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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Therese C. Tepedino for the
Master of Arts in History presented May 20, 1977.

Title: The Founding and Early Years of the National
Association of Colored Women.

APPROVED BY MEMBERS OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE:

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The National Association of Colored Women was formed in 1896, during a period when the Negro was encountering a great amount of difficulty in maintaining the legal and political rights granted to him during the period of reconstruction. As a result of this erosion of power, some historians have contended that the Negro male was unable to effectively deal with the problems that arose within the Negro community. It was during this same period of time that the Negro woman began to assert herself in the affairs of her community. In the beginning, her work was done in

conjunction with church groups and ladies auxiliaries to Negro male secret societies and fraternal organizations. In the 1890's, however, she began to form clubs of her own. This did not mean that the other organizational ties were severed, but rather that she added new priorities to her varied interests.

Generally speaking, the women who participated in these groups were middle class women who saw needs within the Negro community and attempted, with their limited resources, to alleviate the problems.

There were many clubs of Negro women formed during the period from 1890 to 1895, and there was a general feeling that unification of the clubs would be beneficial to the overall movement of Negro women. The major goal of the National Association of Colored Women was the uplift of the Negro race in all facets of life. The organization declared that it was not drawing the color line but that all clubs of women whose goal was to improve the life of the Negro were eligible to join. From the beginning, the goal that the National Association of Colored Women set up for itself was too broad in relation to membership and resources of the members. Instead of concentrating on one or two specific areas, such as kindergartens, reformatories for Negro youth, homes for the aged, or civil rights, the women divided their forces to such an extent that their effectiveness in dealing with the problems that

plagued the Negro community was extremely limited. It is true that many fine examples of their dedication and unselfishness brought relief and in some cases institutions were established to aid their people, but more often than not the lack of unified efforts failed to produce the desired results. Besides the diffusion of goals, there was also the human factors of pettiness, un-co-operative spirit and a desire for self-recognition that disrupted the movement.

Later, with the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the N.A.A.C.P., the National Urban League and other similar organizations dedicated to the improvement of the life of the Negro, the National Association of Colored Women lost much of its impact. In part this was caused by the limiting of the goals pursued by the new organizations. They concentrated their efforts on a few specific areas and refused to be distracted by a multiplicity of causes. Furthermore, the personnel of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League were generally more professionally qualified to handle the problems that they attempted to solve.

The thesis is based largely upon original sources: memoirs, autobiographies of the founders of the N.A.C.W. and periodicals and newspapers published between 1890-1930.

THE FOUNDING AND EARLY YEARS OF THE NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF COLORED WOMEN

by

Therese C. Tepedino

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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in
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PREFACE

The National Association of Colored Women is an organization composed of autonomous clubs of Negro women. The principal focus of this study is to recount the beginnings of the club movement of Negro women and the formation of the National Association of Colored Women. To comprehend why Negro women moved to form such an organization, however, it is important to understand the climate of opinion regarding Negroes in both the North and South during the years following the Civil War.

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INTRODUCTION

THE NEGRO IN THE POST-CIVIL WAR PERIOD

Although the American Civil War in the nineteenth century brought an end to the institution of slavery in the United States, the attitudes of the nation in relation to the Negro, were still in flux. Toward the end of the war, both the North and the South were beginning to re-evaluate the position of the Negro in their respective areas.

Southerners, in danger of losing the war and in desperate need for more men, considered allowing Negroes, both free and slave, to join the Confederate Armed Forces. Men such as Robert E. Lee felt that the participation of Negroes was necessary for the successful completion of the war. When, late in the conflict, the South finally allowed the slaves to join the armed forces, it did so with the understanding that the participating slaves would gain their freedom at the conclusion of the hostilities. Some Southern leaders even considered emancipating all slaves in order to gain foreign aid. Some officials in the Confederate government felt that emancipation might be necessary in order to place the Civil War on a basis other than freedom versus slavery.¹

¹ Robert Cruden, The Negro in Reconstruction (New Jersey, Prentice Hall, Inc., 1969), 8.

While these military and political maneuvers were occurring, Southern planters were confronted with grave economic problems, especially in relation to their slaves. Planters were faced with the enormous cost of caring for the slaves. Food, clothing, and shelter were at a premium. Before the war the cost of these items was great, but with the military conflict, the cost became prohibitive. One of the basic reasons for this was that trade was at a standstill, thus eliminating the major source of revenue for most planters. Besides this, planters near the military combat zone were forced into constant movement in order to protect themselves and to hide their slaves from the advancing Union Army. Planters living in both the Confederate and in Union occupied territory often either encouraged their slaves to grow their own food and sell the surplus where they could, or they left the slaves to fend for themselves.²

Meanwhile, in the Northern states, there was considerable controversy as to whether the Negro should be allowed to join the army. Despite the fact that the navy accepted Negroes almost from the outset of the war, the army did not. Only after much pressure was brought to bear by both White³ and Negro groups, did the army accept the Negro volunteer.

Coupled with the reluctance of the army to accept the Negro recruit was the fact that most Northerners considered

²
Ibid., 8.
³
Ibid., 8-9.

the Negro free but not equal to the White population. Even before the Civil War, Negroes in some cities were often segregated; their educational facilities were poorly equipped and their teaching staffs were inadequate.⁴ As the war drew to a close, many Northerners were fearful of a mass movement of Negroes into their section. Lower class workers were especially concerned. These individuals generally worked hard and received low wages for their labor. They feared that with the demobilization of the army and the predicted increase in European immigration to the North, the competition for jobs would be severe. If more Negroes came to the North in search of employment, they argued, the labor market would be faced with an unbearable strain. Furthermore, White laborers remembered that during the War, the Negroes had been used as strikebreakers. Consequently, many of the lower class Northern laborers felt that their economic security would be greatly jeopardized if the former Negro slaves came North.⁵

Besides laborers, skilled artisans also opposed an influx of Negroes into the North. These craftsmen did not wish the Negro to enter the crafts. Like the common laborers, these men felt that they would run the risk of either losing their jobs or having their wages lowered.⁶

⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁵ Ibid., 2, 12.

⁶ Rayford W. Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901, New York, The Dial Press,

As a result of these feelings by the working class, those people in control of the fledgling groups of organized laborers sought to exclude Negroes from their unions. With the plea of labor for the closed shop, not only were some places of employment closed to non-union Whites but also to Negroes. This action of the unions brought about the widespread exclusion of Negroes in the areas of private industry. As a result some historians have contended that the Negroes in the North were driven to political action in order that they could find a means to cope with their economic problems.⁷

The emancipated Southern Negro fared even worse than those in the North. The Negro was grudgingly given his freedom, but he was not considered equal to the White populace. In fact, to many Southern people, the Negro became the living and ever present symbol of defeat, for the South, unlike the North, lay devastated after the War. Fortunes were liquidated by the collapse of the Confederate currency and securities, by the manumission of the slaves, and by the destruction of property.⁸

In part to ease the sting of defeat and to lessen the fear of the Negro, stringent laws were passed in some Southern states in relation to the freedman, and in particular to the problem of vagrancy. Generally referred to as

⁷
13, 3. Ibid., 4. Cruden, The Negro in Reconstruction,

⁸
Cruden, The Negro in Reconstruction, 20-22.

Black Codes, these laws sought to assure a measure of Southern White control to the war torn states of the former Confederacy. Although these laws differed from state to state, there were similarities. For the most part, the mobility of the Negro was restricted. For some months even before the war ended, slaves began to leave the plantations, a process intensified by the newly emancipated slaves. Some freedmen desired to locate relatives who had been separated from them during the period of slavery. Others hoped to find work on better terms than on plantations. Still others sought refuge in the towns, not in order to find work but rather to take advantage of their ability to move about freely. The cities, however, were also the congregating place for the soldiers of both armies and for the newly arrived Northerners, who came either to seek their fortunes or to help the freedman. The congestion in the Southern cities led to crimes, violence, and vice. The Black Codes were implemented as one method to deal with the problem.⁹ Most state Black Codes also restricted the legal and political rights of the Negroes. Although the freedman was allowed to enter into a legal marriage with one of his own race and some other types of contracts were permitted, he could not vote. Part of the reason for this was the fear that Abraham Lincoln's Republican Party would become the party of the freedman. Perhaps most important,

⁹ Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought, 7.

however, was the fact that in some states and in particular in many localities the Negroes outnumbered the Whites. Consequently, in order for the defeated Southerners to have some measure of security and power, the Negro was denied the right to vote. Nor were the freedmen allowed to hold public office.¹⁰ Under the Lincoln and Andrew Johnson reconstruction policies, many Southerners who had participated in the Confederate war effort as leaders were also able to participate in the newly reconstructed state governments. As the Southerners were attempting to re-establish control of their respective states, the people living in the Northern states were becoming alarmed at the turn of events in relation to the Negro. Many Northerners worried about the political repercussions of the Black Codes. Some feared that if the freedmen were not given the vote, then some of the national laws favoring the industrial North would not pass Congress. Others who supported the abolitionist policies felt that the franchise was essential if the freedman was to retain his freedom. Another very important factor concerned the financial arrangement between the Federal Government and private citizens and corporations in relation to war bonds. During the War, many citizens and corporations had invested heavily in war bonds and in other ways had lent money to the Federal Government. Many Southern politicians in

their election campaigns expressed their intention to have all debts incurred during the Civil War repudiated. Those people who had invested heavily in the war effort began to take the Southern verbiage on repudiation seriously and felt that the only way to prevent such action would be from the voting power of the freedmen. Consequently, more and more people began to feel that a change in reconstruction policy was needed. The changes that they sought would guarantee their interests and at the same time help the freedman, who many considered essential for the protection of Northern interests in the South. Therefore, some of the changes in reconstruction policy called for the granting of suffrage to the Negro and allowing him to hold public office. As a result, Congress divided the South into five military districts so that these changes could be implemented.¹¹

Although many Negroes were elected to the radical reconstruction governments, at no time in any Southern state did the freedman completely control any Southern legislature. Consequently, radical reconstruction generally indicated integrated state governments in the South.

Despite the fact that not all state legislatures during the various phases of reconstruction passed the same laws, some commendable laws were passed in many states.

11

11. Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought, 9-

Among them was the liberalization of suffrage for Whites as well as Negroes. Imprisonment for debt was abolished as were the whipping post and the branding iron. A system of free public schools for both races was also instituted and women were given more rights.¹²

Many scholars of the reconstruction period, however, have preferred to dwell upon the abuses that occurred. It is true that in many instances fraud and corruption were used by those who were in power as well as those out of power. State debts rose to astronomical proportions. This development, however, was not limited to the reconstruction governments. On the national level, the administration of Ulysses S. Grant was also riddled by the same type of problems. Such ethical deviance might be better explained as part of the temper of the times, rather than the sordidness of reconstruction governments.¹³

By 1876, some Northerners had begun to change their attitudes toward Southern reconstruction. Many people urged that reconstruction should be terminated so that a return to normal relations could ensue. The average person was deeply frustrated by the inability of the Federal Government to find a quick and easy solution to the problem

¹²

Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought, 9, 10.

¹³

August Meyer, Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Radical Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1963), 22. Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought, 18-20, 52-53. Cruden, The Negro in Reconstruction.

of the freedman. More realistically, however, some Northern industrialists became aware that the Negro was no longer needed in order to secure an economic program favorable to the North. There had been a significant growth in Southern industrialization. As a result, the political climate in the South toward industrial development was becoming more favorable. Previously, Negro votes were considered necessary in order to support the industrial attitudes expounded by the Republican Party. Consequently, with the change in attitudes toward industrialization in the South, Negro votes were no longer considered essential. Besides these factors, many Northern industrialists who had business interests in the South, were more concerned with obtaining a semi-skilled labor force than being in the vanguard of justice and social reforms. Due to these varied elements and to the rise of new national issues, the remaining troops who symbolically enforced reconstruction withdrew in 1877 as part of the compromise that resulted from the controversial Hayes-Tilden election.¹⁴

Gradually, the newly found rights that the freedmen were given during the era of radical reconstruction began to be weakened. This erosion was not peculiar to the South but rather occurred in the nation as a whole. In 1883, the United States Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act

¹⁴

Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought, 37, 191, 192.

of 1875 unconstitutional. The decision of the Court permitted private individuals to segregate the races and denied equal "social" rights to Negroes. Supporters of the Court's action have contended that the decision actually helped to reduce some of the violence in the South that was directed
15
against Negroes.

Paralleling the rise in segregation were actions, some legal and others less so, to discourage the Negroes from exercising their right of suffrage. In 1889, President Benjamin Harrison, in his first annual message to Congress, mildly criticized the South for its denial of political rights to the Negroes. Although Harrison was vague in his criticism of Southern policy, it was the first major threat to the White South since the end of reconstruction. Harrison's message helped to precipitate the revision of the Mississippi State Constitution in 1890. The major change that concerned the Negro was the so-called "Grandfather" clause by which a person could not vote if he was unable to read and write unless his father or grandfather was able to vote before 1867. The purpose of the amendment was to disenfranchise the Negroes while allowing most Whites to vote. Most Southern states soon followed
16
the lead of Mississippi.

15

Ibid., 53-56.

16

Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought, 57-58.

Other means of limiting the effectiveness of the Negro vote were the introduction of the poll-tax and literacy tests, the establishment of boards to question voters on the meaning of the constitution, and the designating of voting areas in inaccessible places. Some Negroes approved of some of these methods in order to obtain an educated electorate. Booker T. Washington, the president of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial School, and W. E. B. DuBois, a noted sociologist and historian of the Negro race, felt that if the electorate was educated then the government officials would be more responsive to the needs of all the people. DuBois, however, was very outspoken in regard to the voting qualifications. It was his contention that these laws be applied to all male voters and not directed only toward the Negro.

The year 1890 brought another disappointment for the Negro on the national level. Since 1880, Senator Henry William Blair of New Hampshire had campaigned for a bill calling for federal assistance for ten years to public school systems throughout the nation. The amount of assistance proposed was to be allotted on the basis of the number of illiterates in a state above the age of ten in proportion to all illiterates in the United States. In states where

17

Hugh Hawkins, editor, Booker T. Washington and His Critics: Black Leadership in Crisis (Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1974), 71. August Meier, Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1963), 196-197.

separate schools existed for the races, the governor of the state was to provide information to the Secretary of the Interior stating that no discrimination existed in relation to either the raising or distribution of funds for the separate school systems. The Secretary of the Interior was to investigate any charges of discrimination or misappropriation of funds.¹⁸

In order to gain western support for his bill, Blair proposed the establishment of a common school fund. This portion of the bill provided for the construction of school houses in sparsely settled areas. Many Southern congressmen supported this bill. It was defeated, however, in the Senate in 1890 by a combination of New England and middle western senators who feared that government intervention¹⁹ would lessen local responsibility for the schools.

The following year, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, proposed a bill that would guarantee federal supervision of federal elections. This bill met the same²⁰ fate as the Blair education bill.

In 1896, the United States Supreme Court rendered another monumental decision in relation to the Negro. It ruled in the Plessy v. Ferguson case that separate but

¹⁸

Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought, 52-53. "Editorial, The Blair Bill," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, March, 1911, I, 16-17.

¹⁹

Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought, 52-53.

²⁰

Ibid., 191-192.

equal accommodations were acceptable. The states were allowed to use their police powers in order to separate the races in public conveyances. This decision was reached despite the fact that it was common knowledge that separate accommodations were rarely equal.²¹

Although many Northern Whites did not support these developments in the South or on a national level, they did not vigorously oppose them. This was true of not only the manufacturing interests and politicians but also of many former abolitionists. For various reasons, these people began to feel that the Southern Negroes should be better prepared for citizenship. Many were discouraged by the fact that shortly after the Negroes were given the right of suffrage, they voted for their former masters. Others felt that the Negro population as a whole was not progressing at a rate commensurate with the time out of bondage. There were a few Negroes, such as W. E. B. DuBois, Robert Terrell, a Harvard graduate, and Mary Church, an Oberlin graduate, who were notable exceptions. These people, however, were partly White and some Northerners as well as Southerners attributed their success to their White ancestry. Affecting this feeling also was the theory of the survival of the fittest developed by Charles Darwin, an English scientist. This idea, popularized in the United States by

²¹

Ibid., 191-192.

another Englishman, Herbert Spencer, led many people to question the innate ability of the Negro, and many accepted the argument that the Negroid race was inferior.²²

As a result of this trend in thought, many Negroes felt that the only way in which they could better their condition was through self-help. Although this idea was not new to Negroes; it had played a minor role in Negro community affairs. From the mid-1880's, however, this concept took on new dimensions. It was during this time that Booker T. Washington secured the presidency of a new Negro industrial school in Tuskegee, Alabama. Washington believed that one of the major ways for Negroes to improve themselves was through economics. In his speeches as well as with the school program, he stressed the importance of securing jobs and of practicing thrift. He argued that if the Negro could improve his economic position, all other facets of his life also would be enhanced. Publicly, he urged Negroes to dwell less on political and social matters and concentrate on practicing the gospel of wealth. He urged Negro communities to support the efforts of the small Negro businessman. Washington publicly portrayed

22

Herbert Aptheker, Afro-American History: The Modern Era. (New York: The Citadel Press, 1971), 31, 107. George E. Mowry, The Era of Theodore Roosevelt and the Birth of Modern America, 1900-1912 (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1958), 16.

himself to the White population as an unobtrusive person²³ who did not wish to obstruct their judgement.

Washington gained national prominence, however, in 1895 at the Atlanta Exposition, and not earlier. It was during this event in Atlanta, Georgia that he delivered his famous speech incorporating his ideas of economic security and Southern hospitality toward the Negro. The ideas that he expressed were not new, but the manner in which he stated them and the fact that he was a Negro caused many White people to hail him as the leader of the Negro people. Although many Negroes approved of parts of his speech, it was largely the White people who proclaimed Washington as²⁴ the Negro leader.

In his new position as leader, Washington was afforded recognition and privileges that other Negroes were not allowed. Although the Jim Crow practices existed on railroads, special cars were put at his disposal by George Pullman, president and owner of the Pullman Palace Cars, whenever Washington traveled. Furthermore, Washington was presented with a lifetime certificate allowing him to vote in the town of Tuskegee, even though many other Negroes were not afforded this same right. In order that his

23

Hawkins, Booker T. Washington and His Critics, 170-173.

24

Ibid., 24-27. Louis R. Harlan, Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 204, 205, 207, 232. Louis R. Harlan, editor, The Booker T. Washington Papers (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), in four volume II, XXVI.

position and that of the school would not be jeopardized, he did not publicly speak out on the treatment that other Negroes experienced. Although he clandestinely supported legal action involving the rights of Negroes, he deluded himself into believing that with economic success would²⁵ come political equality and social betterment.

As a result of the disenfranchisement of the Negroes, the Jim Crow laws, the inability of Negroes to secure meaningful employment, and the lack of aggressive leadership, the Negro male found it difficult to handle the changes occurring within his community. Consequently, a stabilizing force was needed in the communities to deal with the problems that were occurring. Since the Negro male was feeling inadequate in handling some of the problems, the Negro woman began to take a more direct role in the affairs of the community. Her efforts will be examined in detail in the²⁶ next chapter.

25

Harlan, Booker T. Washington, 230-231. Hawkins, Booker T. Washington and His Critics, 68-69. Harlan, The Booker T. Washington Papers, vol. II, XXVI.

26

In the last few years some historians have disputed the contention concerning the inability of the Negro male to effectively deal with the problems within his communities.

CHAPTER I

LOCAL NEGRO WOMEN'S CLUBS

While legal and extra-legal means were used to deprive Negroes in America of their liberties, some Negroes found solace in separate group activities. There were two major organizations, churches and secret societies, where Negroes were able to join together and obtain not only a social release from their plight but also to search for a solution to a number of their problems. In both instances, the Northern Negro was more advanced than his Southern counterpart by the very fact that he had more time to develop organizations to carry out his objectives. The experiences derived from these groups proved to be invaluable to the Negro woman as a means of awakening her social consciousness and providing her with the tools that she needed to rectify some of the problems that faced the Negro community.¹

1

Fannie Barrier Williams, "Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," contained in A New Negro for a New Century: An Accurate Up-to-Date Record of the Upward Struggles of the Negro Race, by Booker T. Washington, (Chicago: American Publishing House), 383-384.

Although Negroes living in the North had functional organizations since the late 1780's, separate Negro churches² were a relatively new phenomenon in the South. Following the Civil War, various Northern churches ventured south in order to re-convert many of the newly emancipated slaves to Christianity. From the outset, both the Negro and White missionaries were deeply committed to the work of gaining new religious recruits. In the case of the White missionaries, their goal generally was to establish separate Negro churches, that is, churches where Negroes worshipped. The direction and guidelines, however, were to be obtained from³ the White parent organizations. Besides receiving religious instruction, the converts were also taught the fundamentals of cleanliness, the need for education and work and the necessity for thrift. In many congregations, special groups were organized in order that such goals could be put into practice. It was here that the Negro woman learned the basics of group organization and developed the rudiments of

²
Carol V.R. George, Segregated Sabbaths: Richard Allen and the Emergence of Independent Black Churches 1760-1840, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), VII.

³
August Meier, Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1963), 14.

team work. Through her effort and devotion, the woman be-
 4
 came the mainstay of the Negro church.

Besides the church, many Negroes found that secret societies offered companionship and a forum for the achievement of other goals. In most instances, the secret societies were formed by the male members of the community who were aware of the needs of the community. In many ways the secret societies that developed in the South were an extension of the fraternal organizations founded by some free Negroes during the ante-bellum period. After the Civil War, the South experienced an expansion of the fraternal associations that were already in existence and the formation of the new secret societies. Although social by nature, these organizations were usually imbued with a more definite purpose. The goals of the various secret societies and fraternal organizations differed in particulars, but generally not in substance. They were basically concerned with the social betterment of the members, their families, or the community at large. Generally each society had a major emphasis, such as the care of the sick, the elderly,

 4

Carrie K. Bowles, "The Negro Woman's Contribution to American Life," Interracial Review, vol. VI, January, 1933, p. 3. Williams, "Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," A New Negro for a New Century, 383. Mary Church Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World, (Washington, D.C.: Ransdell, Inc., 1940), 148. Mrs. John E. Melholland, "Talks About Women," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, vol. I February, 1911, p. 12.

and the orphans, the securing of a decent burial for members,⁵ or providing for some other personal need.

Frequently, the wives of the men in the secret societies banded together to form "ladies auxiliaries" to the male dominated organizations. Like their husbands, these women were usually among the more influential members of the community. Although many of the women were active church members, they also found time to devote to the auxiliaries. The basics of group organization and the rudiments of team work that these women acquired by working for the church groups were developed more fully. In most instances, the auxiliaries took on the goals of the society that they represented as their own. From this experience, the women became more aware of the ills that affected their communities. Furthermore, and perhaps more important, they were made conscious of the fact that while problems were difficult to solve,⁶ relief could be found.

During the period that the Negro woman was becoming more aware of her ability to help the community in which she lived, the Negro male was confronted with the erosion of the liberties that had been granted to him during the period

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Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World, 148.
Williams, "Club Movement Among Colored Women in America,"
A New Negro for a New Century, 383-384.

⁶

Williams, "Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," A New Negro for a New Century, 383-384.
Melholland, "Talks About Women," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, vol. I, February, 1911, p. 12.

of reconstruction. As for the Negro woman, in many instances she was becoming more cognizant of the world around her and of her ability to solve numerous problems through cooperation. In return, this provided her with a feeling of security. Yet, ironically at the same time, the Negro male was becoming more frustrated in the society in which he lived.

Very gradually, from the late 1880's, some Negro women began to join together and form their own clubs. These new clubs of Negro women were separate from church organizations and the auxiliaries of the various secret societies. They were divorced in the sense that they did not take direction from these groups, even though most of the leaders of these new Negro women's clubs had generally received their early training in group work from the church and the secret societies. In joining these new clubs, however, women did not renounce their earlier affiliations, but rather added another cause to their priorities.⁷

Generally, the early clubs of Negro women were formed as a direct response to a very real and pressing problem within the Negro community. In most instances, a group of women chose one major area of concentration they wished to improve. Some, for example, organized in order to defray the expenses that a young man might incur while he studied for the ministry. Groups of women also formed associations

⁷ Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World, 148.

in order to improve the school system, to seek better sanitation for their area, or to help young girls obtain employment. From these humble gatherings of a few women, the⁸ foundation of the early clubs was laid.

In some instances, however, the clubs that were formed were inspired by the work of clubwomen belonging to the General Federation of Women's Clubs, a national organization of affiliated clubs comprised mainly of White women. Many Negro women who observed the work that was being done by the General Federation desired to be a part of the movement of progressive women and improve the quality of life in the neighborhood. Another reason for the popularity of the clubs was that it was not only fashionable but socially useful to belong to a club or an organization in order to be accepted by the community at large. This was true in the⁹ Negro as well as the White community.

There was, however, one very important difference between most White women's clubs and the Negro women's clubs. The clubs of the White women were usually comprised of the more educated and affluent members of the race. For the most part, they had position and wealth, sometimes great wealth. Furthermore, they were generally concerned about their own social betterment. In contrast, the clubs of

⁸
Williams, "Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," A New Negro for a New Century, 384, 393.

⁹
Ibid., 384.

Negro women were composed of very few people of wealth and position. Instead, while most of the Negro clubwomen were financially solvent, they were not considered among the wealthy upper class of American society. They were, however, concerned about the problems relating to their race and in fact, desired the social uplift of the entire race and not just themselves.¹⁰

One of the first clubs formed by Negro women was the Woman's Loyal Union of Brooklyn and New York City. Two friends, Mrs. Victoria Earle Mathews of New York, a journalist and free lance writer, and Miss Maritcha Lyons, a Brooklyn school teacher, one day discussed the possibility of helping Miss Ida B. Wells.¹¹ Miss Wells was a young Negro woman who was valiantly attempting to make the American public aware of the injustices that both Negroes and Whites were encountering as a result of the lynchings that were taking place in the United States.¹² Not surprisingly, however, Miss Wells was primarily interested in

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Ibid., 382, 383.

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Ida B. Wells grew up in Memphis, Tennessee. As a young woman she taught school and was deeply involved in newspaper work. After losing her teaching position as a result of an article that she wrote criticizing the Negro schools in her district, newspaper work became her livelihood. While thus engaged, three of her close friends were lynched in Memphis on March 9, 1892. As a result of this, Miss Wells began her crusade against lynching. She carried out this crusade by newspaper articles and by lecturing on the subject of lynchings.

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Alfreda M. Duster, editor, Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), XIX, 78.

the Negro lynchings. Consequently, Mrs. Mathews and Miss Lyons invited a group of their friends to meet and to assist in arranging a testimonial for Miss Wells on October 5, 1892. Ida B. Wells noted that several very important things occurred as a result of this testimonial. First, she received an invitation to accompany Miss Catherine Impey of Somerset, England, a Quaker by faith, on a tour of England, Scotland and Wales. The purpose of the tour was to inform people of the "color problem" in America, and especially to call attention to the numerous lynchings that were occurring. Consequently, Ida B. Wells spent the months of April and May, 1893 informing the British public about the lynchings that were taking place in America.¹³

Second, Miss Wells, received a sum of five-hundred dollars in order that she could start another newspaper. This talented young lady had previously owned a newspaper, the Free Speech and Headlight, in Memphis, Tennessee, but in 1892 her newspaper was destroyed by a mob. The participants apparently were annoyed by her outspoken stand against lynching. The third, and perhaps the most important result was the decision of the women who attended the testimonial to form a permanent club in 1892. This was the first Negro woman's club in any city that was not associated with a church organization or a secret society.¹⁴

¹³

Ibid., XIX, 82.

¹⁴

Ibid., 81.

The New Era Club of Boston, Massachusetts, organized in February, 1893, was another club formed during this time period. One of the most influential Negro women's organizations in the country, the major objective of this club was to educate the American public regarding the progress that Negro Americans had attained. In order to accomplish this goal, club members collected information relating to the Negro's progress and published this knowledge in the form of tracts, pamphlets, and newsletters. Besides this, the New Era Club took the initiative to work for reforms that would benefit the Negro community. Furthermore, this club, composed solely of Negro women, was the first organization of its kind to publish a monthly newspaper, the Woman's Era, also referred to as the New Era.¹⁵

It is difficult to ascertain the exact role of Miss Wells in the formation of the New Era Club, the first specifically organized as a civic club. According to Miss Wells, Mrs. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, one of the major organizers of the New Era Club and an associate of Julia Ward Howe, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, attended the testimonial that was given for her. As a

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Fannie Barrier Williams, "Club Movement Among Negro Women," contained in Progress of a Race or the Remarkable Advancement of the American Negro From the Bondage of Slavery, Ignorance and Poverty to the Freedom of Citizenship, Intelligence, Affluence, Honor and Trust, by J.W. Gibson and H.W. Crogman (Florida: Mnemosyne Publishing Inc., reprinted 1969), 207-208. Williams, "Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," contained in A New Negro for a New Century, 390.

result of the work done by Mrs. Mathews and Miss Lyons, Mrs. Ruffin conceived of the idea of the New Era Club. Miss Wells helped her organize the club after she returned from her speaking tour of England, Scotland and Wales.¹⁶ Although this explanation appears to be rather plausible, it is contradicted by certain very important facts. First, the New Era Club was actually organized before Miss Wells departed for the British Isles. Second, Mrs. Ruffin, the wife of a distinguished judge, George L. Ruffin, was a member of several influential clubs, some which were composed mainly of White women. It can be argued, that her involvement in these clubs gave this dedicated woman the background and the training to establish such a venture. She also possessed the drive, the skill, and the desire to form such a club. Although it is very likely that the impetus for the formation of the club may have been derived from the testimonial, the organization of the club was done by Boston women. Furthermore, only Miss Wells mentioned the fact that she was instrumental in the formation of the club. Nevertheless, the major factor to be considered was that the club was formed and that it became one of the most influential among Negro women. The monthly journal, the New Era, did much to activate Negro women in other states so that they too could follow the doctrine of self-help and improve their conditions.¹⁷

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Duster, (editor), Crusade for Justice, XIX, 81.

¹⁷

Williams, "Club Movement Among Negro Women," contained in Progress of a Race, 207-208.

Miss Wells, meanwhile, was active in a variety of projects and programs designed to improve her race. During 1893, a World's Fair was held in Chicago and most Negroes felt that they had been slighted severely when it was learned that members of their race, requesting participation as individuals as well as groups, were denied any degree of involvement in the activities of the Fair. Miss Wells, who had just returned from her speaking tour of the British Isles, Ferdinand L. Barnett, an attorney, and Frederick Douglass, a leading reformer, attempted to inform the public of this slight by publishing The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition--The Afro-American's Contribution to Columbian Literature.¹⁸ This was an eighty-one page booklet. Their efforts were successful in that Negroes were granted a booth at the Columbian Exposition. Also, as a result of this activity, several new woman's clubs were formed.¹⁹

As early as 1889, Susan B. Anthony, the noted suffragist and reformer, had begun conferring and planning with influential women in the nation's capital to accomplish the goal of participating in the Chicago World's Fair. In order to accomplish this dream, the women who were working with Miss Anthony began holding parlor meetings. Miss Anthony was very closely associated with

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Duster, editor, Crusade for Justice, XX.

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Davis, Lifting as They Climb, 5.

the woman's suffrage movement; a movement that was not highly esteemed by many men or women. Consequently, she felt that it would be advisable if she remained in the background. Despite these meetings, when the bill requesting financial support for the Columbian Exposition was introduced in Congress in January, 1890, no provision was made for women to have an active role in the planning of this event. After this was learned, Miss Anthony wrote a petition and her co-workers obtained the signatures of the wives and daughters of congressmen, supreme court justices, military personnel and other government officials. This petition was presented to Congress, and, although individual women were not named to the Board of Managers, women were appointed by the members of the board. As a result of this, a representative number of women were on planning committees. Although the women were participants in the events, they also conducted a Woman's Congress. Without the organization and foresight of Miss Anthony and her co-workers, not only the Negroes but also all women would have found participation in this event difficult to secure.

The Chicago Women's Club was one of the clubs organized as a result of the Chicago World's Fair. To a large

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Ida Husted Harper, The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony, 742-747.

extent, the development of this club was due to the efforts of Miss Wells. Earlier, a number of the more influential Negro men of Chicago had formed the Tourgee Club, named in honor of Judge Albion W. Tourgee, a White state judge friendly to Negroes in North Carolina during the reconstruction period and author of several books. The major reason for the establishment of the club and the erection of the clubhouse was to provide a place where important Negro visitors could be entertained. Eventually the managers of the clubhouse set aside Thursday afternoons for the use by women. To the dismay of the management, however, the Negro women of Chicago failed to take advantage of this opportunity. Consequently, Miss Wells was invited to speak to the women. During her speech, she informed the women of the club movement in the East and urged to women of Chicago not only to make use of the clubhouse but also to form a club of their own. Encouraged by Ida B. Wells, the women organized the Chicago Women's Club. Later, while Miss Wells was on her second speaking tour of the British Isles, the club changed its name to the Ida B. Wells Club in honor of this exceptional young woman.

Another club of Negro women that was formed as a direct result of efforts to participate in the Chicago World's

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Duster, (editor), Crusade for Justice, XIX, 120-124.

Fair was the Colored Woman's League of Washington, D.C. This club was formed in 1892, and its structure was patterned after the General Federation of Women's Clubs. The women who formed the Colored Woman's League of Washington, D.C., hoped that they too could eventually have a national organization. Consequently, they attempted to develop a strong central core of leadership.²² This club, in the true spirit of self-help, instituted many programs to improve the living conditions in their community. According to Mary Church Terrell, one of the young women who was instrumental in the formation of the club, the fledgling organization was extremely fortunate in that most of the women members were well educated for their day.²³ Many of these women, for example, were teachers and extremely interested in youngsters. As such they started kindergartens, day nurseries, sewing classes, and mother's meetings. During the mother's meeting the women discussed the problems of motherhood and homemaking. As a result of these discussions, many of the women were able to learn new ways of accomplishing tedious tasks as well as learning the value of a balanced diet and the necessity of cleanliness. Perhaps the most ambitious project that was started, however, was a night school. Classes were offered in German,

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Davis, Lifting As They Climb, 20. Rayford W. Logan, The Negro in the United States: A Brief History (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1957), 57.

23

Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World, 148.

English literature, and other subjects. Within a short period of time, this organization had a larger membership²⁴ than any other Negro women's club in America.

Many other Negro women's organizations formed between 1890 and 1895 throughout the United States and all of these²⁵ associations stressed the spirit of self-help. Also, all of the clubs were searching for ways to improve the quality of life for the Negro people. They did this by temperance work, penny savings banks, and by initiating reforms. The women, whatever their educational backgrounds or their organizational abilities, were intense, sincere, and extremely dedicated. Besides those already noted, a few of the clubs that proved to be successful ventures were the Harper Woman's Club of Jefferson City, Missouri, and the Phyllis Wheatley Club of New Orleans, Louisiana, and the²⁶ Woman's Club of Omaha, Nebraska.

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Williams, "Club Movement Among Negro Women," contained in Progress of a Race, 207, 386-387. Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World, 148.

25

Ibid., 205-206. Williams, "Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," contained in A New Negro for a New Century, 392-393. "Efforts for Social Betterment Among Negro Americans," The Fourteenth Annual Conference, contained in The Atlanta University Publications Nos. 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 46.

26

Williams, "Club Movement Among Negro Women," contained in Progress of a Race, 205-206.

Unfortunately, many of the early clubs soon ceased to exist. The major reasons for their quick demise were the lack of experienced leadership and the failure to establish, at the time of formation, clear but flexible guidelines. Furthermore, there was a diffusion of objectives within these clubs. The members attempted too much in a short period of time.²⁷

Even though some clubs failed in the initial stages of the movement, this fact in itself had some beneficial results. It forced the women to ascertain the reason for the demise of the groups. While examining some of the defunct Negro clubs, a few of the ladies also studied the structure of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. They soon discerned that there was a need for a strong central leadership. Consequently, they reasoned that they should create an organization capable of supporting fledgling clubs in the varied states until these clubs were able to establish a firm foundation.

Three astute women in particular did have the vision to take the leadership in the establishment of a national organization. They were Mrs. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin of the New Era Club of Boston and two organizers and leaders of the Colored Woman's League of Washington, D.C.,

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Ibid., 205-206.

Mrs. Mary Church Terrell and Mrs. Helen A. Cook, a woman of²⁸ culture, wealth, and experience. Their efforts were instrumental in establishing the first national organizations of Negro women.

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Williams, "Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," contained in A New Negro for a New Century, 386-387.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS OF NEGRO WOMEN

In 1893, Mary Church Terrell, a teacher in the District of Columbia and a member of the Colored Women's League of Washington, D.C., proposed that the Negro club women of America form a national organization. In an article, "What the Colored Women's League Will Do," which appeared in Ringwood's Afro-American Journal of Fashion in June, 1893, Mrs. Terrell urged that the separate clubs of Negro women then in existence join together and form a national association similar to the General Federation of Women's Clubs. It was her contention that with a national base the Negro women would be able to combine their resources and accomplish numerous objectives that would benefit the race.¹ As a result of this article, leaders representing clubs from several states asked that their organizations be affiliated with the Colored Women's League of Washington, D.C. Some of the states that were

¹ Rayford W. Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir 1877-1901 (New York: The Dial Press, Inc., 1954) 335-336. Mary Church Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World (Washington, D.C.: Ransdell, Inc., 1940), 149.

represented as a result of this union were Missouri, Colorado, Virginia, West Virginia, South Carolina and Pennsylvania. Most clubs, however, preferred to remain apathetic. Consequently, the Colored Woman's League of Washington, D.C. did not develop a true national character until 1894.²

In the intervening period it was the National Council of Women, a predominately White organization, that was largely responsible for the Colored Women's League of Washington, D.C. ultimately adopting a national character. The National Council of Women, it must be remembered, was formed in 1888 under the guidance of Susan B. Anthony, an internationally recognized reformer. The purpose of this organization was to join together national associations of women engaged in the trades, professions, reform movements and other social activities. It was hoped that in this manner women with diverse interests would become cognizant of the work done by women in other fields and that support and cooperation for the different areas of work could be attained.³

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Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World, 149. Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Club Movement Among Colored Women of America," contained in A New Negro for a New Century: An Accurate Up-to-Date Record of the Upward Struggles of the Negro Race, by Booker T. Washington (Chicago: American Publishing House, 1902), 287. A. Anna J. Jones Cooper, "National Association of Colored Women," Southern Workmen in Hampton School Record, September, 1896, vol. XXV, 173-174.

³
Ida Husted Harper, The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony, 632-633, 639.

Toward the end of 1894 Mrs. Rachel Foster Avery, corresponding secretary of the National Council of Women, invited the Colored Women's League of Washington, D.C. to send fraternal delegates to the triennial meeting that was to be held in February, 1895. In effect, this was an invitation for the League to join the National Council of Women. Consequently, the officers of the League wrote letters to the various member organizations in the different states and explained the invitation. As a result of this correspondence and a subsequent executive meeting held in Washington, D.C., a number of Negro women, led by Mary Church Terrell, accepted the invitation. In order to do so they formed the National League of Colored Women. At the same time officers of the newly created National League as well as the delegates to the meeting of the National Council of Women were chosen. The first national organization of colored women thus came into existence. Significantly, the formation of this national organization came into being without a national convention. The Colored Women's League had never called a convention and this fact was later used to discredit the League's "national" base. Despite the fact that the League did not call a convention, the member clubs held regular meetings and the officers were aware of the situation.

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Cooper, "National Association of Colored Women," Southern Workman and Hampton School Record, XXV, 174. "Club Activities-Colored Woman's League," contained in Black Women in White America: A Documentary History edited by Gerda Lerner (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 451.

Mary Church Terrell was not the only Negro woman who was astute enough to recognize the need for a national organization among Negro women. Another woman who did was Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin of the New Era Club of Boston and editor of the club's journal, the Woman's Era. Using her position as editor to its ultimate advantage, Mrs. Ruffin began, during the summer of 1894, to agitate openly for the formation of a national organization of Negro women. In order that the subscribers of the journal, who were not only from Boston but also from throughout Massachusetts and from several other states, could express their opinion on the subject of a national organization, Mrs. Ruffin reserved a column in the journal for the publication of their comments. In this manner, the readers were able to learn the sentiments of other concerned club women. Such a column also helped expose readers of the journal to the pros and cons of unification. It was generally conceded that a national body was not only practical but also essential if the club women truly hoped to carry out their plans to elevate the Negro race. They had already seen the demise of many clubs due to the lack of leadership and guidance. Furthermore, many women felt that if a national organization had been in existence at the time of the Chicago World's Fair, some of the confusion and disappointments in relation to Negro exhibitors and Negro displays would have been eliminated. Besides this, it was felt that if a national convention was held, even if it was

decided that a permanent body would not be formed, the convention itself would eliminate some of the obstacles encountered by Negro women as a result of racial prejudice. A convention would help to show, for example, that Negro women were concerned, intelligent and rational human beings, characteristics which some people of the Negro as well as the White race denied.⁵

Even though the club women recognized the need for a national base, a catalyst was needed before they began to make overt plans to implement this dream. The major stimulus that would bring these hopes to fruition occurred in 1895. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, the young reformer-journalist who was attempting to end the lynch law in America, again traveled to the British Isles. Her oratory aroused the English public and stimulated the formation of the British Anti-Lynching Society. Her work abroad did not go unnoticed in the United States. John J. Jacks, a Missouri editor and president of the Missouri Press Association, receiving reports from England, became alarmed at the growing support that Miss Wells was generating for the American

⁵ Williams, "Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," contained in A New Negro for a New Century, 396-397.

Negro while she was abroad. Consequently, in the spring of 1895, he wrote an open letter addressed to Miss Florence Belgarnie of England, a member of the British Anti-Lynching Society and a friend of Ida B. Wells-Barnett and of Susan B. Anthony, the noted suffragist. In his widely publicized letter, the Missouri editor attempted to defend the actions of some Southerners while negating the work of Miss Wells.

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Mary White Ovington, The Walls Came Tumbling Down (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 124. It should be pointed out that while Miss Ovington's book is valuable for its substance, it is unreliable in relation to names, dates, and places. Furthermore, there is some confusion as to the name of the Missouri editor. All the sources that were consulted were in agreement on his last name-Jacks. The confusion is in relation to his first name and middle initial. He has been referred to as James J. Jacks and John W. Jacks. The majority of the sources consulted, however, referred to him as John J. Jacks.

Ida B. Wells married Ferdinand L. Barnett in 1894.

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Lerner, Black Women in White America: A Documentary History, 436. "No Color Line at Milwaukie Biennial. Mrs. Ruffin, A Brilliant Colored Woman of Boston, Has Her Credentials as a Delegate. Club She Represents a Worthy One and Duly Qualified Member of the Federation," Chicago Times-Herald, June 8, 1900, section 5, p. 3. Fannie Barrier Williams, "Club Movement Among Negro Women," contained in Progress of a Race or The Remarkable Advancement of the American Negro From the Bondage of Slavery, Ignorance and Poverty to the Freedom of Citizenship, Intelligence, Affluence, Honor and Trust by J.W. Gibson and H.W. Croghan (Florida: Mnemonysyne Publishing, Inc., reprinted 1969), 209. Alfreda M. Duster, editor, Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 242. Most sources claim that the letter was written to Miss Belgarnie. One source, however, stated that it was sent to the British Anti-Lynching Society, while another claimed that Jack's statements were issued at an address of the Missouri Press Association, of which he was president.

He stated that "the Negroes in this country were wholly devoid of morality, the women were prostitutes and all were natural thieves and liars."⁸

Not surprisingly, the Afro-American club women were infuriated by these statements. Throughout the United States, mass meetings of Colored women were held in order to refute the charges leveled by the president of the Missouri Press Association. Mrs. Ruffin of the New Era Club of Boston was especially active. She began making arrangements for calling the first national convention of Negro club women. The express purpose of this convention was to repudiate the anti-Negro statements contained in Jacks' letter. The gathering was scheduled to last for three days, July 29 through 31, 1895.⁹

On the appointed day, delegates representing twenty-five clubs from ten different states assembled at Berkely

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Lerner, Black Women in White America: A Documentary History, 436.

⁹
Williams, "Club Movement Among Negro Women," contained in Progress of a Race, 209. "No Color Line at Milwaukee Biennial. Mrs. Ruffin, A Brilliant Colored Woman of Boston, Has Her Credentials as a Delegate. Club She Represents A Worthy One, and Duly Qualified Member of the Federation," Chicago Times-Herald, June 3, 1900, section 5, p. 3. Williams, "The Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," contained in A New Negro for a New Century, 396-397, 400. Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought, 335-336.

Hall in Boston, Massachusetts. The women in attendance were considered by most Negroes to be the best representatives of Negro womanhood. Many of them were members of some of the most influential White woman's clubs. They were sincere reformers and their dedication and devotion to easing racial problems in America was well known. A large percentage of the women were college graduates, and many either were or later became teachers, writers and artists. A few of the women were moderately wealthy. The women were keenly aware of the problems that faced the Negro race, and they were brave enough to attempt changes that they felt would help Negroes become productive contributors to the development of American life. Primarily, they hoped the conference would help to foster a different attitude toward the Negro, especially the Negro woman. Jacks, in his letter, had made serious statements about the Negro woman and her morality. The Missouri editor verbalized feelings

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Some of the clubs that were represented at the Boston Convention were: Woman's Era Club, Boston, Massachusetts; Colored Woman's League, Washington, D.C.; Women's Loyal Union, New York and Brooklyn; Colored Woman's League, Kansas City, Missouri; Phyllis Wheatly Club, New Orleans, Louisiana; Women's Club, Omaha, Nebraska; Women's Afro-American Union, Flushing, Long Island, New York; Women's Club, Jefferson City, Missouri; Tuskegee Woman's Club, Tuskegee, Alabama; Women's Club, Los Angeles, California; W.C.T.U., Charlotte, North Carolina; Working Women's League, Providence, Rhode Island; Women's Progressive Club, Salem, Massachusetts; Belle Phoebus Club, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. "Meeting of Colored Women. Representatives of Many Societies Have Their Initial Session in Boston," Chicago Times-Herald, July 30, 1895, p. 12.

shared by many Whites of that period. Therefore, the women felt that it was imperative for them to discuss, study and repudiate the charges presented by John J. Jacks.¹¹

At the meeting, a significant event occurred. Shortly after the women gathered in Boston, they realized that the convention would be a wasted venture if they only confined themselves to the remarks of the Missouri editor. Consequently, they decided to enlarge the scope of the convention and consider other matters that were of particular interest to women, especially Negro women.¹²

In her opening address, Mrs. Ruffin conveyed these thoughts. She felt that the convention should provide an opportunity for the delegates to confer with each other on a wide variety of matters that they considered important. From this interchange of ideas, she hoped that the club women would encourage each other in their chosen areas. Mrs. Ruffin stated further that the Negro women were not drawing the color line; all women who were interested in the welfare of the Negro were welcome to participate. Among the White women who did was Lucy Stone, a noted

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Williams, "The Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," A New Negro for a New Century, 397, 400-401. Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought, 335-336. "Meeting of Colored Women. Representatives of Many Societies Have Their Initial Session in Boston," Chicago Times-Herald, July 30, 1895, p. 12.

12

Williams, "The Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," A New Negro for a New Century, 397, 400-401.

abolitionist and advocate of the woman's rights movement. Also present was Miss Stone's husband, Henry B. Blackwell,¹³ a leading abolitionist and a well-known reformer.

The infamous letter written by Jacks generated several hours of spirited discussions. Resolutions were passed denouncing the Missouri editor and repudiating the allegations that he had made. The women also passed a resolution expressing their appreciation to Florence Belgarnie for the concern that she had shown for the Negro¹⁴ people living in the United States.

Another item that was considered by the convention delegates was the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, W.C.T.U.⁷. Mrs. Libbie C. Anthony of Jefferson City, Missouri and a member of the Woman's Club of that city, spoke of the work that the W.C.T.U. was accomplishing, especially in the South. She also declared that Miss

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Conference of Colored Women. "A Representative Gathering in Berkely Hall Today-Plans for a National Organization," Boston Evening Transcript, July 29, 1895, p. 3. Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, Lifting as They Climb (n.p., n.d.) 17-19. "The Beginnings of the National Club Movement, 'Address of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin to the First National Conference of Colored Women (1895),' " contained in Black Women in White America, edited by Lerner, 441-443. "Meeting of Colored Women. Representatives of Many Societies Have Their Initial Session in Boston," Chicago Times-Herald, July 30, 1895, p. 3.

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"In Secret Session: Long Discussions of the Colored Women's Conference - Resolutions on the Jack Letter," Boston Evening Transcript, July 30, 1895, p. 3. "Meeting of Colored Women. Representatives of Many Societies Have Their Initial Session in Boston," Chicago Times-Herald, July 30, 1895, p. 12.

Francis E. Willard, one of the major organizers of the W.C.T.U., was a true friend of the Negro people. Although most of the women in attendance were aware of the work of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and supported it in theory, if not always in practice, their feelings concerning Miss Willard differed.¹⁵

In the highly spirited debate that ensued regarding the temperance leader, Mrs. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin argued that Miss Willard could have taken a stronger stand on the subject of lynchings. Furthermore, it was Mrs. Ruffin's contention that from interpretation of Francis Willard's comments, lynching was almost a necessary evil. Mrs. Florida R. Ridley, also of Boston and the daughter of Mrs. Ruffin, offered tangible evidence by quoting from various newspaper and magazine articles. Many delegates agreed that this material substantiated the allegations made against Francis E. Willard, and some of the women became disenchanted with Miss Willard as a result of these statements. They passed, nevertheless, a resolution endorsing the work of the W.T.C.U. This was due mainly to the fact that the women were quick to realize that the

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"Did Miss Willard Hedge? Her Sentiments on Lynching Not Quite Clear. Closing Sessions of the National Conference of Colored Women," Boston Evening Transcript, July 31, 1895, p. 3. "Colored Women and Miss Willard. Endorsed the Temperance Work But Not Her Views on Lynching," New York Times, August 1, 1895, p. 14. "Mediates for Miss Willard. Mrs. Libbee B. Anthony Seeks to Set Her Right with Colored Women," Chicago Times-Herald, August 1, 1895, p. 10.

work of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union was extremely beneficial to their race. Many of the women felt that some members of the race spent their money too freely on alcoholic beverages. Consequently, they felt that personal prejudices concerning Miss Willard should not cloud their view of her organization.

Other subjects discussed enthusiastically by the delegates ranged from higher education for women to the convict lease system. The abuses of this system especially concerned the women because of the attending brutality of the system. Perhaps the most important topic that was brought up for discussion during this convention was the formation of a national organization. Although the New Era Club of Boston took the initiative to call the convention and was also instrumental in mentally preparing the women to see the benefits of a national body by advocating a union through its journal, the Woman's Era, it did not expect the other clubs to affiliate with it. The New Era club women recognized that each club was proud of

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"Did Miss Willard Hedge? Her Sentiments on Lynching Not Quite Clear. Closing Sessions of the National Conference of Colored Women, Boston Evening Transcript, July 31, 1895, p. 3. "Colored Women and Miss Willard. Endorse Her Temperance Work but not Her Views on Lynching." New York Times, August 1, 1895, p. 14.

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"Did Miss Willard Hedge? Her Sentiments on Lynching Not Quite Clear. Closing Sessions of the National Conference of Colored Women," Boston Evening Transcript, July 31, 1895, p. 3.

its own accomplishments, which ranged from the fight against lynching to the establishment of homes for the elderly. Consequently, in order for the body to truly reflect a national nature, each club should be allowed to retain its autonomy. A few delegates argued, however, that a completely new association was imperative. In this manner, the more astute members present realized that the better known women from the nation could lead this august
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body.

Although the above reasoning was sound, there was a slight problem. When the call for a convention had been issued by the New Era Club, members from the National Colored Women's League made plans to send representatives to the convention. It was their intention to ask the assembled delegates to approve the status of the National League and to adopt its name. They hoped to accomplish this by pointing to the fact that Mrs. Terrell was the first to publicly suggest that a national organization was needed. Also, the delegates from the National League intended to show that
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they already had a national base and status.

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Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World, 148-149. Williams, "Club Movement Among Negro Women," contained in Progress of a Race, 209.

19
Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World, 150. Cooper, "National Association of Colored Women," contained in Southern Workman and Hampton School Record, XXV, September, 1896, p. 174.

Mrs. Terrell and Mrs. Cook, the delegates representing the National League, conveyed these facts to the convention members. It was, however, the contention of several delegates that the National League was in reality several local clubs, working on a local level, for the benefit of a particular locality. In other words, the League was national in name only. Carrying the matter one step further, it was pointed out that the delegates at the convention represented more clubs than were affiliated with the National League. As a result, some of the delegates felt that the League should join forces with the convention delegates and form a new organization independent of any existing association. Furthermore, it was quickly noted that since the National League did not issue the call for a convention, its proposal for unification under its name was out of order.

Consequently, on the last day of the convention, after all arguments had been heard, the Negro women agreed to form a new organization called the National Federation of Afro-American Women. The name that they chose reflected their strong desire to establish their identity. The delegates representing the National League of Colored Women refused, however, to join the newly-created National Federation. Although many of the women felt that this

action was one of pettiness, it should be pointed out that Mrs. Cook, president of the National League, did not have the authority to commit the League. When the call for the convention was issued, no one expected that a new national organization would be formed; consequently, no provisions had been made by the League members for such an event.²¹

The officers of the newly formed National Federation of Afro-American Women were some of the most competent leaders among the Negro women. In the selection of these women to head the new organization, there was no contest. Mrs. Booker T. Washington of Tuskegee, Alabama was elected president. The women chosen as vice-presidents were Mrs. Mary H. Dickenson of Providence, Rhode Island, Mrs. Cruen of Charleston, South Carolina, Mrs. Mahanett of Omaha, Nebraska, and Mrs. Mable Garner of New York. The first corresponding secretary was Mrs. Lizzie C. Carter of New York, while the recording secretary was Mrs. Florida R. Ridley of Boston. Mrs. Libby C. Anthony of Jefferson City, Missouri was elected treasurer. Mrs. Victoria Earle Mathews of New York was made chairperson of the executive

21

Cooper, "National Association of Colored Women," Southern Workman and Hampton School Record, XXV, September, 1896, p. 174.

committee. The Woman's Era was designated the official organ of the association. ²² The purpose of the National Federation of Afro-American Women, as formulated by the members of the convention, was to work for the "elevation, progress and moral improvement of colored women in America." ²³

Not everyone was satisfied with the outcome. Mrs. Booker T. Washington, president of the new body, and many of the other thoughtful women did not wish to create any ill will among the group members. They were cognizant that Mrs. Cook did not have the authority to consolidate with the National Federation. Therefore, in one of the incorporating resolutions the women stated that they were "looking towards union with the National League already formed." ²⁴

The significance of this first national convention of Negro women cannot be overlooked. For many of the women, this was the first time that they became aware of the work done by other club women in the different states. In many cases, their provincial attitude toward problems

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"To Form a National Society, Colored Women in Session at Boston Decided Upon a Federation," Chicago Times-Herald, August 2, 1895, p. 10. Lerner, editor, Black Women in White America: A Documentary History, 440. Williams, "Club Movement Among Negro Women," contained in Progress of a Race, 209.

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Editorial, Washington Bee, August 17, 1895, p. 2.

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Cooper, "National Association of Colored Women," Southern Workman and Hampton School Record, XXV, September, 1896, p. 174.

broadened. Intemperance, inappropriate child care, homeless children, and other local problems took on national significance. From the exchange of ideas that this gathering provided, the women were able to discuss the methods that worked in some instances and analyze the reasons for failure in other cases. In so doing they gained hope for the future and confidence that through their efforts the Negro race would greatly benefit. Another important factor was that the ladies did not complain about the existing conditions but rather sought means by which they could better these conditions. When the club women returned home it was with a new feeling of vigor and unshakable confidence that through their efforts life for themselves and others would be better. The club movement among Negro women, that had in some cases been imitative of White women's clubs, now had direction. The new organization was sympathetic to the needs and the problems of Negro club women and open to offer guidelines for action.

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The only disappointing feature of the convention was that there were two national organizations of Negro women, instead of one. Mary Margaret Washington, the wife of

 25

August Meier, Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1963), 135. Williams, "Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," contained in A New Negro For a New Century, 384, 393, 396, 400.

Booker T. Washington and president of the National Federation of Afro-American Women, and Helen A. Cook, president of the National League of Colored Women, immediately began making plans to open discussions on consolidation. Both organizations appointed committees to consider an acceptable basis for unification. The joint committee met during the Colored Women's Congress that was held during the Cotton States Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia during the fall of 1895.²⁶

Apparently the discussions were fruitful, for shortly after the meeting of the joint committee, the National League began preparing for its first national convention. The convention was scheduled for July 14 through July 16, 1896 in Washington, D.C. The major purpose for the calling of the convention was to discuss the possibility of unification. As such, an invitation was sent to the National Federation asking that representatives be sent to participate in some of the discussions. Due to this breakthrough, the National Federation decided to re-schedule its planned convention from December in Nashville, Tennessee to July 20 through 24, 1896 in Washington, D.C. This was just one week after the opening of the National League of Colored Women's convention.²⁷

26

Cooper, "National Association of Colored Women," Southern Workman and Hampton School Record, XXV, September 26, 1896, p. 173-174.

27

Cooper, "National Association of Colored Women," Southern Workman and Hampton School Record, XXV, September 26, 1896, p. 173-174.

The National League held its first convention at the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. There were approximately one hundred delegates in attendance, representing clubs from the cities of Baltimore, Maryland; Kansas City, Missouri; Denver, Colorado; Cambridge, Massachusetts; Harper's Ferry, West Virginia; Saint Paul, Minnesota; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Newport, Rhode Island; Norfolk, Virginia; and Washington, D.C. Although the major purpose of the gathering was to consider the advisability of a merger with the National Federation, the women discussed other topics and passed several resolutions.

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Lynchings, for example, were denounced in strong terms and the women recommended that laws be passed that would hold counties responsible for the lynchings that occurred within their boundaries. The delegates proposed that the families of the persons lynched receive large indemnities from the particular county involved. In this way the delegates hoped that lynching would become an

 28

"Morality Their Creed. First Session of Colored Women's Convention. An Address by Mrs Douglass. She Thinks That Justice Could Be Aided by the Placing of Women Upon the Police Court Bench - Report of the Credentials Committee Shows Delegates from Many Cities - Appointment of Standing Committees - Progress of Work in Several Branches," The Washington Post, July 15, 1896, p. 7. Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World, 150. "Colored Women's League. An Interesting Program Arranged for the Meeting Tomorrow." Washington Evening Star, July 13, 1896, p. 8.

economic matter, and, as such, would force the counties to
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 be more vigilant in its enforcement of the law.

Another topic that made for a lively discussion concerned discrimination toward the Negro. It was the contention of the delegates that not only the Whites but also the Negroes had struggled to maintain and preserve American institutions. They considered it a definite insult that despite their actions, some states had passed laws requiring separate transportation carriers for the Negroes. They were also disillusioned by the refusal of the hotel and culinary establishments to accommodate them. Furthermore, they were unhappy about the lack of Black representation on school boards. The women were most upset, however, with the Supreme Court's Plessey v. Ferguson decision. This decision, which became a landmark in American jurisprudence, accepted the principle of separate but equal accommodations for the Negro, even though in the majority of cases, separate facilities were rarely equal. The women charged that these actions were "unjust, un-Christian, and unworthy of the high claims of America." They demanded that

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"Mrs. Cook Re-Elected. Officers for a Year Chosen by Colored Woman's League. An Address by Bishop Arnett Reviews the Life of Bishop Payne and Cites it as One Particularly (sic) Worthy of Emulation on the Part of Colored Boys - Mrs. Anna E. Murphy Pays a Tribute to the Memory of Kate Field - A Set of Resolutions were Adopted." The Washington Post, July 17, 1896, p. 4.

the Negro be accorded the same rights as other citizens living in America. The women also felt that special recognition should be granted to Justice Harlan of the United States Supreme Court for the support that he showed for the Negro through his dissent in this case.³⁰

Besides the above matters, the delegates endorsed the work of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. They also decided to do everything possible to promote higher education for Negroes, especially Negro women. Besides this, they gave recognition to the work that Atlanta University of Atlanta, Georgia, was doing in compiling statistics about Negroes living in the cities.³¹

The major item for consideration, however, was consolidation with National Federation. It was the decision of the club women that comprised the National League that, if a merger could be effected without the complete loss of their autonomy, or the eradication of their goals and principles, unification would be acceptable. Most of the delegates agreed with Mrs. Blanch K. Bruce, wife of the Senator from Mississippi, that maintenance of two national organizations would be a waste of energy and strength. Two organizations would lead to a duplication of projects

30

Ibid., 4.

31

Ibid., 4.

and more importantly, a division of talent and leadership. They considered this last point especially detrimental, since there were very few women of color who had the training and ability to lead the Negro club women of America.

Consequently, during an executive session, a committee of seven was appointed to meet with the National Federation of Afro-American Women. The members selected were Miss A. V. Thompkins of Washington, D.C., Miss Julia F. Jones of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Miss Coralie L. Franklin of Washington, D.C., Miss Anna Holland Jones of Kansas City, Missouri, Mrs. Ruth Collett of Baltimore, Maryland, Mrs. Florence A. Barbour of Norfolk, Virginia, Mrs. E. E. Williams of New York City. Mrs. F. J. Jackson and Miss E. G. Merrill were chosen as alternates. It was hoped that the National Federation would appoint a similar committee of seven to meet with the committee chosen by the National League. It was the intention of the delegates of the National League that both committees be given the power to act and that the meetings would begin on the second day of the convention of the National Federation.

32

Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World, 150.
Davis, Lifting As They Climb, 20-21.

33

"Mrs. Cook Re-Elected. Officers for a Year Chosen by Colored Woman's League. An Address By Bishop Arnett Reviews the Life of Bishop Payne and Cites it as One Particularly (sic) Worthy of Emulation on the Part of Colored Boys - Mrs. Anna E. Murphy Pays a Tribute to the Memory of Kate Field - A Set of Resolutions were Adopted," The Washington Post, July 17, 1896, p. 4. "Second Day's Session," The Washington Bee, July 25, 1896, p. 4.

The day before the National Federation met at the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., Mrs. Booker T. Washington, president of the organization, spoke with reporters. She stated that the major reason for the calling of the convention in Washington, D.C. was to enable the officers and members of the two organizations to meet and hopefully bring about a union between the two groups. She stated that she would do everything in her power to accomplish unification. She contended that the work embarked upon by the organizations was too important to be neglected due to group jealousies and dissension. But not all of the delegates held Mrs. Washington's views. Some of the officers claimed that the National Federation was the larger of the two organizations and was the more practical, since it worked very closely with the unenlightened members of the Negro race in an attempt to improve their standard of living. Such printed statements in the newspapers did not make for a conciliatory attitude. The majority of the women, however, as well as the editors of the Washington Bee, an influential Negro newspaper, were

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"May Unite Their Forces. Officers of the Two Colored Women's Associations Concur. Second Annual Convention Today of the National Federation. Following Closely Upon the Convention of the National League," The Washington Post, July 20, 1896, p. 10. "They Say," The Washington Bee, July 18, 1896, p. 4. "Cannot Agree," The Washington Bee, July 18, 1896, p. 4. "Mrs. Booker T. Washington Presides," Boston Evening Transcript, July 20, 1896, p. 10. "General News," The Washington Bee, July 18, 1896, p. 2.

The first convention of the National Federation of Afro-American Women was a memorable occasion in many respects. Harriet Tubman was present. During the American Civil War, she was a conductor on the underground railroad and was reputed to have never lost a passenger. Also in attendance were Mrs. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mrs. John M. Langston, the wife of the noted congressman from Virginia, Mrs. B. K. Bruce, wife of Senator Bruce, Mrs. Booker T. Washington, wife of the president of Tuskegee Institute of Alabama, as well as Mrs. Rosetta Sprague, the only daughter
35
of Frederick Douglass.

According to the committee on credentials, there was more than a fifty percent increase in the number of clubs represented. The previous year, there had been twenty-five clubs affiliated with the national body; a year later, 1896, there were sixty-seven clubs. A total of fifty-four

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"Colored Women in Convention. Sixty-Seven Clubs Represented in a Washington Gathering," New York Times, July 21, 1896, p. 10. Duster, editor, Crusade For Justice, 243. "The Afro-American Woman. Hon. John W. Ross, District Commissioner Welcomes Them to the National Capital in a Timely Speech. Mrs. Booker T. Washington, Presided," The Washington Bee, July 25, 1896, p. 4.

delegates attended the convention, with some of the women representing more than one club. Boston, Atlanta, and New York City, sent the largest delegations.

The main objective of the convention was to discuss the work already begun by the clubs and to make plans for future work that would better the conditions of the Negro people in the industrial as well as the religious sectors of their lives. Clubs belonging to the National Federation were engaged in "mission, rescue [of women in

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There is some discrepancy as to the number of clubs represented at the convention. One source claims there were thirty-four clubs while all the others contend that sixty-seven clubs were in attendance. "Colored Women in Convention. Sixty-Seven Clubs Represented in a Washington Gathering," New York Times, July 21, 1896, p. 10. "Assisting Their Race. Second Annual Convention of Afro-American Women. Delegates from Many States. The Sessions Presided Over By Mrs. Booker T. Washington of Alabama - Address of Welcome in Nineteenth Street Baptist Church by Rev. Dr. Brooks - Response by Mrs. Sprague - A Review of Auxiliary Work by Mrs. Bruce," The Washington Post July 21, 1896, p. 4. "The Afro-American Women. Hon. John W. Ross, District Commissioner Welcomes them to the National Capital, in a Timely Speech. Mrs. Booker T. Washington Presided," The Washington Bee, July 25, 1896, p. 4.

37

"Assisting Their Race. Second Annual Convention of Afro-American Women. Delegates From Many States. The Sessions Presided Over By Mrs. Booker T. Washington of Alabama - Address of Welcome in Nineteenth Street Baptist Church by Rev. Dr. Brooks - Response By Mrs. Sprague - A Review of Auxiliary Work by Mrs. Bruce," The Washington Post, July 21, 1896, p. 4. "General News," The Washington Bee, July 18, 1896, p. 2.

distress⁷, philanthropic, domestic, and educational
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 work.

On a broader scale, the delegates discussed the problem of lynching. Once again, the Negro club women of the United States denounced lynchings and other forms of mob violence. Resolutions were passed commending the efforts of Ida B. Wells-Barnett in her attempt to abolish the lynch law in America. Praise was also expressed for the British Anti-Lynching Society and especially for its secretary, Miss Florence Belgarnie. The women also commended the Republican Party for its 1896 platform deploring
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 lynchings.

Resolutions were passed supporting the work of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. In relation to the Supreme Court of the United States, however, the ladies

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"The Afro-American Women. Hon. John W. Ross, District Commissioner Welcomes Them to the National Capital in a Timely Speech. Mrs. Booker T. Washington Presided," The Washington Bee, July 25, 1896, p. 4.
 "Assisting Their Race. Second Annual Convention of Afro-American Women. Delegates From Many States. The Sessions Presided Over By Mrs. Booker T. Washington of Alabama - Address of Welcome in the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church by Rev. Dr. Brooks - Response By Mrs. Sprague - A Review of Auxiliary Work by Mrs. Bruce," The Washington Post, July 21, 1896, p. 4.

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"Are Rivals No Longer. Colored Woman's League and Federation Now United. Full Set of Officers Elected. The Last Day of the Federation's Sessions Taken Up in Christening Its Youngest Member, Master Barnett - Many Speeches and Papers - Resolutions Criticising The Supreme Court for Sustaining the Single Coach Law. Lynching Denounced," The Washington Post, July 23, 1896, p. 4.

were highly critical. It was their contention that the decision to allow separate but equal accommodations on public conveyances was "unjust, un-American and unconstitutional." They felt that the highest tribunal in the country was bowing to racial prejudice. It was the intention of these women to educate the Negro public to these facts in hopes that they would use public transportation sparingly, if at all. It was hoped that the railroads would incur financial losses which would then encourage the railroads to fight the separate car laws.⁴⁰

In relation to the convict lease system, the women classified the system as legalized slavery and vowed to work for its abolishment. On the lighter side, Charles Aked Barnett, the eight-week old son of Ida B. Wells-Barnett was made an honorary member of the National Federation and christened "Boy of the Regiment."⁴¹

But the topic that held the attention of everyone was the possibility of a merger with the National League of Colored Women. On the first day of the convention of the National Federation of Afro-American Women, a committee of seven was selected to meet with a similar committee appointed by the National League. The women that comprised the committee for the National Federation were Mrs. Victoria Earle Mathews of New York, Mrs. Rosa D. Bowser of

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Ibid., p. 4.

41

Ibid., p. 4.

Richmond, Virginia, Mrs. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin of Boston, Massachusetts, Mrs. Libbie C. Anthony of Jefferson City, Missouri, Mrs. Addie Hunton of Richmond, Virginia, Mrs. Selina Butler of Atlanta, Georgia, and Mrs. Mary Church Terrell. The joint committee selected Mrs. Terrell as its chairwoman. It is interesting to note that Mrs. Terrell was listed as residing in Memphis, Tennessee, a city that she left at six years of age, instead of Washington, D.C. Furthermore, Mrs. Terrell did not represent the National League of which she had been a member since its formation, but rather the National Federation. ⁴²

On the second day of the convention of the National Federation, the joint committee met in the parlor of the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church. The full convention was in conference in the main section of the church. The joint committee met for the entire day, breaking only for a hurried lunch. Apparently both sides were anxious for

42

"Second Day's Session," The Washington Bee, July 25, 1896, p. 4. "The Afro-American Women. Hon. John W. Ross, District Commissioner Welcomes Them to the National Capital in a Timely Speech. Mrs. Booker T. Washington Presided," The Washington Bee, July 25, 1896, p. 4. "Assisting Their Race. Second Annual Convention of Afro-American Women. Delegates from Many States. The Sessions Presided Over by Mrs. Booker T. Washington of Alabama - Address of Welcome in the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church by Rev. Dr. Brooks - Response by Mrs. Sprague. A Review of Auxiliary Work by Mrs. Bruce," The Washington Post, July 21, 1896, p. 4. Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World, 150-151.

unification, for, according to the account given by Mary Church Terrell, one of the most difficult items on the agenda was the selection of a name for the new body.

Members of both organizations were desirous of using the name of the group that they represented. Consequently, it was decided that the words "league" and "federation" had to be omitted. In place of those words, "association" was substituted. "Afro-American" was not used, but "colored" was. Therefore, the name that was decided upon was the
 43
 National Association of Colored Women, N.A.C.W.

When the joint committee met with the full convention that evening, all the delegates were anxious to learn what

 43

Josephine Yates, "National Association of Colored Women," Voice of the Negro, I, July, 1904, p. 283. Davis, Lifting As They Climb, 20-21. "Uniting Their Forces. Committees of Colored Women Agree on Details. Officers Will Be Elected Today. The Name of the Consolidated Afro-American Federation and the Woman's League will Be The National Association of Colored Women - Convention of the Federation in Session All Day - Address By Mrs. Booker T. Washington and Many Others," The Washington Post, July 22, 1896, p. 4. Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World, 150-151. Mrs. J. Silone Yates, "Report of the National Federation of Colored Women's Clubs to the National Council of Women at Washington," The Colored American Magazine, May, 1905, p. 258.

had transpired. The joint committee was given power to act and their word was to be final. The decision of the committee was:

That we do consolidate under the name of the National Association of Colored Women.

That the officer/s⁷ shall be chosen on a basis of Equality by a joint committee.

That neither Association shall assume any of the liabilities of the other incurred prior to consolidation.

That the Association shall support the work already planned by each of the old organizations.

That a joint Committee should draft a constitution and elect officers for the ensuing year.⁴⁴

The following day, while the convention was engaged in the morning session, the members of the joint committee notified the delegates that by the evening session they would announce the officers of the new organization. Apparently, some of the convention delegates objected to this procedure. It was their feeling that the joint committee was partial to the National League of Colored Women and that the interests of the National Federation were not being tended to in an appropriate manner. Some of the delegates questioned the honesty of the National

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"Uniting Their Forces. Committees of Colored Women Agree on Details. Officers Will Be Elected Today. The Name of the Consolidated Afro-American Federation and the Women's League Will Be The National Association of Colored Women - Convention of the Federation in Session All Day - Address By Mrs. Booker T. Washington and Many Others," The Washington Post, July 22, 1896, p. 4. "Second Day's Session," The Washington Bee, July 25, 1896, p. 4.

League in relation to the membership that it claimed.

The dissenters felt that the League had inflated its membership rolls in order to be on an equal basis with the
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National Federation.

At this point, Mrs. Terrell secured the floor. She chided the delegates for their un-Christian approach and asked if they wished harmony or rivalry. If they preferred the latter, then she was bewildered and was unable to comprehend why a committee had been appointed. She asked the delegates if a membership count was more important than unity of purpose among club women. If it was, she stated that she would resign. This speech by Mrs. Terrell helped to solidify the support for consolidation among the delegates. In fact, The Washington Bee claimed that Mary Church Terrell was largely responsible for the
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unification of the two groups of Negro club women.

After this discussion was completed, the selection of the officers was begun by the joint committee. The choosing of the president was an extremely difficult

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"Are Rivals No Longer. Colored Woman's League and Federation Now United. Full Set of Officers Elected. The Last Day of the Federation's Session Taken Up in Christening Its Youngest Member, Master Barnett - Many Speeches and Papers - Resolutions Criticizing the Supreme Court for Sustaining the Single Coach Law. Lynching Denounced." The Washington Post, July 23, 1896, p. 4.

46

Ibid., p. 4. "Mrs. Terrell's Triumph," The Washington Bee, July 25, 1896, p. 4.

assignment. According to the account by Mrs. Terrell, almost every prominent Negro woman in the United States was nominated, as well as all the members of the joint committee, but to no avail; agreement could not be reached.

Several times during the proceedings, prayers were offered by the delegates in order that they could receive divine guidance and make a final but a wise choice. After many hours, Mary Church Terrell was chosen president of the
47
National Association of Colored Women.

The selection of the other officers proceeded quickly. The joint committee selected seven vice-presidents. The Negro women chosen to fill the positions were, in order of ascendancy, Mrs. Fannie Jackson-Coppin of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Mrs. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin of Boston, Massachusetts, Mrs. F. E. Harper of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Mrs. Josephine Silone Yates of Kansas City, Missouri, Mrs. Sylvanie Williams of Abbeyville, South Carolina, and Mrs. Lucy Thurman of Jackson, Michigan. Mrs. Alice Ruth Moore of New Orleans, Louisiana was elected recording secretary, while Miss

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Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World, 151.

A. V. Thompkins of Washington, D.C. was selected corresponding secretary. The treasurer was Mrs. Helen A. Cook⁴⁸ of Washington, D.C. The journal of the New Era Club, the Woman's Era, edited by Mrs. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, was delegated the official organ of the National Association of Colored Women. The motto chosen by the delegates was "Lifting As We Climb." As for the membership in the N.A.C.W., it was open to all women's clubs whose purpose⁴⁹ was to improve the living conditions of the Negro race.

Another major objective of the National Association of Colored Women was to raise the quality of home life. It was the belief of the women that the future of the Negro race depended upon the children. As a result, a strong emphasis was placed upon the "mothers' meetings." The aim of such meetings was to teach the women new ways to cook various types of foods, the importance of a balanced diet, cleanliness, and, most important, proper care for the children. Their concern, however, did not terminate at this point. They also worked to establish day care centers, kindergartens, reformatories, homes for the aged

48

Lerner, (editor), Black Women in White America: A Documentary History, 440-441. "All United," The Washington Bee, July 25, 1896, p. 4.

49

Josephine Yates, "National Association of Colored Women," The Voice of The Negro, I, July, 1904, p. 283. Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought, 335-336. John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: The History of the American Negroes (New York City, Vintage Books, 1956), 407.

and orphans, as well as other social agencies. The women also sought means to fight various forms of racial discrimination.⁵⁰ In this way they hoped to achieve their goal as stated in Article II of the constitution of the National Association of Colored Women, "To secure harmony of action and cooperation among all women in rising to the highest plane [of] home, moral and civil life."⁵¹

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Anna H. Jones, "A Century's Progress for the American Colored Woman," The Voice of the Negro, September, 1905, II, 633. R.R. Morton, "Organized Negro Efforts for Racial Progress," The Annals, (New York: Kraus Reprint Co. 1971), November, 1928, CXXX, 260. B.F. Lee, Jr., "Negro Organizations," The Annals, September, 1913, XLIX, 133-134. Ovington, The Walls Came Tumbling Down, 124.

51

"Efforts for Social Betterment Among Negro Americans," The Fourteenth Annual Conference. Contained in The Atlanta University Publications, Nos. 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 47. Mrs. Silone Yates, "Report of the National Federation of Colored Women's Club to the National Council of Women at Washington," The Colored American Magazine, May, 1905, p. 258.

CHAPTER III

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COLORED WOMEN

The National Association of Colored Women quickly became the leading secular organization of Negro middle class women. After the first convention of Negro club women was held in 1895, new impetus was given to the club movement. Newspapers in the major cities had carried reports of the convention and of the formation of the National Federation of Afro-American Women. Many Negro women who had been unaware of the possibilities of a united front began to join together and to form clubs of their own. Many of these newly organized clubs sought to gain membership in either the National Federation of Afro-American Women or the National League of Colored Women. Consequently, when the two organizations merged in 1896, both could report an increase in membership over the previous year.

Although there was a growth in membership, the officers of the new organization were aware that in order for the movement to be a potent force in changing the social, economic, political, religious and moral conditions within the Negro communities, more adherents were needed.

It was the contention of the clubwomen that until the poor, the working women, and the wives of the tenant farmers were made aware of the benefits of self-help, the Negro communities would border on stagnation. Therefore, an all out effort was made to not only encourage the formation of new clubs but also to have these clubs affiliate with the N.A.C.W. Due to the fact that this membership drive was one of the major emphases of the N.A.C.W., the internal structure of the organization developed in a rather unplanned manner.¹

During the initial stages of development, there was no thoughtful grouping of clubs according to goals, nor was a major effort made to establish correspondence between all the clubs and the national organization. In effect, the clubs were left to their own devices in their attempt to achieve their objectives. Unfortunately, this lack of direction caused some clubs to make the same errors that other clubs made. The major reprieve from this situation was the annual convention. At the meetings, a delegate from each club read reports about the activities of the

¹
Addie W. Hutton, "The National Association of Colored Women," contained in A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, 1910-1932, vol. II, edited by Herbert Aptheker (New York: The Citadel Press, 1951), 33. Mrs. J. Silone-Yates, "Report of the National Federation of Colored Women's Clubs to the National Council of Women at Washington," The Colored American Magazine, May, 1905, p. 261.

club, and discussed the successes and failures that the club experienced. It was during these sessions that the exchange of ideas between club women occurred. During the remainder of the year, however, there was no one appointed by the national body to assist clubs experiencing difficulty in achieving their goals. As this need became more pronounced, the officers began to seek a means to remedy the situation.²

The first president of the N.A.C.W., Mary Church Terrell, slowly began to develop an internal structure that would consist of departments. It was left to her successor, Mrs. Josephine Silone-Yates of Jefferson City, Missouri, who was elected in 1901, to implement fully this plan. Under this system, the president of the organization appointed women who were experienced in certain areas, such as kindergartens or reformatories, to head the corresponding department. Through this system, departments were created that represented the major fields of endeavor of the clubs. This categorizing of the goals helped the women to analyze the problems that they faced. Furthermore, they were able to assess whether or not the obstacles that they were experiencing were of a national

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Hutton, "The National Association of Colored Women," contained in A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, 1910-1932, vol. II, edited by Herbert Aptheker, 33.

or local character. With this knowledge they were in a better position to effectively handle the conditions that they encountered.³

Besides developing a departmental system, some of the club women also began to form state federations. This movement to form state federations closely followed a similar movement within the General Federation of Women's Clubs, [G.F.W.C.], an organization composed almost exclusively of White women. In 1900, at the Milwaukee biennial convention of the G.F.W.C., some White club women began to agitate for the exclusive representation of state federations at the national conventions. It was the feeling of these women that there were too many delegates present. It was their contention that a meaningful completion of business was virtually impossible. Although the National Association of Colored Women did not have the extensive membership that the General Federation possessed, the more astute leaders of the N.A.C.W. realized that

³
A.W. Hunton, "Women's Clubs: The National Association of Colored Women," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, II, 17-18. "Efforts for Social Betterment Among Negro Americans," The Fourteenth Annual Conference, contained in The Atlanta University Publications nos. 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, (New York: Arno Press, 1968) no. 14, p. 47. Addie W. Hutton, "The National Association of Colored Women: Its Real Significance," The Colored American Magazine, August, 1908, 417-4k8. Hutton, "The National Association of Colored Women," contained in A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, 1910-1932, vol. II, edited by Herbert Aptheker, 33-35.

within the near future their conventions also would become unwieldy. Consequently, Negro women from various states⁴ began to organize into state federations.

Besides the above mentioned reason, there were other advantages to such groupings. Some women felt that a state organization would form a closer working unit. The clubs could draw upon the experiences that each had encountered and learn from their errors. Also, competition between clubs in the same locality could be reduced. Another factor concerned conventions. The N.A.C.W. no longer held annual conventions, instead, biennial conventions were held. Since the leaders of the movement to form state federations proposed to hold annual meetings, the members would be able to outline a program, establish priorities, and effectively work toward the goals outlined at the convention. Furthermore, it must be remembered that the women were familiar with their states and were attuned to the needs of particular localities. With this knowledge, the basis for their efforts became more realistic and conceivable to the members. On the other hand,

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A.W. Hunton, "Women's Clubs: The National Association of Colored Women," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, May, 1911, II, 18. Hunton, "The National Association of Colored Women," contained in A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, 1910-1932, vol. II, edited by Herbert Aptheker, 34.

most of these women were ill-prepared to attack these same problems on a national level, partly due to the complexity of the nation as a whole.⁵

State federations, like the individual clubs, were to be accepted into membership by the National Association of Colored Women if certain requirements were met. The state federations were to be composed of several autonomous clubs from the state that they represented. Besides this qualification, each federation was required to work toward a goal that would benefit the entire state. This last point proved to be the most beneficial. Usually, the individual clubs were small. Therefore, the goals that they set for themselves had to be rather limited, if they were to be realistic. With the advent of the state federations, however, the club women could engage in more ambitious projects, such as a state reformatory for Negro youth. The financial burden alone for such a project would have been insurmountable for a club of twenty members.⁶

⁵ Mrs. Josephine B. Bruce, "The Afterglow of the Women's Convention," The Voice of the Negro, November, 1904, I, 542. Hutton, "Women's Clubs: The National Association of Women's Clubs", Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, May, 1911, II, 18. W. A. Hunton, "Women's Clubs: State Conventions," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, September, 1911, II, 210.

⁶ Jessie Fausett, "The 13th Biennial of the N.A.C.W.," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, October, 1922, XXIV, 258. Hunton, "The National Association of Colored Women," contained in A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, 1910-1932, vol. II, edited by Herbert Aptheker, 34. Hunton, "Women's Clubs: The National Association of Colored Women," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, May, 1911, II, 18.

The goals or projects that the club women belonging to the National Association of Colored Women set for themselves usually dealt with children, the aged or infirmed. In part, it was their concern for the children that led many clubs to establish "mother's meetings". In the North, these meetings were usually held in the poorer neighborhoods to allow a greater number of women to attend. In the South, club women attempted to contact the wives of the tenant farmers as well as the poor living in the cities. The purpose of these meetings was to instruct those in attendance on proper child care and better and more efficient ways of housekeeping. Many club women felt that the solution to the "race problem" depended upon the children. Thus, they hoped to provide as many advantages for the children as they could.

As the influence of the club women began to be felt, more concern for the children was generated within the communities. Many women who lived in the poorer areas of the cities worked. Some of these working women were cognizant of the problems and influences of the neighborhoods

7
Yates, "Report of the National Federation of Colored Women's Clubs to the National Council of Women at Washington," The Colored American Magazine, May, 1905, 259. Hutton, "The National Association of Colored Women: Its Real Significance," The Colored American Magazine, August, 1908, p. 421. Josephine Silone-Yates, "Kindergartens and Mother's Clubs: As Related to the Work of the National Association of Colored Women," The Colored American Magazine, June, 1905, p. 307.

and felt that day nurseries and kindergartens should be established. Although kindergartens and day nurseries were usually the outgrowth of mother's meetings, this was not always so. In fact, some clubs had established kindergartens and day nurseries for the children of working women that had never conducted "mother's meetings".⁸

Of the two, day nurseries and kindergartens, the latter project perhaps was the most ambitious. Before the 1890's, there were very few kindergartens in the United States. The majority of those that were in existence were private ventures. The Colored Women's League of Washington, D.C. was among the first clubs of Negro women to establish not only kindergartens but also training centers for the teachers. Mary Church Terrell, a teacher in the District of Columbia, was largely responsible for the Colored Women's League following this course. Mrs. Terrell and several other teachers were concerned about

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Yates, "Report of the National Federation of Colored Women's Clubs to the National Council of Women at Washington," The Colored American Magazine, May, 1905, 261-262. Yates, "Kindergartens and Mother's Clubs: As Related to the Work of the National Association of Colored Women," The Colored American Magazine, June, 1905, p. 307-308. Hutton, "The National Association of Colored Women" Its Real Significance, The Colored American Magazine, August, 1908, p. 421. Mary Church Terrell, "Club Work of Colored Women," Southern Workman and Hampton School Record, 1901, XXX, 437-438. "Club Activities: Colored Women's League," contained in Black Women in White America: A Documentary History, edited by Gerda Lerner, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 451-452. A.W. Hutton, "Women's Clubs: Caring for Children," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, June, 1911, II, 78-79.

the lack of educational skills that young students possessed. They felt that if they opened a kindergarten the advantages for the young would improve. In order to facilitate the development of the kindergartens in the nation, Mrs. Terrell wrote a pamphlet dealing with the progress that the Negro woman had achieved since reconstruction. At the Chicago and Buffalo biennial conventions of the N.A.C.W. in 1899 and 1901 respectively, the Association assumed the cost of publication and sold the pamphlet at the convention. Mrs. Terrell also attended the thirtieth convention of the National American Suffrage Association, of which she was a member, and sold copies of the pamphlet. The proceeds from these sales were donated to the N.A.C.W.'s ways and means committee with the explicit purpose of helping kindergartens.

In many cases the establishment of kindergartens was hampered by the lack of funds and/or teachers. In Chicago, Illinois, however, a different type of problem presented itself. Apparently, the Chicago Women's Club, also known as the Ida B. Wells Club, decided to start a

9
 Mary Church Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World (Washington, D.C.: Ransdell, Inc., 1940), 153. Josephine Yates, "National Association of Colored Women," The Voice of The Negro, July, 1904, I, 286. "Club Activities: Colored Women's League," contained in Black Women in White America: A Documentary History edited by Gerda Lerner, 451. Yates, "Kindergartens and Mother's Clubs: As related to the Work of the National Association of Colored Women," The Colored American Magazine, June, 1905, p. 307, 309-310.

kindergarten. Two members of the club were trained kindergarten teachers but were unable to secure a position. The Armour Institute conducted a private kindergarten in the area, but the waiting list was long. Many of the Negro people living in the area did not want the club women to establish the kindergarten. They felt that if the women were successful, then Negro children would be excluded from the Armour Institute. The club women, however, prevailed. Educators in some cities credited the National Association of Colored Women and its member clubs with the incorporation of kindergartens into their public school systems.

Negro youth were helped in other ways. While the Alabama State Federation was studying the feasibility of various projects, it discovered that there were one-hundred and five reformatories in the nation and only seven of those were in the South. Alabama had one reformatory, but it was for White boys. Consequently, Negro children who were convicted of a crime, no matter how serious, were either sentenced to work in the coal mines

10

Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Club Movement Among Colored Women of America," contained in A New Negro for a New Century: An Accurate Up-to-Date Record of the Upward Struggles of the Negro Race, by Booker T. Washington (Chicago: American Publishing House, 1902), 417-418. Alfreda M. Duster, editor, Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 249-250.

of the state or to prison with adult law breakers. In order to rectify this situation, the Negro club women of Alabama decided to establish a reformatory for Negro boys. Although the idea was conceived in 1899, it took nearly nine years for the women to raise enough money to purchase a farm near Montgomery, Alabama. By 1906, this reformatory was receiving Negro boys. Later in 1912, the women turned the Mt. Megis Boys Reformatory over to the State of Alabama. After the state assumed the operation of this correctional center, the women began to work toward the erection of a girls reformatory.

The Virginia State Federation also began a reformatory for Negro girls. Unlike the club women of Alabama,

II

Hunton, "Women's Clubs: The National Association of Colored Women," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, May, 1911, II, 18. Fausett, "The 13th Biennial of the N.A.C.W.," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, October, 1922, XXIV, 258. "A Conference of Negro Women," The Survey, August 3, 1918, XL, 514. "Social Uplift," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, February, 1912, III, 141. "Social Uplift," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, December, 1912, V, 60. Hunton, "Women's Clubs: State Conventions," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, September, 1911, II, 211. Hutton, "The National Association of Colored Women," contained in A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, vol. II, edited by Herbert Aptheker, 34-35. "The Horizon, The National Association of Colored Women," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, April, 1920, XIX, 214. "The Alabama State Federation," The Colored American Magazine, October, 1908, p. 547. "Social Uplift," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, March, 1911, I, 7-8. Josephine T. Washington, "Child Saving in Alabama," The Colored American Magazine, January, 1909, p. 49-51. Cornella Bowen, "Woman's Part in the Uplift of Our Race," The Colored American Magazine, March, 1907, p. 40.

the culmination of the fund raising project came dramatically. Apparently in 1912, a sixteen-year-old Negro girl killed her employer, a White woman in her fifties. Although there was some question as to the girl's mental stability and the degree of premeditation, she was condemned to death. Despite several stays of execution, she was executed. It was the feeling of many Negro as well as White citizens of Virginia that if a reformatory for Negro girls had existed, she would have been committed to the institution. The State Federation of Virginia, formed a few years earlier, had been diligently working toward the establishment of such an institution. After the execution, their dream was realized.

Negro club women across the country engaged in other types of social service. The Phyllis Wheatly Home Association of Detroit, Michigan, organized in 1897, was

12

Hunton, "Women Clubs: The National Association of Colored Women," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, May, 1911, II, 18. Carrie K. Bowles, "The Negro Woman's Contribution to American Life," Interracial Review, January, 1933, VI, 3. "A Conference of Negro Women," The Survey, August 3, 1918, XL, 514. Mary White Ovington, The Walls Came Tumbling Down (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 122-123. "Virginia Christian," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, September, 1912, IV, 236. "Christian Virginia vs. Virginia Christian," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, September, 1912, IV, 237-239. Hunton, "Women's Clubs: State Conventions," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, September, 1911, II, 211. Hunton, "The National Association of Colored Women," contained in A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, 1910-1932, vol. II, edited by Herbert Aptheker, 34-35.

concerned with the aged and infirm. The twenty-four members of the club rented a small house in Detroit in order to start a home for the elderly. When the home opened, the club women received seven elderly women.

Projects such as the above were not uncommon for the Negro club women. In most cases they were successful. Many clubs were able to obtain the assistance of the Negro as well as White citizens in order to accomplish their goals. In some cases the clubs also applied for funds from the respective state governments and philanthropic societies. Individual clubs and state federations often donated the institutions that they founded to the respective states. An example of this was the presentation of the Mt. Megis Boys Reformatory to the State of Alabama by the State Federation of Alabama.

While the individual clubs and state federations were engaged in various types of social service work, the national body was not idle. Besides offering moral and financial support to club projects, the National Association of Colored Women also pursued various activities. At conventions, memorials and resolutions were passed condemning lynchings, the convict lease system and the Jim

13

"Club Activities: Phyllis Wheatley Home Association of Detroit," contained in Black Women in White America: A Documentary History, edited by Gerda Lerner, 542-453.

14

Hunton, "Women's Clubs: State Conventions," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, September, 1911, II, 211.

Crow laws. On the matter of lynchings, the N.A.C.W. in 1918, ran a full page ad in the New York Times. The advertisement featured a lynched Negro with the caption, "The Shame of America." The funds for this ad were collected by the clubs and sent to the national body as requested. The national headquarters also directed that studies be made concerning the convict lease system. As a result of these studies the N.A.C.W. recommended the abolishment of this system and worked toward this goal. In part, the work that was done in the area of reformatories for Negro youth was to save the young people from becoming victims of the system. Many of the club women considered the convict lease program a form of legal slavery. In relation to the Jim Crow laws, the national body attempted to educate the Negro public about the discriminatory practices. They proposed that Negroes avoid buses, trains, theaters, restaurants and other places where discrimination was practiced. The N.A.C.W. encouraged boycotts against the street car company which

discriminated against Negro passengers. Although such direct action tactics were occasionally successful, the success was usually limited.

The N.A.C.W. was outspoken in other areas where it felt that Negroes were unfairly treated. During 1906, there was considerable racial tension in Brownsville, Texas. Apparently, after several racial incidences, approximately twelve Negro soldiers from Fort Brown rode into Brownsville and "shot up" the town. One person was killed and several injured. The soldiers returned to the fort unnoticed. The next day, inquiries were made at the fort. Stationed at Fort Brown were three regiments of Negro soldiers. None of these soldiers would either admit to the incident or accuse those who were involved. Angered by this, President

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W.E.B. DuBois, "DuBois on Two Negro Conventions, 1899," contained in A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, 777. Mary Church Terrell, "The Progress of Colored Women," contained in the Voice of Black America: Major Speeches by Negroes in the United States, 1797-1971, edited by Philip S. Foner (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 646. Ida B. Wells Barnett, "Let the Afro-American Depend But on Himself," contained in Black Women in a White World: A Documentary History edited by Gerda Lerner, 538-540. Mary White Ovington, The Walls Came Tumbling Down, 177. "Meetings", Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, September, 1912, IV, 219. Fausett, "The 13th Biennial of the N.A.C.W.," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, December, 1921, XXIV, 260. "Opinion, Mrs. Talbert," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, December, 1923, XXVII, 56-57. Williams, "Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," contained in A New Negro for a New Century, 404-405. Terrell, "Club Work of Colored Women," Southern Workman and Hampton School Record, March, 1901, XXX 436. "National Association of Colored Women, 1904," contained in A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, 889-890.

Theodore Roosevelt dishonorably discharged all three regiments. Three of the discharged men were holders of the medal of honor. Protests against the President's action came from all sectors of society and not solely from the Negro community. Mary Church Terrell, John E. Milholland, a White liberal, and other people of both the Negro and White races, organized indignation meetings. The National Association of Colored Women also conducted an investigation. All efforts, however, were to no avail. President Roosevelt would not alter his stand.¹⁶

Furthermore, leaders of the N.A.C.W. were instrumental in the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the N.A.A.C.P. This organization was composed of White and Negro people who were interested in the Negro obtaining political and economic equality. Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Mary B. Talbert, the current president of the National Association of Colored Women, were among the charter members. As this organization gained in respectability and prominence, it became a potent force in fighting for Negro

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George E. Mowry, The Era of Theodore Roosevelt and the Birth of Modern America, 1900-1912 (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1958), 212-214. Arna Bontemps, 100 Years of Negro Freedom (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1961), 211.

rights. In fact, it quickly overshadowed the existence¹⁷ and work of the National Association of Colored Women.

Besides these activities, the National Association of Colored Women engaged in projects that would encourage racial pride. For example, they restored the house that Frederick Douglass had owned. Douglass, a former slave and abolitionist, was considered one of the most prominent Negro leaders at the time of his death. He bequeathed the house to his wife, Helen Pitts Douglass, but due to a legal technicality, the house reverted to all legal heirs. Mrs. Douglass, aware of her deceased husband's position in the community, mortgaged the house in order to purchase it from the other heirs. Her intention was to save the house for the Negro people. Unfortunately, she died before the mortgage was paid. A few enterprising citizens formed the Frederick Douglass Historical Association with the intention of making the home a monument for the Negro people. They hoped that the mortgage would be paid in a short period of time. Despite their efforts, the members of the historical association found this to be a difficult task. In 1916, at the Baltimore convention of the National Association of Colored Women, a proposal was made to study the feasibility of assuming the mortgage. After several meetings, the members of the board of directors of the

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W.E.B. DuBois, "Postscript, Ida B. Wells Barnett," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, June, 1931, XXXVIII, 207. Mary White Ovington, The Walls Came Tumbling Down, 177. Mary Church Terrell, A Colored Woman in a White World, 194-195.

Frederick Douglass Historical Association decided to resign if the National Association of Colored Women would assume the responsibility of acquiring the house. The N.A.C.W. accepted the challenge and within two years paid off the mortgage. In order to accomplish this feat, the women raised over five-thousand dollars. The national body enlisted the assistance of all the Negro people. Club women canvassed the cities in which they lived in order to reach their goal. All donations were accepted no matter how small. They asked segregated Negro schools to sponsor a fund raising drive in which children would be asked to bring a penny. In areas where Negro children attended schools with White children, the church ministers were asked to collect funds during Sunday School. Adults were asked to donate a dime for the cause. To celebrate the redemption of the Frederick Douglass house, the club

women of the National Association of Colored Women burned
18
the mortgage on the front steps of the house.

On a national basis, the organization also supported the United States during World War I. The association was credited with raising five-million dollars during the Third Liberty Loan Drive. They devoted their time and energy to help their country, despite their protests against the
19
discrimination of Negro service personnel.

18

"National Association of Colored Women's Clubs," Southern Workman and Hampton School Record, December, 1922, LI, 544. "Meetings" Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, October, 1916, XII, 297. Duster, Crusade for Justice, 75. "A Conference of Negro Women," The Survey, August 3, 1918, XL, 514. Fausett, "The 13th Biennial of the N.A.C.W.," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, October, 1922, XXIV, 258. "The Douglass Memorial," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, August, 1917, XIV, 164. "The Douglass Home," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, February, 1916, XL, 81. Mary B. Talbert, "Concerning the Frederick Douglass Memorial," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, August, 1917, XIV, 167-168. "A Frederick Douglass Memorial," The Colored American Magazine, March, 1907, 199-200. Mrs. Mary B. Talbert, "The Frederick Douglass Home," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, February, 1917, XIII, 174-175. "The Horizon. The National Association of Colored Women," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, April, 1920, XIX, 214. "The Horizon," Crisis, A Record of the Darker Races, February, 1923, XXV, 180.

19

"A Conference of Negro Women," The Survey, August 3, 1918, XL, 513-514. Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, Lifting As They Climb, (n.p., n.d.), 60. John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom (New York City: Vintage Books, 1956), 470-471.

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Although the National Association of Colored Women became involved in many successful projects, it did not become a vigorous force in Negro communities. There were many reasons for this failure.

In part the women were plagued with jealousy and pettiness between themselves. Inter-club rivalry within the same community was also detrimental. In some instances, the formation of state federations alleviated the situation but did not eradicate the problem. Furthermore, some of the Negro women's clubs were too imitative of White women's clubs; even adopting White club's goals and constitutions in entirety. Other clubs adopted long and entangled by-laws and, as a result, spent most of their time arguing over the by-laws and parliamentary procedures. In relation to the national body and some of the larger clubs, too many departments and committees were organized, many of them with overlapping objectives. Consequently, their effectiveness was greatly reduced. Other clubs were not realistic in their aims, attempting to do too much, too soon, and without the proper resources. In other cases, the club women were ill-prepared to handle the problems that they encountered in their communities; many times they applied stop-gap measures that seemingly covered the problem but did not solve it. Perhaps if the national organization had focussed on one or two particular problems, such as

kindergartens; reformatories, or homes for the aged, infirmed, or orphans; the organization would have become a stronger influence in Negro communities.²⁰

In fairness to the women, it should be stated that they received little direction or help from the outside. Although the Negro fraternal and secret societies as well as church organizations gave verbal support to the N.A.C.W., substantial help was rarely forthcoming. Consequently, the club women were forced to rely on their own resources.²¹

One of the areas where the women could have expected to receive considerable guidance was from the General Federation of Women's Clubs. This aid, however, did not materialize. The National Federation had been formed in 1890, and it was composed of clubs whose members were predominately White, although several northern and mid-western clubs had a few Negro women as members.

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Fannie Barrier Williams, "Work Attempted and Missed in Organized Club Work," Colored American Magazine, May, 1908, p. 281, 285. Williams, "Club Movement Among Colored Women in America," A New Negro for a New Century, 427-428. Fannie Williams, "The Club Movement Among Colored Women," contained in Progress of a Race or the Remarkable Advancement of the American Negro From the Bondage of Slavery, Ignorance, and Poverty to the Freedom of Citizenship, Intelligence, Affluence, Honor and Trust, by J.W. Gibson and H.W. Crogman (Florida: Mnemosyne Publishing, Inc., 1969), 215-216, 229-230. "Women Divided," The Washington Bee, August 19, 1899, p. 4.

The constitution of the G.F.W.C. did not specifically exclude Negro women's clubs, but none were accepted or even applied for membership until 1900, when the New Era Club of Boston, Massachusetts was affiliated with the Massachusetts State Federation of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. During the spring of 1900, the president of the state federation asked Mrs. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, president of the New Era Club, to apply for membership in the G.F.W.C. When the application for membership was made, a copy of the constitution was forwarded along with a statement of the aims and objectives of the club. From the material forwarded, it was evident that the club was composed of Negro women. Within a short period of time, Mrs. Ruffin received a certificate and a letter from the

president of the G.F.W.C., Mrs. Rebecca Lowe of Atlanta, Georgia, stating that the club was accepted into the
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federation.

In June of 1900, the General Federation of Women's Clubs held its biennial convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Mrs. Ruffin was chosen to represent not only the New Era

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Mary L. Wood, The History of the General Federation of Women's Clubs for the First Twenty-two Years of Its Organization (Massachusetts: Norwood Press, 1912), 128-131. Hereafter cited as The History of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. "No Color Line At Milwaukee Biennial. Mrs. Ruffin, a Brilliant Colored Woman of Boston, Has Her Credentials as a Delegate--Club She Represents a Worthy One, and Duly Qualified Member of the Federation." Chicago Times-Herald, June 3, 1900, section 5, p. 3. "Club Women's Congress: Numerous Delegates Arrive at Milwaukee. Fifth Biennial Conference Opens There Tomorrow. There Are Represented 2500 Clubs. Reorganization Is the Main Question This Year." Boston Evening Transcript, June 4, 1900, p. 5. Anna D. West, "Mrs. West Speaks Officially For the First Time Facts Are Officially Given on the Woman Era Question," Boston Evening Transcript, June 16, 1900, p. 4. "Mrs. Ruffin Complimented. The State Federation of Women's Clubs Yesterday Adopted a Resolve which Depreciates the Action of the General Federation," Boston Evening Transcript, June 16, 1900, p. 4. Williams, "The Ruffin Incident--1900," contained in Black Women in White America: A Documentary History, edited by Gerda Lerner, 448. Pauline E. Hopkins, "Famous Women of the Negro Race: Educators," The Colored American Magazine, July, 1902, p. 210. "Pleads for Equality. Mrs. Ruffin States Her Case. Says the Southern Women Were All Banded Together and that Mrs. Lowe Did Everything Possible to Insult Her," Chicago Times-Herald, June 11, 1900, p. 8.

Club but also the Massachusetts State Federation. The New England Women's Press Association elected her as an alternate delegate. Mrs. Ruffin was one of the few Negro women belonging to this press association.

When it was learned that a Negro club had been admitted to the G.F.W.C., a great furor arose. Some White club women, especially those from the South, sought to nullify the action of the president. Mrs. Lowe, the president, was one of the prime movers. After a careful study of the constitution and by-laws, the women felt that

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"No Color Line at Milwaukee Biennial. Mrs. Ruffin, a Brilliant Colored Woman of Boston, Has Her Credentials as a Delegate. Club She Represents a Worthy One and Duly Qualified Member of the Federation," Chicago Times-Herald, June 3, 1900, section 5, p. 3. "Principle Rather than Color That Is Why the New England Woman's Press Association Indorsed Mrs. Ruffin's Position at Milwaukee," Boston Evening Transcript, June 7, 1900, p. 7. "Color Question Pre-Eminent. Still Agitates Club Women's Convention. It May Dominate the Election for President. The Reorganization Plan Meets Defeat. Biennial Convention of 1902 May Come to Boston," Boston Evening Transcript, June 7, 1900, p. 7. Mary L. Wood, The History of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, 129-130. Bertha Damaris Knobe, "Club Women's Work. Lively Times for Convention. Opening Day of Biennial at Milwaukee Will Include Indiana Controversy, Reorganization Matter and Color Line." Chicago Times-Herald, June 4, 1900, p. 8. Bertha Damaris Knobe, "Club Women Bar Colored Sisters. Action of the General Federation Board of Directors. Vexed Question Settled. Matter Will Not come Up Before the Biennial Convention--Indiana Controversy Over." Chicago Times-Herald, June 5, 1900, p. 5. "Women's Club Convention. Mrs. Ruffin, A Colored Delegate Gets a Seat, But Her Club is Barred." New York Times, June 5, 1900, p. 6. "Pleads for Equality. Mrs. Ruffin States Her Case. Says the Southern Women Were All Banded Together and that Mrs. Lowe Did Everything Possible to Insult Her," Chicago Times-Herald, June 11, 1900, p. 8.

the club could be rejected during the meeting of the executive board. The board passed on some of the decisions rendered by the president. Unfortunately, the executive board would not meet until the convention was in session. Mrs. Lowe and other women who did not want the New Era Club to be recognized by the convention or in the organization, used parliamentary procedures to deny Mrs. Ruffin a seat at the convention as a delegate of the New Era Club.

The methods startled the supporters of Mrs. Ruffin and before they could recover, the damage was done. Mrs. Ruffin had considerable support from the clubs of the North and the mid-West, and despite the loss of her seat as a delegate of the New Era Club, she still had a seat as a representative of the Massachusetts State Federation.

She elected, however, to remain loyal to the New Era Club
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 and was, consequently, banned from the convention.

The White Club women's major concern dealt with
 Negro clubs entering the G.F.W.C. and not Negroes belonging
 to predominately White clubs in the federation. There was
 concern among the members of the organization that if clubs
 of Negro women joined the General Federation, the clubs of
 Southern women would succeed from the federation. Due to

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"Women's Convention Ended. Mrs. Rebecca Lowe of
 Atlanta Re-Elected President--Massachusetts and New
 Hampshire Represented in the New Directorate--Mrs. Ruffin
 Will Take Legal Action Against the Federation." Boston
 Evening Transcript, June 9, 1900, p. 22. Anna D. West,
 "Mrs. West Speaks Officially. For the First Time Facts
 Are Given on the Woman Era Club Question." Boston Evening
 Transcript, June 16, 1900, p. 4. "Mrs. Ruffin Complimented.
 The State Federation of Women's Clubs Yesterday Adopted a
 Resolution Which Depreciates the Action of the General
 Federation." Boston Evening Transcript, June 16, 1900, p. 4.
 "State Federation Eighth Annual. Today in South Weymouth
 the State Federation of Women's Clubs Convened--Rotation
 in Office Adopted, and Working Girls Clubs Admitted
 According to Amendment." Boston Evening Transcript,
 June 15, 1900, p. 7. "Club Women's Last Day. Mrs. Lowe
 Is Now Likely to Be Re-Elected. Mrs. Anna West Named to
 Board of Directors. The Color Question Skillfully Evaded.
 It Will Probably Be Left to Incoming Board." Boston
 Evening Transcript, June 8, 1900, p. 5. "The Massachusetts
 Caucus. Action Further than to Appoint a Committee to
 Petition for the New Era Club's Re-instatement, was Decided
 to be Unadvisable." Boston Evening Transcript, June 5, 1900,
 p. 6. Wood, The History of the General Federation of
 Women's Clubs, 129-131. Bertha Damaris Knobe, "Champion
 Colored Women's Cause. Delegates Oppose the Exclusion of
 Mrs. Ruffin. Warn Fight is Probable. Directors of the
 General Federation of Clubs Urged to Reconsider Their
 Action." Chicago Times-Herald, June 6, 1900, p. 5.

the nature of the problem, it was decided to hold the matter in abeyance until the next biennial. Another matter that was held over was the question of reorganization.

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Both of these problems merged during the interim.

Two plans came to the forefront. The names given to the plans were from the states that proposed them. The Georgia Plan proposed that the word "White" be inserted into the constitution of the G.F.W.C. In relation to the

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West, "Mrs. West Speaks Officially. For the First Time Facts Are Officially Given On the Woman Era Club Question." Boston Evening Transcript, June 16, 1900, p. 4. "Mrs. Ruffin Complimented. The State Federation of Women's Clubs Yesterday Adopted a Resolve which Depreciates the Action of the General Federation." Boston Evening Transcript, June 16, 1900, p. 4. "Club Women's Last Day. Mrs. Lowe Is Now Likely to Be Re-Elected. Mrs. Anna West Named to Board of Directors. The Color Question Skillfully Evaded. It Will Probably be Left to Incoming Board." Boston Evening Transcript, June 8, 1900, p. 5. Wood, The History of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, 131, 156. Bertha Damaris Knobe, "Fifth Biennial Closed. Delegates to the General Federation Leave Cream City. Club Women Return Home. Meetings Declared to Have Been a Complete Success--Echoes of the Color Controversy." Chicago Times-Herald, June 10, 1900, p. 6. Bertha Damaris Knobe, "Club Women's Work. Lively Times for Convention. Opening Day of Biennial at Milwaukee Will Include Indiana Controversy, Reorganization Matter and Color Line." Chicago Times-Herald, June 4, 1900, p. 8. Williams, "Club Movement Among Negro Women," contained in Progress of a Race, 219-224.

matter of reorganization, they desired to exclude the representation of state federations at the biennial convention and have only individual clubs represented. In this manner, the Negro clubs would definitely be excluded from the General Federation of Women's Clubs. On the other hand, the Massachusetts Plan called for exclusive representation of state federations at the biennial conventions.

Furthermore, they wanted all clubs of the state federations to be members of the General Federation. In order to insure the continuation of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, a compromise was needed. The substitute plan allowed the state federations to "determine what clubs should be accepted into their organizations." In order for the individual clubs to join the General Federation, however, they had to be recommended by the executive board of the state and approved by the unanimous vote of the General Federation's executive board. This compromise was approved at the Los Angeles convention in 1902. It effectively banned clubs of Negro women from the General

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Federation of Women's Clubs.

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Wood, The History of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, 154-157, 162-163, 345. Hopkins, "Famous Colored Women of the Negro Race: Club Life Among Colored Women," The Colored American Magazine, August, 1902, pp. 274-277. Rayford W. Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901 (New York: The Dial Press, Inc., 1954), 150. Hopkins, "Famous Women of the Negro Race: Educators," The Colored American Magazine, July, 1902, pp. 210-212. Duster, (editor), Crusade for Justice, 269-270. Williams, "Club Movement Among Negro Women," contained in Progress of a Race, 219-224.

Prior to balloting, however, several rumors and announcements were made in an attempt to discourage discussion of the proposal. According to the stories, Booker T. Washington, a Negro leader of national prominence, Theodore Roosevelt, president of the United States, Julia Ward Howe, a leading club woman, and Senator William Hoar, a consistent supporter of Negroes, felt that the Negro women's clubs should not be admitted to the G.F.W.C. and that the matter should not be discussed on the convention floor. Later, it was learned that the stories were false. One of the few supporters for the Negro club women at the Los Angeles convention was Jane Addams, the founder of Hull House in Chicago, Illinois. Despite her speech and her reputation, she was unable to sway the delegates.

It must be remembered that these events were not occurring in a vacuum. During this same period, the American Federation of Labor also permitted the exclusion of Negroes on a local level. Furthermore, Theodore

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Hopkins, "Famous Women of the Negro Race: Educators," The Colored American Magazine, July, 1902, p. 211. Allen F. Davis, American Heroine, 129-130. Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought, 236. Logan, The Negro in the United States: A Brief History (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1957), 52. Hopkins, "Famous Women of the Negro Race: Club Life Among Colored Women," The Colored American Magazine, August, 1902, pp. 274-277.

Roosevelt was cultivating a more "lily-White" Republican Party in the South. The desire of the nation as a whole was reunion. In order to accomplish this, many people were willing to allow racists, from the North as well as the South, to dictate policy. The basic aim was the economic development of the nation. The action of the General Federation of Women's Clubs therefore, coincided with the national trend. The effect upon the National Association of Colored Women, however, was enormous. When it was learned in 1900, that the New Era Club of Boston, Massachusetts was a member of the G.F.W.C. new hope was given to the Negro women. Many felt that the women of the nation, both White and Negro, could effect a new era of race relations, as well as improve the general climate of American society. Several other clubs of Negro women considered joining the General Federation. The club women felt that they would gain in experience, and obtain advice and help in carrying forth their goals. Instead, the Negro club women were left to themselves. They did not have the wealth, time, energy or experience to attempt many of the projects that the Negro people needed. Despite this, they tried and incredibly succeeded in many instances. Yet, the lack of recognition by the General Federation of Women's Clubs hampered the development of the National Association of Colored Women. Unlike the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the

N.A.C.W. did not have a strong base. It diffused its efforts by attempting to accomplish what it was not prepared to do. Although its membership increased, there was quantity and not quality in the areas of ability, leadership and organization among the members.

CONCLUSION

The National Association of Colored Women was formed in 1896, during a period when the Negro was encountering a great amount of difficulty in maintaining the legal and political rights granted to him during the period of reconstruction. As a result of this erosion of power, some historians have contended that the Negro male was unable to effectively deal with the problems that arose within the Negro community. It was during this same period of time that the Negro woman began to assert herself in the affairs of her community. In the beginning, her work was done in conjunction with church groups and ladies auxiliaries to Negro male secret societies and fraternal organizations. In the 1890's, however, she began to form clubs of her own. This did not mean that the other organizational ties were severed, but rather that she added new priorities to her varied interests.

Generally speaking, the women who participated in these groups were middle class women who saw needs within the Negro community and attempted, with their limited resources, to alleviate the problems.

There were many clubs of Negro women formed during the period from 1890 to 1895, and there was a general feeling

that unification of the clubs would be beneficial to the overall movement of Negro women. Forces outside the Negro community, however, were needed to stimulate the movement for unification. The precipitating factor in the formation of the first organization of Negro women with a truly national base was a letter by John W. Jacks, a Missouri editor, in which he degraded Negro womanhood. Out of this controversy came the formation of the National Federation of Afro-American Women. The following year, 1896, this organization, the National Federation of Afro-American Women merged with another group, the National League of Colored Women, to form the National Association of Colored Women.

The major goal of the National Association of Colored Women was the uplift of the Negro race in all facets of life. The organization declared that it was not drawing the color line but that all clubs of women whose goal was to improve the life of the Negro were eligible to join. From the beginning, the goal that the National Association of Colored Women set up for itself was too broad in relation to membership and resources of the members. Instead of concentrating on one or two specific areas, such as kindergartens, reformatories for Negro youth, homes for the aged, or civil rights, the women divided their forces to such an extent that their effectiveness in dealing with the problems that plagued the

Negro community was extremely limited. It is true that many fine examples of their dedication and unselfishness brought relief and in some cases institutions were established to aid their people, but more often than not the lack of unified efforts failed to produce the desired results. Besides the diffusion of goals, there were also the human factors of pettiness, un-co-operative spirit and a desire for self-recognition that disrupted the movement.

Later, with the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the N.A.A.C.P, the National Urban League and other similar organizations dedicated to the improvement of life of the Negro, the National Association of Colored Women lost much of its impact. In part this was caused by the limiting of the goals pursued by the new organizations. They concentrated their efforts on a few specific areas and refused to be distracted by a multiplicity of causes. Furthermore, the personnel of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League were generally more professionally qualified to handle the problems that they attempted to solve.

In many instances the National Association of Colored Women acted as a catalyst in regard to the N.A.A.C.P. and the National Urban League by pointing out specific problems. The latter organizations, however, usually had the personnel, financial backing and a stronger voice in swaying public opinion than did the women.

Furthermore, after the 1930's, the work of the National Association of Colored Women, was superceeded by the change in attitudes toward governmental responsibility in America. The movement from a laissez faire society to a general welfare state on both the national and state levels of government negated many of the projects that the Negro woman's organization had once sponsored. With this change in attitude and the resultant shift of responsibility from individual self-help to governmental aid made many of the activities of the National Association of Colored Women no longer necessary. The organization itself, however, was founded on a rather strong basis, for it still exists. With new leadership and a new set of issues, it may once again be revitalized as a basic factor in Negro community affairs.

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