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FROM HOME MISSIONS TO SOCIAL ACTIVISM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SOUTHERN METHODIST AND SOUTHERN BAPTIST WOMEN DURING THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

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From Home Missions to Social Activism: A Comparative Study of Southern Methodist and Southern Baptist Women during the Progressive Era

Introduction

Evangelical churches in the United States have historically interpreted and communicated the message of Jesus Christ, as outlined in the biblical gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, in a variety of ways. Denominations communicate this message toward a goal of increasing church size, and providing ministries to individual members of churches. Another very important aspect of the work of evangelical churches is to minister to the wider community, with the goal of improving the lives of its individual community members, and much of the ministry and social engagement with communities is done by women in the church. Along with other denominations, the Southern Baptist Church and the United Methodist Church, have organized groups of women that engage in social activist work today. However, these groups have contrasting, and at times opposite, views of what constitutes social activism. The women's organization, United Methodist Women (UMW), currently engages in more politically liberal activism that addresses social issues of climate change, homelessness, immigration and childcare for low-income families. In contrast, Southern Baptist women employ a more socially and politically conservative stance on social activism that centers on family preservation issues, and more recently, the global problem of sex trafficking. Especially in the current contentious political environment, religion and

politics appear to be intertwined and even in evangelical churches there exists a divide along political lines regarding which social justice issues are important and valued, as well as which issues are worthy of attention and response. *In the context of similar evangelical backgrounds, what motivating factors produced such varied, and sometimes opposite, responses to the question of what constitutes appropriate social activism?*

The late nineteenth and early 20th century precursor to the United Methodist Church was the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Methodist Episcopal Church South and the Southern Baptist Church represented large evangelical denominations that flourished during the years of the Progressive Era in the South. The Progressive Era was a social and political response to the problems created by industrialization and urbanization of the United States in the years between 1890 and 1920. Progressive Era doctrines called for government to instigate social reforms to counter the problems of rapid industrialization and urbanization, such as poverty, immigration, and criminal justice. Government was also called upon by Progressives to regulate industry to reduce the exploitation of workers. Progressive ideals encouraged wider social reform to raise the standard of living for those in the lowest socio-economic strata through education and public policy.[1]

The religious offshoot of Progressive Era principles was found in the Social Gospel movement. The Social Gospel applied the teachings of Jesus Christ to the social issues created by industrialization and urbanization. Social Gospel tenets melded

[1] Social Welfare History Project. (2017). The Progressive Era. *Social Welfare History Project.* Retrieved from http://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/eras/civil-war-reconstruction/progressive-era/.

together Progressive Era reforms with the Christian doctrine of salvation to collectively meet the spiritual and physical needs of those members of society who were exploited by industrialization most, such as the poor, immigrants, and children. Social Gospel movement goals included a furtherance of the kingdom of God, which was defined as an ultimate perfection of humanity and the church.[2] These particular social movements of the Progressive Era and its auxiliary Social Gospel movement provided fertile conceptual ground for even religiously conservative denominations to contemplate social activism. For women in the Southern Baptist and Methodist Episcopal Church South, the Progressive Era provided an opportunity of paramount importance to engage in social activism.

As most avenues of church work in the public sphere were closed for women during the early Progressive Era, those who desired to contribute to their communities were able to do so through the vehicle of mission work. Southern Baptist and Methodist women engaged in mission work through two groups: the Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention (WMU), and the Women's Home Mission Society (WHMS), and later the Woman's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Through these organizations, women in both denominations were able to fully participate in the life of their churches and communities by organizing and implementing mission programs that could be described today as social activism. The importance of the early mission work for each group was two-fold. First, mission work provided a way for women to put their personal Christian

[2] Holcomb, Carol Crawford, "The Kingdom at Hand: The Social Gospel and the Personal Service Department of Women's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention," *Baptist History and Heritage*, 35, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 49-66, 49.

faith into action and have a positive and meaningful impact on the lives of people inside and outside of the church community, thus fulfilling the command of Jesus Christ to spread the message of the gospel. Secondly, church mission work supplied a method for women to engage in personally satisfying activities outside the home. Church mission work represented a more socially acceptable and less threatening approach for women to operate in the public sphere.

The Progressive Era was a defining moment in the individual lives of Methodist Episcopal and Southern Baptist women and the organizations that became United Methodist Women and the Woman's Missionary Union, and laid the foundation on which both groups engaged social activism. The era provided a unique intersectional framework of ideology, theology and politics in which each group constructed their own particular brand of social activism that is evident today. Further, the denominational response to Progressive Era ideologies contributed to the divergence of the goals of appropriate social activism of each group. The Progressive Era was a catalyst for the women of these two denominations to become involved in their communities and the public sphere.

A comparison of the two groups reveals how the Progressive Era changed the trajectory in which they structured mission goals and activities, and the ideas of change and modernization produced during the Progressive Era created an atmosphere of fear for the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and its male leadership, and it rejected any beliefs that could potentially undermine the entrenched hierarchical power structure. The SBC became even more determined to uphold its conservative traditions of doctrinal autonomy, preservation of established familial roles, and social and economic

attitudes on race. In the face of this denominational response, WMU's social reform activities became more restrained as it continued to function within the strict Southern Baptist framework that supported the orthodox view of Southern society. In contrast, the women of the Methodist Episcopal Church South and WHMS were also confronted with some of the same backlash to Progressive Era and Social Gospel doctrines in their church and homes that was experienced by WMU, the Woman's Home Mission Society embraced Social Gospel ideals that focused on ministering to all people, which they were convinced would result in a better and more just society. The denominational reaction and response to change produced by the Progressive Era set the divergent course for women of the Southern Baptist Convention and the United Methodist Women to engage in the different forms of social activism in which they are still involved today.

Historically, women's groups in churches have taken up the mantle of action in addressing social justice issues where governments and other institutions have failed or are otherwise inadequate. When considering current social justice problems taken up by both Southern Baptist women and United Methodist Women, each group continues to respond to issues that profoundly affect women, and are often negatively politicized in current partisan climates. Issues such as poverty, childcare, healthcare, and immigration were taken up by each group through the organizations of the Woman's Home Mission Society (WHMS), and later the Woman's Missionary Council, and WMU during the Progressive Era. Both groups prolifically engaged in Progressive Era social justice with evangelism as the central and most significant point of ideological purpose for their work.

There is not a large number of scholarly works on WHMS and WMU and the Social Gospel, but what does exist is meticulously researched. Much of the Southern Baptist research is done from an institutional standpoint and can be considered gendered, as the analysis is performed by men and is focused primarily on the leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention. As women have been and still are largely excluded from leadership positions (women are currently excluded from ordained ministry in the Southern Baptist Convention), critical analysis of women's activities, organizations, and viewpoints in the church is historically scant or missing. As Baptist historian Karen Smith argues, in referring to one male historian's examination of women's contributions to the church: "His approach is faulty in that he tends to view women from a particular gender-based institutional perspective, and hence their contributions are visible only when they occur in the male-dominated structures."[3] Smith argues that institutional histories can be problematic because the critical analysis only focuses on the theoretical and theological contributions of the pastorate and other leaders of the SBC, and only men hold these positions. Smith's critique is warranted in the context of academic scholarship of the Woman's Missionary Union.

John Lee Eighmy's *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* is an in-depth study of Southern Baptist responses to social justice issues from the Civil War to the years of the Civil Rights Movement, and he devotes several chapters to the Southern Baptist attitudes toward the Progressive Era and ideals advanced by proponents of the Social Gospel. Eighmy's institutional

[3] Smith, Karen E., "Beyond Public and Private Spheres: Another Look at Women in Baptist History and Historiography," *Baptist Quarterly*, 34, no. 2 (April 1999): 79-87, 81.

assessment is highly salient to understand the conservative value system of the denomination, which centered on the importance of individuality and autonomy of each church. An entirely stubborn maintenance of Southern culture and a rejection of theological changes or trends that originated outside of the Southern sections of the United States were hallmarks of the denominational response to tenets of the Social Gospel. In his discussion of the Social Gospel movement in the South, Eighmy highlights other denominations' social justice activities, but, in a glaring omission, failed to mention the most organized and prodigious Southern Baptist effort to extend Social Gospel ideals to suffering communities: WMU. It could be argued that since WMU was predominately considered to be a mission-based organization, its activities during the Progressive Era were only viewed as an extension of the Home and Foreign Mission Boards of the denomination. It is more likely, however, that the omission is due to fact that Southern Baptist women operated outside the male-dominated institutional framework, resulting in their church work remaining overlooked.

Scholarship on the social justice work of women of the Methodist Episcopal Church South (MECS) is found in books by John McDowell and Ellen Blue. Blue's contribution to Southern Methodist women's participation in Social Gospel theology and social justice issues is specific to one particular long-standing settlement house in New Orleans. McDowell's treatment is larger in scope and provides an overall view of Southern Methodist women's organizations and activities using Social Gospel theology. McDowell's *The Social Gospel in the South: The Woman's Home Mission Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1886-1939*, thoroughly examines the movement of the Social Gospel in the South, and the changes it produced as evidenced in the social

justice work of some women in the MECS. McDowell asserts that the work of women in the MECS proves that Social Gospel theology did take hold in the South, which counters the argument that the movement was primarily a phenomenon of Northern Protestantism. He further argues that the women of the MECS, through their social justice work with immigrants and in the context of their foundational evangelistic mission, were forced to reevaluate their stance on race relations with African Americans in their own communities. McDowell's work is important in showing that Social Gospel theology was put into action by the women of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and that Southern Methodist women responded in a highly organized manner to the issues created by industrialism and unchecked capitalism. His research also demonstrates that the women of MECS slowly changed their viewpoint on which groups were worthy to be recipients of its social justice activities, and that MECS women eventually included African Americans in their social activism. His analysis does not focus primarily on the Woman's Home Mission Society, but on several organizations in which MECS women were involved that were influenced by tenets of the Social Gospel. McDowell does not, however, hypothesize on the whether or not the Social Gospel affected later social activism by Methodist women.

In *St. Mark's and the Social Gospel: Methodist Women and Civil Rights in New Orleans, 1895-1965*, Ellen Blue focuses on the work of Southern Methodist women and the settlement house program. Like John McDowell, Blue is challenging the prevalent idea that Social Gospel theology was not embraced in the South. She argues that while Social Gospel activism is overlooked in the South because it was done by religious women. For example, Social Gospel theology was entirely the basis for the subject of

her study, the St. Mark's Community Center in New Orleans. She chronicles St. Mark's beginnings as a MECS mission to a settlement house where, led by deaconesses, it ministered to immigrants and members of the white and African American communities. Blue defines settlement houses as "…facilities that allowed well-educated women to live in low-income neighborhoods, learning from their neighbors as they got to know them about what their true needs were".[4] Settlement houses provided an opportunity for women to fully understand and address the issues facing people living in areas of poverty, often becoming a center of those communities. Blue's analysis supplies an in-depth look into how Southern Methodist women applied Social Gospel theology to the community through settlement work.

Two dissertations (one for each denomination) contribute extensive scholarship on the leadership of WMU and the women of the MECS during the Progressive Era. Carol Crawford Holcomb's dissertation, "Mothering the South: The influence of gender and the social gospel on the social views of the leadership of Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention, 1888-1930," examines how WMU's leadership was influenced by Social Gospel tenets, and attempted to incorporate these tenets into the national WMU agenda. Holcomb outlines how WMU leaders crossed denominational lines to observe and incorporate ideas from MECS settlement work, as well as other denominations' efforts, and how WMU leaders were involved in interdenominational groups and secular charitable organizations that adhered to Progressive Era and Social Gospel ideologies. Holcomb argues that WMU's Personal Service Program was the Southern Baptist answer to addressing issues created

[4] Ellen Blue, *St. Mark's and the Social Gospel: Methodist Women and Civil Rights in New Orleans, 1895-1965* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2014) 1.

by Industrialization, including settlement work and a missionary training school. According to her, WMU did utilize Social Gospel theology to improve the lives of the impoverished in their communities, albeit on a smaller scale than that of other denominations. Holcomb's research proves that WMU leadership was involved in Social Gospel theology and participated in social activism, but does not examine these programs on a state or local level. Further, while this dissertation does discuss some of WMU's social justice efforts on behalf of African Americans, the larger element of WMU's attitudes regarding race and the residual effects of slavery in the context of Social Gospel theology is outside the scope of the dissertation.

In her dissertation, "Southern Methodist women leaders and church missions, 1878-1910", Sara Joyce Myers examines the early leaders of the Southern Methodist women's organizations, namely the Woman's Home Mission Society, and the Woman's Foreign Mission Society, against the backdrop of the strict expectations of women in upper class Southern society. The idea of "True Womanhood" permeated hierarchical institutions of the church and highlighted womanly characteristics of submissiveness and devotion to family. Further, in *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939*, Peggy Pascoe argues that the True Womanhood ideal was used by white Protestant women to shift the moral power structure from men to women in the home, thus setting a foundation for the westward expansion of mission work during the Progressive Era. Louise Newman discusses the use of women's moral authority in the home and its extension to mission work in her book, *White Women's Rights*. White women took advantage of the shift of moral authority in their homes to attain a higher position in social hierarchy through

"civilization work," which was mission work. Civilization work focused on the elevation of subordinate groups such as immigrants by "Americanization" and "Christianization," which ultimately served to elevate white women's position in the eyes of white men. True Womanhood informed the attitudes and behavior of the leadership of WHMS, as much of its leadership (as well as that of WMU) were members of the upper class. Myers argues the leadership was able to maintain these characteristics of womanhood while expanding their organizations into the public sphere. The movement into the public sphere was a risky endeavor for these women, but because their behavior was unobtrusive, they were able to continue their work and increase the size of their organizations.

The work of Myers and Holcomb each focus on the leadership of WHMS and WMU, which was predominately upper class and educated. Many of the leaders were unmarried and childless, which is why they were able to devote extensive time and energy into their respective organizations. As they were not encumbered with running households, raising children, or working outside the home to contribute to family finances, they were, as Holcomb points out, elite. This perspective is important in that it explains partially how, through the exhaustive work of their leaders, each group was able to grow and thrive within a very conservative social environment utilizing Progressive ideals, but it does not explain why Southern Methodist women continued to embrace Social Gospel theology and why WMU did not incorporate Social Gospel tenets after the Progressive Era, and instead focused primarily on mission work.

In his article, "Southern Baptists and the Social Gospel: White Religious Progressivism in the South, 1900-1925," Paul Harvey analyzes the impact of social

Christianity on Southern Baptist leaders in the Progressive Era, including theologians and pastors. Southern Baptist progressives were inspired by the Social Gospel, even if they didn't use that particular terminology. Harvey states: "Baptist progressives believed they had found a golden mean between what they saw as the denuded piety of liberal theology in the North and the stubborn conservatism of evangelicalism in the South."[5] Progressive theology enjoyed some success largely due to the efforts of tenacious clergy, but ultimately, progressivism was stifled in the church, especially in rural areas. Harvey devotes a few sentences to WMU, but women in the church are otherwise not mentioned. As clergy and theologians were all men, Southern Baptist women's attitudes regarding a church social agenda is unexplored.

The most exhaustive and in-depth historical account of WMU was written by Catherine Allen in *A Century to Celebrate: History of Woman's Missionary Union*. It is an important reference for most scholarship on WMU, and several chapters are devoted to WMU's substantial activities and fundraising efforts during the Progressive Era. Allen's account is often a critique of the significant challenges WMU members met from Southern Baptist men and the leadership of the Convention. Another shorter history was written by Alma Hunt, (*History of Woman's Missionary Union, Revised Edition*) a former president of WMU, on the occasion of the organization's 75th anniversary in 1963. Hunt's history provides a detailed recounting of the early challenges of the women who ultimately organized WMU, as well as an overview of the organizational work up to the early 1960s. In addition, David T. Morgan's *Southern Baptist Sisters: In Search of Status, 1845-2000* chronicles the often-frustrating

[5] Harvey, Paul, "Southern Baptist and the Social Gospel: White Progressivism in the South, 1900-1925," *Fides et Historia*, 27, no. 2, (1995): 59-77, 64.

experiences of women in the Southern Baptist Convention in their efforts not only to organize, but to be formally recognized by the denomination. He argues that after the fundamentalist takeover of the leadership of the denomination in the late 1980s, any progressive inroads of equality achieved by Southern Baptist women during the previous century were effectively erased. Morgan's history his highly critical of the Southern Baptist Convention's gendered policy toward women. Hunt's history is salient in supplying biographical detail of WMU's earliest members and leaders, but does not include a critical analysis of the denominational response to the work of these leaders, or of the denomination, as Allen's historical treatment does.

In *Freedom's Coming, Religious Culture and the shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era*, Paul Harvey analyzes how religion is a dominant factor in the cultural history of the South, with an emphasis on the interplay between religion and race on the cultural development of the South. Throughout Reconstruction and the Progressive Era, he outlines how the South struggled to reconcile the issue of race with religious culture, especially in Protestant evangelical churches. Progressive ideals of social reform, which were found in several Protestant denominations and in white and black churches, paved the way for the later Civil Rights Movement. He does include a discussion of the efforts of Southern Methodist and Southern Baptist women to address racial issues in the South during the Progressive Era, which John Lee Eighmy ignored in his critical analysis. Harvey argues that once the evangelical South ceased to use race as a cultural point of focus after the Civil Rights Movement, the issue of gender became a central theme of Southern religious life, especially within the Southern Baptist Convention. Harvey's argument extends

Morgan's and Eighmy's, with Southern Baptists stressing church hierarchy, and a resurgence of traditional roles for women. He argues that in the SBC, there now exists a backlash against the Southern elite and any kind of progressive agenda. He states: "The era of cultural captivity had come to an end, and the era of culture wars inaugurated."[6]

In their article, "Introduction: Restoring Women and Reclaiming Gender in Social Gospel Studies," Wendy Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford define the Social Gospel movement as a "…theological and practical response to the stark realities of poverty and economic injustice" and "…a ringing indictment of the complacency of a Protestantism that had become too comfortable, individualistic, and otherworldly".[7] Social Gospel theology was two-fold: it stressed the need for personal conversion and a personal faith in Jesus Christ, as well as the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, which included a more equal social order. Edwards and Gifford argue that historical scholarship on the Social Gospel has generally omitted women's voices throughout the movement. They provide an extensive historiography in Social Gospel literature from the perspective of women, and largely written by women. The historiography reveals a varied account of viewpoints of women during the Social Gospel era, though predominately from the Northern United States, which seems to underscore the arguments of McDowell and Blue, that Social Gospel theology and practice was widely considered by historians to be a Northern phenomenon.

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[6] Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming, Religious Culture and the shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era (*Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005) 250.

[7] Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Giffords, "Introduction: Restoring Women and Reclaiming Gender in Social Gospel Studies," *Gender and the Social Gospel*, Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, eds. University of Illinois Press (2003): 1-17, 3.

There exists a great deal of scholarly literature on the Progressive Era, and specifically the Social Gospel as a religious movement espousing Progressive ideals. Social Gospel theology applied the teachings of Jesus Christ to not only minister to individuals but to create a better and more equal social order. Much scholarship is concentrated on densely populated urban areas, where the negative effects of Industrialization was more pronounced, and therefore the Northern and Northeastern United States was a focal point of literature. All of the authors referenced here have shown that the Social Gospel did take hold in the Southern United States in the post-Reconstruction period, in spite of the more conservative religious environment that existed in the area. The bulk of this scholarship is more recent, since the research into the influences of the Social Gospel on Southern Protestants was largely ignored until the last 25 years. William Link's *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism: 1880-1930* discusses Southern attitudes towards reform and focuses on the rural South, where Progressive ideologies met with much more resistance than in urban areas. In *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition*, Dewey Grantham asserts that Southern Progressives sought a movement that was framed in traditional Southern culture. Both of these authors discuss in depth how Progressive Southerners struggled to confront the issue of race, which was primarily addressed through segregation. Progressive ideals of a more egalitarian social order did not extend to African Americans in the South.

Even less academic literature is to be found on the role religious women played in the practical application of Social Gospel theology to communities in the South. Because women were not part of the leadership of these denominations, their

contributions to the Social Gospel movement have been overlooked or ignored at the institutional level, thus compounding the false idea that the Social Gospel was not actively practiced in the South. As is evidenced by the research of Carol Holcomb, John McDowell, Ellen Blue, Sara Myers and Catherine Allen, evangelical women in the Methodist Episcopal Church South and the Southern Baptist Convention were not only involved in the Social Gospel movement, but were often the primary conduits by which the movement's ideologies reached suffering communities. However, these works do not address how Progressive Era and Social Gospel tenets may have influenced the future direction of each group, or why their paths ultimately diverged, which will be the topic of this thesis.

The first chapter of this thesis will include a brief discussion of the Progressive Era in the United States and the response to the problems created by Industrialization. The religious off-shoot of the Progressive Movement was the Social Gospel and the chapter will include an analysis of the salient ideology in Social Gospel theology. Walter Rauschenbusch, one of the Social Gospel's most prominent intellectual leaders, argued that Jesus Christ's teachings outlined a communal ministry to create a Kingdom of God on earth, and Rauschenbusch's socialistic theology will be examined. Chapter 1 will also provide historical narratives of the inceptions of WMU and WHMS, and will examine how the Social Gospel and wider Progressive Era influenced the leaders of each group, and consequently how they influenced the mission outlook and trajectory of each group within the theological and cultural framework of their respective denominations.

The second chapter will discuss the home mission goals, programs, projects, and activities of Southern Baptist and Southern Methodist women that resulted in the implementation of the Social Gospel to their communities in the South. The Woman's Home Mission Society (WMHS) of the MECS (and later the Woman's Missionary Council) and the Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) embraced the Social Gospel through the mechanism of home missions, and it was through home missions that each group engaged in local social activism. Each group's work will be analyzed through the lens of Progressive Era reform issues, and the Social Gospel agenda for each group will be compared. The third chapter will examine the larger denominational responses to the Social Gospel and the Progressive Era, and the responses to the activities of these organized women's groups. As the leadership of the Southern Baptist and Methodist Episcopal Church South was entirely male and white, the responses from both denominations reflected the societal power structure of the South. This power structure, along with the theological and cultural perspectives of each denomination, created an atmosphere that embraced or rejected Social Gospel ideals.

Chapter 1

Profound Social Changes: The Progressive Era, Social Gospel and the Organization of Southern Baptist and Southern Methodist Women

The Progressive Era began in the late 1880s as a response to the many and difficult economic and social problems created by rapid Industrialization in the United States, which resulted in an explosion of economic productivity, as well as the swift development of intercontinental transportation and communication.[8] Increasing populations in urban areas of the United States due to migration and immigration, as well as the relocation of former slaves to Northern urban areas, led to unemployment, extreme poverty, overcrowded living conditions with inadequate sanitation, rampant illness, and racial and economic discrimination.[9] Unregulated and corrupt industrial practices produced exploitative environments for workers and children. Progressives, who were primarily middle class, educated and living in urban areas, sought to alleviate these problem through education, industry reform and legislation. They believed that an ordered community environment would bring stable economic development, which "…depended on the effective regulation of society in the interest of ethical business practices and good government, and in the elimination of political corruption, machine politics, and the insidious power of large corporations and other special interests".[10] To achieve less exploitative business practices and political corruption, progressives

[8] Leonard, Thomas C., "Religion and Evolution in Progressive Era Political Economy: Adversaries or Allies?" *History of Political Economy*, (Sept 2011): 429-469, 431.
[9] Deichmann, Wendy J., "The Social Gospel as a Grassroots Movement," *Church History*, 84, no. 1 (March 2015): 203-206, 203.
[10] Dewey Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1983) xvii.

supported an expansion of regulatory governmental controls. Social changes during the era emphasized the collective over the individual, and stressed the basic democratic principle of majority rule. Social reformers identified a lack of education of the "common man" as a major contributor to problems of poverty and they advocated education as an "…instrument of material progress and social control.[11]

Progressive responses to Industrialization were also produced in institutional arenas such as religion. Progressive Era tenets were conceptualized and implemented in a religious context by American Protestants in the form of the Social Gospel.[12] Like other progressives, "Social Gospelers" were not working class, but were members of the middle class. The Social Gospel movement did not originate and was not a revolt by the oppressed classes, but was taken on by people who identified with the suffering and disenfranchised and endeavored to elevate the status of the oppressed. The methods of Social Gospelers did not mimic those of other reform movements during the Progressive Era, and did not achieve its goals of moral and economic uplift through social agitation.[13] Instead, Social Gospelers worked in cooperation with secular reform entities, and pressed for legislation, believing that "…the state's regulatory powers could act as the hand of God, replacing the now failing invisible hand of the classical economists".[14] The movement worked toward social change utilizing all elements of the community with the foundation of the social teachings of Jesus Christ in the biblical gospels.

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[11] Grantham, xviii.
[12] http://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/eras/civil-war-reconstruction/progressive-era/
[13] Leonard, 432.
[14] Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming,* 54.

The Social Gospel Movement

The Social Gospel movement represented a shift in many evangelical denominations from that of an individualized, personalized concept of Christianity to an outward, socially-minded theology of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Wendy Deichmann, in "The Social Gospel as a Grassroots Movement," states, "The goal of the social gospel was to effect Christian salvation that redeemed and transformed both personal lives and the social order."[15] She argues that the transformation of the social order is conceived largely as a democratic and egalitarian one to ultimately accomplish a Kingdom of God on earth. The movement encompassed both theologians and clergy, as well as the congregants of the church, and incorporated "… political processes and the emerging social sciences" to address the mounting problems already identified by progressives using biblical teachings that emphasized love and compassion for others.[16] Deichmann argues the Social Gospel movement was a complex one, which resulted in the goal of a new Christian world order with roots in evangelical theology. Racial and economic equality were salient, if not utopian, elements of the movement's ultimate objectives, which gave rise to the modern idea of Christian ethics.[17]

[15] Deichmann, 203.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Deichmann, 204.

One of the movement's primary intellectual leaders, Walter Rauschenbusch, a professor and Northern Baptist minister, stressed the need to apply biblical principles to the mounting problems of a modern industrialized society. In *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, Rauschenbusch argued that Christian theology must not be static, but must be practically implemented to create a kingdom of God on earth. He placed the blame of sin not only on the individual, as was the common theme of many evangelical sermons, but also on a sinful framework of society. He states:

> "The social gospel is the old message of salvation, but enlarged and intensified. The individualistic gospel has taught us to see the sinfulness of every human heart and has inspired us with faith in the willingness and power of God to save every soul that comes to him. But it has not given us an adequate understanding of the sinfulness of the social order and its share in the sins of all individuals within it."[18]

Rauschenbusch argues that Christianity has, in the Social Gospel movement, an opportunity to work with other social sciences to achieve a form of social democracy, which would take control of the institution of the church. He argues that in the scriptures, Jesus often spoke of the "Kingdom of God," which Rauschenbusch described in *Christianity and the Social Crisis* as "…a collective conception, involving the whole social life of man. It is not a matter of saving human atoms, but of saving the social organism. It is not a matter of getting individuals to heaven, but of transforming the life on earth into the harmony of heaven".[19] He posits that the institution of the church as the Kingdom of God is a distortion of Christ's true meaning of the term, and

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[18] Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918) 5.

[19] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907) 65.

that Social Gospel ideas constitute the actual embodiment of the Kingdom of God. Another leader in the Social Gospel movement, Shailer Mathews, also a professor and theologian, defined the Kingdom of God as "…an ideal (though progressively approximated) in which the relation of men to God is that of sons, and (therefore) to each other, that of brothers,"[20] and "…by the kingdom of God, Jesus meant a society, is confirmed by the position which the kingdom, as the ideal, occupies in relation to the world, as the actual social order."[21]

Rauschenbusch's Kingdom of God, and by extension, the Social Gospel, was revolutionary, democratic, egalitarian, and an aspirational hope in contrast with the reality of the church: "If the Kingdom of God had remained part of the theological and Christian consciousness, the Church could not, down to our times, have been salaried by autocratic class governments to keep the democratic and economic impulses of the people under check."[22] He was critical of many denominations that considered personal conversion of paramount importance in church life, because it mainly served to add to church membership, rather than ministering to the needs of the community.[23] The ideals of the Social Gospel were collective and community-oriented in nature, rather than individual and autonomous. This ideological difference exposed a fundamental rift between biblically conservative theologians and clergy and more liberal progressive Christians. Rauschenbusch's democratic theology addressed racial and economic considerations to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. However, gender equality

[20] Shailer Mathews, *The Social Teaching of Jesus* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902) 54.
[21] Ibid, 59.
[22] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 136.
[23] Ibid.

and its potential repercussions to the established social fabric clashed with his conservative religious background and ideas of Christian social order.

Publically, Walter Rauschenbusch appeared to be in favor of gender equality, or "the woman movement." But, as Janet Forsythe Fishburn argues in "Walter Rauschenbusch and 'The Woman Movement': A Gender Analysis," he firmly believed in the traditional role of women as wife and mother, and that the social order is best served by men and women excelling at their respective roles, and occupying their very separate spheres. Fishburn argues that Rauschenbusch's perspectives on gender were a reflection of accepted social norms of the time. While he continued throughout his life to call for racial and economic equality as a way to create a more just social order, the idea of women venturing out of the private sphere into "…roles formerly reserved for men created a sense of social disorientation," in which women "…might become the dominant sex."[24] He was further concerned about poor working conditions for women not only because women provided cheap labor and were victims of exploitative employment practices, but also because this exploitation kept women from fully attending to their God-given role in the home.[25] Rauschenbusch states in *Christianity and the Social Crisis*: "But it is not choice, but grim necessity that drives woman into new ways of getting bread and clothing. The great majority of girls heartily prefer the independence and the satisfaction of the heart which are offered to a woman only in a comfortable and happy home."[26] For Rauschenbusch, women were ordained to be

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[24] Fishburn, Janet Forsythe, "Walter Rauschenbusch and 'The Woman Movement': A Gender Analysis", *Gender and the Social Gospel*, Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003): 71-86, 83-84.
[25] Ibid, 79-80.
[26] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 276-277.

middle class wives and mothers in the Kingdom of God, and an economic system that forced women to work outside the private sphere was untenable. And like most progressives, he considered education of vital importance for boys and girls alike, but his fervor for women's education was once again restricted to the framework of the home: "Better-educated, healthier women uplifted the race by bearing more more-intelligent, healthier children."[27]

Rauschenbusch's views were not only the result of a religious lens of Progressive ideology, but also heavily reflected Victorian mores that pervaded mid-to-late 19th century American society. As Peggy Pascoe argues in her book, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939*, the Victorian social structure appeared at first glance to enhance the status of women, as it gave women more agency in choosing a spouse, thus shifting this responsibility away from parents.[28] However, women's agency in their own lives could be even more restrictive under the Victorian ideals of "true womanhood," which stressed the "…virtues of purity, piety, domesticity, and submissiveness."[29] As Pascoe argues: "According to the ideal, husbands were assigned economic responsibility for the family. Wives were expected to be economic dependents, a status that sharply limited women's alternatives inside and outside marriage."[30] Further, an ideal of the "Christian home" emerged during the Progressive movement, which also undergirded the patriarchal structure of society. The romanticized "Christian home" concept was an attempt by

[27] Ibid, 81.
[28] Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 35.
[29] Ibid, 4.
[30] Ibid, 36.

some men, and specifically religious leaders, to maintain men's authority in the home, and was implemented under the guise of protecting women from the immoral and corrupting influences of the public sphere.[31] Social Gospel leaders were clearly impacted by this ideology and although Social Gospel theologians and clergy sought to apply Christian biblical principles to answer the problems of political and economic inequalities, gender equality represented a paradigm shift from which even the most progressive "Social Gospelers" feared society would not recover. Proponents of the Social Gospel, including its most visible and vocal leaders, reinforced the traditionally gendered societal structures, and did so by utilizing biblical texts and rhetoric that evoked the authority of God and the church.

Even though the Victorian principles of "true womanhood" and the "Christian home" dominated white middle class Progressive society, and were designed to maintain the power of white Christian men, Pascoe argues that religious women leveraged these ideals to gain power and agency to become the moral center of their own homes. Especially within the realm of home mission work, women's "…rhetorical devotion to the Christian home was both heartfelt and strategic, a way of turning the Christian home, an image of powerful symbolic significance for Victorian culture, into a symbol for female moral authority."[32] In her book *White Women's Rights*, Louise Newman argues that during the early Progressive Movement years, white religious women extended their moral authority to do "civilization-work." Civilization-work firmly placed white Christian women in charge of uplifting civilization as a whole, specifically targeting nonwhites and non-Christians. Newman states that this work

[31] Ibid.
[32] Pascoe, 36-37.

"…encompassed all activities intended to 'elevate' a 'lower race,' including converting 'savages' to Christianity, 'Americanizing' immigrants in settlement houses, uplifting Negroes for the Freedman's Bureau, and 'bringing civilization' to Indians on reservations."[33] Through civilization-work, white women gained societal status through the vehicle of moral authority over nonwhites and non-Christians. White Christian men had to "…acknowledge white women's claims to greater effectiveness in civilization-work."[34] In extending the ideals of the Christian home to wider American society, white Protestant women effectively created a higher tier in the social hierarchy for themselves by first changing the power structure within the home.

It is in this environment that the leadership of the Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) and the Woman's Home Mission Society (WMHS) and later the Woman's Missionary Council, engaged in social activism through their organizations, and were impacted by Social Gospel ideologies. Because of the Progressive Era, leaders in each group developed perspectives of activism through mission work and implemented change in their organizations that demonstrated the influence of the Social Gospel. Prior to the formal organization of WMU and WHMS, women in these denominations and others had few avenues open to function in the public sphere, and enjoyed few outlets with which to express their faith through ministry to others. Ironically, Southern Baptist and Southern Methodist women, like their evangelical counterparts in and out of the South, began their home mission work by creating separate organizations, which functioned largely without male leadership. Pascoe states: "Breaking away from denominational missionary organizations administered by men, evangelical women

[33] Louise Michelle Newman, White Women's Rights (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 8.
[34] Ibid.

formed their own missionary societies, this time devoted to projects chosen by churchwomen rather than churchmen."[35] In organizing their own groups and engaging in their own social activism through home missions, evangelical women all over the nation gained a foothold in the public sphere.

Organizational Beginnings:

Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention

The Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention (WMU), was formally recognized in 1888 after a 20-year battle by women of the Southern Baptist denomination to formulate an organized structure with the goal of aiding and funding mission work in the United States and overseas. *In Royal Service*, a history of WMU written for the 25th anniversary of the organization, Fannie E.S. Heck, the intellectual leader, and a three-time WMU president spanning 15 of the organization's early years, described the 1868 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Baltimore, Maryland. At this convention, a group of Southern Baptist women from various churches and states met in conjunction with the SBC annual meeting, though not in an official capacity, with the goal to "…touch a wide circle of American women for other women."[36] The women met in a basement of a church, and "The result was, as far as known, the first general meeting of Southern Baptist Women for Missions."[37] According to Heck, the meeting was precipitated by a request for

[35] Pascoe, 6.
[36] Fannie E. S. Heck, *In Royal Service* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1913) 89.
[37] Ibid.

mission funding by a Southern Baptist doctor, minister and missionary to China, Rosewell Graves to his mother. In an attempt to evangelize families in China, Graves requested monies to pay for a Chinese woman to relay bible stories in communities and homes, as there was no funding from the FMB for this endeavor.[38] Ann Graves agreed to help fund the "bible" woman missionary for her son's ministry in China, and asked the women at the meeting in Baltimore to organize women's "societies" to raise money toward this goal. In 1871, Ann Graves, as the corresponding secretary of the Woman's Mission to Woman of the Baptist Churches of Maryland, suggested that Southern Baptist women organize, with "…state branches and missionary circles either in churches or having neighboring churches unite, these to meet regularly 'for prayer and the dissemination of missionary intelligence.'"[39]

The first official fundraiser of Southern Baptist women toward the goal of missions was a "mite box", which was to be distributed to all households in the church, and into which all family members could contribute coins. The mite box is taken from a bible story in Luke 21:1-4 where Jesus saw a poor widow give two copper coins to the church treasury. He stated that the widow gave all she had, but other rich members of the church gave only of their surplus.[40] The distribution of the mite box by the Woman's Mission to Woman gave all women of the church an opportunity to contribute toward the mission effort in China. Graves also forwarded this mite box concept to the Foreign Mission Board (FMB) to aid in their own work, which the board published in

[38] Alma Hunt, *History of Woman's Missionary Union* (Birmingham: Woman's Missionary Union, 1974) 11.
[39] Ibid, 12.
[40] New American Standard Bible.

its *Foreign Mission Journal* in 1878.[41] Although the mite box represented the beginning of the mission effort of Southern Baptist women, and further the beginning of a battle to discourage and disrupt the organization of its women by the Southern Baptist leadership, the men of the FMB did not hesitate to utilize a successful fundraising idea created by a group of women.

The women encountered considerable opposition to any formal organization by the male leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), leaders of state conventions of the denomination, ministers and lay leadership in individual churches and male church members. In her WMU history, Fannie Heck pinpointed the real impetus of the male challenge to women's organizing: "After these years it is hard to understand the opposition these organizations met from the leader of missions, or to understand the real fears with which they regarded the determination of the women to organize societies of their own."[42] The male leadership was fearful of the potential power an organized group of women could wield within the church, and by extension, in their homes. Heck also gave an historical explanation for the male opposition to organization: "…this opposition was very strong in the South. The impulse moving among Southern women encountered also the depression, sorrow and poverty which followed in the track of devastation left by war."[43] The vehement challenges to the women's organization in which Heck refers was part of the disruption of the social Southern hierarchy brought on by the war, Emancipation and Reconstruction. While this included opposition to a change in gender roles, Southern Baptists, like many white

[41] Hunt, 12-13.
[42] Heck, 91.
[43] Ibid.

Southerners, were openly hostile to any changes in the racial hierarchy. In his book, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists*, John Lee Eighmy argues that Southern Baptist attitudes towards race continually reflected the idea of white racial superiority which was pervasive in Southern society: "From the time of emancipation to the end of the century, Southern whites united to determine that the freedmen made equal under the Constitution would not enjoy equality in education, economic opportunity, social relations or civil rights."[44] With few exceptions, Southern Baptists upheld ideas of inferiority of African Americans, and justified racial discrimination by advancing African American's "…supposed preference for subordination, the divine sanctity of segregation, and miscegenation as the greatest evil associated with race and the certain consequence of social equality."[45] Southern Baptists endorsed discriminatory and separatist positions that laid the groundwork for Jim Crow laws.[46]

During the Reconstruction years, Southern Baptists did not consider reunification with the Northern Baptist church for the same reason the division happened in the first place: slavery. Baptist historian Carol Crawford Holcomb asserts that Southern Baptists "…refused to confess any moral wrong in slavery or political wrong in secession."[47] Northern Baptist mission groups saw disenfranchised former slaves as an opportunity for evangelism and ministry, and attempted to cooperate with their Southern Baptist counterparts in this effort. Southern Baptists rejected any

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[44] John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972) 38.
[45] Ibid, 39.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Carol Crawford Holcomb, *Mothering the South: The Influence of Gender and the Social Gospel on the Social Values of the Leadership of Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention, 1888-1930*, PhD dissertation, Baylor University, 1999, 25.

cooperation with these groups "…partly because of territorial jealousy and partly due to Baptist fears that northern missionaries would promote social equality among the races."[48] Nonetheless, Northern Baptist missionaries engaged in home mission work with African Americans in the South, especially in education.[49] Southern Baptists eventually embarked on a home mission and evangelical ministry for the black community, primarily because it maintained the idea of white superiority and the Southern racial hierarchy. The male leadership of the SBC fought to preserve traditional societal roles, whether racial or gendered, and was resentful of any Northern encroachment upon their religious autonomy.

WMU historian, Catherine Allen,[50] gives another reason for the staunch opposition to a women's mission organization: church leaders viewed women's groups as competition. The men feared churches would be split in two, rather than enhanced if women's groups were able to organize. Men were also anxious that they would lose control of church finances if women were allowed to decide where monies were spent.[51] Most opposition to a women's mission organization was based in a fear of change, a fear of loss of power, as well as a strict interpretation of New Testament teachings. Using the book of First Timothy as a scriptural basis, Baptist men developed an entrenched belief that women should not engage in public speaking, especially to mixed audiences, as doing so would indicate a woman's authority over a man. 1 Timothy 2:11-13, which is attributed to the Apostle Paul, states: [11]"Let a woman quietly receive

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[48] Holcomb, 26.
[49] Eighmy, 36.
[50] Current WMU librarian and archivist, Cindy Johnson, considers Allen's *A Century to Celebrate* the most comprehensive history of WMU to date.
[51] Catherine Allen, *A Century to Celebrate: History of the Woman's Missionary Union* (Birmingham: Woman's Missionary Union, 1987) 30.

instruction with entire submissiveness. [12] But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. [13] For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve."[52] This passage of scripture is the foundation for the present policy of the Southern Baptist Convention that denies women positions of leadership as clergy or deacons. Even with this well-known dictum of Southern Baptist doctrine, very early Baptist movements showed that women not only participated in the spiritual life of the church and their communities, but in some very rare instances they were allowed to speak in public, though their actions were still restricted by social hierarchy.

Catherine Brekus asserts in *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845*, prior to the American Revolution, Baptists, as well as another group called Separates, represented outlier religious sects that "…stood outside of the formal public of the state."[53] Because of their separate status, Brekus argues, these Baptists were somewhat more open to allowing women to testify to the mixed audiences of church meetings of their spiritual experiences, than their established counterparts. As Baptists were mostly uneducated and poor, and were "…dissenters who occupied a middle ground between church and state,"[54] gender norms upheld by the established denominations generally did not apply, and Baptists "…saw no reason why women should not be allowed to speak during religious meetings."[55] But the group, faced with harassment from the dominant Anglican community, acquiesced to the established social norms, and forbade women from speaking in public.[56] Baptists

[52]New American Standard Bible.
[53] Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 51.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid, 65.

desired survival and power as its membership increased, and this was attained by adherence to the more mainstream social ideologies. Ultimately, Brekus argues, as most evangelical women in American history experienced, Baptist women "…lost their public voice as a struggling marginal sect matured into a prosperous denomination with all the trappings of respectability, including a well-educated male clergy."[57] Other reasons for this prohibition were racially motivated. Southern evangelicals feared any potential change in the hierarchical structure of the church or society. If white women could be allowed the opportunity to freely speak or preach as men did, then slaves could do so, as well, which could upend the male power structure and social order.[58] As the 18th century ended, Baptist women were held to the dictates of 1 Tim. 2.

In *Bodies of Belief: Baptist Community in Early America*, Janet Moore Lindman discusses the paradoxical nature of late 18th and early 19th century American Baptist church. She argues that once a member of the church body, American Baptists believed in a gender and even racial spiritual equality, but still enforced the secular social hierarchy. She states that Baptists "…did not progress on a one-way course from marginal sectarian movement to traditional mainline denomination; instead it encompassed both radical and conservative attributes from the onset of development in early America."[59] Women, both white and free blacks, were able to be spiritual leaders in the community, albeit outside the walls of the church, by "…creating their own devotional culture based on female friendships, household meetings and community

[57] Brekus, 66.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Janet Moore Lindman, *Bodies of Belief: Baptist Community in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) 7.

involvement."[60] Baptist women were barred from participation in the creation and implementation of church policy, but they utilized the annual assembly meetings to listen to sermons and engage in social interaction with other women.[61] Literate white women frequently read and wrote about their spiritual experiences.[62] Lindman argues this particular concept of spiritual equality "…had powerful implications for the ways in which female piety and black spirituality was shaped and experienced."[63] Even if societal and political equality did not exist, the ideal of spiritual equality informed the work and social activism of Southern Baptist women during the Progressive Era. They believed they held an important role in the evangelical mission of the church, and they carefully implemented their mission goals with the established social and denominational boundaries in mind.

In an apparent effort to demonstrate its allegiance to the Foreign Mission Board, Home Mission Board, delegates and leaders of the SBC, WMU officially declared its intention to engage in mission work in support and for the benefit of the SBC, while maintaining its subordinate position within the Convention. The WMU Constitution Preamble of 1888 stated:

> "We, the women of the churches connected with the Southern Baptist Convention, desirous of stimulating the missionary spirit and the grace of giving among the women and children of the churches, and aiding in collecting funds for missionary purposes, to be disbursed by the Boards of the Southern Baptist Convention, and disclaiming all intention of independent action, organize…"[64]

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[60] Ibid, 6.
[61] Ibid, 117.
[62] Ibid, 118.
[63] Ibid, 113.
[64] Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention Constitution, 1888, WMU Archive, Birmingham, AL.

The language of the preamble indicates that a primary focus would be to raise funds for mission work, which would be handed over to the Foreign and Home Mission Boards of the SBC without question or oversight by WMU. The statement further shows an intention to deny any future attempts to organize or gain power, which would be contrary to expected gender roles, and as Catherine Allen argues, was an endeavor to "…comfort the fearful."[65]

Although the phrasing of the group's name indicated its status as merely a support to the SBC, and its Home and Foreign Mission Boards, the phrase "disclaiming all intention of independent action" was eventually deleted from the preamble. WMU's most pivotal early leaders, Annie Armstrong and Fannie Heck, had very different styles of organizational management that reflected different Progressive Era influences. Armstrong, while publicly taking a subservient role to the male populated mission boards, created an entrance into the public sphere for herself and her organization. As WMU's first Corresponding Secretary[66], Armstrong would run the organization in the manner of any male Chief Executive Officer, and her prior experiences in secular and religious charity work in the most oppressed areas of Baltimore made her an undaunted advocate for the dispossessed, and a highly successful fundraiser for mission work. WMU's later mission efforts would go far beyond fundraising for the mission boards of the SBC, but the first years of organization were devoted to the development of fundraising techniques and programs, especially those created and implemented by

[65] Allen, 48.
[66] The office of Corresponding Secretary in WMU and the mission boards of the Southern Baptist Convention was the modern equivalent of a Chief Executive Officer. Under Armstrong, the office was the center of power within the organization.

Armstrong, whose accomplishments for the goal of missions became a lucrative publishing business that continually funded the mission boards for years.[67] This steady stream of monies in support of the mission boards, along with a strict outward adherence to the directive of 1Timothy 2, allowed WMU to grow and thrive without much male interference from the SBC.

WMU's change in leadership reflected a shift from an early emphasis on the financial support of foreign missions, and an organizational support to the FMB, HMB and Sunday School board, during the tenure of Annie Armstrong, to the more progressive, community oriented leadership under the direction of Fannie Heck. Heck's substantial contributions to the Progressive outlook of WMU is evident in the direction of the work of WMU. Under her leadership, a missionary training school for women was opened, a social service program was developed and implemented, and the Southern Baptist version of the settlement house movement, a Progressive Era hallmark, was begun. Heck's experience with the progressive groups and networking skills kept her in touch with the larger reform movements in the United States, and she used this knowledge to steer the efforts of her mission organization toward social awareness. However, WMU leaders and members, who became the denomination's largest and most powerful women's group, rarely publicly voiced progressive rhetoric, nor would its leadership officially acknowledge this ideological trend toward social activism. Nevertheless, WMU's foundational mission programs, extensive body of literature and educational tools, fundraising techniques and overall dedication to the improvement of the lives of women, men and children in communities at home and

[67] Allen, 164.

abroad, indicate a receptiveness and responsiveness to the Progressive Movement's reform ideals.

Armstrong and Heck were both crucial figures in the early years of development of WMU, and although their leadership styles were dissimilar (Armstrong's style was more commanding, and Heck's was more genteel and polite), they shared the same religious and Southern socio-economic backgrounds. Each was born into upper class Southern families, and received a private education. Neither leader married or moved out of the family home. Both women, at a young age, were exposed to socially and community conscious organizations, and were involved in secular and religious-based charity work. Though their status as unmarried and childless women might have placed them at a social disadvantage within the context of the Southern Baptist church, which ultimately valued women only as wives and mothers, Armstrong and Heck were able to devote time and energy to the goals of WMU unencumbered by familial responsibilities. Their economic status allowed them to work for WMU without salary,[68] the result of which was two-fold: the lack of administrative overhead permitted more funds to flow into the boards and mission work, and it soothed fears of the leadership of the SBC that the women might venture into the public sphere by performing paid work. Both women were acutely aware, and also accepted, women's secondary and supportive positions in the Southern Baptist church. However, Armstrong's early leadership set the foundation for WMU to function as an important group on which the boards of the SBC relied, and Heck, with a background steeped in

[68] Bobbie Sorrill, *Annie Armstrong: Dreamer in Action* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984). Allen, *A Century to Celebrate*.

activism, led WMU to implement programs that reflected Progressive Era and Social Gospel ideals.

Annie Walker Armstrong's Leadership

Annie Walker Armstrong, WMU's first Corresponding Secretary, was born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1850, in a family who earned their wealth in the tobacco business.[69] Armstrong's father died when she was two, and her mother brought her young family up in the early Southern Baptist church. Armstrong's spiritual conversion experience in the church occurred relatively later in her life, at age 20, and it profoundly changed the trajectory of her life into one of social action through mission work. The effects of rapid Industrialization were evident and problematic in Baltimore, a port city,[70] and during Armstrong's early adult years, she was involved in organizational efforts to minister to the most indigent people in the area through, and in cooperation with, religious and secular groups. She was involved in charity work with children, which was considered class and gender appropriate at the time, and she taught Sunday School and bible lessons to children from a local shelter called "Home of the Friendless," as well as visited area hospitals. Armstrong later founded the Ladies Bay View Mission, which ministered to the Bay View Asylum, originally an almshouse that provided shelter and healthcare for men and women, including African Americans. By

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[69] Catherine Allen, *Laborers Together with God* (Birmingham: Woman's Missionary Union, 1987) 165.

[70] Sorrill states that in the 19th century Baltimore was an active port city with several industries, including textile manufacturing. Baltimore received an influx of immigrants from Germany and Ireland, and experienced many problems created by Industrialization. As Maryland was a border state during the Civil War, both Northern and Southern political parties were active in Baltimore. The Armstrong family sided with the South (19-30).

1866, it became Bay View Asylum, which provided care for mentally ill patients and the poor. It became part of the Baltimore City Hospitals, and eventually merged with Johns Hopkins Hospital in 1982.[71] She made weekly visits to Bay View Mission and began her extensive fundraising career for the benefit of the asylum, often eliciting moneys from other religious women's groups. She acknowledged that the visits to Bay View Mission were difficult and often exhausting,[72] but Armstrong's years-long support of this mission was indicative of the influences of Social Gospel doctrines, and the early exposure to Progressive Era issues set the stage for her later organizational activism.

Although Armstrong's fundraising efforts for Bay View Mission were considered an appropriate way in which to engage in mission activities for aristocratic women, continued weekly visits to the poorhouse showed Progressive Era influences in her outlook toward missions. She also considered working with African Americans and Native Americans part of her service toward the goal of home missions, and was one of the first leaders of WMU to implement programs to address the spiritual and educational needs of African American women and children. But, as Catherine Allen argues, Armstrong's desire to uplift African Americans and evangelize them revealed ulterior motives: she was in competition with Roman Catholics and Northern Baptists for the souls of African Americans. Armstrong feared that the Catholic faith could potentially take over the South if relations between whites and blacks did not improve. She found the Northern Baptist mission work with blacks annoying. Allen states that Armstrong "…believed that blacks were the personal responsibility of Southern

[71] H. Furlong Baldwin Library, Maryland Historical Society, mdhs.org.
[72] Sorrill, 51-56.

Christian white women."[73] Often Northern Baptist missionary work did nothing to dispel ideas of segregation and the racial superiority of whites. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham asserts in *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church 1880-1920*, that the Northern mission movement during the Progressive Era "…could and would translate into racist paternalism and cultural imperialism on the part of white women. Pious white missionaries-educators, sent South by their denominational societies to teach the Gospel and academic or industrial skills, felt compelled, all too often, to instruct blacks as to their subordinate place within the racial hierarchy of the South and nation."[74] Armstrong also felt that evangelizing black women aided in Southern Baptist Foreign Mission efforts: black women could be trained to be missionaries to the African continent,[75] which further perpetuated cultural imperialism. Her motives were less competitive in her work with Native Americans. Through a meeting on foreign missions, she became aware of the extreme conditions of poverty in which the Osage and Creek tribes lived in Indian Territory, and she organized clothing drives for the students to attend school. She visited Indian Territory in 1904 and continued to work to evangelize Native American populations there.[76]

Annie Armstrong was known to be a doer, with exceptional drive to achieve and exceptional energy with which to devote to mission work. A nickname attributed to her was "Annie Strong Arm"[77] which described not only her physical and mental fortitude, but also her leadership style. As Corresponding Secretary, Armstrong's personality

[73] Allen, *A Century to Celebrate*, 242.
[74] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) 92.
[75] Sorrill, 139.
[76] Sorrill, 57-58; Allen, *Laborers Together with God*, 169.
[77] Allen, *Laborers Together with God*, 165.

made her a natural fit to lead an early WMU, and helped her to mold the organization into a position of importance within the SBC. Even though her disposition and personal drive were admirable characteristics for a public sphere leader, her value system was still framed by the social confines and theology of the Southern Baptist church, which regarded women primarily as a support system for men. Armstrong managed the delicate task of developing and expanding the organization while not offending the male leadership of the SBC by venturing into the public sphere. She successfully accomplished this in four specific ways. First, her plan for organizational mission work practically implemented the most important goal of the church, which was to save souls through spiritual conversion, and add members to the church. The spiritual conversion process was the first step and main objective of all Southern Baptist evangelism, and was believed to be the only avenue to heaven. The membership expansion of the church was based on the commandment of Jesus to his disciples following his resurrection from the dead in Matt 28:19: "'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.'"[78]

Secondly, Armstrong forged positive, cooperative and supportive relationships with the male Corresponding Secretaries of the Foreign Mission Board, Home Mission Board and Sunday School Board; and thirdly, she began publishing mission literature which financially supported the SBC boards, and utilized other successful fundraising techniques; and fourth, her exhaustive work for WMU was entirely voluntary, and she took great care to never break the denominational rules of speaking in public to a mixed-gender audience. She never took a salary and continued to decline pay for her

[78] New American Standard Bible.

work even when WMU's Executive Committee passed a motion to do so, and also when the SBC boards suggested her office become a paid position.[79]

Armstrong laid the groundwork for WMU's early survival and continued success by carefully negotiating relationships with her male counterparts in the SBC. Early mission tasks were done solely at the behest of the SBC boards. WMU's formation and role in the SBC was explained by Alma Hunt in *History of the Woman's Missionary Union*: "The Union desired to be auxiliary, not only in name, but in reality; to have definite guidance from the boards in forming the pattern and direction of the work undertaken."[80] The boards agreed to share in the expenses incurred by WMU in its requested work.[81] Armstrong regularly wrote the corresponding secretaries at the SBC and kept them well informed of WMU's activities. She also met with them in person, and as Catherine Allen notes, "When she wanted to see the SBC board secretaries, she summoned them to Baltimore."[82] Her extensive correspondence with the three board secretaries was often demanding and she had no difficulty in directing the male Corresponding Secretaries to follow her wishes. While she commanded the attention of many SBC leaders, she downplayed public praise, as is evident in a letter from Armstrong to J.M. Frost, Corresponding Secretary of the Sunday School Board:

> "I do want you to recognize that I thoroughly appreciated the full and cordial endorsement you gave to the work as done by Woman's Missionary Union for all three Boards S.B.C., and the way you spoke of the Corresponding Secretary's impartiality in the efforts she has made for the

[79] Allen, 170.
[80] Hunt, 43.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Allen, 170.

> three Boards. I do believe in this request you did not say more than was correct, even though you did overrate her 'ability,' etc., etc. I do want to thank you for your hearty support."[83]

In "Building a Publishing Empire: The Annie Armstrong Era of WMU, SBC," Carol Crawford Holcomb details Armstrong's business acumen in the daily running of WMU. Holcomb states that Armstrong "…utilized accounting, marketing, promotion, advertising, publishing, and mass communication (she wrote thousands of letters by hand) to raise money and awareness for foreign and home missions."[84] Armstrong began publishing mission-based literature before WMU's official organization by establishing a Maryland Baptist reading room and library to spread information about home and foreign missions. Armstrong was appointed, as corresponding secretary, to operate, and "…sell leaflets and have on hand missions periodicals and books from all denominations."[85] Armstrong would serve as Corresponding Secretary of the Maryland Baptist Mission Rooms during her entire tenure at WMU. She created fundraising methods that stressed systematic giving of smaller amounts to ensure continual and long-lasting donations to the mission cause. She also implemented a plan, in accordance with the SBC, to raise monies toward alleviating debt incurred by both the Foreign and Home Mission Boards in 1894 and 1895.[86]

Annie Armstrong was forceful, exact, and sometimes domineering toward other WMU leaders and the male leadership of the SBC, but she managed to make WMU's

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[83] Keith Harper, Ed., *Rescue the Perishing: Selected Correspondence of Annie W. Armstrong* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2004) 79.
[84] Holcomb, Carol Crawford, "Building a Publishing Empire: The Annie Armstrong Era of WMU, SBC," *Baptist History and Heritage,* Spring (2012): 18-38.
[85] Sorrill, 63.
[86] Sorrill, 123, Allen, 129.

work indispensable to the SBC. She avoided damaging criticism of WMU by refusing to accept payment for her extensive work for WMU, the result of which would outwardly indicate a desire to function in the world of business and the public sphere. As Allen argues: "Her absolute purity from financial motives undoubtedly gave her and WMU a higher standing among certain Baptists."[87] Armstrong also kept Southern Baptist men content by refusing to speak to mixed-gender audiences, although she frequently gave speeches to female audiences and enjoyed public speaking on her favorite subject of missions.[88] As a member of the Southern Baptist Church, Armstrong was taught to believe in the authority of the Bible. As a result, her submissive conduct reveals more than an attempt to leverage power with the SBC boards. She considered Southern Baptist theology to be correct. Even though she believed in the gendered societal and religious hierarchy, she found women's work in the home tiresome. Hunt states that Armstrong "…admitted that she enjoyed missionary work more and found it less difficult than keeping the domestic machinery running smoothly."[89] Armstrong's leadership traits and personality belonged in the public sphere, and she easily operated in the world of men. Yet, her acceptance of and deference to the patriarchal church structure contributed to the survival and success of WMU during its beginning years.

Fannie Exile Scudder Heck

[87] Allen, 170.
[88] Ibid, 170-171.
[89] Hunt, 41.

Three-time president of WMU, Fannie E.S. Heck, was arguably the ideological mother of WMU, and was a leader who was profoundly influenced by the Social Gospel movement in the South. She, in turn, brought Social Gospel principals to WMU. Her third presidency, from 1906 until her death in 1915, marked rapid growth for WMU and an implementation of Social Gospel programs despite the Southern Baptist Convention's opposition to the Progressive movement and Social Gospel theology. Heck's early life was heavily influenced by her mother, Mattie Callendine Heck, who was involved in civic and religious activism, and her father, Jonathan McGee Heck, who served in official capacities as a trustee of Wake Forest University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and on the Foreign Mission Board.[90] Like Annie Armstrong, Heck was born into Southern aristocracy, and her father was an officer in the Confederacy. She was born during the Civil War and grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina.[91] Her personal conversion experience occurred in her early teen years during a revival meeting when she "…confessed faith in Jesus Christ and had accepted him as Saviour."[92]

Fannie Heck's early adulthood encompassed work in both civic and church organizations, and she remained faithful to many of these organizations while she led WMU. She was a founder and first president of the Woman's Club of Raleigh, whose activities were described as "…social, cultural, and benevolent."[93] She was involved in the creation of Raleigh's Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and eventually

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[90] Minnie Kennedy (Mrs. W. C) James, *Fannie E.S. Heck: A Study of The Hidden Springs in a Rarely Useful and Victorious Life* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1939) 26.
[91] Heck's middle name, "Exile," commemorated the family's location at the time of her birth at a Virginia resort, from their home in North Carolina. Heck herself would later add "Scudder" as a middle name to honor a mission-minded great-grandmother. James, 4, 8; Hunt, 51.
[92] James, 38.
[93] Ibid, 59.

the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Much of this work contributed to Heck's awareness of the problems of poverty in Raleigh and she was actively involved in, or helped create organizations focused on social service. She was a founder and early president of the Associated Charities in Raleigh, was a member of the North Carolina Conference of Social Service, and served on the Committee of Juvenile Courts.[94] She was also served as vice-president of the Wake County Betterment Association.[95] Heck's secular charity work placed her in contact with members of other denominations where she was exposed to the activist work done by other women's groups. She also forged relationships with her Northern Baptist counterparts and led the Jamestown Exposition, which was meeting of Northern and Southern Baptist women.[96] The impact of the Social Gospel movement on Heck can be seen in her secular charitable work. This led to her involvement and later leadership in the Southern Sociological Congress.

Southern Sociological Congress

Founded in 1912 by the Governor of Tennessee, Ben Hooper, the Southern Sociological Congress convened to "…discuss social and civic problems of the South."[97] Attendees and members included many socially progressive leaders from government, academia and religious organizations. An underlying theme of the

[94] James, 61.
[95] Allen, 31.
[96] Ibid, 33.
[97] Bernard, L.L., "Southern Sociological Congress," *American Journal of Sociology*, 18, no. 2 (Sept. 1912): 258-259; 259.

Congress was to promote cooperation between various institutions to address social problems through reform. The Congress was part of a national conference, and leaders agreed that the best way to bring social reform to the South was to create its own organization, not one that was entirely affiliated with northern efforts.[98] The first Congress highlighted over 50 speakers, who discussed issues of "…child welfare, courts and prisons, public health, Negro problems, enemies of the home, education and co-operation, the church and social service, the call and qualifications of a social worker."[99] This Congress upheld "principles" ranging from the adoption of new prison and juvenile court systems, and the abolition of child labor to reducing or preventing alcoholism and prostitution.

A main focus of attention was on the issue of race, with an emphasis on "equal justice to both races."[100] While the 1912 Congress emphasized the African American problems of poverty, lack of education, and white violence against blacks, especially lynching, as William Link points out, organizations like the Southern Sociological Congress encouraged paternalistic attitudes towards African Americans. The Congress and other groups promoted "…appropriate values and objectives within the black community by encouraging the evolution of a class structure that existed parallel to the white social hierarchy."[101] This separation was evident in the 1912 meeting, in which some black leaders met with members of the Congress, but no African Americans were allowed to present papers. By 1914, leaders of the National Association for the

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98 Chatfield, E. Charles, "The Southern Sociological Congress: Organization of Uplift," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 19, no. 4 (Dec.1960): 328-347.
99 Bernard, L.L., 259.
100 Ibid, 258.
101 William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992) 241.

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) expressed vocal criticism of the Congress, and blacks were then invited to sit on the floor of the meeting.[102] The Congress desired the uplift of the African American community, but ultimately did not venture, even theoretically, outside the confines of the entrenched racial societal structure.[103] However, and organization of black Baptist women did support the Congress. The Woman's Convention, the auxiliary to the National Baptist Convention, which was and is the black Baptist denomination,[104] formally endorsed the Congress in 1913. The Woman's Convention supported the work on the Congress as it addressed societal topics important to black women, including "…industrial problems, alcoholism, sanitary conditions, public health, race relations, and mob violence."[105]

Other principles of the Congress stressed "The closest co-operation between the church and all social agencies for the securing of these results,"[106] highlighting the idea that engagement with religious leaders was a salient element of a cohesive social reform movement. Initially, Congress attendees were "…specialists in the field of organized charities, courts and prisons, public health, child welfare."[107] But during the nine years the Congress was in existence, the subject matter discussed became even more evangelistic in tone. By 1919, the official Platform of the Southern Sociological Congress included preservation of the home, community health issues, public education, issues of race, temperance, and an anti-communist sentiment. The platform following World War I reflected a shift toward nationalism and reform through

[102] Grantham, 381.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Higginbotham, 8.
[105] Ibid, 183-184.
[106] Grantham, 381.
[107] Ibid, 259.

religious and moral means: reform would be attained through moral uplift. Ultimately, social service workers were not involved in the Congress, as focus shifted away from social welfare and moved to reform.[108]

Fannie Heck was heavily involved in the very early years of the Congress, as she was appointed by the Governor of North Carolina to be a delegate, and in 1914 was elected second vice-president.[109] Her appointment to the Congress was an indication of her established reputation as a proponent of social reform and her standing as a community leader in the Social Gospel movement. WMU officers, Lulie Wharton, who was the head of the Personal Service department at WMU, and Maud McLure, who ran the WMU Training School, as well other national and state WMU leaders also attended the conference.[110] By the time Heck was elected as an officer in the Southern Sociological Congress, the Personal Service Department had already been established under her leadership. "Personal Service" was WMU's name for social work, but the term and the work was modified to include Southern Baptist principles of conversion as a basis from which all social and mission actions sprang, and to avoid provoking Southern Baptist leaders that were offended by the Social Gospel.[111] Heck's biographer and friend, Minnie Kennedy James, explained Heck's motivation for the creation of Personal Service: "It would have been impossible for her to map out any program of Christian work without taking into consideration the vital need of those who considered themselves 'labourers together with God' to apply themselves personally to the great

[108] Chatfield, 346.
[109] James, 61. Allen, *A Century to Celebrate*, 213.
[110] Allen, 213.
[111] Ibid, 215.

task of redeeming the world."[112] The WMU Training School, which provided theological and mission education for women embarking on a career in missions, was formally inaugurated in 1907 under Heck's third presidency and she devoted much of her time and energy toward its success.[113] In Heck's words, "1907 was distinctly the young woman's year."[114]

Heck's leadership style, religious piety and position as an aristocratic Southern lady allowed her to steer WMU toward Social Gospel programs without garnering negative attention of Southern Baptist men. She was described as physically beautiful, immaculately dressed, and a role model of femininity: "…the perfect picture of a Christian woman leader,"[115] and embodied many of the characteristics of Southern ladyhood, which included graciousness, beauty, and religious fervor.[116] Southern ladies were also expected to be hard-working, economical, and able to run a large household of slaves or servants.[117] Although the ideal of the Southern lady centered around marriage and the running of an aristocratic antebellum Southern home, the imagery endured into the 20th century for all classes of white women. Southern historian Anne Firor Scott argues that Southern women learned from childhood that they must strive for "…perfection and submission,"[118] and that schools for girls "…emphasized correct female behavior more than intellectual development."[119] The image of the Southern lady

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[112] James, 125.
[113] Allen, 263.
[114] Heck, 189.
[115] Allen, 104-105.
[116] Anne Firor Scott, *Making the Invisible Woman Visible* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 220.
[117] Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: from Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970) 6.
[118] Ibid, 7.
[119] Ibid.

had some of its roots in 17th century England, especially in its adherence to a patriarchal family structure. Obedience to the husband and father was paramount in this structure, which continued into the rural and aristocratic pre-war South.[120] Scott argues that the image of the Southern lady helped to maintain the hierarchical social and system in the South, as well as the institution of slavery. After the war and Emancipation, the image was still perpetuated because it helped to maintain the traditional social structure, and white patriarchal power, especially when this structure was in flux: "A society increasingly threatened from the outside had every reason to try to diminish internal threats to its stability."[121] Fannie Heck's early life would have been profoundly influenced by the imagery of the Southern lady, which not only sustained the secondary social position of white women, but the subordinate position of African Americans.

Fannie Heck was, like Annie Armstrong, a prolific writer and she wrote and edited many of the leaflets, periodicals and other WMU literature during her last tenure as president.[122] Her writing style was lyrical, often using poetry as a tool to promote interest in missions. She advanced prayer as a tool around which mission activities should center. She philosophically guided WMU toward a more progressive agenda, which promoted Baptist women's access to education, and a more community-based service program for home missions. Her socially-minded philosophy of missions stressed inclusivity in the education and training of missionaries, as well as future leaders of WMU. She sought out the ideas and contributions of state WMU leaders and she remained President of North Carolina's WMU state Central Committee for most of

[120] Ibid, 16.
[121] Ibid, 21.
[122] Allen, 195, 204.

her WMU career. She was not fearful or suspicious of the work of other denominations or her northern counterparts, but embraced new ideas.

Fannie Heck and Annie Armstrong represented opposite leadership styles which caused fundamental disagreements in the way WMU's executive offices should function. While Armstrong fostered cooperative relationships with the Board leaders at the SBC, she was not inclusive or willing to share power within WMU's executive committee. Her office of Corresponding Secretary was the nexus of power at WMU and she considered the office of President a figurehead position only. Heck, who's first and second presidency coincided with Armstrong's term as corresponding secretary, disagreed, and a years-long battle for power ensued. Armstrong prevailed but ultimately resigned in 1906 over the issue of the WMU Training School, which she argued might produce missionary wives rather than missionaries, and would also encourage Southern Baptist women to preach, as the Training School students were allowed to sit in on seminary classes.[123] Following her resignation, she was never again involved with WMU. Heck was elected president in 1907, and changed the office to reflect her inclusive Progressive ideals, making it a more powerful platform to guide the direction of WMU. Annie Armstrong and Fannie Heck devoted decades of their lives shaping the mission direction of WMU during the Progressive Era.

Both Armstrong and Heck were influenced in varying degrees by the forces of Progressive Era reforms occurring during the early development of WMU. Annie Armstrong's contributions provided a stable organizational foundation that ensured WMU's survival and continued position in the Southern Baptist denomination.

[123] Sorrill, 214, 226.

Her leadership processes provided financial support to home and foreign missions, and she developed steady and positive relationships with the male leadership of the SBC. She maneuvered comfortably in the male dominated environment of the SBC. In the context of gender relations in the Southern Baptist church, Armstrong was a trailblazer. Fannie Heck believed that the Social Gospel would improve the lives of suffering members of communities in the South. She created and implemented Social Gospel programs to alleviate this suffering, and used her substantial leadership skills to guide WMU toward a more progressive agenda. But both Armstrong and Heck were evangelical Southern Baptists first, and did not test the denomination's hierarchical structure, which they believed to be ordained by God. Neither of them were willing to fully confront controversial social issues such as race and gender inequality in the church and society. Both of them stopped short of leading WMU to an agenda of Progressive Movement reforms.

Organizational Beginnings

Woman's Home Mission Society and the Woman's Missionary Council Methodist Episcopal Church South

The Methodist Episcopal Church, like its Baptist counterpart, split over the institution of slavery to create two separate organizations, the northern Methodist Episcopal Church, established in 1784 and the Methodist Episcopal Church South,

established in 1844.[124] Women's mission groups generally organized earlier in the Northern Methodist church than in the South, with foreign missions as the first focus in both churches. The Women's Foreign Mission Society of the northern Methodist Episcopal Church formally organized in 1869. The first signs of the organization of women for missions occurred in the Methodist Episcopal Church South before the Civil War to secure funding for a school in Shanghai, China. Most mission efforts were suspended during the war and the early Reconstruction years.[125] In 1874, the Woman's Bible Mission of Nashville was organized for the benefit of the school in Shanghai. But the organization had larger plans, according to WHMS and Woman's Missionary Council historian Estelle Haskin,[126] which incorporated foreign and home missions: "'To send pecuniary aid to the foreign mission fields and to employ efficiently the women at home in a systematic visitation and Bible instruction of the poor and destitute in their own midst.'"[127] In 1886, the MECS Board of Church Extension formally established the Woman's Department of Church Extension with its primary goal to raise funds for building parsonages for clergy in the western United States.[128] The Woman's Department of Church Extension elected Lucinda B. Helm as general secretary, and her leadership was instrumental in the development of home missions for Southern Methodist women.

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124 http://www.gcah.org/

125 Sara Estelle Haskin, *Women and Missions in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: M.E. Church South, 1920) 13-14.

126 Estelle Haskin was the first historian for the Southern Methodist women's missions, early literature editor for the Woman's Missionary Society, a founder of the black settlement Bethlehem House, and coworker and friend of Belle Bennett.

127 Haskin, 16.

128 John Patrick McDowell, *The Social Gospel in the South: The Woman's Home Mission Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1886-1939* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982) 6.

Lucinda Helm's Leadership

Lucinda Helm was born in Kentucky to a wealthy, influential, and slave holding family, and her mother claimed she "…was converted before she could talk."[129] She devoted her early life to religious and charitable activity, teaching Sunday School and creating religious clubs for children in the community.[130] Helm also taught at night school for the family's slaves, and later, when sent to Louisville for a social season, accompanied city missionaries to "…distribute food and clothing to the poor residents of Louisville."[131] Helm supported the efforts of Southern Methodist women toward foreign missions, but felt a calling to minister to her own country: "'I felt as if some propelling power beyond me had entered my soul and was moving me with an irresistible force to throw my life into this work of helping to redeem my country from the enemy of souls and to establish the kingdom of the Lord.'"[132] Helm queried the Board of Church Extension for an avenue in which to help, and the answer was to raise funds for the parsonages only. Helm and other Southern Methodist women requested to extend the work beyond parsonage building, but the request was met with opposition from Board leadership and also women involved in foreign missions, who felt that focus and funding would be taken from foreign missions and the parsonage effort. Helm spoke persistently for the desire to serve in home missions, with ultimate success. The

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[129] Arabel Wilbur Alexander, *The Life and Work of Lucinda B. Helm, Founder of the Woman's Parsonage and Home Mission Society of the M.E. Church, South* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1898) 26.
[130] McDowell, 6.
[131] Myers, Sara Joyce (1990) *Sara Joyce Myers, Southern Methodist Women Leaders and Church Missions, 1878-1910.* PhD dissertation, Emory University, 1990.
[132] Haskin, 26.

Woman's Parsonage and Home Mission Society (WPHMS) was organized in 1890, with Helm as secretary of the Central Committee of the new society. With the approval of key male leaders in the church, the new society had the blessing of the Board of Church Extension to branch out its ministry efforts at home.[133]

The Woman's Parsonage and Home Mission Society took full advantage of its broader capacity for mission work. WPHMS work took two tracks: education and city missions. Schools were opened for children in poverty and for immigrants in Florida, Greeneville, Tennessee and London, Kentucky, and a night school was opened on the Pacific Coast for Japanese and Chinese immigrants.[134] The Central Committee of WPHMS began to discuss work in urban areas in 1891, and city mission work was launched shortly thereafter in Nashville, New Orleans, Kansas City and Waco. Estelle Haskin describes the early volunteer efforts as "…largely that of rescue work, house-to-house visitation, and distribution of literature – or the most part, purely personal work; although there had begun to be some institutional features; such as kindergartens, sewing schools, and mother's and children's meetings."[135] It was from here that the mission emphasis shifted from the more personalized work of visitation to areas of poverty and need to the establishment of a home base within the communities with the goal of social service. After researching the settlement movement in the north, the leaders of WPHMS and the subsequent Women's Home Mission Society understood the fundamental value of the settlement idea. Haskin stated: "The leaders of philanthropy were beginning to realize than of far greater value that work for people

[133] Tatum, 27.
[134] McDowell, 12.
[135] Haskin, 201-202.

was work with people, so here and there, through the social settlement, the contagion of the higher life was being brought to bear upon the hitherto detached masses of the crowded cities and industrial centers."[136]

Progressive ideas were evident in the early home mission endeavors of the WPHMS, WHMS, and later the Woman's Missionary Council. Lucinda Helm's leadership in the early years set Southern Methodist women's missions on track, but Belle Harris Bennett, who served as president of WHMS and the Woman's Missionary Council for over 20 years, guided Southern Methodist women toward an agenda of social activism, using Social Gospel theology as a foundation.

Belle Harris Bennett's Leadership

Born in 1852 outside Richmond, Kentucky to a large aristocratic family, Belle Harris Bennett's early years were marked by a private education, which included a thorough preparation of the social responsibilities and activities of upper-class girls and women, religious instruction, and a way of life sustained by the institution of slavery. Family finances were not affected by the Civil War, and, like Annie Armstrong and Fannie Heck, Bennett was able to devote her adult life to mission organizations without much financial concern. Also like Armstrong and Heck, Bennett was unmarried, and the familial responsibilities of caring for aging parents and later adult siblings fell to Bennett and her older unmarried sister, Sue Bennett.[137] After the death of Bennett's

[136] Ibid, 202.

[137] Tochie (Mrs. R.W.) MacDonell, *Belle Harris Bennett: Her Life Work* (Nashville: The Woman's Section of the Board of Missions Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1928) 28-32.

father, the family moved to Richmond, Kentucky, where Bennett cared for her sister and her mother until their deaths. Bennett did not want to live in the family home alone, so she resided with a brother, and then later, when her organizational responsibilities of mission work increased, moved to a hotel and resided there for 20 years until her death.[138] It was against this backdrop of private sphere responsibility of family care that Bennett cultivated a career as a leader in Southern Methodist missions.

Belle Bennett's family were multi-generation Methodists, and she grew up faithfully attending services and working in Sunday School. She was not particularly interested in religious life, however, until she was 23 years old and heard a Presbyterian evangelist. It was at this time Bennett "…experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit."[139] According to Bennett's biographer and fellow executive officer in the Women's Home Mission Society, Tochie MacDonnell (Mrs. R.W.), Bennett told a friend, "'I have spent my life in frivolity and idleness. Now I mean to give it wholly to the Lord.'"[140] In 1887, Bennett and her sister attended a missionary meeting and she was concerned by the fact that women missionaries were sent into foreign countries with little or no training, and were not properly prepared to work in the field. She researched a school founded by Lucy Rider Meyer, a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and corresponded with Meyer regarding the Chicago Training School for women missionaries. Bennett felt called to begin a training school for women missionaries founded by the Methodist Episcopal Church South.[141]

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[138] Ibid, 33-34.
[139] Stapleton, Carolyn, "Belle Harris Bennett: Model of Holistic Christianity," *Methodist History* (April 1993): 130-142; 132.
[140] MacDonell, 38.
[141] Ibid, 64.

In 1888, she was elected president of the Kentucky Conference Woman's Missionary Society, and was a member of the Committee on Examination for Missionary Candidates, where she presented a proposal for a training school. The committee was receptive and she was later appointed agent of the Woman's Board of Missions to investigate a missionary training school for the Methodist Episcopal Church South. As Bennett and a committee elicited funding from individual churches for the training school, she incurred powerful opposition from the several groups, including women from the Woman's Missionary Society, who felt the training school would deplete foreign mission funding, and from a bishop and General Secretary of the Board who asked, "'Who is this Miss Bennett anyway? By what authority is she going through the Church collecting money?'"[142] The opposition of men and women of the church caused Bennett to reevaluate her calling to build the training school. After careful consideration, she concluded her calling was no mistake, and she was able to secure $500,000 in funding for the school, which, due to a substantial donation of land and cash by a wealthy church member, was to be built in Kansas City, Missouri. The debt free building was dedicated on September 14, 1892.[143] Bennett felt the school would address the need for training single women for foreign missions, and also for home missions.[144]

Belle Bennett's shift in focus from foreign to home missions shows the beginning influences of the Social Gospel in her overall mission outlook. Gradually, her perspective changed to emphasize Christian service as a tool for community uplift,

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[142] MacDonell, 64-65.
[143] Ibid, 69.
[144] Alice Cobb, *"Yes, Lord, I'll Do It:" Scarritt's Century of Service* (Nashville: Scarritt College, 1987) 15.

rather than the conversion of people in "heathen lands." After her sister Sue Bennett's death, Bennett was elected to replace her on the Central Committee of the Woman's Parsonage and Home Mission Society. She continued her sister's work in educating the people of the "…mountain district of southeastern Kentucky."[145] and opened the Sue Bennett Memorial School. In 1896, Bennett was elected president of the Central Committee for home missions, and president of the Woman's Home Mission Society in 1898.[146] In her early tenure as president of WHMS, she considered the issue of immigration a problem that could be addressed by home mission activities. Methodist historian Ellen Blue argues that Bennett's views toward Japanese and Chinese immigrants as "'idol worshiping people'"[147] indicated the fear of Southern Methodist women and other Protestant women's groups felt about the possible influx of immigrants to urban areas of the South, as well as the threat to religious and political institutions. Immigrants were by viewed by the women as "heathens" that could potentially corrupt the American way of life.[148] In a speech given at the General Missionary Conference in New Orleans in 1901, Bennett used the idea of influence of non-church goers to inspire her audience to take action to evangelize immigrants through home missions. Blue states that Bennett, "…may have included the material to help convince men in the audience that an 'all hands on deck' policy, with 'all hands' including the women's mission board, would prove wise."[149]

[145] Stapleton, 136.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Blue, 40.
[148] MacDowell, 64-65.
[149] Blue, 40-41.

Under Bennett's leadership, the Southern Methodist version of the Settlement House movement took shape. According to MacDonell, Bennett's "…vision was that of large central institutions with men and women conducting various educational, friendly, and evangelistic forms of service as the effective means of reaching the unchurched and lonely masses,"[150] and City Mission Boards were organized for this purpose. However, there was loud opposition to the proposal of settlement houses by Southern Methodist clergy, and Bennett realized, as Fannie Heck did during the early years of the Personal Service Department, that terminology mattered. To the denominational male leadership, the name "settlement house" conjured up images of secular Northern institutions that were not steeped in evangelism and did little to address the spiritual needs of the community. Bennett changed the name to reflect Methodist history by calling the city missions "Wesley Community Houses."[151] To provide trained workers to the Wesley Community Houses, Bennett led the program to install deaconesses to run the city missions. The deaconess movement was already fully functional in the Methodist denomination in the North, as Bennett most likely knew from her communications with Lucy Rider Meyer at the Chicago Training School. Again, she was met with opposition, who felt women trained to hold a position that officially ministered to communities would discourage volunteers from work in home missions. Bennett and other supporters of the deaconess movement countered that trained workers could only enhance the work of volunteers, and would train volunteers themselves.[152] The request for the deaconess program was granted and the development

[150] MacDonell, 91.
[151] Ibid, 93-94.
[152] McDowell, 62.

and implementation of the program was given to the Woman's Board of Home Missions.[153]

During the decade of 1910 to 1920, the Social Gospel was implemented under the leadership of Belle Bennett as Southern Methodist women became increasingly devoted to home missions. Bennett was a member of the Southern Sociological Congress, and was appointed to first committee on Race Problems for the first meeting in 1912. She was only one of two women on the committee.[154] In 1910 the Woman's Home Mission Society and the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions combined to become the Woman's Missionary Council and Bennett was elected president of the new organization. Bennett led the Woman's Missionary Council until her death in 1922. During the years Bennett led the Council, it implemented programs and policies that reflected the tenets of the Social Gospel and wider Progressive Era ideals. The Council addressed issues of immigration, education, child labor in cotton mills, temperance, and suffrage. Most notably for the Southern United States, Bennett vocally opposed discrimination and violence against African Americans, and led Woman's Missionary Council toward a policy of interracial cooperation. Under Bennett's leadership, the Progressive Movement was realized, as its foundational principals of social service became policies for the Council. The Woman's Missionary Council effectively institutionalized Social Gospel theology. Lucinda Helm and Belle Bennett were not content to maintain the status quo for women in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The each possessed a forward-thinking outlook for home missions. They planned,

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[153] Stapleton, 137.

[154] *The Human Way: Addresses on Race Problems at the Southern Sociological Congress, Atlanta,* James E. McCulloch, Ed. (Washington DC: Southern Sociological Congress, 1913). http://www.babel.hathitrust.org/

expanded and changed their organizational models to further develop home mission work that evolved into a social activist and reform movement.

Belle Bennett, Lucinda Helm, Fannie Heck and Annie Armstrong shared a common social, economic and religious standing in the South. Although the word "career" would have been an inappropriate term to describe the work they did on behalf of their religious faith and denominations, their efforts toward missions surpassed the qualifications of full-time employment. Armstrong and Heck never publically confronted the boundaries ascribed by Southern society or their evangelical churches. Heck's early life and young adulthood were not only framed by the private sphere role of women, but by the civic and charitable duties of an influential family. Annie Armstrong's early life was impacted by the urban effects of industrialization in Baltimore. Belle Bennett and Lucinda Helm were arguably most affected by the social standards of affluent Southern unmarried women, and for several years assumed the role of caretaker of aging and ill relatives. All of these women stayed within the social and religious confines of traditional Southern society. Yet their religious belief systems, education and social status led them to regard their talents as beneficial to the advancement of the Kingdom of God for society. Each woman moved past obstacles created by the hierarchy of their respective churches to fulfill Walter Rauschenbusch's Social Gospel doctrine of "…saving the social organism."[155] Through the organizations they led, they put into action the concept of "…transforming the life on earth into the harmony of heaven,"[156] and worked for a more just social order, although the institutions for which they worked thrived on inequality.

[155] Rauchenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 65.
[156] Rauschenbusch, 65.

Even though these leaders shared fundamental evangelical and Southern social values, and economic commonalities were evident in all four women, Progressive Era influences were eventually imbedded in the Southern Methodist home mission agenda. Especially under the leadership of Belle Bennett, representation of women in leadership positions in the church, as well as the beginnings of ministry toward African Americans, which were not values embraced by traditional Southern society, were integrated into the programs of the Woman's Home Mission Society and then the policies of the Woman's Missionary Council. This reform minded philosophy provided the bedrock for subsequent decades of social activism of Methodist women. The acceptance and practical application of the Social Gospel and Progressive Era reforms separated Southern Methodist women from their Southern Baptist sisters and set each group on divergent paths.

Chapter 2

Organizational Work: The Manifestation of the Social Gospel

Social Gospel theology was embraced in the South later during the Progressive Era than in Northern states, but it did take hold and was carried out by Protestant women all over the South. Although Southern Baptist and Southern Methodist women groups began their organized mission work by sending missionaries to foreign countries with the purpose of evangelizing large populations to Protestant Christianity, the practical application of the Social Gospel was accomplished through the system of home missions. Southern Methodist women initially organized their home mission effort through the Woman's Parsonage and Home Mission Society. As the work progressed beyond fundraising to provide clergy with adequate housing, the home mission group became the Woman's Home Mission Society. In 1910, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South combined the Women's Home Mission Society with the Woman's Foreign Mission Society to create the Woman's Missionary Council. By 1910, the home mission effort was fully engaged in addressing many societal issues caused by Industrialization in the South, using Social Gospel principles. The Southern Baptist organization, Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), created its own Social Gospel methodology that reflected its strong evangelical values and the autonomous nature of the Southern Baptist Convention. WMU's national leadership guided its state and local societies toward Social Gospel goals, but it was up to individual churches to modify or execute any approaches of social activism.

Southern Baptist Mission Work: WMU's Answer to the Social Gospel

"What have they accomplished? It is said that men's successes are easy to weigh and measure. They stretch across the country in steel rails and copper wires; they stand in stone and mortar; they rest in safe deposit boxes, in opened caverns of mineral treasure, in fields of waving grain. The best work of women is not much expressed in material things. Consecration to duty and service, to child nurture, to character building are their treasures transmuted and translated into human lives, into redeemed communities. Their successes are made flesh. How blest and honored are we that God permits us to have a part in sending such workers into a great needy world."

Anna Eager, Chairman, Board of Managers of the WMU Training School reporting to the WMU Annual Meeting, 1915.[157]

Anna Eager, a years-long officer and supporter of the WMU Training School, captured the essence of Southern Baptist women's roles in the church in her report to the 1915 WMU annual meeting. Eager's statement emphasizes the intangible, yet highly important aspects of the mission work of women for the benefit of the community, while acknowledging and accepting the secondary status of women in the church. Eager stated that Southern Baptist women were fortunate to have the opportunity to work, and to do so without the glory often enjoyed by men. However, WMU carefully utilized Social Gospel doctrine to navigate the public sphere, developing a program that melded evangelism and social service, with the concept of personal conversion as the foundation from which all social activism sprang. The result

[157] *Annual Report of the Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention*, 1915. WMU Archive, Birmingham (WMUA).

of this blended effort was an agenda of missions that focused on the extension of Southern Baptist ministry, and was often a reinforcement of traditional gender and family roles in a world that was quickly changing.

WMU leadership, including Fannie Heck, Lulie Wharton, head of WMU's Personal Service Department and Maud McLure, Principal of the WMU Training School, were heavily involved in the emergence of Social Gospel thought and theology in the South through their involvement with the Southern Sociological Congress, and their knowledge of the work of other Protestant women's groups, and civic organizations. Carol Crawford Holcomb, Southern Baptist and WMU historian, argues that WMU leadership were most heavily influenced by the work of Southern Methodist women and utilized the methods of the Woman's Home Mission Society: "…they incorporated Methodist teachings on race, adapted Methodist manuals on settlement work, and studied Methodist settlement houses in order to begin their own work."[158] WMU leadership also personally visited Presbyterian and Northern Baptist settlement houses in Chicago, as well as Hull House.[159] WMU leadership considered the methods of other denominations and adapted these structures to create their own model not only settlement houses, but of Southern Baptist social service work.

While WMU's leadership was influenced by organizations outside the Southern Baptist church, and incorporated ideas from other denominations, Fannie Heck's vision of WMU's social activism had to encompass meeting the spiritual needs of the

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[158] Holcomb, Carol Crawford, "The Kingdom at Hand: The Social Gospel and Personal Service Department of Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention, *Baptist History and Heritage*, 35, no. 2, (Spring, 2000): 49-66. 52.

[159] Ibid, 54.

community.[160] Heck and Lulie Wharton created a new department within WMU, called Personal Service, which was organized in 1909.[161] The name "Personal Service" was, in itself, a covert description of a social service agenda, which was eventually renamed "social work" in later decades.[162] The Personal Service Department of WMU was not considered a part of official Southern Baptist home mission work, and was not to encroach upon the work done in conjunction with the Home Mission Board or Foreign Mission Board. Its leaders were careful to continue support of the SBC boards.[163] However, Personal Service became the Southern Baptist application of Social Gospel theory. Heck and Wharton's plan for Personal Service sought to meet the spiritual, as well as the material needs of the poor and unconverted in the community. Catherine Allen argues that it was clear that Personal Service was something to be done by WMU members: "…Personal Service became a part of the Union's call to the women of the societies. Nothing was to be reported but what they had striven to do for the physical and moral uplift of their own communities; money expended in these efforts was not to be reported."[164] Heck stated that the department was not a charitable hand-out that "perpetuated misery," but was to focus on the "…giving of self."[165] In Heck's view, help and "uplift" could not be found primarily in the dispensing of money, and that "…even charity could not only be cold but unkind."[166] Her emphasis on self-giving reflected ideals of social activism and the Social Gospel, where Personal Service workers were

[160] Allen, *A Century to Celebrate*, 214.
[161] Heck, 207.
[162] Allen states in *A Century to Celebrate*, "Not until 1935 did WMU actually use the term *social service* in connection with Personal Service, thus avoiding antagonizing opponents of the social gospel" (215).
[163] Ibid.
[164] Heck, 207.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.

implored to go out to areas in need and provide ministry themselves, not just finance Southern Baptist ministry from afar. The organizational plan for Personal Service was communicated to state and local societies for implementation by WMU leadership, and was performed at the national level by students of the WMU Training School.

Preparing for the Ministry: Woman's Missionary Union Training School

The WMU Training School opened in 1907 after years of effort to establish a school for young women for training in the mission field, and amid controversy that resulted in the resignation of Annie Walker Armstrong from WMU. Southern Baptist women had been sitting in on classes at Southern Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky for years without grades or academic credit, but formal education for women in the mission field did not occur until members of the Texas WMU society and a male missionary to China proposed a training school.[167] Suggestions from Armstrong that Southern Baptist women travel to Northern Baptist training schools in Chicago and Philadelphia were rejected by the Texas society, and a committee of the Mission Boards and WMU leadership was established to consider a training school for women. After a change to the WMU constitution allowed the organization to formally take over the proposed training school, a resolution was passed in 1907 to open the school in Louisville, Kentucky.[168] For its first 10 years, the school was located in a family residence that was rented or purchased by WMU, until a permanent building was

[167] Allen, 264.

[168] Carrie Littlejohn, *History of the Carver School of Missions and Social Work* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958) 42.

erected in 1917. Maud McLure was named the first principal of the Training School. She envisioned the school to be a home for the new students,[169] and under her supervision, the school became a testing ground for the Southern Baptist application of the Social Gospel.

Through the vehicle of the Training School, Maud McLure established a Baptist Settlement in Louisville in 1912. McLure had visited and studied settlement houses in New York and adjusted their methodologies to form a unique Southern Baptist mission effort.[170] The General Board of the Training School reported in WMU's 1913 Annual Meeting that the settlement work "…has given the opportunity for personal service and practical mission work along definite lines and under skilled direction."[171] The settlement was "…a veritable beehive of activity, helping to create under God a new heaven and a new earth for a part of the 'submerged masses.'"[172] The reported activities of the settlement workers reveal secular work, such as visits to institutions and poor families, attending court and funerals on behalf of community members, providing clothing, establishments of a library, and attending to the ill.[173] Workers also reported a large number of evangelical efforts such as the establishment of Sunday Schools, religious boys' and girls' clubs, distributions of bibles, religious visits to community members and 22 conversions to the faith.[174] Training School students received practical training for future ministry in the Baptist Settlement, which functioned "…as a

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169 T. Laine Scales, *All That Fits a Woman: Training Southern Baptist Women for Charity and Mission, 1907-1926* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2000) 143.
170 Ibid, 187-188.
171 *Annual Report of the Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention*, 1913, WMUA, 50.
172 1913 Annual Report, 50.
173 Ibid, 51.
174 Ibid, 50-51.

workshop for students."[175] The Training School also staffed the Baptist Settlement endeavor.

The Baptist Settlement's primary goal was the "redemption" of the community members: "'…not to try to patch up the material that is there, sending it out shabby from the past, the worse for wear, but to undertake the joyous task of trying to bring it back to the One to whom it belongs, that this spirit may possess that life again and the penitent soul be set free to start afresh.'"[176] The desired spiritual results of the Settlement and of Personal Service was evident in a 1914 letter from Maud McLure to Fannie Heck: "The evangelistic forces of the Home Board have been in our city and the personal work of our girls has resulted as follows: Professed conversions on Settlement field 11 and 7 others through Miss Leachman's influence. On the other fields 34. A total of 52 conversions. God has blessed the efforts of our students."[177] This overarching evangelical theme separated the Southern Baptist settlement from its Northern counterparts, and from the Southern Methodist Wesley Houses. The Southern Baptist settlement system, later called Good Will Centers, differed from other settlement houses in that no missionaries or workers resided there. The missionaries maintained offices in the settlement and visited homes to get to know the needs and environment of the community, but did not conform to the concept of immersion in the community that other denominations found necessary for settlement work.[178] The Southern Baptist settlement idea did not focus on social reform, but on spiritual

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[175] Littlejohn, 64.
[176] *Annual Report of the Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention*, 1914, WMUA, 58.
[177] Maud McLure to Fannie Heck, December 8, 1914, Fannie E.S. Heck papers, Wake Forest University Archive.
[178] Scales, 188, 192.

conversion and the addition of members to the church.[179] As a result, Personal Service became unique and separate version of Social Gospel theology, with Good Will Centers as a cornerstone of Southern Baptist women's social activism.

Personal Service: A Modified Social Program

In *A Manual of Personal Service*, Fannie Heck and WMU missionary Emma Leachman outlined Personal Service objectives: "…to bring men and women to a personal acknowledgment of Christ as their Saviour,"[180] so that men and women may live up to their full potential as "…good citizens, God-fearing parents, savers of their fellow beings."[181] Salvation allows humans to realize their full potential physically, mentally and morally, and the "…ultimate standard of efficiency of these plans will be the effect of the direct Christian influences brought to bear on the lives of those whom they touch."[182] *A Manual for Personal Service* was the written instructions from the WMU leadership to the state and local WMU societies to create and accomplish the Personal Service agenda, which presented Social Gospel doctrine of social uplift as a natural byproduct of the conversion experience. The Manual states that "'Such a full salvation includes the betterment of the physical conditions, the development of mental powers, the culture of moral sense,' in a word, making men better citizens because they are conscious citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven."[183] It is significant, however, that the

[179] Ibid, 188.
[180] *A Manual of Personal Service* (Baltimore: The Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention).
[181] Ibid.
[182] *A Manual of Personal Service*.
[183] Ibid.

Personal Service program, and especially the settlements, were geared toward ministry to women and children,[184] as the Southern Baptist women viewed the preservation and strengthening of the family as an ideological priority. With the exception of a prison ministry, Personal Service workers generally did not provide ministry directly to men.

Although the doctrine of personal conversion is paramount in WMU's philosophy of action and works, the Social Gospel concept of social reform through Christian benevolence appeared in Personal Service, as stated in the *Manual of W.M.U Methods*: "It is social service whose high ideal is not alone the lifting of mankind to better living conditions, to Christian business standards, especially regarding women and children employees, to proper and adequate opportunities for play, to social and cultural advantages and to educational privileges but also salvation through faith in Jesus Christ."[185] The national WMU carefully interjected a more progressive agenda reflecting Social Gospel ideals into its literature, and instituted some methods utilized by other denominations in their settlement work. The *Manual of W.M.U Methods* suggested that each WMU society conduct detailed surveys to understand the needs of specific communities. Surveys included comprehensive information and statistics from government officials, and categorized communities into small or rural towns, cities with five to ten thousand inhabitants and larger cities.[186] From the surveys, ministry workers could identify the particular needs to address in each community. In larger cities, issues arising from extreme poverty encompassed relationships with other organizations such as YMCA and YWCA. Personal Service workers were encouraged to "sustain" these

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[184] Scales, 188.
[185] *Manual of W.M.U Methods Reference Book for Missionary Organizations* (Nashville: Sunday School Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 1917): 174.
[186] Ibid, 180-181.

organizations, and work in cooperation with other charities in the area.[187] The information obtained through the surveys was used to tailor work done specifically in the Good Will Centers.

Good Will Centers

Using the methods of the prototype Baptist settlement of the WMU Training School in Louisville, Good Will Centers were opened up in several cities, including Nashville, Norfolk and Richmond, Virginia, Atlanta and Augusta, Georgia, and Meridian, Mississippi.[188] As head of the national Personal Service Department, Lulie Wharton, renamed the Baptist settlements to Good Will Centers, "…because the purpose was to demonstrate the good news of 'peace on earth, good will to all men' (Luke 2:14)."[189] Good Will Centers were established in areas of most need, especially areas surrounding cotton mills and factories, and were urban and rural. Good Will Centers formed clubs for boys and girls, provided day nurseries for the children of factory workers, and industrial schools to provide practical skills for children under 15.[190] In the Personal Service Report to WMU's 1915 Annual Meeting, Lulie Wharton stated that Homemaker's Clubs were initiated for mothers, "…as a feature of growing importance, striking as they do at the heart of home-life and bringing blessed results incalculable,"[191] and the clubs included classes and instruction on cooking, sewing,

[187] Ibid, 180.
[188] 1914 Annual Report, 59.
[189] Allen, 221.
[190] Holcomb, 190.
[191] 1915 Annual Report, 61.

gardening and health.[192] The Homemaker's Clubs were extended to reach immigrant and African American mothers, as well.[193] "Cheer-All" Clubs were formed for young working women in factories and shops.[194] Although some of the work done in Good Will Centers paralleled that of the settlement houses established by other denominations, they were not considered true settlements. The Centers did not have missionaries to reside on the premises, nor was their structure intended to instigate or address social reform. These Centers provided Southern Baptist ministry to the unconverted.[195]

Through Good Will Centers, WMU attempted to minister to women and children affected by social problems created by industrialization, and WMU societies were made aware of the problem of child labor, which was especially egregious in the cotton industry. The industry, and the issue of child labor, began in mills in the northern United States, but moved to the rural south in search of cheaper labor. Good Will Centers held night schools for children working in the mills.[196] Some progressive Southern Baptists spoke out against children working long hours in dangerous environments, but even they argued that "…mill workers themselves counted on their children to help their families make ends meet, and that cheap labor was essential to attracting industry to the impoverished rural South."[197] The Southern Baptist Convention declined to issue any political statements regarding child labor and did not

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[192] Holcomb, 199.
[193] 1915 Annual Report, 61.
[194] *Annual Report of the Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention*, 1916, WMUA, 52.
[195] Holcomb, 197.
[196] Allen, 217.
[197] Harvey, Paul, "Southern Baptist and the Social Gospel: White Progressivism in the South, 1900-1925," *Fides et Historia*, 27, no. 2, (1995): 59-77, 70.

participate in any legislative processes to address children working in mills.[198] Traditional Southern mores concerning state economic and political control were still an influential force in the post-Reconstruction years, and the SBC was reluctant to apply pressure to powerful industries regarding their business practices, as rural poverty was a significant factor in the region. As much of the population of the South was rural and agrarian, mill owners often recruited workers, especially children, from farming communities. Many child labor reformers engaged in arguments about which form of child labor, mill work or farming, was more beneficial for children. As a large proportion of child labor was garnered from the already impoverished Appalachia area and moved to the deep South, many mountain communities were further traumatized economically and socially.[199] Some reformers dubiously argued that child labor on the farm was somehow preferable as it helped to develop children physically, and that seasonal farm labor did not inhibit children from attending school. William Link asserts: "Behind the defense of rural child labor lay an articulation of the superiority of rural life over the mill village."[200]

The justification of rural child labor revealed a schism of what was the appropriate application of reform within the issue of child labor. If Southern Baptist Convention leaders were disinclined to challenge the industries that exploited vulnerable groups in their own communities, whether farming or mill, Southern Baptist women did respond to them as they "…were from the same cultural group of typical Baptist churches. Many of them were Baptists displaced from rural churches."[201]

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[198] Ibid.
[199] Link, 169-170.
[200] Ibid, 170.
[201] Allen, 217.

WMU's Personal Service department had already determined that many rural Southerners were "…in need of education, medical services, utilities, and recreation."[202] The migration of white rural families to mill communities not only represented opportunities for the Personal Service department to minister to a vulnerable population, but also for evangelism and a potential boost in church membership. WMU was also in agreement with attempts to bring about legislative labor reform, as it was first and foremost a tool for personal conversion:

> "Failure of the church to help adjust social and economic wrongs is one of the obstacles that has arisen to widen the gap between the church and the working people. A rest day in seven, a living wage, an eight-hour working day, child labor laws, and other just needs of the workers brought about by the united efforts of Christian people would do more to win the vast army of toilers to the kingdom of Christ than a multitude of sermons."[203]

Through Good Will Centers, the Personal Service Department engaged in work with immigrants, though a more concerted effort to conduct work among immigrants occurred after World War I. Work prior to the war was implemented through the Homemaker's Club, and these efforts concentrated on immigrant mothers and children working in factory areas,[204] which included teaching cooking, sewing, and English classes.[205] However, after the war WMU leadership referred to immigration as a problem that would be solved through "Americanizing" immigrants. WMU leadership called for all Southern Baptist women to be involved in solving the immigrant problem:

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[202] Ibid, 218.
[203] *Royal Service* (September 1919): 13
[204] *Annual Report of the Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention*, 1917, WMUA, 81.
[205] Holcomb, 248.

> "Today we are feeling the effects of having neglected to welcome the immigrant, of having failed to make his life here even tolerable, for we find we have in our midst some whose loyalty to the 'old country' makes them dangerous citizens of this. This task of teaching American ideals, of making him into a true American belongs not to societies alone; it should be a part of the personal service for Christ of every woman who has as her neighbor or in her town another woman of alien birth."[206]

WMU called for its state and local societies to establish Good Will Centers to minister to immigrant groups, "Have you any group of strangers or even one family in your community? Have you mining villages in your state that need a Goodwill Center, a worker to help the women and girls? If so, here is a chance for patriotic Christian service."[207] WMU leadership was sympathetic to the plight of immigrant mother and child, and extolled its members to meet immigrants with understanding. However, actual work with the immigrant population in the South did not appear to be a large priority of state and local societies, and reflected the Southern Baptist stance of assimilation to evangelical Christianity and American culture. Keith Harper asserts that for Southern Baptists, personal conversion was the key to assimilating immigrants into American culture, and that "…the same gospel that converted Americans could convert immigrants and have similar social effects."[208] Immigrants must "…divest themselves of any cultural traits foreign to American folkways and become 'true' Americans."[209] Southern Baptists believed it was their calling to be a moral compass in the world, and to have Christian influence over immigrants before immigrants had influence over

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[206] *Royal Service* (June 1918): 11.
[207] Ibid, 12.
[208] Harper, 24.
[209] Ibid.

American culture, and there was an ever-present fear that immigrants brought with them socialist ideas and non-Christian religions.[210] WMU leadership and the Personal Service Department clearly agreed that the first order of business in ministering to immigrants was to evangelize and "Americanize."

The Question of Race: Personal Service and African Americans

In her 1917 article, "Southern Women and Racial Adjustment, Lily Hardy Hammond discussed the denominational work of religious women toward the betterment of African Americans in the South. In her description of the work of WMU, she stated: 'The Baptist Women's Board has no specific enterprise for colored people. They definitely teach, however, through their literature, the duty of local Christian service. This chiefly takes the form of helping colored Baptist women to form and conduct missionary societies."[211] Hammond's remarks encapsulate WMU's racial agenda during most of the Progressive Era. Southern Baptist women generally struggled to reconcile their mission goals with the realities of racial problems in the South. In the absence of a plan to engage the struggles of African Americans, WMU often reverted to the policies of the Southern Baptist Convention, or the individual state conventions. Before the Civil War, many slaves identified as Southern Baptists more than other denominations in the South.[212] As John Eighmy argues, the early Baptist idea of spiritual equality was understandably inviting to African Americans: "Their emphasis

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[210] Ibid.
[211] Hammond, Lily Harris, "Southern Women and Racial Adjustment," *The Trustees of the John F. Slater Fund Occasional Papers*, no. 19 (1917). http://babel.hathitrust.org/, 12.
[212] Eighmy, 25.

on personal conversion and congregational participation in church life offered special attractions to the enslaved. Belief in human equality in matters of the spirit allowed no racial barrier to confine the Baptist movement."[213] This basic early ideology caused the Southern Baptist message to take hold in both the white community and among those enslaved at the same time, but "…it was never allowed to effect a social brotherhood of the races in any practical sense."[214] Although slaves regularly sat in on church services, they were relegated to separate sections of the building. White Southern Baptists advocated for separate church meetings for African Americans, as this religious disconnection was found by whites to preserve the subordinate status of slaves,[215] and laid the groundwork for a policy for segregated worship in the SBC.

The Southern Baptist policy of segregation in religious life also laid the foundation for the black Baptist church, and its subsequent denomination, the National Baptist Convention, USA. As Evelyn Higginbotham argues, black churches were paramount in the development of black social identity: "From the early days of slavery, the black church had constituted the backbone of the black community. Truly African American in its origins, it provided a spiritual cohesiveness that permitted its people to absorb, interpret and practice the Christian faith – to make it their own."[216] Following Emancipation and Reconstruction, and during the early Progressive Era, the black Baptist church provided not only a refuge against the suffering endured by African Americans because of racial violence, poverty and segregation, but "…an ideological

[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid, 26.
[215] Ibid, 27.
[216] Higginbotham, 5.

and social space for articulating group needs and implementing programs for their fulfillment."[217]

White Southern Baptist women not only accepted, but also cultivated the secondary status of African Americans. As many of WMU's leaders were members of upper class Southern society, much of the literature written during this time reflected African American's work as domestic help, and a social system that was propped up by the work of a subordinated group: "In our Southern culture we need much help about our homes, so the negro renders faithful service as cooks, maids, laundresses and nurses. Wherever they are needed the negro becomes the white man's faithful ally."[218] The language here shows WMU's leadership's obstinate unwillingness to present African Americans in any other terms except those that were reminiscent of slavery. The literature is framed to show African Americans not as full members of God's kingdom, but only as a support system that benefits white society. WMU leadership argued that the black community was in agreement with their secondary status quo and segregated position: "The intelligent negro does not want social equality any more than we do, but because this is true we ought to pay him a living wage and to see that proper housing and laws of sanitation are provided for him."[219] This argument was a justification to maintain white superiority in the Southern Baptist church and in the South. Evangelization was again WMU's primary goal in its dealings with African Americans, and was used as a tool to make a more efficient secondary class: "…rather

[217] Ibid, 47.
[218] *Royal Service* (September 1919): 22.
[219] *Royal Service*, 19.

should we train and educate and Christianize them. When truly converted they are honest and faithful."[220]

It wasn't until 1921 that WMU became involved with the interdenominational Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC). The CIC was created for secular and religious groups to respond to increased racial tensions in the South in 1920, and to address problems such as education, voting rights, child welfare, and lynching. As Jacqueline Dowd Hall argues in *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching*, the CIC did little or nothing to address the core problems of racial tension, which was the socially ingrained policies of segregation and racial inequality. The CIC "…represented an acknowledgment that white violence could have extremely disruptive social consequences if blacks fought back, turned to the federal government for protection, or chose migration as an alternative to victimization."[221] The CIC's initial membership included only white men, and a few months later, two black men were admitted. Membership of white women was met with vehement resistance as "…would open a Pandora's box of sexual fears and taboos"[222] if white women and black men were seen to be engaging in "…interrelationships that symbolize equality."[223]

White and black women were invited to join the CIC, and they created the Woman's Committee to begin their own work to alleviate racial tensions, though it was not an autonomous group and was ultimately controlled by the CIC.[224] However, Dowd

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[220] Ibid.
[221] Jacqueline Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 63.
[222] Ibid, 65.
[223] Ibid.
[224] Ibid, 105.

asserts that the Woman's Committee began the process of "…regional self-criticism and rendered interracial work respectable in the conservative South."[225] Interracial friendships were created through the Woman's Committee, but the group met with challenges that hindered attempts at real change. Attitudes of racial superiority on the part of white women proved a complicated obstacle to overcome, and the social hierarchy "…made it difficult for white women to distinguish between interracial cooperation and charity."[226] They were often moved emotionally by the plight of black women in the segregated South, and were in philosophical, and sometimes vocal, agreement with the need for "law and order," but this maternal feeling of white women towards black women rarely resulted in any tangible changes in the entrenched social attitudes or hierarchy.[227]

Once white and black women were invited to participate in the CIC, WMU voted to join the Woman's Committee for the CIC.[228] In a report from the Third Annual CIC meeting, WMU detailed work done by Southern Baptist women in health, the building of a library, hospital, parks and plans for orphanages.[229] All of the facilities mentioned were segregated. The report stated that the CIC's work was "…largely spiritual and for that reason its far-reaching influence and service are impossible of tabulating."[230] WMU also participated in interdenominational educational work in Alabama under the leadership of two missionaries from the Northern Baptist Women's Board. White teachers taught a four-year bible course to over 700 black women.[231]

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[225] Dowd, 104.
[226] Ibid, 105.
[227] Ibid.
[228] Allen, 246-247.
[229] *Royal Service* (December 1923): 28.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Hammond, 13.

WMU leadership was undoubtedly affected by the Social Gospel and Progressive Era solutions to some social problems. As they participated in socially-minded organizations with members from other denominations and secular charity groups, they were cognizant of the multi-pronged efforts toward social activism and reform. But, as a whole, WMU membership did not engage with these organizations. WMU's efforts in areas of industrial poverty reflected reform mechanisms of the time, and did try to meet the overwhelming physical needs of the community, but Good Will Centers maintained a separateness from the communities in which they ministered. WMU's brand of social activism was religious first, and relied on the concept of spiritual conversion as the most important feature of social reform. The absolute adherence to this fundamental tenet of Southern Baptist religious life created a barrier that impeded Southern Baptist women from making the shift from ministry to full participation in the social reform movement. Participation in the social reform movement was, for women, a large step into the public sphere, and Southern Baptist women were reticent to embrace life outside the socially and religiously imposed private sphere. For women in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, however, social reform became a natural progression of their home mission work. The most important progressive issues of education, labor reform, immigration, and race became mission priorities for the Woman's Missionary Council. For the leadership of the Woman's Missionary Council, the right of women to be formally recognized as equals in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South emerged as a primary issue during the later Progressive Era. For these women, the church should be the first place to engage in reform for gender equality, not the last.

Southern Methodist Women's Work: A Mission Transformation

One of the first progressive issues embraced by the women's mission societies was education, and it was also one of the first social reform movement in the South. Historian Dewey Grantham asserts that around 1900, there occurred a "great educational awakening" that "…elicited widespread support from southerners and was the beneficiary of extraordinary northern philanthropy."[232] The public school systems in urban areas was more established than in rural areas, where funding for education was scarce due to governmental restraints on taxation for schools. Many rural schools were underfunded, sparsely attended and lacking in experienced and sufficiently paid teachers.[233] Southern Methodist women identified mountain regions as areas where educational opportunities were most lacking and extreme poverty was the norm. A missionary to the mountain area of Brevard, North Carolina described many of the members of the community as independent, "…thrifty, upright and honorable," but victims of illiteracy, indigence and superstition.[234] Within these communities, Southern Methodist women applied Social Gospel and Progressive Era goals of social uplift through the vehicle of education.

Belle Bennett's sister, Sue Bennett, was the secretary of the Kentucky Conference Society of the Woman's Parsonage and Home Mission Society, and became interested in the mountain communities around her home town of Richmond, Kentucky,

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[232] Grantham, 246.
[233] Ibid, 247.
[234] *The Missionary Voice* (Nashville: Board of Missions, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1913): 145. http://www.babel.hathitrust.org/

and specifically the lack of schools in this area.[235] She began work toward the establishment of a school in London, Kentucky. When Sue Bennett died in 1892, Belle Bennett took over leadership, and was named Superintendent of Mountain Work.[236] The Sue Bennett Memorial School was opened in 1897, with a mission to "…provide an education distinctly Christian and a better and higher education than that offered by the public school."[237] The school served children ages 6 through 18, with a liberal secular and religious education,[238] and by 1919, the school had an enrollment of 400 students and 19 faculty.[239] A second school was opened serving the mountain community in Brevard, North Carolina. The Brevard Industrial School was taken over by the Woman's Home Mission Board in 1905, and by 1914 improvements were underway to provide "…laboratories for agricultural studies, domestic science rooms and modern sewing and millinery equipment."[240] The school curriculum included tailoring, carpentry, and home economics.[241] The tangible results of the industrial school education were marked by employment of many of the students upon graduation.[242]

Addressing the Labor Issue: Cotton Mill and Factory Community Problems and the Mission Response

[235] Haskin, 177-178.
[236] MacDonell, 76.
[237] 1913 *Missionary Voice*, 159.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Haskin, 179.
[240] *The Missionary Voice* (Nashville: Board of Missions, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1914): 613. http://www.babel.hathitrust.org/
[241] Haskin, 183 and *The Missionary Voice* (Nashville: Board of Missions, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1915): 541. http://www.babel.hathitrust.org/
[242] Haskin, 183.

The hands-on implementation of the Social Gospel movement can be found in the City Mission and settlement work of the Woman's Home Mission Society. Following the lead of the northern Methodist women's societies, the WHMS set up mission centers where the need was most evident, which was the center of industry, found in the cotton mill and factory districts. The communities around cotton mills represented areas with the most social problems, such as rampant poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and child labor. In the 1912 *Missionary Voice*, Owen Lovejoy, Secretary of the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC),[243] reported that the cotton and textile industry in the Southern United States was among the most egregious participants in exploitative child labor practices, and was among the last industries to embrace labor reform. Cotton mills, like other industries, employed children at unreasonably low wages and worked them for extended hours. Cotton mill owners utilized children for labor for a variety of exploitative reasons. Lovejoy states: "…prominent representatives of the industry have frequently affirmed that the best operative is the one who most closely approaches the machine, who can develop mechanical skill and deftness with the minimum mental exertion and without the utilization of any creative faculties."[244] While some child labor reform had occurred in the northern United States, reform was much slower to take hold in the South, and Northern mill owners, to escape new labor regulations, moved their operations to Southern states. By 1912, labor laws in New York required an eight-hour work day for

[243] The National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) was instituted by US Congressional Act in 1907 to investigate laws and industry in an effort to establish a uniform child labor law. Social Welfare History Project. (2011). National Child Labor Committee (NCLC). *Social Welfare History Project.*http://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/programs/child-welfarechild-labor/national-child-labor-committee/

[244] Owen Lovejoy, *The Missionary Voice, Official Organ of the Board of Missions, M. E. Church, South* (Volume II, 1912) 19. http://babel.hathitrust.org/

children under the age of 16, while in Alabama, a child under 14 may legally work 78 hours a week. Mill owners defended this discrepancy with the claim that Southern children mature earlier than Northern children and may therefore be employed earlier.[245] Lovejoy explained that exploitative child labor practices resulted in systemic social problems: "The real cruelty, which cannot be denied, is that of perpetuating a system, with the approval of both the parent and the child, which means the undermining of health, the thwarting of educational opportunity, and the crushing out of those ideals which are the child's birthright."[246]

Belle Bennett was a member of National Child Labor Committee, and supported efforts to curb the exploitation of children in mills and factories.[247] In 1913, she called for the full abolition of child labor.[248] Through the work of the NCLC, Bennett supported Progressive tactics of creating and changing legislation to address the problem of child labor. While she was involved in working on the issue of child labor at the policy level, WHMS and Woman's Missionary Council worked in the mill and factory communities to implement Social Gospel theology. Wesley Houses were opened in five states, with four houses opened in Georgia alone, serving cotton mill communities. Wesley House activities focused on education, as the lack of education of adult and child mill employees was a significant issue. Wesley Houses provided "…day nurseries for the children of working mothers, night schools for those who were

[245] Ibid, 19-20.
[246] Ibid, 19.
[247] MacDonell, 167.
[248] *Third Annual Report of the Woman's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South for 1912-1913* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1913): 294. Scarritt-Bennett Archive, Nashville.

deprived of the privilege of public education, kindergartens for the little ones, and industrial classes for boys and girls."[249]

In some instances, the settlements worked in cooperation with mill management to provide health services and education for employees, such as classes in hygiene and contagious diseases.[250] A deaconess in a cotton mill community in Georgia reported an establishment of a kindergarten, religious instruction through Sunday School, sewing classes for girls employed by the mill, a library which was frequently utilized by community, and hundreds of personal visits to the ill. Women from WHMS hosted frequent social gatherings for the community.[251] At Kingdom House in St. Louis, programs emphasized play for young children, and the women provided a playground and game rooms, as well as a library. The kindergarten curriculum included playtime and educational games,[252] and all holidays were celebrated with the entire neighborhood.[253] The settlement houses in mill and factory districts were designed to be community centers from which trained deaconesses, nurses and lay workers administered social services, but they also were a hub of social activity where the community could participate in recreation. This important element of social service reflected the egalitarian principles of the Progressive Movement, where all members of society should have access to leisure and entertainment.

Southern Methodist women's mission groups worked in tandem with public welfare organizations to efficiently meet the needs those most affected by

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[249] Haskin, 218.
[250] *Twenty-Third Annual Report of the Woman's Home Mission Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1909): 146. SBA.
[251] Ibid, 145.
[252] 1912 *Missionary Voice*, 349.
[253] *Twenty-Third Annual Report*, 132.

industrialization. An Institutional Church was begun in Kansas City, MO and in Winston-Salem, NC, which combined a city church with the city mission with the goal of providing many of the services found in settlement work, as well as establishing a day care for children under 14 for a nominal fee. The Kansas City Institutional Church also functioned as a "receiving home" for children from the juvenile court "…where they might be kept in comfort and safety until permanently placed in some institution or returned to their parents."[254] The Church supplied the community with a "Pure Milk" station, in cooperation with the Kansas City Pure Milk Commission, public baths, a gymnasium, library and a variety of industrial classes and clubs for girls and boys. Industrial classes taught traditionally gendered skills, with girls learning cooking, sewing and "…to be neat little house mothers."[255] Kansas City's Institutional Church served a district of 20,000 people, which included six different immigrant groups.[256] Although the South did not receive the large number of immigrants during the Progressive Era as did the northeastern United States, there was an influx of immigration into Southern states, especially in larger coastal cities. Southern Methodist women set up City Missions in port cities such as New Orleans, LA, and Biloxi, MS, and Galveston, TX. They also ministered to larger immigrant populations within the South.[257] The Southern Methodist mission effort toward immigrants during the Progressive Era revealed a complicated agenda of Social Gospel tenets of ministry to the poor, evangelizing groups into Protestantism, and Americanizing citizens of

[254] Haskin, 220.
[255] 1912 *Missionary Voice*, 343-344.
[256] Ibid, 343.
[257] McDowell, 64-66.

different countries. Belle Bennett's use of the term "…Christianize the world"[258] refers not to the foreign mission efforts abroad, but to a policy of treatment of immigrants to the United States. For Bennett, Christianization was a vital part of home missions, and one that addressed many social issues in the South. She states: "A practical application by Christian people of the old law, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' would clean up every city slum, eliminate seven-tenths of the poverty and disease in the land, and give every child a chance for an honest life and good citizenship."[259]

Ministry to Foreigners: The Complex Goals of Home Missions to Immigrants

In her 1908 Presidential Address to the Annual Meeting of the Woman's Home Mission Society, Belle Bennett proposed a plan to address the influx of immigrants into the port cities of New Orleans and Galveston. She was aware that Jewish immigrants in Galveston were met by members of the American Jewish community when they disembarked into Galveston. Jewish immigrants were welcomed, housed and soon employed, thus beginning a new life in American society. Bennett saw the benefit of this system to not only provide a Christian welcome for non-English speaking people in an unknown country, but she saw it as an opportunity to evangelize non-Christians and Roman Catholics. In New Orleans, Bennett stated, "…with its one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants speaking a dozen different languages, its crowded tenements, its narrow streets, and generally congested and unsanitary conditions, is a wide-open field

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[258] *First Annual Report of the Woman's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South for 1910-1911* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1911): 101. SBA.
[259] Ibid.

that American Protestantism has scarcely touched."[260] Bennett advocated a large plan that required "…a dozen Christian institutions of the best and most aggressive type to assist in evangelizing and Christianizing this conglomerate people."[261] A Wesley House would be just a beginning program, but that a larger hall run by an "aggressive, forceful man" would be necessary to continue this important work.[262]

Bennett's commanding language underscored the fact that, although numbers of immigrants in the South were small in comparison to northern cities, Southern Methodist men and women were concerned that the immigration problems of widespread poverty, crowded housing, and an overextension of resources would eventually travel south. The concern of mass over-population did not materialize, but there was an ongoing apprehension about the spread of Catholicism from Southern European immigrants.[263] Often Catholics were included as "heathen" when referenced in Southern Methodist mission literature, and were considered non-Christian by some of the leadership of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In an article entitled "Why Evangelize Romanists?", a Methodist clergyman argued that "…Romanism does not teach them the real gospel of Jesus Christ"[264] and "…Romanism does not offer any assurance of salvation and peace with God for this life."[265] Male church leaders had less sympathy for the plight of the immigrant than women in the church, and were more concerned that the non-Christian values of immigrants would infiltrate the South.

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[260] *Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Woman's Home Mission Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1908): 38. SBA.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid.
[263] McDowell, 67-68.
[264] *The Missionary Voice* (Volume VI, Board of Missions, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1916): 229. SBA.
[265] Ibid, 229.

However, the deaconesses, missionaries and laywomen who worked with the immigrant population generally took a more tolerant and empathetic view of the difficulties endured by them.[266] Southern Methodists women as a whole agreed that the best policy to address the issue of immigration was to integrate immigrant groups into American society to create good citizens.

Social Gospel leaders acknowledged the problems created by a mass influx of immigrants into the United States, and Walter Rauchenbusch advocated some nationalistic ideals. He understood that nationalism and patriotism was sometimes used by European monarchies as a justification for war, but socialism must not endeavor to dismantle important historical institutions. He argued that "The internationalism of the working classes is nobly right in protesting against a narrow and warlike patriotism, but we must never lose our loyalty to our own country, nor our reverence for her past, her heroes, and her flag."[267] He argued just as humanity is made better because of individual differences, nations are also made better by their uniqueness. He stated: "Nationality is a good and holy fact. As the individual has a right to his individuality, so the nation has a right to its nationality."[268] This approval of some forms of nationalism by the dominant Social Gospel leader validated the Protestant agenda of the Americanization of immigrants. For Southern Methodist missionaries, deaconesses and laywomen working in immigrant communities, Americanization activities were easily integrated into mission programs and were considered a vital service to immigrant

[266] Blue, 41-42.
[267] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907): 215.
[268] Ibid.

groups, and many efforts were designed to simply meet the needs of immigrants as soon as they landed in port cities.

In Port Galveston, an Immigrant Home was established in 1909 by the Woman's Board of Home Missions. Immigrants were "…met at the ship, and all possible assistance was rendered there; after which they were carried to the Home in free omnibuses, where they had free baths, reading rooms, and literature."[269] Immigrants were offered inexpensive rooms, and in some cases, were helped onto trains to other destinations,[270] or they were "…met by missionaries in charge and directed to centers where work was found for them."[271] These efforts were not only an extension of Christian kindness, but also so immigrants would be "…given a chance to know something of the better things of our American civilization."[272] The Immigrant Home also served as a place for immigrants to stay who did not meet the requirements for admittance to the United States. The Home was an official place, in lieu of a government station, where people were detained until their legal requirements for admittance were negotiated, or they were deported. The Immigrant Home provided benevolence to detainees during a time of uncertainty.[273]

Estelle Haskin reported in her book, *Women and Missions in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, that an important part of social evangelism for the mission movement was the Americanization of immigrants. She argues: "One of the great tasks accomplished through the city mission enterprise has been that of the Christian

[269] *Twenty-Third Annual Report*, 147.
[270] Ibid.
[271] Haskin, 226.
[272] Ibid.
[273] 1913 *Missionary Voice*, 407.

Americanization of the foreign-born. In numbers of cities vast communities of foreign-born people have been Christianized and Americanized."[274] In the port town of Ybor City, Florida, a city mission was established for the Italian population, referred to as "Little Italy", and here the agenda to "Christianize" and Americanize was applied. The mission provided missionaries and clergy for Sunday Schools and church services, as well a night school for young men, day school, and kindergarten. Church and school were intertwined and a missionary reported that many of the attendees drifted away from Catholicism. The missionary stated: "Our aim is to make strong, faithful Christian men and women who will become loyal citizens of Christian America. We desire to take the best that this noble race brings with it and combine with it the best we can give them. We unite the two flags by an open Bible, teaching truth and life in Jesus Christ."[275]

Wolff Mission School in Tampa, Florida, which served a Cuban community sought to Americanize the population through the observance and celebration of American holidays, and other days important to Southern Methodist women, such as Peace Day, and World's Temperance Sunday.[276] Wesley Houses in immigrant districts incorporated English classes into their service agenda. The Wesley House in Fort Worth, Texas provided night classes several times a week for adults, using religious literature and materials designed to Americanize immigrant groups. Books entitled "How Foreigners Can Learn English," "The Desirable Immigrant," and "Duties of an Alien" were used as educational tools in night classes. In many cases, Wesley House

[274] Haskin, 207.
[275] 1913 *Missionary Voice*, 408.
[276] 1915 *The Missionary Voice*, 258.

English classes were the first opportunity for an immigrant to learn to read,[277] albeit never in the immigrant's own language, but only in English, with the ultimate goal of Americanization.

Southern Methodist women responded to nationalistic rhetoric promoted by male and female leaders in the church, and the mission societies. The leadership conflated the concept of Americanization with that of Christianity as an important standard for mission work. Walter Rauschenbusch's argument that some forms of nationalism were appropriate in creating social order undergirded the Southern Methodist mission agenda. The practical application of these tenets was evident in the work of the Woman's Home Mission Society and later the Woman's Missionary Council. The work done with immigrants showed an implementation of the Progressive Era doctrine of education for all people, the Social Gospel principal of equality through social uplift, and the church's agenda to evangelize non-believers. The mission workers believed it was their duty, and in the best interest of society, to produce ideal citizens.

The Issue of Race: A Complicated Mission Agenda

Poverty, illiteracy, and exploitative labor practices were all issues that the Southern Methodist mission movement sought to address in white and immigrant communities, but the issues were just as pressing in black communities all over the South. As the Progressive movement and Social Gospel theology took a stronger hold in the South, the Woman's Home Mission Society and later the Woman's Missionary

[277] Ibid, 259.

Council took the lead in the religious response to the question of race and racial equality. Even with the backdrop of overwhelming historical traditions of regional racial segregation, discrimination and inequality, Southern Methodist women developed a policy of reform in cooperation with the African American community to begin to create a more just social order. Deeply ingrained social structures and attitudes of racism were large obstacles for Southern Methodist women to overcome to begin work on behalf of African Americans. Southern Methodist historian Noreen Dunn Tatum states: "It was not until 1899, however, that Southern Methodist women as an organized body began even to consider the possibility of service to Negro Americans. Even then the sketchiness of the records may be taken as an indication of uncertainty and temerity at this point."[278] It was Belle Bennett's leadership, which was heavily influenced by Social Gospel theology, and her involvement in organizations such as the Southern Sociological Congress and the Madison County Colored Chautauqua, that propelled the Southern Methodist women's mission movement forward to embrace the issue of race in the South. As was the usual protocol for the Woman's Home Missionary Society, the women began work through the mechanism of education.

In 1883, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church established Paine College, which was an African American school in Augusta, Georgia.[279] In 1900, Paine College requested funding to construct an industrial building for black girls and women to receive vocational training from the Home Mission Board.[280] The request was initially denied, but Belle Bennett proposed that

[278] Tatum, 355.
[279] http://www.Paine.edu/
[280] MacDonnel 123.

funding be granted the next year. Five thousand dollars was raised for the establishment of the Industrial Annex for Colored Girls at Paine Institute, amid opposition of church members, who found the work "objectionable."[281] New construction continued for years, including a dormitory and dining hall, which freed up space to conduct industrial classes.[282] The curriculum was designed to prepare students for leadership and for secular and religious vocations. Lily Hardy Hammond wrote in the Missionary Voice: "But more and more the students, including the preachers and teachers, are to be given a training which will fit them for leadership in practical life as well as in things spiritual."[283] For WHMS, education was the first element of the Progressive doctrines to be implemented to achieve social uplift for Southern blacks. However, some Southern Methodist men believed that the social uplift of African Americans was important because it benefitted the white community, and the study of "the negro problem" was salient "…for the sake of protection – self-protection and national protection."[284]

In 1913, The Southern Sociological Congress devoted its entire conference to the issue of race. Entitled "The Human Way: Addresses on Race Problems," the Congress presented papers, established committees, and discussed progressive ways to solve the social problems of African Americans in the South. In an address to the Congress, Lily Hardy Hammond, one of two women to present a paper at the proceedings, described the nexus of the racial problems in the South:

[281] Ibid.
[282] 1912 *Missionary Voice*, 181.
[283] Ibid.
[284] 1913 *Missionary Voice*, 93.

> "Justice and opportunity – those are the fundamental human needs, the necessary basis of human progress, the test of the measure of a nation's civilization. The lack of them is the taproot of all social and industrial problems the world around. What we call the negro problem is the South's fragment of this world-tangle, which we have hitherto viewed as a thing apart, instead of as our share of the task of the human race."[285]

Topics discussed at the Congress ranged from the economic status of African Americans to infectious diseases plaguing the community. As one of two women on the 20-member Committee on Race Problems, Belle Bennett was steeped in Progressive ideas regarding race. The ideas presented at the Congress reinforced the work that the Woman's Missionary Council had begun in the Bethlehem House, which was a Wesley House for the black community.

Approximately 10 years after WHMS began the cooperative effort to expand the Paine Institute, the first Bethlehem House opened in Augusta, Georgia by the Woman's Missionary Council's first missionary to the African American community, Mary De Bardeleben.[286] De Bardeleben was a student at the Methodist Training School in Nashville, and offered her services to the Woman's Missionary Council for the sole purpose of ministering to the black community. Even with opposition from her parents and her home Methodist bishop, she felt called to work in this mission field.[287] In an article to the Missionary Voice in 1912, De Bardeleben argued that members of the black community were involved in every part of Southern society, as they "…cook our

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[285] *The Human Way: Addresses on Race Problems at the Southern Sociological Congress, Atlanta*, James E. McCulloch, Ed. (Washington DC: Southern Sociological Congress, 1913): 113. http://www.babel.hathitrust.org/

[286] Tatum, 356.

[287] McDowell, 85-86.

food, care for our little ones, serve in our business offices, lay the foundations of our buildings, pave our streets, till our land, drive our teams, by hard labor make the money that rents our homes."[288] She argued that because they provided society with every kind of service, there were many opportunities to serve them, as well. She advocated for basic kindness and patient treatment, better living conditions through better wages and housing, religious instruction for children and adults, and community uplift.[289]

Another Bethlehem House was organized in Nashville in conjunction with the Methodist Training School, and this work led to a cooperative relationship with Fisk University, an African American school, by establishing a Social Service Department at the university. This program was supervised by Estelle Haskin,[290] and focused on early education in kindergarten, as well as industrial training.[291] Although the program was run by the Southern Methodist women, non-denominational work was encouraged, and students from neighboring Vanderbilt University worked at the Bethlehem House. The board of directors for both settlement houses were populated by black and white community members.[292] The Bethlehem House programs represented a cooperative and community-wide effort to administer social service to African Americans. After the end of World War I, this mission work organized again with the establishment of the Commission on Race Relationships, with a goal to "'accept the challenge to show forth His power to settle racial differences, thereby setting before the whole world an example of the power of Christianity to meet interracial crises everywhere.'"[293]

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[288] 1912 *Missionary Voice*, 209.
[289] Ibid, 209-210.
[290] Haskin, 222-223.
[291] 1913 *Missionary Voice*, 55.
[292] Hammond, 8.
[293] Tatum, 356.

Recognizing the Value in Women's Missions: Gender Equality in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South

In 1909, Belle Bennett made her last presidential address for the Woman's Home Mission Society before WHMS and the Woman's Foreign Mission Society were combined in 1910 to form the Woman's Missionary Council. In her address, she took time to reflect on the history of the Southern Methodist mission movement, and explained the desire of the early organization to grow in numbers as well as importance in the denomination. She argued that even in the first years of organization, Southern Methodist women were looking for more expansive and satisfying work:

> "The women were willing to aid in building homes for those who ministered to the people in the things of God, but they had caught the vision of a wider field; and having had the development and the management of their own work in the Foreign Missionary Society, they were not content to become an advisory adjunct, collecting money to be expended by another Board."[294]

Bennett's comments about feelings of discontent of Southern Methodist women in the early years revealed more than a historical timeline of events and organizational growth, or a desire for the women to participate in more than a supportive role in missions. In this address, she was beginning to lay the groundwork for her vision not only of social service and activism in the form of mission work, but also of gender equality in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

[294] *Twenty-Third Annual Report*, 47.

She communicated to the membership the tangible results of their mission work, which was in the form of substantial funding: "…for the last two years, these women's societies, representing less than one-tenth of the membership of the Church, have given for mission annually about four hundred thousand dollars, a sum equal to nearly two-thirds of the total amount given by the entire membership of the Church."[295] As she was aware that a large organizational change to the Mission Societies was being discussed within the General Board of Missions, and had been since 1906, Bennett stated: "A new era is upon us. The Church must go forward; she cannot, will not stand still."[296] This statement is followed by an extraordinary warning that the male leadership of the church should not disrupt the autonomy or rights of the Woman's Missionary Societies, or the church would suffer, and would "…bring about such a disturbance of relationships in the Church as Methodism has never known. It will so shake the confidence and loyalty of the women that the decrease in missionary collections will result in nothing short of disaster for the work at home and abroad."[297] She also reminded her readers that their Northern counterpart, the Methodist Episcopal Church, had granted women full and equal rights as lay members of the church 20 years before, and although there had been considerable opposition to these rights, the church had not been damaged because of it.[298]

Bennett asked that, in light of their substantial contributions toward the mission efforts of the MECS and the financial support provided by Southern Methodist women, shouldn't women be granted the same privileges the male lay membership of the church

[295] *Twenty-Third Annual Report*, 48.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Ibid.
[298] *Twenty-Third Annual Report*, 48.

enjoyed in the form of leadership roles? Bennett concluded her address by admonishing the membership of the Board of Woman's Home Mission Society to send a signed formal request to the General Conference of the MECS to grant Southern Methodist women equal laity rights. She felt that considering the work that had been achieved through the WHMS, representation of women in the executive committees of the MECS was not only fair, but was a requirement for the church to move forward. The issue of gender equality in the MECS was something Bennett had pushed to the forefront of her agenda in the area of missions and for Southern Methodist women. However, the church was slow to grant rights and women were not permitted lay leadership positions until 1922, the year of Bennett's death.[299]

While the General Board of Missions did not change the autonomous nature of the women's mission societies, as Bennett warned against, it did change the structure of the societies by combining the home and foreign societies under one umbrella of the Woman's Missionary Council, and installed Bennett as president. In her first presidential address to the Woman's Missionary Council in 1911, the feelings of loss are evident: "In the unexpected dissolution of our Woman's Boards and the readjustment of all of the missionary forces of the Church there could be no exception to this rule of change. The action was radical and far-reaching, and we naturally face the future with mingled feelings of hope and fear."[300] She identified where basic needs of society are not met, and are not addressed by "more progressive" public institutions, namely "…city slums, the mill villages and the mining camps."[301] These areas, she

[299] http://www.gcah.org/
[300] *First Annual Report*, 96.
[301] Ibid, 101.

argued, "…are home mission fields,"[302] and are the responsibilities of the church. Bennett did not advocate systems which just administered aid, but was a proponent of processes that helped people to help themselves. This progressive value drove the work of home missions.

Through their extensive and integrated system of education and settlements, Southern Methodist women not only succeeded their mission goals of ministry to the most vulnerable groups during the Progressive Era, they helped drive the social reform movement in the South. The largest issues of the era, namely labor, immigration and race, were addressed by these women through the mission-oriented mechanisms of education and settlements. While they focused on ministering to the marginalized in their communities, they also evaluated their own place as women in the denomination, and began the fight for equal rights in the church. The Social Gospel served to galvanize the women of the Woman's Home Missionary Society and the Woman's Missionary Council toward social activism and toward the public sphere. Southern Methodist women welcomed the opportunity to use their substantial organizational skills and energy toward extending the Kingdom of God, and as a result, took steps toward equality within Southern society and the Southern Methodist Episcopal Church. These reform efforts had long-lasting ramifications for Methodist women. The Progressive Era home mission work created a legacy of women's social activism that continues to thrive today.

[302] Ibid.

Chapter 3

Church-wide Effects of the Social Gospel: Denominational Responses and Influences

The home mission work of Southern Baptist and Southern Methodist women was undoubtedly shaped by the Progressive movement and was carried out through the lens of Social Gospel theology. Each group of women devoted an enormous amount of time and energy to the work of home missions and did so through skillful organization and management. But the extent to which the women of each denomination enacted the principles of the Social Gospel was affected by the responses and influences of the male leadership of their respective denominations. The social changes brought about by the Progressive Era and a liberal biblical interpretation evident in Social Gospel theology proved a challenge for Southern Baptist and Southern Methodist men, and especially for clergy and lay church leaders. For these men, the Progressive movement provided an opportunity to either embrace, reject, or begrudgingly accept social changes and reform in the South. As they held the power to change policy in their denominations, their responses to these changes are salient. Further, Southern Methodist women maintained contact with the activities and policies of their Northern counterparts in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and often embraced or modified their processes to meet the needs of communities in the South. These internal and external responses helped to determine the degree of impact of each group's social activism.

An Insular Outlook: Southern Baptist Reaction to the Social Gospel

In writing *In Royal Service,* the 50th anniversary history of WMU, Fannie Heck recorded the beginning influences of the Social Gospel on WMU work, and the change in entrenched and comfortable attitudes of Southern Baptist women: "The old near-sightedness of Christian women, which kept them from seeing anything but the need of their own neighborhoods, was being succeeded by a strange far-sightedness, which saw as nearest the need in some other community."[303] Heck also recognized this shift to be one that required personal action, which might prove uncomfortable, as "…the giving of money to pay someone else to look after the poor was found to be much easier than haunting unpleasant streets one's self."[304] She inserted the Social Gospel tenet of actively helping the needy into WMU's historical record as a salient aspect of home missions. She carefully wove evangelism into her historical treatment of the Personal Service mission: "There were souls to be clothed with righteousness, prisoners to be told of release from sin, sick to be cheered and comforted, strangers to be welcomed and held to old beliefs or led to better ones. Here was a great engine of power to be attached to the nearest need."[305] In her history, Heck outlined WMU's agenda for its particular application of the Social Gospel, which encouraged Southern Baptist women to step out of their homes and into the wider community.

As WMU leadership encouraged its membership to engage in the home mission field, the Southern Baptist male leadership was creating a climate of denominational exclusivity and theological purity that discouraged the basic Social Gospel ideology of an equitable social order. In his book, *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of*

[303] Heck, 206.
[304] Ibid, 207.
[305] Ibid.

the Baptist Faith, Edgar Mullins, a president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, credited Baptists with founding many American democratic principles, such as the separation of church and state,[306] and acknowledged Progressive Era social changes as agents that could develop denominational strength. He argued that change is a test where only the strongest survive and that "Some are so modified by their environment that they lose their original characteristic entirely. Others are purged of dross and purified and unfold more fully their distinctive life and power."[307] Mullins stressed the importance of individuality and a personal spiritual relationship with God ran counter to the idea of environmental social uplift: "To be saved as an individual, to be 'in the ark of safety' provided by the gospel, to escape from death and hell has often been the sum of Christian teaching."[308] He argued that some proponents of the Social Gospel rejected the value of individualism in favor of a gospel that "…aims primarily at social results. Frequently this takes the form of an assertion that a change in environment is all that is necessary to effect a change in character."[309] Mullins ultimately asserted that socialistic forms of religion and government would fail because they advocated equality for subordinated groups by addressing the physical problems of poverty through reform. He argued "Inequalities in human personality will always create inequalities of condition."[310] In short, God ordained the economic, social and religious status quo, and "the socialistic scheme" which sought "… to cure a recognized evil by ignoring a fact

[306] Eighmy, 76.
[307] Edgar Young Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1908): 11-12.
[308] Ibid, 201.
[309] Ibid, 202.
[310] Ibid, 305.

which is organic in human nature, and which belongs to the providential order"[311] was a threat to the established Southern Baptist hierarchy.

John Lee Eighmy confirms the idea that personal conversion and the revival of traditions which created the existing social order underscored the reluctance of conservative Southern Baptist leaders to embrace social justice causes.[312] In response to the rapid changes produced by an increasingly industrial society, protestant churches "…reacted to industrialization either by openly defending the new order or by ignoring economic ills as irrelevant to religion."[313] Many established churches were dependent on the contributions of their wealthy members, who saw little benefit in a change of social order. Baptists historically confined their political aspirations to the cause of religious freedom. According to Eighmy, some prominent evangelists promoted public welfare, but most restricted any social message to personal charity work, and individual moral reform.[314] He states that, "…by presenting morality in terms of individual rather than social reform, revivalism functioned as a socially conservative force with the practical effect of upholding traditional values and institutions against basic social changes."[315] Southern Baptists eventually distinguished themselves as a denomination by a strict attachment to the authority of the bible, by personal conversion, and a "…separation from compromising ecumenism."[316]

The Progressive movement and a more liberal interpretation of the teachings of Jesus Christ by proponents of the Social Gospel served to distill Southern Baptist

[311] Ibid.
[312] Eighmy, 58.
[313] Ibid, 57-58.
[314] Ibid, 58.
[315] Ibid.
[316] Ibid, 76.

theology as exceptional among Protestant denominations. The leadership of the Home Mission Board actualized this idea of uniqueness and separateness in its mission objectives. Victor I. Masters, who served as superintendent of the Home Mission Board's publicity department, rang the alarm against what he considered to be false doctrines found in some Social Gospel theology. He wrote literature that was to be disseminated to Southern Baptist churches and used as educational tools for missions, and as head of the publicity department, held significant power over the message of the Home Mission Board. In his book, *A Call of the South: A Presentation of the Home Principle in Missions, Especially as it Applies to the South*, Masters argued against diluted Christianity: "I am so confident that a supreme danger to true religion lurks in these faiths which minimize sin and the Saviorhood of Christ, while they magnify environmental salvation and an external exhibition of human fraternity…"[317] His rhetoric proposed a complete denial of Social Gospel theology as it represented a shift away from the importance of personal conversion as the first weapon of individual and social reform:

> "Consider the amazing sweep of social service propaganda in recent years, and what it means that many a pulpit is becoming a more expert voice on a moral and physical clean up program, than it is on men's hopelessly sinful nature, God's holiness, and Christ's sacrificial love. Consider how the devil took social service, a good thing, and made it more damaging to real spirituality than bar-rooms and brothels, by getting good people so busy with secondary benefits, that they forgot to hold up the God-appointed and only availing source of all spiritual good."[318]

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[317] Victor I. Masters, *A Call of the South: A Presentation of the Home Principle in Missions, Especially as it Applies to the South* (Atlanta: Publicity Department of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1918): 9.
[318] Ibid, 142-143.

In addition to repudiating the Social Gospel movement among Southern Baptists, Masters also rejected attempts to establish formal cooperation between denominations or other Christian churches. He argued that ecumenism only served to weaken individual denominations. At the surface, the union of many Christian churches would look impressive, but, he asserts, no souls would be won for Christ. Ecumenism created a sentimental view of Christianity, rather than sound theology,[319] the result of which was a watered-down faith. Masters was in agreement with Southern Methodist Bishop Warren Candler, who stated: "'The suppression of individual belief in order to preserve a monotonous conformity has paralyzed faith and quenched the zeal by which Christian effort is quickened.'"[320] Through his literature and the publicity department at the Home Mission Board, Masters was able to affect an isolated Southern Baptist mission policy through which personal conversion was the only entrance.

In his book, *The Quality of Mercy: Southern Baptists and the Social Christianity, 1890-1920*, Southern Baptist historian Keith Harper argues that church leaders looked to mold the post-Reconstruction South into a Christian community that adhered to antebellum traditions, a religious value system, and a focus on family. Their view of their own Southern Baptist exceptionalism made them the most appropriate denomination to lead the South into a new century. In the context of religious and cultural tradition, as well as a central theme of strong connectivity to family, Harper asserts "…it is not surprising to find a strong current of paternalism in Southern Baptist social ministries."[321] This paternalistic current's foundation was in the home, and

[319] Masters, 149-150.
[320] Ibid, 150.
[321] Keith Harper, *The Quality of Mercy: Southern Baptists and Social Christianity, 1890-1920* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1996): 116.

Southern Baptist women roles in the home and society were defined for them by fathers, husbands, and church leaders. To men, women's value was solely determined by domesticity. Gregory Vickers posits in "Models of Womanhood and the Early Woman's Missionary Union," that "To her husband she was wife and subordinate; to her children she was mother and influencer; and as a member of society she was homemaker and the creator of stability."[322] The function of women to raise and nurture Christian children was the most important element of womanhood, and this, in turn, would create a stable South. The role of women in creating stable homes also naturally extended into the social and religious security of the South, and the nation. This was a responsibility that Baptist women accepted and viewed as highly important to the creation of an appropriate social order.[323] They also found it acceptable to protect the stability and sanctity of the home from destructive forces and influences. They took full advantage of a reform movement to eradicate a social issue that they felt was dangerous to the fabric of the family: the use and abuse of alcohol.

Temperance: The Acceptable Reform Movement

In the late 19th century, Southern Baptist men were generally against laws that conflicted with their ideas of individual liberty, including liquor laws, and many men did partake in the moderate consumption of alcohol in their own homes. However, some Southern Baptist progressives seized upon opportunity to combine "…older

[322] Vickers, 41.
[323] Ibid, 51.

condemnations of personal sin with progressive-era conceptions of social evil."[324] Ultimately, it was Southern Baptist women who drove the temperance effort within the denomination, and WMU utilized progressive tactics to address the problems created by the liquor industry. It is significant that in their capacity as defenders of women and children and preservers of the family, WMU stepped out of the private sphere of domesticity and into the very public arena over the issue of temperance. While WMU took no official stance on the suffrage movement or the passing of the 19th Amendment,[325] [326] the prohibition of alcohol was the one reform topic in which Southern Baptist women fully engaged. Viewed as an evil that often victimized women and children, and destroyed the fabric of the home, alcohol consumption was officially rejected by WMU in its earliest years. Catherine Allen states: "…WMU opposed both the personal consumption of and the manufacture and the sale of alcoholic beverages. The call after a few years was invariably to total abstinence from all alcohol."[327]

Even though there was a "cultural prohibition" of the service of alcohol on Sundays, bars in larger cities were routinely open for business. Southern Baptist women supported the closing of bars on Sundays in observance of the Sabbath, which, they believed, should be reserved for familial activities and spiritual rejuvenation.[328] WMU members at the national, state, and local levels were involved in the temperance movement and several joined the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), which contradicted the Southern Baptist male leadership's policy of isolation from other

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[324] Harvey, 71.
[325] Allen, 235-236.
[326] Allen states that Fannie Heck took no public stand on suffrage. When she was asked about it, "…invariably she would respond that her only interest was in missions." 235.
[327] Allen, 238.
[328] Tew, C. Delane, "On the Conservative Side: Woman's Missionary Union in the Progressive Era," *Baptist History and Heritage* (Spring 2012): 52-59, 55.

denominations and secular groups. Several members of the WMU leadership were also members of WCTU, and WMU took a public stance in support of the 18th Amendment, which prohibited the production, sale, and distribution of alcohol in the United States.[329] When Southern Baptist women realized the 18th Amendment was largely unenforceable, they redoubled their efforts to maintain existing prohibition laws. In support of the Woman's National Committee on Law Enforcement, WMU passed a resolution defending the 18th Amendment: "We heartily endorse the suggestion made by the Woman's National Committee for the enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment without any modification and that we cooperate in every way possible."[330] WMU's public position on Prohibition and the 18th Amendment marked a significant departure from its usual reluctance to engage in efforts of social reform and activism. Southern Baptist women, through temperance and support of Prohibition, publically defended and preserved the institution of the family. WMU felt secure in taking a public stance to preserve a private sphere issue.

Southern Baptist women worked in cooperation with other denominations and secular organizations on the issue of temperance, and Southern Methodist women were also heavily involved in the movement for Prohibition. Southern Methodist women took the same fundamental stance as Southern Baptists in that the abuse of alcohol undermined the stability of the family and victimized women and children. They "…opposed alcohol so strongly because they believed it perpetuated sexual immorality, violent crime and other social evils.[331] Like WMU, the Woman's Home Mission

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[329] Allen, Catherine, Rosalie Beck, and Kay Shurden, "The Impact of Southern Baptist Women on Social Issues: Three Viewpoints," *Baptist History and Heritage*, 22, no. 3 (July 1987): 29-40, 38.
[330] *WMU Executive Committee Meeting Minutes* (March 31, 1926) and Allen, 239.
[331] McDowell, 45.

Society took a position against the consumption of alcohol at the earliest points in its organization. The 18th Amendment provided a mechanism to publically advocate for this social reform. The Woman's Missionary Council passed a resolution in 1919 to "…cooperate to the utmost in securing the enforcement of our national prohibition laws."[332] The Woman's Missionary Council also resolved to fight for the enforcement of the laws because liquor manufacturers expressed the intent to sell their products overseas to "…foreign lands where we are engaged in missionary operation."[333] Here was one specific occasion where the domestic activist agenda of Southern Methodist women impacted their international mission efforts.

Southern Methodist Denominational Responses: Inside Resistance and Outside Influences

> "Dear Lord, we pray for the men of the Board of Missions. Thou knowest how they have troubled and worried us. They have been hard to bear sometimes, but we thank thee that they are better than they used to be."
>
> Closing prayer of the Woman's Missionary Council Executive meeting in 1926, by Maria Layng Gibson, President of Scarritt Training School.[334]

Southern Methodist women incurred some of the same gendered opposition to their home mission organization and Social Gospel policies as Southern Baptist women,

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[332] *Ninth Annual Report of the Woman's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South for 1918-1919* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1919): 181. SBA.

[333] Ibid.

[334] Maria Layng Gibson and Sara Estelle Haskins, *Memories of Scarritt* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1928): 131-132.

and some members of the male leadership of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South actively challenged the social agenda of the Woman's Home Mission Society or the Woman's Missionary Council. Southern Methodist men, including powerful clergy and a few Southern Methodist women, had the most difficulty accepting women who assumed roles outside the domestic sphere, which was manifested in the women's appeal to the leadership of the General Conference to be recognized as full and equal members of the MECS. This effort of the Woman's Missionary Council, led by Belle Bennett, also sought to obtain full membership on the Board of Missions, as well as membership positions on the executive committee of the Board of Missions, which would establish women's work as function of the Board, instead of this work being "independently administered."[335] In her presidential address of the Ninth Annual Report of the Woman's Missionary Council in 1919, Bennett outlined the subordinate status of women in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: "For seventy-five years they had served as its handmaidens, supported its institutions, and worshipped at its altars as minors. They had no voice in its councils and no lawful place in its Conferences."[336]

The Southern Methodist women's progressive home mission agenda was generally endorsed by the Board of Missions, and the larger MECS, and it wasn't until the women requested laity rights that they incurred substantial resistance from church leadership. In her biography of Belle Bennett, Tochie McDonell explained the reaction of many church leaders to the issue of laity rights:

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[335] Mabel Katherine Howell, Women in the Kingdom: Fifty Years of Kingdom Building by the Women of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1878-1928 (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1928): 268-269. http://www.archive.org/

[336] Ninth Annual Report, 48.

> "Let no one suppose that the opposition of the leaders of the church to this movement was static; it was aggressive and in every section there were some women who suffered ridicule, censure and contempt. The brunt of the condemnation, however, fell upon Miss Bennett, for in their judgment it was she who had put this unladylike feminist idea into the heads of women."[337]

A primary leader and laity rights challenger in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was Warren Candler, a Bishop, Senior Bishop and Chancellor of Emory University. While Candler was a proponent of some progressive principals such as public education, he believed that education for women and African Americans was important only for the proper maintenance of subordinate roles, and not for the purpose of achieving equal societal status. Candler was vocal for years in his opposition of the suffrage movement, and equated suffrage to Reconstruction in its potential damage to Southern society.[338] Even after women won the right to vote, Candler refused to allow his wife, Nettie Curtright Candler, to exercise this right, although she did so without his immediate knowledge.[339] Candler's opposition to women's participation in the public sphere spilled over into the policy of the Board of Missions for the MECS regarding laity rights for women. He vehemently disapproved of Belle Bennett's progressive leadership toward social reform and objected on the grounds that the movement "…would hurt the church by weakening its structure and driving men away."[340] As he felt that women did not require representation in the church by women, he not only opposed laity rights and the elevation of women to the status of deaconess, he actively

[337] MacDonell, 242.
[338] Mark Bauman, *Warren Akin Candler: Conservative Amidst Change*, PhD Dissertation, Emory University, 1975, 288.
[339] Bauman, 289.
[340] Ibid.

organized opposition groups in several states to petition the General Conference of the church against women winning representation in the leadership of the MECS. Although his conservative views met with resistance by church leadership, and he ultimately failed in his campaign to stop women from gaining laity rights, Candler's consistent efforts prolonged the battle for equality for women in the church,[341] who did not gain full membership rights until 1918.[342]

The issue of laity rights forced the male leadership of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South to confront societal changes brought on by the Progressive Era. The women of the Woman's Missionary Council, because of their implementation of the Social Gospel in home mission work, were more open to equalizing social reforms, and embraced the opportunity to operate in the public sphere. Southern Methodist women also continued in their progressive home mission efforts and endeavored toward equality in the church due to their contact with their Northern Methodist counterparts, as well as Social Gospel leaders in other parts of the country. The Woman's Home Mission Society and the Woman's Missionary Council were not only aware of the work done by the women of the Methodist Episcopal Church, they were influenced by their organizational processes such as settlement work and the deaconess movement. After the Civil War, Northern and Southern Methodist women in Baltimore engaged together in mission work for the poor, and also worked together in foreign mission efforts.[343] Before researching Methodist settlements in Chicago, Belle Bennett was in contact with Lucy Rider Meyer regarding the training of women into the mission field. Meyer was

[341] Ibid, 290.
[342] Howell, 85.
[343] McDowell, 9.

the founder of the Chicago Training School for Deaconesses, and she was instrumental in providing early guidance to the leaders of the newly opened Scarritt Training School in Kansas City. One of the first members of the faculty at Scarritt Training School came from the Chicago Training School.[344] Meyer also advised Bennett on beginning deaconess work, and training schools for deaconesses were opened in Atlanta, as well as several other cities outside the South.[345]

Other reform influences could be found in Belle Bennett's involvement with the Southern Sociological Congress. At the Congress meetings, Bennett heard the most modern reform thinkers of the era. The Congress brought in national reform leaders from the juvenile court and child labor movements, as well as regularly including African American leaders to speak on racial issues.[346] Additionally, The Missionary Voice, which was the missions periodical published by the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and to which the Woman's Missionary Council contributed monthly, included articles submitted by secular and Northern Methodist reformers, and Social Gospel theologians from all over the country. Therefore, the leadership and membership of the Woman's Missionary Council were kept well informed of the national Progressive movement and reform activities from all over the country. Southern Methodist women were not isolated from the trailblazing activities of the Methodist home mission societies, but incorporated and modified their ideas to fit Southern communities.

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[344] Cobb, 15.
[345] Ibid, 64.
[346] Green, Elna C., ed., *In Black and White: An Interpretation of the South by Lily Hardy Hammond* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2000): xxix.

The Progressive Era, through the implementation of the Social Gospel, provided the means for Southern Methodist and Southern Baptist women to actively minister to the marginalized and suffering in communities throughout the South. In doing so, they tested the boundaries of deeply rooted and rigid religious traditions, although this was not the initial intent or objective of their work. They simply and innately desired to express their Christian faith and contribute to the spiritual life of their denominations. During the Progressive Era, these women made history in their denominations, thus changing the narrative for many women in the South. For Southern Baptist women, the narrative of women's mission contribution is still publically subsumed by the dominant male history. For Southern Methodist women, the Progressive Era mission work marked the beginning of over a century of social activism and movement toward gender equality. They ultimately achieved and continue to maintain complete control over their own narrative and history.

Conclusion

During the Progressive Era, Protestant denominations in the South felt social pressures created by the national reform movements, although these movements were embraced more slowly in the South. The Southern Baptist Convention and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South were both highly patriarchal institutions that valued their Southern heritage, customs, and a God-ordained hierarchy, which mirrored and reinforced Southern culture. As the social hierarchy found in the bible, which placed women in a subordinate and submissive position, held immense authority and power within Southern society, the entrenched social structure was very slow to change. For women in both denominations, the Progressive Era, and especially the Social Gospel movement, opened the door for them to begin to take an active part in church and public life. Here, organizational home mission work reveals how Southern Baptist and Southern Methodist women responded to the entrance into the public sphere created by the Progressive Movement. Southern Methodist women, through their mission work, placed themselves into the public domain, ultimately using the Progressive Movement to achieve more equal status in the church. Southern Baptist women did not utilize the social reform movements to change the gendered balance of power in the Southern Baptist church.

Both groups of women believed in the authority of the bible, the expression of personal faith, and the importance of the preservation and safeguarding of family to create a stable social framework. Southern Baptist and Southern Methodist women both believed they had much to contribute to the evangelical efforts of their respective

denominations and to spread the message of Jesus Christ to the world. Ultimately, it was the acceptance or rejection of the wider Progressive Movement outside the South that made the difference of whether these two groups embraced public social activism. The women of WMU were part of a denomination that valued individual church autonomy and rejected attempts to reform institutions. Southern Baptists had no other northern counterparts or denominations outside their own to serve as a real precedent for change. The leadership of WMU was influenced by the mission work done in other denominations, but were more swayed by patriarchal structure of their own church and by the scriptural interpretations of the male Southern Baptist leaders. The central Southern Baptist tenet of personal conversion weighed heavily on how home mission work was performed in communities. Personal conversion was the only way to a reformed life and a reformed society, therefore efforts to alleviate the suffering of marginalized groups by addressing material needs or changing oppressive environments were fruitless if spiritual needs were not confronted first.

The home mission agenda of Southern Baptist women functioned within the framework of the private sphere. Marriage, motherhood and the family structure were not in dispute during the Progressive Era, but were protected and elevated as the most important element in the social fabric by Southern Baptist men. The men in the denomination used the authority of scriptures, and a narrative of traditional women's roles as salient to maintain their power in the church and society. As a result, Southern Baptist women's social activism stopped short of any reform seen in the Progressive Era that would impact the traditional social order. They were not interested in a restructuring of any roles in society. Southern Methodist women were confronted with

the same patriarchal structure as Southern Baptist women, and were excluded from participating in the creation and changing of policy in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. They experienced the same pressures to remain in the private sphere, and appropriate traditional female roles were intact in the MECS. However, these women were engaged with the wider Progressive Movement, as well as the home mission work of their northern sisters.

Belle Bennett and other leaders in the Woman's Home Mission Society studied the educational system, deaconess program, and settlement work of the Northern Methodist Episcopal Church. They were privy to the successes of these programs and emulated them in the South. Southern Methodist women had the precedent of a successful Social Gospel agenda to model in their own communities. They were not reliant on Northern Methodist work, nor did they duplicate Northern Methodist mission processes, but adapted them to suit Southern culture. In the implementation of the Social Gospel in their mission work, Southern Methodist women challenged the hierarchy of the church and Southern society, especially in their policies on race and gender equality in the church. Their work in cooperation with and on behalf of African Americans and their firm anti-lynching policy signaled the beginnings of change between the MECS and African Americans. Southern Methodist women were among the first white religious groups to engage in racial reform in the South.

Drawing upon their substantial home mission work and financial contributions to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the leadership of the Woman's Home Mission Society and Woman's Missionary Council took the opportunity to advance the idea of women's laity rights in the church, and be recognized as full members of the

denomination. Southern Methodist women did have the example of the Northern Methodist Episcopal Church with which to argue for laity rights. The northern church was not destroyed nor damaged by women fully participating in the life of the church. Southern Methodist women did not accept the established hierarchy and secondary status of women in the MECS, especially in light of women's extensive contributions toward the goal of missions. The long battle was eventually won for women in the MECS with laity rights. Southern Methodist home mission work was shaped by Progressive Era reforms and the women of the MECS became powerful activists for social change.

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