

THE SOULS OF WHITE FOLK:
THE SOCIAL GOSPEL AND JIM CROW IN WASHINGTON, D.C., 1880-1920

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Abstract:

This capstone explores how white Protestants in Washington, D.C. experienced Jim Crow segregation from 1880 to 1920. Placing religion at the center of its analysis, this paper seeks to bridge a gap in the literature by demonstrating how Christianity affected the (re)construction of white identity at the turn of the twentieth century.

Drawing upon black religious sources from the period, I have been able to read white religious texts in new ways to conclude that white Christians in Washington, unlike white American society at large, were overwhelmingly silent about segregation. Instead, the Social Gospel allowed white Christians in D.C. to articulate a superior white Christian identity during the Jim Crow era.

Introduction: Race and Religion in Turn-of-the-Century Washington, D.C.

“This race is destined to dispossess many weaker ones, assimilate others, and mould [*sic*] the remainder, until, in a very true and important sense, it has Anglo-Saxonized mankind,” wrote Reverend Josiah Strong in 1893.¹ As the U.S. approached the dawn of the twentieth century, Strong reminded white Protestant Americans that God had given this elect group the privileged mission of civilizing and Christianizing other races. While he did not reject the universal brotherhood of humankind, and even stated that God loved other races equal to the Anglo-Saxon race, Strong openly endorsed racial hierarchies. He argued that because of the Anglo-Saxons’ Christian heritage and their contributions to civilization, white Protestants had the responsibility to share their cultural legacy with all other races, particularly with African Americans.²

Strong’s endorsement of racial hierarchies and of black inferiority was not a new departure in Christian thought, but his remarks merit attention because of his associations with Northern liberal Protestantism at the turn of the century. As a leader in the Social Gospel, a movement within liberal Protestantism that sought to apply the teachings of Christianity to urbanization, immigration, and industrialization in urban centers, it is evident that Strong’s notions of a superior white Christian identity informed both his personal worldview and the philosophy of the broader movement. This is a striking contrast from earlier portions of the nineteenth century when liberal Protestantism often provided the inspiration for radical abolitionists and ministers who articulated counter-

¹ Josiah Strong, *A New Era, or The Coming of the Kingdom* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Company, 1893), 80.

² Ibid. Also: Strong, “The Race Question,” *Studies in the Gospel of the Kingdom*, August 1909.

discourses to white supremacy.³ Developing roughly concurrent to Jim Crow segregation in the American South, the Social Gospel's attitudes on "the race problem" shows that at the turn of the century, racial thought in white liberal Protestantism marked a significant break from the status quo of the antebellum and Reconstruction periods.

Washington, D.C.'s ambiguous regional identity as city that is both Northern and Southern makes it an interesting venue to examine the relationship between the Social Gospel and Jim Crow at the turn of the twentieth century. As a city that was experiencing the social changes that accompanied industrialization during this period, Washington was a fertile ground for the Social Gospel, while its proximity to the Old Confederacy and its sizable African American population also made it amenable to Jim Crow. Though *de jure* segregation did not arrive in Washington until 1913, in Washington's religious life black and white Protestants began worshipping separately as early as the antebellum period. During the nineteenth century, many white congregations in the city maintained ties with black congregations, even if these relationships were fraught with racism. However, around the 1890s these white churches in D.C. adopted a fundamentally different attitude when they embraced the racial ideologies associated with segregation to construct a superior white Christian identity.⁴

Because people like Strong often considered Catholics to be a separate, non-white racial group, this thesis focuses its analysis exclusively on the construction of white

³ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975). Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972).

⁴ Constance Greene, *Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 13-35. For more on the fundamental difference of Jim Crow from earlier periods, see C. Vann Woodward (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). For an institutional church history of Woodward's thesis, see James Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Protestant identity.⁵ Critical to the worldview of the Protestants of Washington was the re-assertion of white, Christian supremacy as the United States at large, and the South particularly, embraced the culture of segregation. Numerous historians, including David Roediger, Matthew Frye Jacobson, Grace Hale, and Walter Johnson, have demonstrated that race is a category not based on objective, fixed features, but one that is mediated by both historical and social factors. Whiteness is the social and historical construction of the white racial category as a privileged group in American society. It conveys a meaningful sense of racial difference in order to make, preserve, and remake social hierarchies and relations of power. In addition, ideas of “whiteness” and “blackness,” can change over time and are regularly reconstructed to reinforce the power dynamics attached to racial differences.⁶

This thesis contributes to the critical (d)evaluation of whiteness by illustrating the importance of Christianity in shaping constructions of race under Jim Crow. Drawing upon the analytical framework of historian Grace Hale, who defines Jim Crow as a cultural system that privileged whiteness in this period, this thesis argues that the response of white Protestants in the Nation’s Capital to the culture of segregation was largely one of silence. Instead of directly addressing Jim Crow and problems of racial inequality on theological grounds, the white Protestants of Washington used Social Gospel activism to ignore these questions and instead, construct a superior white Christian identity. By framing their activism in a racialized discourse under the culture

⁵ See Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 70.

⁶ David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso Press, 2007); Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: The Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (Rutgers: State University of New Jersey, 1998), xi, 8-9; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 8-14.

of segregation, white Washingtonians in the Social Gospel effectively used silence to both defend Jim Crow and to craft a white Christian consciousness in this period.

The importance of silence to these Christians' worldview is somewhat paradoxical in that it was both passive and active. On one level, because of their white privilege, silence allowed white Washingtonians to disengage theologically with the culture of segregation. At the same time, their particular expression of non-responsiveness was also an active way to reassert the racial ideologies associated with the culture of segregation; the discourses in their Social Gospel activism was a mechanism to resist Black Social Gospelers' challenges to racial hierarchies. In Washington, the Social Gospel became a forum in which formations of race were made, contested, and reformed.⁷

Historiography: The Significance of Religion in Critical Studies of Whiteness

Critical studies of whiteness, which seek to examine how white racial identity has been reconstructed, can trace their roots to the early twentieth century when W.E.B. Du Bois argued in *Black Reconstruction in America* that despite sharing a similar class position with African Americans, poor Southern whites opposed Black leadership in Reconstruction because of a "public and psychological wage" of white privilege.⁸ In addition to introducing the social construction of whiteness to the discipline of history, this conclusion offered historians a new approach to studying race. Du Bois' observations highlight how people of color occupy a unique vantage point in American

⁷ Historians are in agreement that as a movement within liberal Protestantism, the Social Gospel was concentrated in mainline, institutional denominations and did not include evangelical, fundamentalist, or Pentecostal churches. See Arthur Schlesinger, "A Critical Period of American Religion," *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings* (October 1930-June 1932): 523-46; Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949); Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 733.

⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, as quoted in David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso Press, 2007), 12.

society that enables them to better understand the social construction of the white racial category and the role of white privilege than most whites.⁹ Therefore, historians studying white identity frequently turn to sources from people of color in order to gain new insights into how race functioned in a specific time period. For example, though historian Glenda Gilmore primarily studied how gender affected expressions of white supremacy *Gender and Jim Crow*, she focuses on examining sources from black women's voluntary associations to better understand how whiteness functioned in this particular time and place.¹⁰ Following this tradition, I have drawn upon black religious sources from the period to read white ones in new ways and gain deeper insight into the discourses on race in Washington religious life at the turn of the century.

Though professional historians largely ignored Du Bois' scholarship on whiteness when it was first published, historian David Roediger re-introduced ideas of Du Bois to the discipline in his 1991 monograph, *The Wages of Whiteness*. Roediger demonstrated how the working-class in the antebellum North distinguished themselves from African American slaves by calling themselves "white workers" and "wage laborers" to create meaningful markers of racial difference.¹¹ Since Roediger's influential work, subsequent studies have demonstrated the construction of whiteness through gender, politics, labor, immigration, and popular culture.¹² Unfortunately, scholars of whiteness have largely ignored the study of religion from their work, in spite of it long having been considered important to the histories of people of color and other marginalized populations.

⁹ David Roediger, *Black on White: Black Writers on What it Means to Be White* (New York: Schocken Books, 1999), 4-10

¹⁰ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, xvi-xxii.

¹¹ Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 95-156.

¹² For additional works on the critical study of whiteness, see: Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*; Hale, *Making Whiteness*.

Blum directly addressed this problem in his groundbreaking work, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism*. He argues that the violence and chaos of the Civil War ruptured white solidarity in the U.S. and that after the war, Christianity was used as a mechanism to restore it. Using the manuscripts of the white evangelists, missionaries, Christian voluntary associations, and white newspaper columnists, he demonstrates that religion in the Reconstruction era was a mechanism by which a national white identity was reconstructed, directly at the expense of people of color.¹³ Because his book concludes with the dawn of American imperialism in 1898, Blum has argued that there is a need for more works that demonstrate the “spiritual wages of whiteness,” or the connections between whiteness studies and American religious history, in later periods in U.S history. This thesis responds to this call by revising by addition Grace Hale’s monograph, *Making Whiteness: Jim Crow and the Culture of Segregation*, by incorporating Christianity into analyses of Jim Crow and whiteness. Hale’s work analyzes the construction of white identity through the advertisements and popular culture that invoked the Old South, but, as the case in most critical studies of whiteness, she does not include religion in her analysis.¹⁴

Blum’s criticism of the absence of American religion from whiteness studies points to a closely related and perhaps even more significant historiographical problem: studies of American religion rarely see white people as people with racial identities. Since Eugene Genovese’s pioneering work, *Roll, Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, many studies illustrate the importance of race in shaping the distinctiveness of African American religion. The decision to call that subfield of history “African

¹³ Edward Blum, *Reforging the White Republic*.

¹⁴ Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness*.

American religion” highlights the significance of religion to understanding Black people’s experiences of race, but when historians study white people of faith, the phrases “white religion” or “white church” are almost never used.¹⁵ Coupled with Blum’s arguments, this suggests that whiteness studies and those on American religion largely overlook and fail to dialogue with each other. The central deficiency to Ralph Luker’s work, *The Social Gospel in Black and White*, is that he neglects to incorporate the social construction of whiteness into his analyses about how white Social Gospel Christians aided Blacks at the turn of the twentieth century. His examination of religious periodical and manuscripts from the religious reform movement demonstrate that white Social Gospelers included racial issues in their social agenda, but it does not address how the inclusion of such issues affected white Social Gospelers’ experiences of race.¹⁶

The failure of scholars of American religious history to incorporate whiteness studies into their literature on the early twentieth century is perhaps best understood when contrasted with studies on religion and marginalized groups. By studying the minutes of women’s missionary societies, Higginbotham demonstrates in her book, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church*, how Black Baptist women’s activism in the Social Gospel mediated their experiences of race and gender under Jim Crow.¹⁷ On the other side of the spectrum, Nancy MacLean has demonstrated the conflation of whiteness with Protestantism and Americanism under the second Ku Klux Klan in the period after World War I.¹⁸ Grace Hale also follows this trend in

¹⁵ Judith Weisenfeld, “Forum: American Religion and Whiteness,” *Religion and American Culture*, 27-35.

¹⁶ Ralph Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

¹⁷ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*.

¹⁸ Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

American religious historiography in her most recent monograph, *A Nation of Outsiders*, which explores how white Americans created an identity as an oppressed, marginalized group in the post-Civil Rights Era. While Hale's inclusion of Christianity in this study addresses the criticisms of *Making Whiteness* and offers important insights into experiences of race and religion in this period, her work, like Higginbotham's and MacLean's contributes to the misconception that religion is only an important tool of analysis when studying marginalized groups.¹⁹ When these works are read in light of Kevin Schultz and Paul Harvey's arguments about the lack of literature that demonstrate religion's significance to "mainstream" groups in American society, one begins to see why whiteness studies and American religion often fail to dialogue.²⁰ By exploring how Christianity was central to constructing the racial identities of mainline Protestants in this period, my study seeks to bridge this void in the literature.

Placing religion at the center of its analysis, this thesis not only addresses the disconnect between whiteness studies and the study of American religion, it also responds to Jonathan Butler and Harry Stout's calls for works that demonstrate the relevance of religion in modern American history.²¹ Because of the rising popularity of social history within the discipline, they suggest that religion has largely been overlooked in studies on the U.S. after 1870 because of its longstanding connections with intellectual history, and therefore, the history of elites.²² Their neglect of religion poses a significant problem: it implies that American society became more secular after the Civil War, but

¹⁹ Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (Oxford University Press, 2011), especially 237-276.

²⁰ Kevin Schultz and Paul Harvey, "Everywhere and Nowhere: Recent Trends in American Religious History and Historiography," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 78, no. 1 (2010), 146-151.

²¹ Jonathan Butler and Harry S. Stout, eds., *Religion in American History: A Reader*, "Introduction," (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

²² Ibid.

rising rates of church membership actually suggest that the importance of religion in American society has not decreased.²³ When framed within this context, one begins to see an explanation for why whiteness studies have tended to exclude religion from their analyses. Therefore, in addition to bridging these two fields, my study also seeks to revise social historians' views on secularization in twentieth-century American history.

Forgotten Theological Alternatives: The Legacy of Southern Missions

In order to fully understand the strange career of white identity under the Social Gospel, it is necessary to step back and first examine Christian ideas about race during and immediately after Reconstruction. It is only by studying the legacy of Southern missions that one can appreciate the fundamental rupture in white Christian racial thought under Jim Crow. After the Civil War, many Northern Protestant denominations sent white missionaries to the South to offer material aid and educational instruction to newly freed African Americans as part of Reconstruction. Historian Edward Blum has argued that because Southern missionary work was the heir to the abolitionist legacy because it championed black civil rights and was deeply influenced by the "of one blood" theology that characterized abolitionism. Though some historians, influenced by postcolonial theory, have argued that Southern missions articulated a discourse of racial paternalism, the significance of interracial contact within Southern missions cannot be dismissed. After spending considerable amounts of time with freed African Americans in both integrated classrooms and worship, Northern white missionaries deconstructed their own stereotypes about blacks. "It is a misconception of the African race," one missionary wrote, "that all the negroes are alike. There is as much individuality – as much variety of

²³ Jonathan Butler, "Jack-in-the-box Faith: The Religion Problem in Modern American History," *Journal of American History* 90, no. 4 (2004), 1357-1378.

intellectual and moral temperament – among the negroes as there is among persons of any other race.”²⁴ The interracial contact and nature of Southern missions ultimately provided a rare forum for white missionaries to reconsider their own racial identities, too. Blum notes that as they spent more time living in African American communities, these white missionaries gradually shifted from seeing themselves as separate to considering them a part of the African American community in which they worked. “I never think but I am black too when I am with my scholars,” one missionary wrote to a friend in the North.²⁵ Abolitionist theologies of unity effectively blurred boundaries between whiteness and blackness and cannot simply be dismissed as paternalistic.²⁶

In a period when nearly every other institution began to ignore the needs of African Americans, the continued presence of Southern missions highlights how white Protestants constructed their identity in the latter portions of the nineteenth century partly by responding to black issues. Sponsored by Protestant denominations with Northern roots, Southern missionary work continued long after the official end of Reconstruction. As late as 1889, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, the denomination’s governing body, described the work of their Board of Missions to Freedmen as an organization designed to promote interracial Christian unity. The report for that year stated, “The General Assembly hereby expresses the hope that the work among the colored population of the southern states may be so conducted as to lead to the increase

²⁴ Corey, *A History of the Richmond Seminary*, as quoted in Blum, *Reforging the White Republic*, 64.

²⁵ Nellie F. Sterns to Lizzie, as quoted in Blum, *Reforging the White Republic*, 64.

²⁶ Blum, *Reforging the White Republic*, 51-86. James McPherson, *The Abolitionist Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 161-183, 368-393, argues similarly, suggesting that this helped lay the groundwork for the formation of formal, interracial organizations in the early twentieth century, notably the NAACP. For works that argue for the paternalistic side of Reconstruction missions to the South, see: Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers in the South, 1862-1870*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); and Joe M. Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

of a spirit of true fraternity among all Christians.”²⁷ Northern-sponsored missions to African Americans after Reconstruction were rare spaces in which ideas of racial egalitarianism were still articulated.

Because nearly all white, mainline Protestant churches in Washington, D.C. were members of Northern denominations, their connections to denominational boards and agencies on Southern missions helped to shape how they defined themselves in relation to African American issues.²⁸ Primarily through monetary donations, the city’s prominent white churches, including New York Avenue Presbyterian, Foundry Methodist Episcopal, Dumbarton Methodist Episcopal, and Calvary Baptist Churches, lent their support to Southern missionary work during and immediately after Reconstruction. Though one might contend that this suggests passive involvement at best, historian James Hudnut-Beulmer argues that monetary donations highlight what a religious culture values as important. So, while such financial support did not exempt Washington churches from racism or white privilege, their donations to denominational freedmen’s boards demonstrates at least a level of direct engagement with African American social problems even if it was not a full endorsement of Southern missions’ intentions to foster interracial equality.²⁹

²⁷ Report of the Special Committee on the Board of Missions for Freedmen: Presented to the General Assembly at New York, May, 1889 (Box 2, Folder 1), Presbyterian Historical Society (hereafter PHS), Philadelphia, PA.

²⁸ Mt. Vernon Methodist Episcopal Church, South was the only church in the District of Columbia that was a member of a Southern denomination. Ann Hutchinson, *Steeple and Domes*, (unpublished manuscript, HSW, 1981) 21, notes that though the Baptists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians also split over slavery in the antebellum period, none of the denominations ever constructed a church as far north as Washington. Established shortly after the conclusion of the Civil War, the Presbyterians, Northern Methodists, Disciples of Christ, American Baptists all had denominational boards that sponsored Southern missions. Though the institutional and hierarchical structure of each denomination varied, each denomination enabled its individual members and churches to donate to the denominational agency that directed freedmen’s aid.

²⁹ James Hudnut-Beulmer, *In Pursuit of the Almighty’s Dollar: A History of Money and Protestantism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

However, because the purpose of Southern missionary work ran so contrary to the racial ideologies of the day, many denominational freedmen's aid boards faced challenges to their continued survival. Forced to defend their work under mounting criticism, these disputes highlight the changing attitude toward race at the end of the nineteenth century, and ultimately, a rebuke of the abolitionist legacy. Within the Presbyterian Church, for example, the Board of Missions for Freedmen was repeatedly forced to defend its legitimacy and autonomy as a separate agency in light of proposals to merge the Board of Missions for Freedmen with the denominations' Board of Home Missions. In an 1888 proposal "asking the discontinuance of the Freedmen's Board and the assignment of the work to the Board of Home Missions," the Washington City Presbytery supported consolidation of the boards on the grounds of similar purposes.³⁰

Though the Presbytery offered no further rationale for their request, the fact that they saw the missions of these two boards as similar highlights changing ideas about race within white Protestantism. Like the Board of Missions for Freedmen, the Board of Home Missions worked primarily with people of color, however, the two organizations took fundamentally different approaches to their work. As discussed above, the former championed interracial fraternity and black equality while the latter was characterized by racial paternalism and focused their efforts on converting non-Christian groups. The Home Missions board, therefore, had a radically different outlook on work with African Americans in the South. "He was just as ignorant and superstitious as a slave, and... with the idea that liberty meant freedom from work," recounted a woman from the Board of Home Missions observing the church's work in the South.³¹ The *Christian Observer*, a

³⁰ The Board of Missions for Freedmen, 1888 Annual Report, PHS.

³¹ "Be Not Weary in Well Doing," *Home Missions Monthly* (1887), 109.

journal of the Presbyterian Church echoed her paternalistic sentiments: “God in his providence has placed this degraded race with us to be civilized and christianized. The negro is very receptive to religious truth, but he must be taught the value of holy living.”³² At the time of the this controversy within the denomination, the Home Missions organization argued it was best to approach Freedmen’s Aid with the same racial paternalism that characterized missions toward other peoples of color.

Criticism of the necessity of Southern missions did not occur in a vacuum; it was deeply influenced by the higher priority that white Protestantism began to place on foreign missions among at the end of the nineteenth century. Though historians differ on whether foreign missionary work was a moral reaction to American imperialism or an endorsement of it, the philosophy of white Protestants’ missionary work abroad was rooted in notions of Social Darwinism, the prevailing racial ideology about Western intellectuals at this time, and the civilizing value of Christianity.³³ O.B. Super of the *Methodist Review* wrote, “We are, to a large extent, the world’s teachers. The petrified nations of the East look to the Anglo-Saxon for instruction. Millions whom we call heathen are waiting for us to educate them.”³⁴ With the rising urgency of foreign missions, Christianizing “heathen” became more important than offering social services to Southern African Americans. It was in this context that New York Avenue

³² “Missions: Home and Foreign,” *The Christian Observer*, October 16, 1895.

³³ William Hutchinson argues that foreign missions in this period were a response to American Imperialism in *Errand into the World*, while Blum, in *Reforging the White Republic*, turns the so-called “reaction thesis” of American religious history on its head, by arguing that foreign missions opened the way for imperialism. For more on the reaction thesis in American religious history, see: Arthur Schlesinger, “A Critical Period in American Religion.”

³⁴ O. B. Super, “The Mission of the Anglo-Saxon” (November 1890), 866.

Presbyterian Church of Washington, D.C. began, in the mid-1890s, to favor donating to the Board of Foreign Missions over that of Freedmen.³⁵

Engaged in missionary work on a global stage, white Protestants began to revise their views of African Americans under the new, transnational constructions of white supremacy. William H. Butler, of *The Methodist Review*, described the tasks of aid to African Americans and missionary work among the Japanese as comparable: both cases illustrate “backwards” peoples who are in need of the assistance of white Christians to bring enlightenment and instruction.³⁶ Butler, abandoning previous beliefs about partnership and interracial fellowship with African Americans, now took a similar outlook on missionary work to all people of color, regardless of their location or nationality. Read in this light, Butler’s thoughts do not differ much from Strong’s, and in fact, offer an explanation for how Strong arrived at his views. Rooted in the new discourse of race at the turn of the century, white Protestants began to understand all missionary work as an expression of Christian white supremacy.

In Washington, D.C., white churches reflected this new construction of whiteness by turning away from the “of one blood” theology that characterized the Reconstruction era. These new ideas emerged around the same time that the Washington City Presbytery’s criticized the work of the Board of Missions for Freedmen, further illustrating the extent to which white Christians in Washington were challenging ideas of racial equality. Roughly at the same of this episode, Dumbarton Methodist Church sought to repossess its cemetery in 1893 from its black break-off congregation, Mt. Zion

³⁵ Annual Reports of New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, 1882-1920, PHS. Reports show a steady decline in freedmen’s aid and a surging increase in foreign missions, especially after the Spanish-American War in 1898.

³⁶ William H. Butler, “Jap and Negro: A Similarity of Social Problem,” *Methodist Review* (July 1905), 576-581.

Methodist Church. Leased to the latter congregation in 1879, just after the official end of Reconstruction, this action was a symbol of interracial cooperation and had highlighted Dumbarton's commitment to partnering with its African American sister church. However, in the midst of the new racial dynamics, ownership over the cemetery was much more than about who was able to bury their dead there; it became about white Christians controlling black Christians' actions.³⁷ Both of these episodes highlight how the discourse of Christian whiteness began to emerge as a counter to notions of interracial Christian unity. More than just a fight over the independence of a particular denominational board, the waning interest in Freedmen's Missions demonstrated how white Protestants in D.C. reconstructed racial hierarchies.

Faced with this situation, African American ministers vigorously defended the importance of Freedmen's Aid and its commitment to the abolitionist legacy. After the Board of Missions for Freedmen faced several other attempts to merge with the Board of Home Missions, Reverend Francis J. Grimké, a prominent black minister in Washington, D.C. preached about the importance of Freedmen's Aid. As the pastor of Fifteenth Avenue Presbyterian Church, an African American church within a majority-white denomination, Grimké was well positioned to understand the racial significance attached to Southern missionary work. "During the last forty years here is one agency that has not only played a part, but a most important part in the general effort to uplift the race," Grimké told his congregation in a 1911 sermon. Because Grimké hailed from a family of famous abolitionists, his defense is more than just a plea for goods and services; it was a defense of the "of one blood" theology Southern missions had, in his mind, embodied.

³⁷ Minutes of the Second Quarterly Conference, July 9, 1877, Dumbarton Archives, HSW. Official Board Minutes, 1890-1930, Dumbarton Archives, HSW.

“Wherever this Board has planted a school or a church the whole community has felt the effect. These schools and churches are centers of light – intellectual, moral, spiritual.”³⁸

Yet, New York Avenue Presbyterian Church’s waning monetary support for Southern missions suggests that Grimké’s words were largely dismissed.³⁹

Neither New York Avenue Church, nor the Presbyterian Church as a denomination, was unusual in their behavior. White congregations in Washington, following the trend in mainline Protestant denominations at large, began to shift their resources and priorities to reflect changing constructions of race at the turn of the century. According to historian Rob MacDougall, in the early 1880s the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Church, the body of church that oversaw the Methodist churches in Washington, D.C., urged its churches to give generously to Southern missions. Even Dumbarton Avenue Methodist Church of Georgetown, who had a relationship with Mount Zion Church, a nearby black breakoff church, made very few donations to Freedmen’s Aid. “The record of its giving in this period...does not attest to passion for the cause, MacDougall concluded. “Dumbarton churchgoers apparently had few contacts, religious or financial, with African American churches.”⁴⁰ Foundry Methodist Church, a prominent Methodist church in downtown Washington, also dropped off its giving to Southern missions. At a church council meeting in 1885, the

³⁸ “The Importance of The Board of Missions for Freedmen,” 1911, Francis J. Grimke Papers, Howard University, Mooreland Spingarn Research Center (hereafter FJG Papers).

³⁹ Annual Reports of New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, PHS, 1882-1920. These reports list the annual giving to each Board, and show that after the 1888 controversy that challenged the legitimacy of the Board of Missions for Freedmen, New York Avenue sharply dropped its funding to Freedmen’s Aid and shifted to funding the foreign and home missions boards.

⁴⁰ Rob MacDougall, “The Question of Improving This Church,” in Jane Donovan, ed., *Many a Witness: A Documentary History of Dumbarton United Methodist Church* (Interlaken, New York: Heart of the Lakes, 1998), 319-320.

members of Foundry decided to stop funding this altogether in favor of focusing their attention on temperance activism.⁴¹

“It is a Liquor Conflict, Not a Race Issue”: The Racial Politics of Temperance in the Social Gospel

Such a shift in funding indicates more than a simple change in a church’s priorities; it also highlights the new ways that white Protestants thought about whiteness and its relationship to African American issues. At the turn of the century, many intellectuals approached contemporary social concerns with a millennial outlook that made broad, sweeping statements about problems and prescribed equally grand solutions to them.⁴² In the case of race relations, turn-of-the-century millennialism suggested that issues of temperance and race relations were analogous; that is, securing prohibition would provide a permanent solution to racial tensions. U.S. Senator A.H. Colquitt of Georgia, addressing a church in New York City on temperance, epitomized this outlook in his 1890 address:

Shut the dram shops in all sections of the South, at every town and hamlet where whites and negroes intermingle in the same community, and I will pledge to you that where you hear of ten cases of bloodshed now you will not hear of one. It is a liquor conflict, not a race issue.⁴³

Foundry Methodist Church was not unique in its behavior; in fact, this was the trend among white churches in Washington, D.C. At Calvary Baptist Church, an American Baptist Church in downtown Washington, a representative from the denomination’s home missions agency explained how teaching temperance was the most

⁴¹ Official Board Minutes, September 4, 1885, Foundry United Methodist Church archives. This is also mentioned in Homer Calkin, *Castings From the Foundry Mold: A History of Foundry Church, 1814-1964*, 1968.

⁴² Mia Bay, *The Black Image in the White Mind: African American Views of White People* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1998. An excellent articulation of turn-of-the-century millennialism is Du Bois’ opening statement in *The Souls of Black Folk*, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.”

⁴³ “Rum and the Race Problem,” *The Washington Post*, February 4, 1890.

effective method of helping Southern African Americans. “We of the South realize that drink is the negro’s greatest curse,” said Dr. S.C. Mitchell, a white minister who worked with blacks near Richmond, Virginia. “The South perceives the necessity of temperance for the negro... The duty of religious teachers among the negroes should be to talk less of religious dogmas and more of morality and right living,” she told the congregation at Calvary Baptist.⁴⁴ At Western Presbyterian Church in D.C., the white pastor Reverend Gerhart Wilson connected liquor to African American criminality in the city. Wilson said that when he visited the city jail, the warden told him an African American prisoner recently admitted his actions were influenced by alcohol and that liquor’s influence had destroyed his life. Like the other white churches in the city, Reverend Wilson established a link between race and drunkenness and concluded, “liquor is the great and crying evil in our land.”⁴⁵ Framed within this context, Foundry’s declining interest in traditional Southern Missions and decision to switch funding to temperance can be understood as part of a broad shift within white Protestantism, particular among those in D.C., which rebuked the “of one blood” theology in favor of a theology of racial paternalism.

Often understood as a response to Progressive-era urban problems, temperance activism in this period could be read as merely a part of the Social Gospel’s interest in urban social concerns. However, as historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has shown, when the Social Gospel, or “social Christianity,” is contextualized within the Great Migration, a mass migration of Southern African Americans to Northern and Southern cities in the early twentieth century, African Americans become central figures and

⁴⁴ “Talks Race Problem: Local Option Helps to Solve, Calls Drinking Negro’s Curse,” *The Washington Post*, May 21, 1907.

⁴⁵ “Anti-Saloon Sermons: League Mass-meeting at Western Presbyterian Church,” *The Washington Post*, May 11, 1903.

constructions of race central issues in Social Gospel activism.⁴⁶ Read in this light, the focus on temperance by white Social Gospelers in Washington, D.C. highlights how their activism was connected to a racialized discourse of white supremacy. Among the white Protestants of the Nation's Capital, Social Gospel reform movements such as temperance enabled white Christians to use religion to articulate a white Christian identity as superior while maintaining direct silence on Jim Crow.

Black Social Gospelers in Washington understood the racial politics at stake in Progressive-era social reform and used their activism to actively challenge white Christians' constructions of race. Higginbotham persuasively demonstrates that while black Baptists in Washington, as well as in other urban centers, addressed many of the same issues as their white counterparts, black participation in the Social Gospel centered on articulating a counter-discourse to the racial ideologies under the culture of segregation. By focusing their involvement on the politics of respectability, African Americans in the Social Gospel used racial uplift ideology to challenge existing constructions of blackness.⁴⁷ According to historian Glenda Gilmore, employing this tactic in their activism enabled black women to make political statements about race, as well as gender, from apolitical venues, like social service organizations.⁴⁸

Drawing upon the politics of respectability, black Washingtonians worked to redefine the racial discourses surrounding temperance activism. African Americans in the Social Gospel embraced temperance, but did so to demonstrate their morality and responsibility. Reverend Francis Grimké understood the political implications surrounding temperance, and repeatedly spoke about its importance to his congregants

⁴⁶ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 172-173.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 185-194.

⁴⁸ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, especially chapters 7 and 8.

and to Colored Units of the D.C. branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Speaking at a WCTU meeting in 1908 at Lincoln Temple Congregational Church, an African American church in the Shaw neighborhood, Grimké told the women, "I feel, as a race, we need especially to be on our guard against this evil, for it is doing as much, if not more than anything else, to degrade us, and to damage us in the estimation of our enemies. The dram shop is largely responsible for the condition of our people."⁴⁹ Like Senator Colquitt's statement on temperance, Grimké's ideas about temperance and race were rooted in the millennialist outlook that characterized many in the Social Gospel, but his words differ from the white senator from Georgia because Grimké emphasized the politics of respectability over the politics of social control. He believed that adopting temperance was critical to resisting Jim Crow, and at other meetings at which he was invited to speak, Grimké praised the Colored Units of the WCTU for how their efforts uplifted the race. "This is the spirit that we all need in the great cause of temperance, and must have if victory is to crown our efforts."⁵⁰

White Social Gospelers in Washington felt threatened by black temperance activism because the politics of respectability blurred the boundaries between whiteness and blackness. The counter-discourse articulated by Social Gospel ministers like Grimké and the Colored Units of the WCTU forced white Social Gospelers in Washington's WCTU to vigorously police the racial politics of temperance. For example, at the October 1911 meeting of the executive committee, the Washington WCTU received a letter from Mr. W.W. Green of Eckington, a neighborhood in the city, "generously

⁴⁹ Address to WCTU meeting at Lincoln Temple Congregational Church, October 8, 1908, FJG Papers.

⁵⁰ Addresses to WCTU meetings, June 1908, October 1910, April 1911, October 1915 address highlight Grimké praising the Colored Units for racial uplift. As quoted in, "Temperance in DC," November 1, 1914, FJG Papers.

offering to assist the Women's Christian Temperance Union in its good work."⁵¹ At the suggestion of Mrs. Burnett, the committee decided to send someone from the Eckington branch to meet with Mr. Green and find out how he could support the work of the WCTU.⁵² However, the white executive committee's interest in Mr. Green's assistance quickly ended when Mrs. Allison, the treasurer of the Eckington Union, had visited Mr. Green and discovered that, much to her surprise, he was an African American man. Reporting to the executive committee about this incident, Mrs. Allison said, "she very politely thanked him for his kind and generous offer of assistance, and referred him to the colored W.C.T.U."⁵³ Because Green was living under the culture of segregation in Washington, it is safe to assume that he knew of the boundaries of racial difference under temperance and that he was intentionally trying to challenge white Social Gospelers' constructions of race. More than just a rebuke of a potential interracial alliance, by imposing such limits on black temperance activists white Social Gospelers in DC rigorously reasserted white control and reinforced the dominant white discourses on race in the Social Gospel.

Black counter-discourses on temperance were threatening enough to white Social Gospelers in D.C.; to hear it articulated by a white woman who was a member of their organization was even more so. At the organization's quarterly gathering in April 1911, Mrs. Wilbur Thirkield, the white liaison to the Colored Units, was so inspired by her black sisters' activism that she spoke to her white colleagues about the importance of establishing interracial alliances in order to realize the WCTU's vision of prohibition in

⁵¹ Executive Committee Minutes of the Women's Christian Temperance Union of the District of Columbia, October 18, 1911, HSW.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Executive Committee Minutes of the Women's Christian Temperance Union of the District of Columbia, November 15, 1911, HSW.

the District of Columbia. The minutes from the gathering state that she “strongly appealed to us, as comrades together, facing a common danger, to work for National Temperance and have it begin here by making the District strong and pure.”⁵⁴ As the wife of a Methodist minister who had once headed the Freedmen’s Aid Society of the Northern Methodist Church and was presently the president of Howard University, Thirkield’s words echoed the calls for interracial unity of the abolitionist and Reconstruction periods.⁵⁵ However, at the next quarterly meeting that year, Thirkield was notably absent from the meeting’s program. Though no rationale for her absence is provided in the minutes, it is highly possible that it was because at the last meeting she breached the delicate silence on Jim Crow that the white Protestants of Washington had crafted.

To reinforce the racialized discourse on temperance, the WCTU invited Reverend John Milton Waldron, an African American minister at Shiloh Baptist Church to speak in her stead. Though it might seem that by inviting an African American minister to speak at their meeting, the WCTU challenged notions of white supremacy, but Waldron’s address reinforced the very articulations of blackness that white Social Gospelers sought to use temperance to articulate.⁵⁶ In an address entitled “The Conditions and Needs of the Alley Population of Washington,” Waldron told the white women about the moral depravity of blacks living in alleys and how white Christian charity and white-sponsored temperance education could remedy the situation. The report from his speech notes that, “some of these people are good, but the majority are idlers, loafers, and gamblers. He

⁵⁴ Quarterly Convention Report of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union of the District of Columbia, April 12, 1911, HSW.

⁵⁵ For more on Wilbur Thirkield’s involvement with Reconstruction missions see: McPherson, *The Abolitionist Legacy*, 152-153, 155.

⁵⁶ Minutes of the WCTU of D.C., June 9, 1911, HSW.

declared if the bar rooms were closed, the alley problem would be solved.”⁵⁷ His words actually differ little from Grimké’s, but what makes Waldron unique and therefore more acceptable to the white WCTU, is that he does not frame his temperance activism in the politics of respectability.

Instead of speaking about the importance of black agency in racial uplift, his statements endorsed the commonly held white belief that African Americans had a predilection to drunkenness. By describing the efforts of white-sponsored Sunday Schools that instructed blacks on temperance, he also affirmed the importance of white paternalism. After having heard Thirkield’s statements at the previous meeting that contested the WCTU’s notions of blackness and whiteness, Waldron’s words were able to reproduce the racial hierarchies under the culture of segregation. As suggested by the WCTU’s decision to hold a spontaneous free-will offering for Waldron’s work with the alley population, white women of the WCTU not only responded positively to his address, they also vigorously reasserted the notions of Christian whiteness as articulated under the Social Gospel in Washington, D.C.

Critics of the Washington Way: The World Sunday School Convention of 1910

At the World Sunday School Convention of 1910, the delicate racial politics of the Social Gospel that white Washingtonians had crafted were challenged by proclamations of universal Christian brotherhood. When the white Protestants of Washington hosted the annual meeting of this Social Gospel organization, the Sunday School Convention posed serious threats to existing constructions of whiteness. While white Washingtonians welcomed delegates from across the globe to advance temperance, urban reform, and other Progressive-era concerns through Christian education, the

⁵⁷ Minutes of the WCTU of D.C., June 9, 1911, HSW.

visitors' statements that celebrated the unity of Christians worldwide challenged the culture of segregation in Washington, D.C.⁵⁸ As the racial politics of Social Gospel Washington came under attack, the gathering's hosts, the Washington, D.C. Sunday School Association, an all-white group, refused to let African American delegates march in the Convention's parade.⁵⁹

The uniqueness of D.C.'s racial dynamics became evident when delegates from around the world were unable to make sense of and criticized the white Washingtonians' actions. "I cannot, of course, understand the matter," the Reverend Dr. E. B. Meyer of London and president of the worldwide Association told the *Star*. "As a Britisher, however," he added, "I do not understand what is described as 'race prejudice.'"⁶⁰ Even Reverend John D. Dube, a Zulu delegate, could not comprehend white Washingtonians' penchant for Jim Crow. Dube, an African delegate who had travelled to New York and England for previous meetings of the World Sunday School Convention, had been denied service in several restaurants in Washington. Never before, in his previous travels, had he witnessed such overt discrimination as he saw in his first visit to the Nation's Capital.⁶¹

Amidst the controversy that the event had sparked, some white delegates from the North rebuked the white Washingtonians for their actions, and in so doing, challenged

⁵⁸ Historian William Hutchinson has demonstrated that the promotion of Christian education at home and abroad was critical to advancing the Social Gospel's mission of Christianizing the social order, therefore liberal Protestants at the turn of the century poured exhaustive efforts into religious instruction. See: William Hutchinson, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) and Hutchinson, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976). "Word for Moslem and Latin-America," *The Washington Star*, May 21, 1910. "Spread of the Gospel: Sunday School Workers Tell of World's Evangelization," *The Washington Star*, May 23, 1910. "War Upon Saloons, Slogan of Workers at S.S. Convention," *The Washington Times*, May 23, 1910. "Delegates Remain for Conferences," *The Washington Times*, May, 25, 1910.

⁵⁹ "No Negroes in Line: Barred from Parade by Local Sunday School Committee," *The Washington Star*, May 20, 1910 (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms), microfilm.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ "Protest in Pulpit," *The Washington Star*, May 22, 1910 (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms), microfilm.

such constructions of white identity under the Social Gospel. The white Massachusetts delegation adopted a resolution that condemned the behavior of their D.C. brethren, gaining the support of several of the World Sunday School Association's white leaders. All were attending the convention to further the mission of the church, so the presence of "race prejudice" at the gathering was unconscionable.⁶² The only means of an official apology offered was the decision to make Booker T. Washington a lifetime member of the Sunday School Association, a suggestion from a white delegate from Kentucky who had fought with the Confederacy during the Civil War.⁶³ Since Washington was held in high esteem by whites for his publicly conciliatory views on Jim Crow segregation, such an action hardly constituted as a serious response to the issues surrounding the parade.

Black Washingtonians were indignant about their inability to participate, and across the country, parade used the parade in Washington to highlight the hypocrisies in the culture of segregation.⁶⁴ The *Indiana Freeman* lamented the presence of Jim Crow at a religious gathering, noting that churches are "institutions that advertise the brotherhood of man as one of the cardinal principles."⁶⁵ In its review of the event, The *Washington Bee* said it "left nothing to be remembered but its Jim Crowism, which prevailed throughout the Convention."⁶⁶ Accompanying its review was an editorial cartoon entitled "A Just Retribution," in which the *Bee* emphasized that white leaders' apology had no redeeming value. The cartoon depicted the white Washingtonians of the parade standing

⁶² "Protest Against Ban on Negroes: Resolutions Censure the Local Committee," *The Washington Star*, May 24, 1910 (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms), microfilm.

⁶³ "The Sunday School World: Great International Meeting of Christianizing People - All the Nations of Earth Represented," *The National Tribune*, May, 26, 1910. "Delegates Settle Color Line Row: Booker T. Washington is Made Life Member of Sunday School Association," *The Washington Star*, May 23, 1910 (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms), microfilm.

⁶⁴ "Not Permitted to March," *Indiana Freeman*, July 2, 1910. "Washington Negroes," *The Cleveland Defender*, December 12, 1910. "A Just Retribution," cartoon, *The Washington Bee*, May 28, 1910.

⁶⁵ "Not Permitted to March," *Indiana Freeman*, July 2, 1910.

⁶⁶ "Paraphrastic," *The Washington Bee*, May 28, 1910.

at St. Peter's gates in heaven, begging to be admitted. St. Peter, seeing this, tells this group of white Christians that they are too late to ask for forgiveness and, instead, hands them over to the devil to descend into the depths of hell.⁶⁷ The *Bee* editorial cartoon implied that the presence of Jim Crow among the white Social Gospellers at the parade directly contradicted Christianity.

The discrimination that earned the World Sunday School Convention such notoriety was an unusually overt display of racism by white Social Gospellers under Jim Crow. During this period, Christian expressions of white supremacy often manifested themselves in more subtle ways, so the exceptional nature of the event that makes it so significant. It is a rare episode that makes the turn-of-the-century religious attitudes that helped to shape whiteness under the Social Gospel and the culture of segregation visible. The Sunday School Convention's decision to award Booker T. Washington a lifetime membership as an apology for discrimination at the parade epitomizes the ambivalent response that many white Christians had about directly challenging segregation.⁶⁸ Such an apology did not seriously address the discrimination at the Convention and did little to ensure that another episode of "Jim Crowism" would not occur at future meeting of the Sunday School Association. Perhaps more significantly, this superficial apology provided a sufficient conclusion to the controversy for white attendees, even the Massachusetts delegation, thus allowing the memory of the Sunday School Convention to be preserved as a pleasant one for white Christians.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ "A Just Retribution," cartoon, *The Washington Bee*, May 28, 1910.

⁶⁸ "Delegates Settle Color Line Row: Booker T. Washington is Made Life Member of Sunday School Association," *The Washington Star*, May 23, 1910.

⁶⁹ "All Nations Unite to Sing Doxology: Final Meeting of Greatest Assembly to Be International," *The Washington Times*, May 24, 1910. "World Sunday School Convention Adjourns," *The Washington Star*, May 27, 1910.

In a period increasingly marked by racial difference, historian Grace Hale has shown that interracial spaces raised fear and anxiety in the early twentieth century, because such spaces had the potential to challenge the culture of segregation that privileged whiteness. As an interracial event that celebrated Christian brotherhood worldwide, the World Sunday School Convention of 1910 carried such tensions with it because representations of whiteness as superior could easily be challenged on theological grounds. Just as Hale demonstrated that segregating train cars reduced the anxiety associated with integration, the same can be said about the white Washingtonians' decision to exclude black delegates from the parade.⁷⁰

Because segregation sought to ignore rather than engage with the black delegates' calls for interracial Christian brotherhood, it could never be a perfect counter to such theologies. However, segregation did bring resolution to the fears of white Washingtonians involved in the Social Gospel movement. This response allowed this particular group of white Christians to ignore serious challenges to whiteness. By prohibiting black participation in one of the most significant parts of the Sunday School Convention, white Washingtonians created a marker of racial difference that cast black Christianity as subordinate to its white counterpart. Exclusion from the parade put to rest fears of interracial equality by marking Christian whiteness as more virtuous while also enabling white Social Gospel Christians in D.C. to maintain the silence that was so integral to this particular construction of the white racial category under the culture of segregation.

In the aftermath of the Sunday School Convention, Francis Grimké preached to his congregation that the behavior of their white neighbors at the parade lacked any

⁷⁰ Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 131.

theological or Biblical basis. As an African American living under the culture of segregation in Washington and a member of majority-white denomination, Grimké's perspective enabled him to draw attention to the presence of white privilege. Drawing upon millennial thought, he used the events at the Sunday School Parade to highlight how Jim Crow and the culture of segregation stood contrary to Christianity.⁷¹ In his sermon, he cited both the Old and New Testaments to illustrate that because God regards all people as his children all people ought to value one another as sacred children of God. "If he, as Father, does not discriminate against any of his numerous children on account of race or color, how can the children themselves be justified in doing it?" Grimké asked, highlighting the tension this posed with Jim Crow.⁷² Using the life of Jesus Christ as his model, Grimké also said that loving one's neighbor and peacemaking were central components to the Christian religion. Nowhere does Jim Crow or race prejudice have a place in the teachings of Jesus, he proclaimed, as he angrily denounced all white Christians who had supported segregation.⁷³ "The lines have been set up, not where Jesus Christ directs them to be set up, but where race prejudice dictates that they should be set up."⁷⁴

Having established that Christianity was antithetical to the culture of segregation, the minister of Fifteenth Street Church exposed the hypocrisy behind their actions. "The fact that they are members of Christian churches exerts no appreciable influences over them," preached Grimké. He spoke about the white Washingtonians' willingness to

⁷¹ For more arguments on the significance of understanding whiteness and white privilege from the vantage points of people of color, see: Roediger, *Black on White*, Introduction; and Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, xx-xxii.

⁷² Francis J. Grimké, "Christianity and Race Prejudice: Part I", 10, May 29, 1910, FJG Papers.

⁷³ Grimké, "Christianity and Race Prejudice: Part I," 11-12.

⁷⁴ Ibid., "Christianity and Race Prejudice: Part II," 17, June 5, 1910. FJG Papers.

impose Jim Crow at the Sunday School Convention, and said, “It is a thing entirely apart from their religion, a thing which does not involve, in the least, to them any religious principle.”⁷⁵ In his view, there was a great disparity between the actions of the white Social Gospelers, and the religion they followed. Christianity provided no legitimacy for white supremacy, noting how his white neighbors were unable to provide any Biblical or theological rationale for their behavior. To Grimké, the events at the Sunday School Parade illustrated that the white Protestants of D.C. could not turn to religion to support their actions, because the teachings of Christ were unequivocally opposed to race prejudice and that silence in the face of criticism was the only way to uphold the Social Gospel’s connections with the culture of segregation.⁷⁶

That white churches were critical in the denial of white privilege was distressing to him; that this helped membership to grow in these churches was even more so. “The church has grown, and with its growth, this diabolical spirit of race prejudice has also grown,” said the eminent minister.⁷⁷ This is odd, he told his congregation, because one would expect the opposite. If the teachings of Christ are unequivocally against Jim Crow and all forms of racial discrimination, then it only seems logical that the presence of race prejudice in American society would decline as more white people joined churches. “Either Christianity, is no match for race prejudice, is powerless before it,” he said, assessing the situation. “Or the Christianity represented in the white churches of America, is a spurious Christianity, is not genuine, is not what it purports to be; or, else the church has not been doing its duty, has been putting its light under a bushel, has not

⁷⁵ Grimké, “Christianity and Race Prejudice: Part II,” 18-19, FJG Papers.

⁷⁶ Ibid., “Christianity and Race Prejudice: Part I,” 12-13, FJG Papers.

⁷⁷ Ibid., “Christianity and Race Prejudice: Part II,” 21, FJG Papers.

been faithful to its divine commission.”⁷⁸ Though white supremacy lacked any Biblical basis, Grimké deeply believed that when faced with the redeeming value of Christianity, the culture of segregation could be transformed. He refused to question the religiosity of white Social Gospelers, he just thought that they needed to be reminded about the church’s teachings. In his view, white Christians, especially his D.C. brethren, had forgotten about theologies of racial equality.⁷⁹

Just as he would not give up his beliefs that the Gospel fundamentally opposed Jim Crow, he also would not give up faith that white Christians’ attitudes on race could be transformed. Despite the moral depravity he saw in Christian whiteness, Grimké was not, however, without hope for redemption. “That the Christianity represented in white America is spurious, I am not prepared to say. That the church has failed to do its duty, in this matter, I am prepared, however, to say,” he declared to his congregation.⁸⁰ Calling upon the white Christians of the city to rebuke their earlier actions, Grimké asked them to follow the example of Jesus. Jesus, Grimké said, taught loving one’s neighbors was of utmost importance to Christianity and demonstrated this by loving those whom popular opinion at the time told one to hate. He ate with Zaccheus, the much-despised tax collector; selected Matthew, another tax collector, to be a disciple; and he even took a drink of water from a Samaritan women, though first-century Jews were told to have no

⁷⁸ Grimké, “Christianity and Race Prejudice: Part II,” 21, FJG Papers.

⁷⁹ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 67-147. Though some scholars, notably Howard Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980) have argued for continuity in race relations in this period, that vast weight of recent scholarship supports Woodward’s argument for change and racial fluidity in this period. Joel Williamson, *A Rage for Order: Black White Relations in the American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness*, Jane Dailey, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Post-emancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), Dailey et al., eds., *Jumpin’ Jim Crow: Southern Politics from the Civil War to Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), and James Bennett, *Religion and the Rise of Jim Crow in New Orleans*.

⁸⁰ Grimké, “Christianity and Race Prejudice: Part II,” 21, FJG Papers.

relations with Samaritans. Just as Jesus resisted public opinions of his day and loved all people as children of God, Grimké instructed and hoped that white Christians would do the same. He preached that the proper Christian response to whiteness was neither silence nor denial, but genuine repentance.⁸¹

Yet, in spite of his calls for a Christian repentance, white Washingtonians did not change their attitudes and begin to denounce Jim Crow. White pulpit across the city remained silent, and white congregations did not offer any formal apologies for their behavior at the Sunday School Convention. As historian Joel Williamson has shown, white Christians never articulated a collective *Summa Theologica* of Jim Crow as seen in the antebellum period when clear pro- and anti-slavery theologies emerged. He argues that this was because fundamentalist Christianity's focus on life after death provided a mechanism for white Christians to ignore Jim Crow on theological grounds and the liberal Protestants of the Social Gospel largely eschewed doctrinal discussions in favor of social activism.⁸² When read in light of Grimké's remarks on the Sunday School Convention, it is apparent that no *Summa Theologica* of Jim Crow could have existed if whiteness were to retain its influence in subtle expressions of white Social Gospel activism in Washington. Though these individuals certainly could have articulated a *Summa Theologica*, a clear statement of theological principles existed to support the culture of segregation, then the white Protestants of DC would have been forced to respond to the theological challenges that Grimké had posed with more than silence.

Jim Crow in Wilson's Washington: De Jure Segregation and Theologies of Resistance

⁸¹ Grimké, "Christianity and Race Prejudice: Part II," 22-23, FJG Papers.

⁸² Williamson, *A Rage for Order: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*, 98-99, 193-197.

The silence of white churches in D.C. persisted, even as *de jure* segregation arrived in the city during the first term of the Wilson Administration. The first Southerner to occupy the White House since before the Civil War, President Woodrow Wilson imported a bit of Southern flavor to the Nation's Capital. Beginning in 1913, the Wilson Administration segregated federal departments and in soon followed with public facilities. By 1915, streetcars in Washington had been segregated and blacks were barred from holding specific civil service positions.⁸³ The Capital City, which had long welcomed the culture of segregation, now embraced Jim Crow laws as well.⁸⁴ Washington, a city that had long occupied an ambiguous regional status now became even more indistinguishable from the South.

Black churches in the city actively resisted its implementation. As historian Evelyn Higginbotham has shown, black churches in the early twentieth century functioned as a "nation within a nation," so their opposition to Jim Crow laws in Washington constitute one of the major forms of resistance to segregation in this period.⁸⁵ Partnering with the newly-formed D.C. branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), black Washingtonians organized a mass protest gathering at Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church, one of the oldest African American churches in the District of Columbia.⁸⁶ Once the place of worship of the great abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass, choosing Metropolitan AME Church as the setting for their gathering held great symbolic value.

⁸³ H.R. 11, H.R. 274, 64th Congress, 1st Session, Archibald Grimké Papers, MSRC.

⁸⁴ For a more thorough discussion of the Wilson Administration's Jim Crow policies and a legal interpretation, see: Greene, *Secret City*, especially chapter 8.

⁸⁵ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 7-13.

⁸⁶ "Colored People Protest: Oppose Separate Cars and Law Against Race Intermarriage," *The Washington Star*, October 28, 1913.

Though the white churches of Washington did not heed Grimké's earlier advice by condemning Jim Crow as unchristian, the protest meeting included white ministers who did.⁸⁷ At the recommendation of the national office of the NAACP, the gathering included Reverend John Haynes Holmes, a prominent white Unitarian minister from New York City who was also a vice president of the organization's board of directors, to speak. "He is a wonderful orator," wrote Chairwoman of the NAACP Board, Mary Ovington to the D.C. branch.⁸⁸ As a Social Gospel minister himself, it was hoped that Holmes could challenge the silence of the white Social Gospelers in Washington. Francis Grimké, having heard Holmes speak at the gathering, expressed admiration for his New York colleague: "It was a spiritually helpful sermon," he said. "It is so different from much of the preaching that we hear in many of our pulpits," referring to the nearby white churches in Washington. However, despite delivering a compelling sermon at Metropolitan AME Church, Holmes was unable to move the white Christians of the city to action, or to even reconsider their constructions of the white racial category.⁸⁹

His view of the Social Gospel and its contribution to a white identity differs starkly from the racialized discourses that the white Social Gospelers in Washington created. Though no documentation of this sermon exists, based other writings of Holmes from the period, it is evident that themes of universal brotherhood and social salvation of all humanity characterized his thoughts on race. In a 1914 sermon preached at the Church of the Messiah, Holmes' home pulpit in New York, the Unitarian minister described his understanding of the purpose Christianity as "the binding of men together

⁸⁷ "City News," *The Washington Times*, October 27, 1913.

⁸⁸ Telegram to L.M. Henshaw, July 1913, NAACP Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (hereafter MLC).

⁸⁹ "Washington News" *Washington Times*, October 27, 1913.

in permanent relations of peace and brotherhood through the spirit of love. Its object is not to...establish hierarchies.”⁹⁰ To him, it was antithetical to the mission of the Social Gospel to articulate such constructions of whiteness as his counterparts in Washington did. However, in spite of the white Washingtonians’ misappropriation of the Social Gospel, Holmes believed that a spirit of universal brotherhood would ultimately prevail. “The misguided church has as little to do with the perfect truth of Christianity,” Holmes said, “as the dirty windows of my room have to do with the dazzling radiance of the sunlight which struggles through its unwashed panes.”⁹¹ Regardless of how much the white Protestants of Washington sought to use the Social Gospel to reassert white supremacy, Holmes believed that true expressions of Christian faith always would stand at odds with the culture of segregation.

The Reemergence of the Liquor Problem: The 1919 Race Riots in Washington

If Holmes had any hope that Washingtonians might change their constructions of race under Social Gospel, it would have evaporated in light of white Protestant responses to the race riots that exploded in Washington during July 1919. Though white and African American pastors united to pledge their support to immediately end to the violence, it is apparent that for the white Social Gospellers, this alliance was predicated upon white superiority.⁹² White ministers saw the chaos in Washington, and many, like Reverend Howard Stewart of Second Baptist Church, blamed the violence on intemperance. Other white pastors agreed, suggesting that both African American and white participation in the riots could be attributed to liquor. Though they were compelled

⁹⁰ John Haynes Holmes, “Is Christianity a Failure?” sermon, October 1914, MLC.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² “Pastors to Fight Riots from Pulpits: Pledge Aid to Authorities in Putting Down Race Disorders,” *The Washington Times*, July 23, 1919.

to acknowledge white participation in the riots, attributing it to alcohol had two effects: under the culture of segregation, it privileged whiteness by excusing white Washingtonians from their actions while simultaneously reproducing the earlier racialized discourses on temperance.⁹³ African American responses to the riots were much different, however. According to historian Constance Greene, the riots in Washington were not the result of intemperance but rather the products of mounting African American frustrations because of white Washingtonians attitudes towards them in the summer of 1919. Greene notes that that year whites in the city overlooked black participation in World War I when honoring veterans from D.C., refused to include black support in a local effort to support Congressional representation, and attributed rising crime and burglary rates in the postwar recession to blacks.⁹⁴ In light of the circumstances, Reverend Milton Waldron, the African American minister of Shiloh Baptist Church who had previously had a relationship with the city's WCTU, took a much more confrontational stance on temperance and the black racial category. He preached against the broad generalizations white ministers made, for they were "condemning the whole negro race for the crimes of a few of its members."⁹⁵ Despite his challenge to white racial thought, white Social Gospellers in the city once again labeled race problem as the liquor problem, and by so doing, white ministers sought to construct blackness as prone to alcoholism and violence and whiteness as innocuous.

In a sermon Francis Grimké preached later that year on the riots, he criticized the white ministers' views of a solution to racial tensions. "The fault is always with the colored people," the minister of Fifteenth Avenue Presbyterian Church said, noting how

⁹³ "Capital Not Dry, Pastor Discovers," *The Washington Times*, July 28, 1919.

⁹⁴ Greene, *Secret City*, 188-194.

⁹⁵ "Capital Not Dry, Pastor Discovers," *The Washington Times*, July 28, 1919.

whites refused to take any responsibility for the incident that summer but instead preferred silence.⁹⁶ Wallace Radcliffe, the white minister of New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, thought highly of Grimke's sermon but quibbled with his conclusions on the riots. "There are bad colored men just as there are bad white men who misunderstand and pervert sin against both sides," Radcliffe wrote, arguing that African Americans were equally as capable as whites to hold prejudices and act violently on them.⁹⁷ Though Radcliffe concurred with Grimke's overall sentiments, he thought that his criticism of white people was too far-reaching and unfair.

By suggesting that black animosity toward white Americans was comparable to white violence directed at people of color, Radcliffe ignored the very power dynamics that Grimke had criticized in his sermon. Though Radcliffe opposed the behavior of white Washingtonians in the riot that summer and was sympathetic to the views Grimke espoused in his sermon, he understood the riot as merely the consequence of an interpersonal conflict between the residents of D.C. Failing to accept it as a product of the culture of segregation, Radcliffe held black participants equally responsible for the events. The riot was unchristian, in his view, because of the hatred people displayed toward each other; unlike Grimke, he failed to accept the event as an indictment of white privilege and superiority in Jim Crow Washington.

Radcliffe's assessment of the riot indicated an unwillingness to take responsibility for it as a white person. In his note, Radcliffe boasted to Grimke that just two weeks prior, he had preached a sermon at New York Avenue in which he supported black civil rights. "I told my people that, 'A colored man who was good enough to fight for the Flag

⁹⁶ "The Race Problem – Two Suggestions as to Its Solution," September 17, 1919, FJG Papers.

⁹⁷ Letter to Francis Grimke from Wallace Radcliffe, October 11, 1919. FJG Papers.

is good enough to be secured in all the rights and privileges that the Flag stands for,” Radcliffe said.⁹⁸ Showing that he personally supported black freedoms, Radcliffe sought to demonstrate that he was not racist and, therefore, not a part of the problem. In his opinion, this was a problem reserved for the “bad white men” he had referenced earlier in his letter and not an issue for all of whites in the city. By connecting the causes of the riot to one’s personal prejudices, Radcliffe failed to recognize the pervasiveness of the culture of segregation in Washington and how superior constructions of white racial identity were the actual causes.

Though he understood that the race riot was at odds with Christianity, Radcliffe could not fully rebuke Christian whiteness. While he wrote to Grimke “the only solution that will settle this question is the philosophy of Jesus Christ,” Radcliffe never embraced Grimke’s call for a fundamental shift in the nature of white Christianity. Instead of seeing the culture of Jim Crow as an indictment on white churches in D.C., he primarily understood it as a deficiency in the character of the civic life of the U.S. In his view, Jim Crow was a legal system and not a cultural one, so Radcliffe did not see the institution of the church responsible for the continued presence of segregation in American society.⁹⁹ Jim Crow was at odds with statements of American equality, but because Radcliffe could not understand Grimke’s statements about the broader culture of segregation, he ignored his colleague’s substantial criticisms of white churches.

Though he could not bring himself to embrace African American Christians’ criticisms of white Christianity after the race riots in 1919, when Radcliffe delivered his twenty-fifth anniversary sermon to the congregation at New York Avenue Church the

⁹⁸ Letter to Francis Grimke from Wallace Radcliffe, October 11, 1919. FJG Papers.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

following year, he moved even further away from their views by merging Christianity with white supremacy. Assessing his tenure in the pulpit since 1895, the eminent minister told his congregation, “It has been a period of remarkable national and world development toward higher ideals. In our national life,” he boasted, “we have seen the acquirement of the Philippines, Hawaii, and the Virgin Islands.”¹⁰⁰ Included in a lengthy list of achievements since 1895, Radcliffe held American imperialism and colonization in high esteem because it offered new venues for evangelism.¹⁰¹

The white minister’s enchantment with the new American territories highlights the connections between whiteness, American imperialism and foreign missions at the turn of the century. In the case of Radcliffe, the juxtaposition of his support of American imperialism with his reluctance to accept Grimke’s criticisms of white Christianity highlights how he had fused Social Gospel Christianity with white supremacy. Though he did not consider himself a racist, and actually prided himself for preaching on black civil rights in the past, the prominent Washington minister still talked about Christianity in ways that upheld white privilege and supremacy.¹⁰² In spite of his statements, Wallace could never bring himself to fully challenge Christian whiteness at home in Washington, D.C. or abroad and, in fact, talked about Social Gospel activism in ways that reaffirmed Christian whiteness.

Conclusion: Christian Whiteness, Silence and the Culture of Segregation

After several decades, the culture of segregation and the Social Gospel coalesced in Washington, D.C. to form a unique, powerful brand of white Christian identity.

¹⁰⁰ Wallace Radcliffe, “Twenty-five Years in the New York Avenue Pulpit: Anniversary Sermon by the Pastor,” 1920, Main Reading Room, Library of Congress.

¹⁰¹ Radcliffe, Anniversary Sermon

¹⁰² Letter to Francis Grimke from Wallace Radcliffe, October 11, 1919, FJG Papers.

Grimke, having occupied the pulpit at Fifteenth Street since 1889, witnessed first-hand the racial transformation. He saw white Protestants in Washington rebuke the interracial unity of Southern missionary work in favor of paternalistic urban reform; adopt the practices of Jim Crow without apology; and ignore calls for change while denying racism and white privilege. In light of the situation, Grimke said that true human brotherhood in the city had been lost.¹⁰³

Stating that the teachings of Christ were in opposition to Jim Crow and that the responsibility of modeling an alternative to the culture of segregation rested primarily with the Christian church, Grimké's 1921 sermon sounded little different than those he preached a decade earlier after the World Sunday School Convention. However, unlike his earlier sermons, he did not shy away from calling the Christianity preached and practiced by whites as hypocritical. After witnessing the racial discord of the past decade in the District of Columbia, Grimke had grown increasingly impatient with white churches' attitudes toward Jim Crow. "The manifest indifference, the cowardly silence of a man-fearing and truckling ministry," he said, "has always been not only the great obstacle in the way of the onward march of the kingdom of God, but also the chief source of encouragement to the forces of evil."¹⁰⁴ In his view, the silence of the churches in the face of Jim Crow was the primary vehicle for its perpetuation in society because silence offered tacit approval for the culture of segregation.

Criticism of white Christians, however, was not limited to their inaction and silence. After years of patience, the minister of Fifteenth Street Church now called into question the authenticity of the religion that white Christians practiced. In a stark

¹⁰³ Grimké, "The Brotherhood of Man, the Christian Church and the Race Problem in the United States of America," 2. FJG Papers.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 8.

contrast to sermons after the Sunday School Convention, Grimké now believed that his white brethren were more than just misguided; they had co-opted Christianity to endorse the culture of segregation. “Christianity is the remedy, but it must be the Christianity of Jesus Christ...not the spurious thing that masquerades under that name in this country.”¹⁰⁵ In the millennialist preaching tradition of the period, Grimké highlighted white Christianity’s hypocrisy by encouraging whites to find another religion that better fit with their racial hierarchies. White Christianity was not, in his assessment, Christianity at all, but only an ideology to support white supremacy.

Unlike other parts of white American society that talked openly about Jim Crow, white Christians in Washington, D.C. were largely silent about the culture of segregation. From the vantage point of the Social Gospel in Washington, it is apparent that their attitude of silence was a form of active defense of Jim Crow. Silence allowed such a culture to exist in Washington, because other responses would have forced these Christians to reconcile their views of white supremacy with the forgotten theological alternatives of Southern Missions. Through a discourse of silence, the Social Gospel in Washington reveals that white churches were actively involved in the making of racial hierarchies under Jim Crow.

¹⁰⁵ Grimké, “The Brotherhood of Man, the Christian Church and the Race Problem in the United States of America,” 13-14. Quoted on page 15.

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