also coordinated with the Frederick Douglass Center (which housed one of only two employment bureaus exclusively for Black women) to help them find employment. In her history of Chicago's Black women's clubs, Elizabeth Lindsay Davis documents that many of Chicago's more prominent Black club women were both involved with the Frederick Douglass Center and also contributed their time and services to the Phyllis Wheatley Home by either serving on the board of directors for the home or volunteering with the Phyllis Wheatley Club.[90] The dual membership of these women, several of whom were among the most prominent leaders in Chicago (e.g., Barrier Williams, Davis, J. Snowden Porter, and Clara Johnson), is telling about the ways in which Black club women's

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[88] Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 102.

[89] "Phyllis Wheatley Association Papers, 1908-1967," University of Illinois at Chicago Special Collections, Box 1, Folder 1.

[90] The following Black club women held membership in both the Frederick Douglass Women's Club, which provided support for the center, and the Phyllis Wheatley Club, supporting the home for girls and young working women: Theresa Gray Macon (p. 57), Minnie A. Collins (p. 99), Lizzie Jane Crawley (p. 69), Celia Webb Hill (p. 65), Ella Johnson (p. 97), Clara Johnson (p. 94), Mattie Johnson Young (pp. 93-4), Carey S. Otey (p. 89), Ethel McCracken Cleaves (p. 83), Sadie Pritchard Hart (p. 82), Bertha L. Hensley (p. 80), Eliza Johnson (p. 79), Dr. Fannie Emanuel (p. 76), Gertrude Moore (p. 72), Desdemona Sublett (p. 71), Fannie Barrier Williams (p. 99), Jennie E. Lawrence (p. 66), J. Snowden Porter (p. 64), Connie Curl-Maxwell (p. 62), Elizabeth Lindsay Davis (p. 6). See Davis, *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (Chicago, IL: Privately published, 1922).

multiple theological ideas of "collective kinship" (caring for the "least" among their own) and "neighbor love" (interracial cooperation) interacted in their racial uplift strategy, especially when one considers the class dimensions involved (see below).

Davis notes that the Phyllis Wheatley Home was "the leading and most valuable institution in the State" for providing domestic training and employment for young Black women.[91] Black club women recognized that helping poorer Black women find respectable employment was important on multiple levels. On the one hand, they were motivated by a religious sensibility to help the unfortunate among them and care or them as their own family. On the other hand, however, they recognized that women maintained inadequate homes and worked in less than respectable lines of work reflected poorly on the race. As we will see below, Black club women were quite concerned about how White Chicagoans perceived Black women. Even though they distinguished themselves from poor working women along class lines—a class stratification they sought to maintain—they also recognized that perceptions about "Black womanhood" were tied to the public opinion of lower-class African American women as well. So club women like Barrier Williams, who was a charter member of the Phyllis Wheatley Club and ardent supporter of the home, evidenced these twin concerns. She believed that the uplift of lower-class Black women was important for their own "spiritual good," and she was concerned that the "church is not always a means of salvation for her."[92] However, she also recognized the

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[91] Davis, "The Phyllis Wheatley Home," in *The Story of the Illinois Federation of Colored Women's Clubs* (1922), 167. Knupfer identifies the following clubs as principal supporters of the home, as indicated in their annual reports published in the newspapers: the (White) Chicago Woman's Club, the North Side Woman's Club, Hyde Park Woman's Club, Samaritan Club, Lady Elliot Circle, and the Necessity Club. See Knupfer, *Toward a Tenderer Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 84.

[92] Barrier Williams, "The Need of Organized Womanhood," *Colored American Magazine* vol. 15, no. 1 (January 1909): 652.

ways in which Black working women reflected on the entire race: “There is still another consideration which suggests the importance to the colored people generally of being interested in the improvement of domestic service as an occupation for their young women. I believe that it is in the power of these young women, by the right sort of training and intelligence, to solve the vexatious ‘servant girl problem,’ and in thousands of American homes give to the race a better standard of character. White people, north and south, have fallen into the albeit unjust habit of estimating the entire race form the standpoint of their own servant girls.”[93] She, and others, became increasingly supportive of training programs in the domestic sciences for young and poor Black women, which also became a primary focus of the Phyllis Wheatley Club and Home.[94] Here, middle- and upper-class club women believed a Washingtonian model of industrial education could provide a solution that would both help poorer women find respectable and dependable sources of income while also reflecting well on the race as whole and on Black womanhood in particular. This multilayered concern in their work with lower-class Black women would prove critical to their efforts and strategies to advance the race.

A Two-Pronged Strategy for Racial Advancement

Considering Black club women’s interracial work with the Frederick Douglass Center alongside their uplift efforts with the Phyllis Wheatley Home, reveals their multilayered strategy for racial advancement. They pursued programs that were motivated by a vision of racial solidarity, seeking better conditions and relations for all Black residents of Chicago (e.g., their

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[93] Barrier Williams, “Lesson No. 70—Field for Colored Women,” *Chicago Tribune* (October 13, 1903): 13.

[94] “Phyllis Wheatley Association Papers, 1908-1967,” University of Illinois at Chicago Special Collections, Box 1, Folder 1.

emphasis on “the least of these”) but that also relied on paternalism and reproduced class distinctions and expectations. In other words, Black club women forged a two-pronged approach to racial advancement that combined interracial cooperation among middle- and upper-class Black and White women with an educative uplift program for poorer Black women. This multilayered strategy, which relied heavily on respectability politics and class division, was complimentary rather than contradictory and corresponded with the theological ideas that drove their activism for racial reform in their club work: care for “the least of these” (uplift) and “neighbor love” (interracial cooperation). This tension—casting a vision of racial solidarity and uplift while pursuing reform strategies that necessitated strong class differentiation—is embodied in the two-tiered motto of the national Black women’s club movement (the NACW), “Lifting as We Climb.” In this way, Black club women imagined themselves as the lynchpin for the race’s advancement. They would be the conduits through which White people would come to know the best of Black Chicago and be converted from the white supremacist logic that dictated race relations in the city, while at the same time organizing themselves to “uplift” poorer African American women and redefine Black womanhood.

Class played a prominent role in the multilayered program of Black club women for racial advancement. They combined the various elements of their distinct theological vision and sense of Christian mission with both Du Boisian and Washingtonian strategies for racial advancement.[95] As their work with the Frederick Douglass Center has shown, in their interracial

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[95] I am indebted to Anne Meis Knupfer for her incisive analysis of the ways that class and the racial ideologies of Du Bois and Washington commingled in the social reform efforts of Black club women. See Knupfer, *Toward a Tendered Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 1-29. The contribution of this dissertation to the discussion about Black club women’s racial ideologies for social reform is to emphasize the extent to which their theological imaginations shaped their approaches to racial advancement and uplift, which is largely missing from Knupfer’s analysis.

cooperation with White club women, they chose only middle- and upper-class Black club men and women as "ambassadors" to White Chicago, a decision that is reflected in the location of the center outside of the Black Belt in a predominantly White middle-class neighborhood in which affluent Black families also lived. Their strategy of interracial cooperation relied on the belief that exposing exemplary African Americans (club women and their families) to White Chicagoans would work to change their negative opinions of Black people in an effort to stamp out the logic of white supremacy. This is to say that for their part in the project of racial advancement they emphasized Du Bois's "talented tenth" model of racial leadership.[96] Fannie Barrier Williams explained that the Black women's club movement consisted of "the few competent ones on behalf of the many incompetent."[97] In order for White Chicagoans to begin to see Black people as fellow humans—as neighbors whom Christ instructed them to love—they believed that they needed to present the "best of the race" to interact with White folks. Thus Black club women constantly navigated class lines in Black Chicago, making deliberate choices about their club, church, social, and leisure activities and memberships in an effort to maintain them, not out of a selfish motive but rather as a collective strategy for uplift, which is again reflected in their motto: "Lifting as *We Climb*."

This two-pronged strategy of Black club women for racial advancement relied on "respectability politics," defined by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham as a value system "that equated public behavior with individual self-respect and with the advancement of African

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[96] Knupfer, *Toward a Tendered Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 12.

[97] Barrier Williams, *The Colored Woman and Her Part in Race Regeneration* (Miami, FL: Mnemosyne, 1969 [1900]), 382-83.

Americans as a group."[98] Not only were they "ambassadors" of the race to White Chicago, but since their fate as a race was tied to all other African American women, they also understood it as their responsibility to help educate and lift up the lower classes, which previous chapters have demonstrated also had significant religious and familial significance (theology of collective kinship). Thus, where they applied a Du Boisian approach to themselves and their interracial relations, as Knupfer suggests, they "most often prescribed Washingtonian remedies for poorer and less educated women."[99] Black club women thus experienced multiple (but not necessarily competing) motivations to lift up poorer Black women. On the one hand, Black club women understood their faith to lead them to care for "the least of these" as they would care for Christ; but, on the other hand, they recognized the racial pragmatism of lifting up and educating poorer Black women to be respectable citizens as a collective strategy for advancing the race. As Barrier Williams explained in the years when the Frederick Douglass Center and Phyllis Wheatley Home were being established, one of their great concerns as "race women" was to work to reshape "public opinion" (that is, White assumptions) about African Americans: "public opinion is stubborn, stolid and self-sufficient. It will not be forced, it cannot be deceived and is without sympathy, but it can be taught, it can be convinced, and in time can be won by valiant men and noble women, helping us to deserve a place in the family of races."[100] As a result, Black club women developed a dual relationship with lower-class Black women in their strategy for racial

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[98] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 14-15.

[99] Knupfer, *Toward a Tendered Humanity and a Nobler Womanhood*, 21.

[100] Barrier Williams, "The Negro and Public Opinion," *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 1 (1904): 32.

advancement, both seeking racial solidarity with them but also needing to maintain class distinction from them.

VI. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to draw out the distinct racial reform strategy that Black club women employed in their work with settlements, and it has tried to understand the religious motivations and ideas that framed their approach to race relations. By focusing on the Frederick Douglass Center and the women who organized it, we are able to observe the variety of activism that Black club women engaged in through their work with settlements, and because of the center's focus on race relations and racial encounter we are able to draw out their unique approach to racial reform. In founding the Frederick Douglass Center, Chicago's Black Christian club women gave institutional form to their distinct strategy for racial uplift, which was pragmatic, relied on a program of interracial cooperation, and was driven by Jesus's mandate to "love thy neighbor." They envisioned that the center would be a force to battle white supremacist logic in the city by exposing White folks to their upper- and middle-class Black neighbors. They engaged the work of the center with a robust optimism that they could change White people's minds and assumptions through interracial interaction and cooperation.

By considering the Frederick Douglass Center's efforts alongside Black club women's uplift work with the Phyllis Wheatley Home, we see more clearly that their strategy was multilayered. At the same time the best of the race were "climbing" (i.e., reshaping the image of the race in the minds of White folks) through their interracial relationships, they also committed themselves to "lifting" lower-class Black women up, both to provide for their needs but also to uplift the image of the lower-classes of Black Chicago. Thus Black club women forged varying

alliances with their lower-class Black sisters. They were united in solidarity in advancing the race and protecting Black womanhood, causes which also necessitated class stratification.Rather than blaming the circumstances of poorer Black women on their individual moral, religious, or social decisions, Black women united in solidarity to address the causes of their conditions: segregation, discrimination, and systems of racism in Chicago's political and social life. This camaraderie among Black women across class lines in their efforts to uplift the race only strengthened over the course of the first decades of the twentieth century—even while they still maintained the social markers of class in their social lives—precisely because of the intensifying reality of racial struggle in the nation, which they felt especially in the resurgence and hardening of Jim Crow practices and the proliferation of racial violence in both the South and the North.

CONCLUSION

Preparing the Way

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me…

–Malachi 3:1

This dissertation has told the story of African American club women's Christian activism in Chicago, who organized, served, and marched to materialize what they understood as the gospel promise of social salvation in the lives of Black Chicagoans who experienced racial discrimination, segregation, and violence, as well as economic oppression and political marginalization. African American club women labored to apply their vision of the Black social gospel for the uplift of the "least" among them (Matthew 25:40) in Black Chicago, namely children, women, and the elderly. For many women in these decades, "missionary work" provided a rationale and framework for their social and racial reform activism.[1] In the context of their clubs, they acted like clergy, drawing their theological motivations for social and racial reform activism from their churches in Chicago and reformulating those theological ideas to address issues that concerned them as Black women and mothers. In pursuing this gospel-inspired activism they developed a distinctive lived theology of the Black social gospel, which I have described in terms of a "theology of collective kinship," which centered and reframed

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[1] For a discussion of the of how a sense of "Christian mission" shaped the social and racial reform efforts, see Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 155-56.

theological notions of “family” and “collective responsibility” among Black Chicagoans. They pursued a platform for social and racial reform that targeted civil rights issues and forged a pragmatic strategy for racial advancement that prioritized interracial cooperation. At its best, the distinct Black social gospel practiced by African American club women in Chicago was a resource for Black residents in the city in their struggles against the forces of white supremacy, economic oppression, and political disenfranchisement.

Their organization and activism took place during what has often been described as the nadir of American race relations, and it is in this larger historical context that Black club women’s extraecclesial organization and activism needs to be understood. In the three decades between 1890 and 1919, Black Americans were made painfully aware of what Willis Jenkins has described as the “quotidian monster of white supremacy” as they had to reckon with what it meant to live in a nation increasingly structured by Jim Crowism and where they were constantly haunted by the specter of racial violence.[2] In a moment in history when tens of thousands of African Americans were on the move, leaving the Jim Crow South and looking for a northern “Promised Land,” Black club women in Chicago were “preparing the way” for them, providing resources, shelter, and jobs, organizing for social reform, and marching to protest racial discrimination.

Black club women’s organization in the decades surrounding the turn of the century helped to prepare the way for southern migrants to the city by creating many of the support networks and institutions that would help them adjust to life in the city when they arrived. Although their programs of reform and service were not perfect (e.g., their strategic maintenance

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[2] Willis Jenkins, “Moral Trauma,” *Medium*, August 28, 2017.

of class stratification in Black Chicago complicated efforts for social advancement for lower-class African Americans, as much as club women thought otherwise), they succeeded in so many ways of interweaving their religious beliefs with their social activism to create what Toinette Eugene has called "womanist communities of care," which have been foundational for Black women's survival in America from slavery into the twentieth century, finding numerous ways to provide support and care for those in need or suffering.[3] Homes for women, children, and the elderly, settlement houses for African Americans, job referral bureaus, childcare, and domestic training are just a few of they ways that club women made Black Chicago more hospitable and livable—even if not a land flowing with milk and honey—for those escaping racism in the South. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a 1922 report by the Commission on Race Relations in Chicago told that even though migrants would initially go to the churches for help upon arriving, they were more likely to actually find support from one of the Black women's clubs.[4] In these extraecclesial contexts, they were forerunners, building and organizing institutions that laid the groundwork, ideologically and materially, for the care and advancement of African Americans into the twentieth century.

In their emphasis on true "interracial cooperation" (as opposed to "biracial" work) in their settlement work with the Frederick Douglass Center, Black club women in Chicago also prepared the way for the Christian Interracial Movement, which was launched in the years following World War I. Historians have tended to see the impetus for Christian interracial work that was deliberately anti-paternalistic as motivated by events at the end of the second decade of

[3] Toinette M. Eugene, "There Is a Balm in Gilead: Black Womanist and the Black Church as Agents of Therapeutic Community," *Women and Therapy: A Feminist Quarterly* 16:2 (1995): 68-69.

[4] *Report of the Chicago Commission on Race Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 142.

the twentieth century (e.g., the end of WWI, the Great Migration, and the 1919 Race Riots), and yet the present study suggests the possibility of an earlier history.

The birth of the Christian "interracial movement" is typically cited around 1919 with the launch of a movement for Christian interracial cooperation by the Federal Council of Churches.[5] In the early decades of the century, the FCC (founded in 1908) became one of the strongest church-related institutional forces to fight racism and promote racial tolerance and cooperation. In September of 1919, the Home Missions Council (a conference of Protestant missionary societies) gathered to discuss racial concerns. Together, with the FCC Committee on Negro Churches, they issued their statement on "A Race Crisis," which read, "We must face frankly the fact that a most dangerous interracial situation now threatens our country. The problems growing out of the presence of two races in America are clearly seen to be nationwide and the adjustments must be … made on the basis of national responsibility. The migration of thousands of Negroes to the North emphasizes this fact. The outbreaks in several cities and the persistence of the anarchy and treason of lynch-law imperil our democracy."[6] In addition, that year the FCC issued a call for "A Constructive Program for Just Interracial Relations," which sought to combine Christian activism and government intervention, and largely as a result of these conferences and statements, the FCC would establish the Department of Race Relations (originally known as the

[5] My account of the interracial movement in this conclusion is drawn from Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 314-35. Collier-Thomas's dating of the origin of the interracial movement is buttressed by Betty Livingston Adams, *Black Women's Christian activism: Seeking Social Justice in a Northern Suburb* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), see especially ch. 5, "'Unholy and Unchristian Attitude': Interracial Dialogue in Segregated Spaces, 1920-1937," pp. 82-104.

[6] George Edmund Haynes, *Toward Interracial Peace* (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1940), I-3. Cited in Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 315.

Commission on the Church and Race Relations) in 1921, which was led by George Edmund Haynes and Will W. Alexander.[7]

To locate the origins of the Christian interracial movement after 1919, however, is to overlook the significant work that Black Christian women were doing in the decades prior to the Great Migration to forge interracial relationships and initiate projects that married a distinctly religious outlook with their efforts to improve "race relations" through interracial cooperation. The 1919 origin story for the interracial movement is plausible if one only considers the activism connected to official church and parachurch institutions. However, as this dissertation has shown, beginning in the 1890s Black women pursued Christian activism in extraecclesial institutional spaces in which they experienced significantly more freedom and found more opportunities for leadership than in their churches. More specifically, Black club women's extraecclesial efforts to develop a program of true interracial cooperation in their work with the Frederick Douglass Center in the first decade of the century should be seen as a forerunner (if not the origin) of the Christian interracial movement, a chronological note that might also have implications for understanding and reperiodizing the "Long Civil Rights Movement."[8]

As I continue to develop this project, thinking more broadly about the Christian activism of Black women in Chicago, there are at least two avenues for additional research that I hope to pursue. The first will be to revisit the archives of Chicago's Black churches, which are mostly housed at the Chicago History Museum, with a focus on the activity and organization of Black

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[7] Collier-Thomas, Jesus, Jobs, and Justice, 315-16. For more on this history, see the forthcoming study by Curtis J. Evans, A Theology of Brotherhood: The Federal Council of Churches and the Problem of Race (New York: New York University Press, forthcoming).

[8] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233–263.

church women. When I initially conducted archival research in the church files, which was prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, my proposal for research did not focus on Black women. It was not until I discovered the full archive of Fannie Barrier Williams's papers (available digitally) while in lockdown during the pandemic that my research questions turned toward African American club women's activism. Following lockdown, I was unable to access those collections again because of a longterm facility renovation that restricted access to many of the archive's collections. I look forward to gaining access to that archive in the future, as the activism of women in Chicago's churches around the same issues that club women engaged is admittedly a lacuna in the project as it currently stands.

The other avenue for future research will be to incorporate material from an archive of Chicago's African American YWCA, which I was just recently able to explore after the University of Illinois at Chicago Special Collections reopened access to outside researchers following the pandemic. I am beginning to understand the YWCA as a "bridge" institution between the churches and women's club, and while the majority of the archive (which is quite substantial) deals with post-migration era history of the YWCAs, it also includes a substantial amount of institutional papers, correspondence, and handwritten records (needing to be transcribed) dealing with the African American women's work with the YWCA in the decades surrounding the turn of the century, as well as with their interracial relationships with White women.[9] In addition to helping connect women's work in Black churches with their

[9] "YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago, Series II," University of Illinois at Chicago Special Collections, Box 44-45, 57-58, and 66.

extraecclesial activism, this line of inquiry would offer an interesting comparative study with Judith Weisenfeld's institutional history of New York's YWCAs in this same period.[10]

Lastly, I am writing the final words of this dissertation just days following the Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022), overturning *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and thus nullifying the constitutional right to an abortion and paving the way for states to pass anti-abortion legislation. As I interrupted my writing to march with my wife and daughter in the streets of Chicago to protest for their right to reproductive health, it was difficult not to think about this turning point in women's history in the U.S. in light of the history of African American women's Christian activism that this dissertation tries to tell, especially as they organized, marched, and protested in the very same city streets just over a century ago for the rights and welfare of Black women, children, and the vulnerable at a time when the courts were stripping away their rights as African Americans (e.g., *Plessy v. Ferguson* [1896)]. I find it difficult to say anything as meaningful about the significance of religion in this current historical moment as one of my mentors, Cynthia G. Lindner, has said:

> In the US today, persons practice their religion by the lights of over one hundred different traditions. Within each one of these communities of practice, there are multiple and often conflicting understandings of such complicated issues as gun control, abortion, what constitutes a religious education, and how one conducts one's private prayers—and for good reasons. This multiplicity, complexity, contradiction, and variety is not religion's weakness, but its true genius—the means by which religious practice cultivates wisdom that is vital and vibrant. Religion that is prescribed by a privileged few to control the lives of the many obfuscates human dignity, limits and cheapens life abundant, substitutes the trivial for the transcendent, and elevates a cruel justice that cannot admit its need for mercy. At their best, religious communities and their practitioners are deeply rooted and broadly based, immersed in the spiritual disciplines of study and ritual practice that are constant sources of wisdom, compassion, understanding, and justice-making. They know that it is impossible and unholy to legislate loving one's neighbor, or to command that

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[10] Judith Weisenfeld, *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York's Black YWCA, 1905-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

> someone else "choose life"—that life and love are not commodities to be owned, forced, or prescribed, but that these mysterious and elusive "goods" must be cultivated, prayerfully and intentionally, every day and all the time, lifelong.[11]

For the African American Christian women at the heart of this study, religion was both a source of their oppression as well as a resource in their fight for racial and gender justice. They drew on their faith and a long tradition of womanist community care to develop organizational networks to address the pressing issues within their communities—racism, sexism, and poverty. I hope that telling the story of these women's Christian activism—both their triumphs and shortcomings—will serve as a resource for those who are engaged in similar struggles for human rights in this moment.

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[11] Cynthia G. Lindner, "Weary (and Wary) of Decisions, Opinions, and Polemics? Religious Wisdom Would Like a Word," *Sightings,* July 1, 2022, https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/articles/weary-and-wary-decisions-opinions-and-polemics-religious-wisdom-would-word.

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